Staging the Past: Richard Wagner’s Ring Cycle in Divided Germany during the 1970s and 1980s

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ABSTRACT

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The staging of Richard Wagner’s Ring des Nibelungen provides an ideal site to examine representations of the German past in the opera house and the broader cultural world surrounding it, in particular how these representations reveal different conceptions of the past in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). By looking at three different productions of the Ring cycle in divided Germany during the 1970s and 1980s, I will show how Wagner stagings both reflected and contributed to historical debates about the Nazi past and discussions about cultural and national identity.

The introduction considers why stagings of Wagner’s Ring cycle are so important for understanding national identity and the process of coming to terms with the Nazi past (Vergangenheitsbewältigung) in the two German states. Along with describing my own methodology, I give an overview of the different approaches to opera staging in recent musicological scholarship. Chapter One provides contextual information on divided Germany during the 1970s and 1980s, and it also introduces three historical debates that appear in the case studies. Chapter Two begins by looking at the Leipzig Ring (1973-1976), directed by Joachim Herz, as a parable about nineteenth-century class conflict. I then consider what the Leipzig production has to say about the relationship between the GDR and the Nazi past, particularly with respect to Herz’s depiction of the Gibichung court as a fascist state. Chapters Three and Four investigate the Bayreuth centennial Ring
(1976), staged by Patrice Chéreau and conducted by Pierre Boulez, each of whom had a different vision of Wagner. In spite of their differences, both Chéreau and Boulez treat Wagner’s work as an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences of the 1968 student protest movement. Both artists articulate a sense of unease about revolutionary activity, which mirrors the growing anxiety in both West Germany and France about the radical left. Chapter Five examines the multiple views of Wagner in Ruth Berghaus’s Frankfurt Ring (1985-1987). While the director Berghaus interprets the work in terms of a tradition of epic theater and historical materialism, the dramaturge Klaus Zehelein focuses on aspects of language, textuality, and representation. I also discuss how the reception of the Frankfurt Ring in West German newspapers reflects the re-intensification of the Cold War in the 1980s.
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Introduction

The staging of Richard Wagner’s *Ring des Nibelungen* provides an ideal site to examine representations of the German past in the opera house and the broader cultural world surrounding it, in particular how these representations reveal different conceptions of the past in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). By looking at three different productions of the *Ring* cycle in divided Germany during the 1970s and 1980s, I will show how Wagner stagings both reflected and contributed to historical debates about the Nazi past and discussions about cultural and national identity.

The introduction briefly describes the time period under consideration, which is later discussed at greater length in the first chapter. I elaborate on my reasons for turning to stagings of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle and why these stagings were so important for constructing national identity in both German states. Finally, I give an overview of methodological approaches to opera staging. In the case of Wagner stagings, I argue for the incorporation of cultural memory studies alongside textual and performance approaches.

*Divided Germany during the 1970s and 1980s*

Shortly after Germany’s division in May 1945, two separate states were established with very different political and economic systems. Founded in October 1949, the GDR was a communist country aligned with the Soviet Union and controlled by a single party, the Socialist Unity Party (SED). Its economy was highly centralized, and the
cultural sphere was closely monitored by the state. Created in May 1949, the FRG was a democratic country aligned with the Western allies – in particular the United States. Its economy combined aspects of free market and social welfare; and, though its cultural institutions received generous state subsidies, cultural expression was much less regulated. Though both German states changed over time, they more or less adhered to these features.

My project focuses on divided Germany during the 1970s and 1980s, a time of great change in the relationship between the two states. The early 1970s witnessed a period of détente between the United States and the Soviet Union that had a profound effect on both East and West Germany. In the FRG, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) became the dominant political party; and, Chancellor Willy Brandt initiated a number of important reforms in the domestic and foreign policy, the most important of these being his Ostpolitik. Signed by the FRG and the GDR in December 1972, the Basic Treaty allowed for greater communication and trade between the two states. During this time, West Germany was also confronting the legacy of the 1968 student protest movement, a legacy that was overshadowed by the terrorist attacks of left-extremist groups such as the Baader-Meinhof gang.

