

≈ INTRODUCTION ≈

MARGARET ELEANOR MENNINGER

The broad influence of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, routinely if imperfectly translated as the “Total Work of Art,” on modern European cultural and political activity is unmistakable.¹ Called the stuff of “campfire stories” by one scholar, *Gesamtkunstwerk* is such an evocatively protean idea that it is hardly surprising that its genealogy and application remain lively subjects, even as its precise taxonomy remains elusive.² In the realms of music, literature, art, architecture, and theater, the idea of *Gesamtkunstwerk* continues to be a potent means of telegraphing a particular set of aesthetic goals for practitioners and analytical practices for scholars. But beyond these usual suspects, it has also been used as a descriptor for virtual reality and as a means of considering pedagogy in the new millennium, all in places far beyond its original geographic and disciplinary locus.³ Perhaps the concept of the total work of art has even become the victim of its own success; indeed, it may have evolved into a “label with no meaning.”⁴ But should it be completely jettisoned?⁵

The participants in this collection hew to the premise that the ideal of *Gesamtkunstwerk* has always revolved more around a central idea of promise rather than of delivery, functioning as a “recurrent dream” as one critic has put it.⁶ The exact contents and manner of such a promise may themselves be subject to change, but this essentially aspirational aspect of *Gesamtkunstwerk* has proven its worth over time to artists, performers, and scholars. It is the durability of the idea rather than the specific details of its content and meaning that continue to make it worthy of study. The sheer number of works on the subject that have appeared in the past twenty years would seem to support the claim that there is still much to be considered about the total work of art vis-à-vis cultural and intellectual life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet the extant literature has its own peculiarities.

If “in the beginning” was *not* Richard Wagner, his ideas exerted and continue to exert the greatest gravitational pull on how scholars and the general public discuss the total work of art. Indeed