The GDR also experienced important changes during the 1970s. A change in leadership – Erich Honecker became First Secretary in 1971 – coincided with a period of relative economic and cultural liberalization. Many works that had been suppressed prior to this date were now published, and composers and musicians were more likely to adopt Western styles and techniques (from serialism to rock music). Be that as it may, the
practice of censorship (never openly acknowledged in the GDR) remained in place, though with a slight easing of constraints.

The 1980s were marked by the re-intensification of the Cold War. The FRG switched to a conservative CDU-FDP coalition that was strongly committed to NATO and the United States in particular. The change of government and economic recession helped put an end to an era of optimistic reform. CDU politicians placed a great emphasis on reinterpreting the German past as the basis of a strong FRG national identity.

The re-intensification of the Cold War was also apparent in the GDR during the 1980s. Already the expulsion of the poet-singer Wolf Biermann in 1976 had signaled an end to the short period of liberalization. In the years that followed, a great number of artists and intellectuals were forced to leave the GDR, resulting in an enormous drain of East German talent.

Why Wagner and the Ring Cycle?

Richard Wagner and his works have long played a central role in the construction of German cultural and national identity.¹ This was especially the case in postwar Germany, when productions of Wagner’s works provided a sense of historical continuity

that was otherwise missing. Particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, the interpretation and use of Wagner took on a new urgency and a unique shape as a result of political division, the ongoing process of coming to terms with the Nazi past, and new intellectual perspectives. By drawing attention to the connection between Wagner and national identity in postwar Germany, I do not mean to suggest that there was a single, unquestioned type of identity. On the contrary, both East and West Germany developed their own identities; and, within each state, there was more than just one kind of identity. Not to mention that many West Germans preferred to think of themselves in terms of a particular region (Bavaria, the Black Forest, the Rhineland, and so on). Be that as it may, I retain the concept of national identity in order to refer to forms of identity that extend beyond a particular region.

In the FRG, Wagner staging served to “perform” a number of competing types of national identity.2 In addition to more traditional stagings, there were those at the Bayreuth festival – after its reopening in 1951 – that interpreted Wagner in terms of ancient Greek tragedy and myth, though without attending to the social and political aspects of these. During the 1950s and 1960s, Wieland and Wolfgang Wagner produced stagings that were stripped down to a few basic elements: a disc, the refined use of light and color, and simple sets and costumes that refrained from suggesting a specific time or place. The “New Bayreuth” style presented an image of the festival as belonging to a

much older Western cultural tradition removed from German nationalism and the Nazi past. In this respect, Bayreuth was a microcosm of West Germany, which stressed Western integration while simultaneously keeping silent about and distancing itself from the recent past.

This type of early postwar West German national identity was challenged in the early 1970s by new Ring cycles in Kiel and Kassel, both of which emphasized the political themes in Wagner’s work and drew on imagery from the present and the Nazi past. There was also a production of the Ring as a piece of spoken theater at the Munich Kammerspiele in 1971, which interpreted the work as a parable about society during Wagner’s lifetime. All three productions were indicative of a new type of national identity, one that was shaped by the 1968 student movement and that sought to address the Nazi past openly. Another key feature of this new left-liberal type of identity was its search for alternative pasts that had been silenced during the Third Reich and the early postwar years, in particular leftist revolutionary thinking of the nineteenth century (Bakunin, Proudhon, Blanqui). The search for an alternative past was especially evident in the Bayreuth centennial Ring, when Chéreau interpreted Wagner in terms of many of these nineteenth-century revolutionary thinkers. Part of what made the Bayreuth centennial Ring so controversial was that it suggested the same sort of identity that had been on display in the Kassel, Kiel, and Munich stagings. A large percentage of the Bayreuth audience was from an older generation that had lived under National Socialism and that had a different conception of national identity (one that corresponded more with the stagings of the early postwar years).
In the GDR, Wagner staging served to perform the official image of East Germany as the “true” inheritor of a long tradition of progressive, enlightened thinking in German history. It also sought to present the GDR as belonging to a more advanced stage of history in which the workers and peasants were in control of the means of production. Though there were multiple conceptions of national identity in the GDR (see chapter one), in most cases only the official one sanctioned by the SED party was allowed to be presented on the stage. As demonstrated by the Leipzig Ring cycle (1973-1976), this image of national identity was highlighted by means of allegorical depictions of class conflict and a view of history leading up to communism.

Wagner staging was also a primary site for the process of coming to terms with the Nazi past (Vergangenheitsbewältigung) in both East and West Germany, though this process was different in each state. Wagner and his works were central in discussions about the Nazi past for the following reasons: Adolf Hitler’s appropriation of Wagner to fashion his own personal image, his close relationship with the Bayreuth festival, and Wagner’s own anti-Semitism. In the GDR, where National Socialism was equated with an extreme form of capitalism, coming to terms with the past involved rejecting the economic conditions of capitalism and dividing German history into two separate strands: the reactionary strand that included the Third Reich and led to the FRG, and the progressive strand that stretched back to the Peasants’ War of 1525 and culminated in the

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GDR. Since Wagner’s late works exhibited the pessimistic ideas of Schopenhauer – a philosopher that was considered reactionary in the GDR – the appropriation of Wagner presented SED cultural functionaries with more of a challenge than Bach, Handel, and Beethoven. As a consequence, officials approached Wagner as a sort of metaphor for German history in general, praising his (pre-1848) revolutionary side and condemning his (post-1848) reactionary side. This approach resulted in a reading of the Ring cycle (completed in 1876) that stressed the work’s original conception during Wagner’s revolutionary years. In short, Wagner stagings served an important function in the GDR’s own version of Vergangenheitsbewältigung, which involved laying claim to the progressive heritage of the German past while simultaneously distancing itself from the Nazi past and the FRG. This approach to Wagner did not involve drawing attention to his anti-Semitism but rather stressed his commitment to revolutionary ideals.

The discussion of Wagner in terms of the Nazi past took on a much different form in the FRG. During the 1950s and 1960s, there were two different tendencies. On the one hand, directors and audience members were silent about Hitler and the Nazi party’s appropriation of Wagner. This was the more common approach and was especially evident at the Bayreuth festival. On the other hand, intellectuals such as Thomas Mann and Theodor Adorno made a direct connection between Wagner and Hitler and Wagner and fascism. In the 1970s and afterward, it became more common for directors, critics, 

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5 For an overview of these Wagner debates in the FRG, see Vaget, Hitler’s Wagner, 17-20.
and musicologists to debate the relationship between Wagner and the Nazi past openly. Along with Hans-Jürgen Syberberg’s controversial 1975 film on Winifred Wagner, two important books were published in 1976 that guided subsequent debates. Hartmut Zelinsky assembled a collection of texts – many of them racist and nationalistic – documenting over 100 years of Wagner reception, implying a direct line from Wagner to Hitler. Zelinsky also published an essay arguing that Wagner’s anti-Semitism is reflected in his music dramas, an argument already made by Adorno. The second book was Michael Karbaum’s history of the Bayreuth festival, which documented the festival’s active involvement with the radical right since the late nineteenth century and with National Socialism beginning in 1919. By far the most shocking was the speech that West German President Walter Scheel gave at Bayreuth just prior to the centennial Ring, in which he spoke directly of the festival’s active role in Nazi politics.

Of all of Wagner’s works, I selected the Ring cycle for the following reasons. This work has an enormous range of interpretations, which is at least partly due to the fact that Wagner himself kept changing his ideas about the Nibelung material and about


7 Winifred Wagner und die Geschichte des Hauses Wahnfried 1914-1975, directed by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg (1975; Munich; H.J. Syberberg Filmproduktion, 2006), DVD.


art and politics in general. Second, the Ring cycle has – from the start – played a central role in the construction of German national identity. During the period following the French occupation and the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, the medieval epic poem *Nibelungenlied* (composed around 1200) took on the function of a national epic, providing early German nationalists with a prehistory of an imagined German nation. Though Wagner’s Ring cycle was only partially based on the *Nibelungenlied*, Wagner was responding to calls for a German national opera based on it. In the years that followed, both Wagner’s tetralogy and the *Nibelungenlied* were repeatedly alluded to in order to express nationalistic sentiments. This was especially the case during the Third Reich, when Siegfried became a symbol of bravery for German soldiers and the object of a “German” religious cult.

It is particularly these two aspects of the Ring cycle – its rich interpretive history and its use to construct conceptions of German national and cultural identity – that led me to select this work. Both of these aspects are also features that directors, audience members, critics, musicologists, and historians were confronted with in the GDR and

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14 On the nineteenth- and twentieth-century reception of *Nibelungenlied* and the Nibelung material in general, see Edwards, Introduction to Nibelungenlied, xix-xxix.
FRG during the 1970s and 1980s. The final reason that I selected the Ring cycle was because of the extreme challenge of staging this work, not only financially but also physically and aesthetically.

Three Case Studies: Leipzig, Bayreuth, and Frankfurt

My dissertation looks at three different stagings of the Ring cycle during the 1970s and 1980s: Leipzig (1973-1976), Bayreuth (1976), and Frankfurt (1985-1987). The Leipzig Ring explores the idea of Wagner as a political revolutionary figure and interprets the cycle as a parable about nineteenth-century class conflicts. I examine how Joachim Herz’s depiction of the Gibichung court as a fascist period of history is in keeping with the SED party’s anti-fascist narrative that equates National Socialism with an extreme form of capitalism. Herz’s interpretation of the ending of Götterdämmerung as a tabula rasa gives theatrical expression to the ideological belief in a clean break with the Nazi past.

The Bayreuth centennial Ring presents conflicting views of Wagner. On the one hand, Chéreau portrays Wagner as a political revolutionary thinker who provides a critique of the power structures underlying the modern state. On the other, Boulez dismisses the political aspects of Wagner’s life and works entirely, focusing instead on the progressive qualities of the music. Boulez argues that Wagner’s music defies all attempts of political appropriation. Yet in spite of their different views of Wagner, both Chéreau and Boulez treat Wagner’s work as an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of the 1968 movement. Both artists articulate a sense of unease about revolutionary activity,
which mirrors the growing anxiety in both West Germany and France about the radical left.

The Frankfurt *Ring* also exhibits conflicting views of Wagner. Ruth Berghaus, an East German director working in West Germany, interprets Wagner in terms of a tradition of epic theater and also historical materialism – the idea of history as a series of stages involving conflicting socio-economic formations. In contrast, the dramaturge Klaus Zehelein approaches Wagner as a *text* among other texts. Along with deemphasizing the significance of the author-composer, Zehelein disregards the idea of Wagner as a political revolutionary figure and Wagner’s anti-Semitism, instead focusing on aspects of language and textuality. In spite of the differences between Berghaus and Zehelein, both stress the independence and interplay of the media involved in opera (music, vocal text, gesture, staging) and favor moments that interrupt the linear flow of the narrative. In addition to looking at the conceptual writings of Berghaus and Zehelein, I will also discuss how the reception of the Frankfurt *Ring* in West German newspapers reflects the re-intensification of the Cold War in the 1980s.

Each case study permits me to take a closer look at a different historical debate in divided Germany during the 1970s and 1980s. I compare Joachim Herz’s depiction of a fascist state in *Götterdämmerung* with descriptions of the Nazi past in the historiography and literature of the GDR during the 1970s. I contextualize Patrice Chéreau’s anti-authoritarian view of the state and his evaluation of revolutionary activity in terms of memories of the 1968 events in the FRG during the 1970s. Both Ruth Berghaus and Klaus Zehelein present historical narratives that share important features in common with
arguments subsequently made by Michael Stürmer and Jürgen Habermas during the Historians’ Dispute of 1986-1987. In all three cases, I argue that these opera stagings not only reflect existing historical debates but also actively contribute to them, in some cases even presenting new and opposing narratives.

Methodological Overview: Text, Performance, and Cultural Memory

Current scholarship on opera staging frequently adopts one of two different methodological approaches: on the one hand, an emphasis on textuality and interpreting texts (the libretto, score, gesture, stage and costume design); on the other, reflection on the phenomenological experience of an opera performance, focusing on those aspects of a performance that cannot be reduced to a pre-existing text such as the score or libretto (the vocal and physical presence of the singers, the viewer/listener’s bodily response to this presence, the subjective experience of time and space). While my dissertation incorporates aspects of both of these approaches, I also add a third one: cultural memory studies and the attention to representations of the past on the opera stage.

The textual approach to opera staging and opera performance relies on semiotic and hermeneutic theories. David Levin describes opera as having multiple, competing texts (the musical score, the libretto, stage directions, costume and stage design), each of which is capable of conveying its own meaning.15 This results in a “surfeit of signifying systems,” which – ideally – the director emphasizes by means of “polylogical stagings” that draw attention to the conflicting components of opera.16 As Levin himself points out,

16 Ibid, 32.
his understanding of “text” is based on Roland Barthes’ description of text as constantly taking on meaning independent of the author and as relying on the active role of the reader (as opposed to the “work” as a fixed object defined by the author).\textsuperscript{17} Though Levin stresses the active part of the reader, for him the “reader” is primarily the director and the dramaturge – not the singers, the musicians, or the audience. As a result, Levin tends to privilege the director’s interpretation over all other forms of interpretation in an opera performance.

Another example of the textual approach is Jean-Jacques Nattiez. Though Nattiez does not use the word “text,” he – like Levin – is interested in signifying systems and the creation and interpretation of meaning. Drawing on Jean Molino’s work on musical semiotics, Nattiez describes opera staging in terms of three levels: the process of creation involving the composer and librettist; the material trace (the musical score, the libretto); and the process of interpretation involving the performers, conductor, and director.\textsuperscript{18} This process of interpretation in turn becomes the starting point of another three levels: the process of creation involving the performers, conductor, and director; the material trace (the performance, the staging); and the process of interpretation involving the audience members. Nattiez stresses that his semiological approach to opera staging is \textit{not} the same thing as a communication model in which the interpreter merely decodes the creator’s intended message. On the contrary, he argues that the interpreter does not have direct

access to the creator’s intentions and actively produces new meanings. While Nattiez emphasizes the active role of the interpreter, there is a certain danger in speaking of a material trace that exists apart from interpretation. I would argue that the work always exists in the act of interpretation.

My dissertation incorporates many aspects of the textual approach. Like Levin, I am very interested in the director’s interpretation, which leads me to consider conceptual writings and program notes. Yet I counterbalance this approach with attention to reception, more specifically how critics interpret these stagings in their reviews. Like Nattiez, I do not assume that the director’s viewpoint is always transparent and that the critic merely records the director’s unmediated conceptual ideas. Additionally, I place both the director and the critics in their cultural and political context, discussing how this context shaped their interpretations. Especially in the case of the Leipzig Ring, I do not assume that what the director articulated verbally in the conceptual writings and program notes directly corresponds with the actual staging. (A director might say something but then do something different – whether consciously or unintentionally.) Finally, I look at not only what the director writes about the staging but also the conductor, dramaturge, and costume and stage designers. In most cases, I did not consider comments made by the singers, though this would – without doubt – contribute to the understanding of these opera productions.

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Over the last fifteen years, a number of scholars have criticized the textual approach to opera staging and opera performance. Carolyn Abbate’s article “Music – Drastic or Gnostic” draws attention to those aspects of a musical performance that cannot
be understood in terms of interpretation and meaning only.\textsuperscript{19} She urges musicologists to consider the “drastic” moments of a performance when the listener/viewer focuses on the experience in the moment and attends to the aural and physical presence of the performer(s).

Abbate’s emphasis on presence and the material is part of a broader trend in literary theory and theater studies. She refers to the literary scholar Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, who argues that the humanities and social sciences in today’s university system are so preoccupied with interpretation and finding meaning that they fail to see the physical and experiential qualities of the things that they study.\textsuperscript{20} Without abandoning more traditional textual approaches, Gumbrecht advocates an approach that focuses on “presence” – that is, on the experience of things that are actually present in the same physical space and on the extraordinary feelings that may accompany such experiences. Applying this approach to opera, Gumbrecht describes the epiphany-like experience of sitting in an opera house and sharing the same space as a performing body.\textsuperscript{21} In such moments, the performing body does not signify or represent something beyond itself (an absent signified); rather meaning resides in the body itself.

Theater studies has also started to move away from semiotic and hermeneutic models in favor of the concepts of the performative and performativity taken from performance studies and the philosophy of language.\(^\text{22}\) (Performance studies treats all cultural phenomena as performances, not just theatrical performances.) Drawing on John L. Austin’s notion of a “performative utterance” (a speech act) and Judith Butler’s concept of gender performativity (gender is constituted by bodily acts), the theater scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte defines the “performative” and “performativity” as the bodily co-presence of performers and spectators.\(^\text{23}\) Rather than focusing on what the performance represents and expresses, she advocates looking at what the performance does as a performative act.

This call for an approach that attends to the performative aspects of theatrical performance has been taken up the opera and theater scholar Clemens Risi. His recent article “Opera in Performance – In Search of New Analytical Approaches” offers several helpful suggestions for writing about those features of an opera performance that cannot be understood solely in terms of textuality.\(^\text{24}\) Risi describes the sensual experience of a voice in terms of the subjective needs and expectations of the listeners, which when not met may result in profound feelings of disorientation. He discusses the perception of time and how the music and/or staging may speed up or slow down the spectator’s experience of time. Finally, he draws attention to the active participation of the audience, as for


\(^{23}\) Fischer-Lichte, Transformative Power of Performance, 32.

example when its applause or booing compels the performers to make adjustments. Risi applies these and additional approaches in an insightful essay on stagings of Wagner’s Ring cycle, giving a fresh perspective on the Bayreuth centennial Ring and its “new discovery of the body” as a central element of opera performance.25

How do I incorporate the performative dimension into my dissertation? While I did not attend the three stagings that I write about, I nevertheless saw video recordings of two of them (the Bayreuth and Frankfurt cycles).26 Though my experience did not include the “bodily co-presence” described by Fischer-Lichte, I did nevertheless experience many of the aspects discussed in Risi’s article (heightened expectations, a sensual and sensorial response to the voices and performing bodies, a heightened awareness of the perception of time). Since the recording of the Frankfurt Ring was of a live performance, I was also able to observe the audience’s active participation (applause and booing) and how the performers responded. In the case of the Leipzig Ring – where no video recording exists – I referred to rehearsal and performance photographs, which gave me an impression of the physical space of the performing bodies. I was able to gauge the response of the audience through the eyewitness accounts of the reviewers. Finally, in all three case studies, I focused on not only what the performers and stagings express and represent but also what they do as performative acts (perceptually, culturally, politically).

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In addition to the textual and performative approaches, I turn to cultural memory studies in order to shed light on the broader function of Wagner stagings. Drawing on the research of Astrid Erll, I refer to cultural memory as the interaction of past and present in specific cultural contexts.\(^\text{27}\) Up until recently, musicology has not shown much interest in cultural memory, but that is quickly changing.\(^\text{28}\) Two aspects of cultural memory studies are especially relevant to my project. Recent research looks at the performative dimension of memory, more specifically at performances of the past in a broad range of cultural phenomena (from music and theater to museums and the media).\(^\text{29}\) Secondly, cultural studies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany focus on memory and the construction of cultural and national identities.\(^\text{30}\)


\(^{29}\) For example, see Karin Tilmans et al., ed., *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

The historian Jay Winter highlights the “performative moment” of cultural memory. That is, when individuals and groups speak about, depict, or embody a particular view of the past, they may forge a sense of community and inscribe new layers of meaning onto existing memories. Like the scholars discussed in the previous section on performativity, Jay Winter employs the work of John L. Austin and Judith Butler to describe how memory, remembering, and remembrance are performatives acts that are an essential component of forming and reiterating individual and collective identity. Individuals and groups engage in acts of performing the past in order to express who they are and from where they come.

In what way do opera stagings perform the past? Theater scholar Marvin Carlson offers a few suggestions that can be applied to opera. In his book *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, Carlson describes theater as a repository of cultural memory that both reenacts familiar events and stories and also subjects them to continual adjustment and modification. He uses the term “ghosting” to refer to how audience members encounter the past in terms of not only the content of the plays (historical events and figures) but also prior experiences of attending the theater. The same is true of stagings of familiar works, which may refer to past (historical) events and previous productions of the same work. Carlson concludes that the theater is a social institution that serves to reinforce a sense of community through shared memory, which it does “by bringing together on repeated occasions and in the same spaces the same bodies (onstage

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and in the audience) and the same physical material.”\textsuperscript{33} While Carlson’s model is helpful for understanding the opera house as a site of memory – opera is perhaps even more “haunted” than theater – he loses sight of how memory is contested and that theater/opera can become a site of multiple, conflicting views of the past.

Now I turn to cultural studies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany and how they discuss national and cultural identity in terms of memory. Drawing on Benedict Anderson’s notion of an “imagined community” (the nation is a community sharing a language and traditions), Mary Fulbrook defines national identity as a community sharing the sense of a common past, common values, and common experiences in the present.\textsuperscript{34} The importance of a shared past in the formation of national identity leads Fulbrook to consider national myth-making, history as a professional discipline, and popular memory as it relates to individual experiences. Like Fulbrook, my project looks at professional historiography alongside other forms of depicting the past.

The historian Rudy Koshar examines German cultural memory over a long time frame (1871-1990) in order to find specific recurring themes and symbols.\textsuperscript{35} He speaks of a “memory landscape,” a physical environment including both natural and man-made landmarks. Koshar describes cultural memory in terms of a three-part relationship between a memory landscape, individuals, and smaller groups that attempt to shape the meaning of this landscape through framing strategies. Koshar borrows the concept of “framing strategy” from the sociologist Erving Goffman to draw attention to how key groups and individuals (politicians, intellectuals, interest groups) guide and shape the

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 11.
\textsuperscript{34} Fulbrook, German National Identity after the Holocaust, 17.
\textsuperscript{35} Koshar, From Monuments to Traces, 7.
public’s interpretation of a memory landscape. Koshar’s approach to cultural memory is helpful for considering stagings of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle. Like a memory landscape, Wagner’s work is a terrain to which listeners frequently return in order to imbue their personal experiences with meaning. Moreover, stagings of the cycle employ framing strategies that guide listeners’ experiences and interpretations of this terrain. In doing so, these stagings give listeners the sense of belonging to a community and of historical continuity. It was exactly this sense of belonging and continuity that listeners needed during the turbulent years of postwar Germany.

*Source Materials*

My dissertation makes use of a number of primary sources from the Joachim Herz and Ruth Berghaus archives at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin. These include video and sound recordings, program books, conceptual notes, rehearsal and performance photographs, costume and design sketches, logs of rehearsals and meetings, personal correspondence, and newspaper articles.

In the case of the Bayreuth centennial *Ring*, there was no need to access the Bayreuth archive. I was able to order program notes through interlibrary loan. Many primary sources are reprinted in the book *Der Ring: Bayreuth 1976-1980*, including conceptual notes by Pierre Boulez, Patrice Chéreau, Richard Peduzzi, and Jacques Schmidt. The book also contains rehearsal and performance photos. Correspondence between Pierre Boulez and Wieland and Wolfgang Wagner is collected in *Pierre Boulez*.

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in Bayreuth. Since the 1976 version of the production was slightly different in a few scenes, I also look at performance photos from that year. Though I use materials that have been available for some time, no other studies have considered them in such detail or in the same manner. I am the first to examine the Bayreuth centennial cycle in terms of memories of the 1968 events.

The dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter One provides contextual information on divided Germany during the 1970s and 1980s, and it also introduces three historical debates that appear in the case studies. Chapter Two looks at the Leipzig Ring (1973-1976) as not only a parable about nineteenth-century class conflict but also a historical narrative about the relationship between the GDR and the Nazi past. Chapters Three and Four investigate the Bayreuth centennial Ring (1976), and they compare and contrast Patrice Chéreau and Pierre Boulez’s very different visions of Wagner. Chapter Five examines the multiple views of Wagner in the Frankfurt Ring (1985-1987). While the director Ruth Berghaus interprets the work in terms of a tradition of epic theater and historical materialism, the dramaturge Klaus Zehelein focuses on aspects of language, textuality, and representation. I also discuss how the reception of the Frankfurt Ring in West German newspapers reflects the re-intensification of the Cold War in the 1980s.

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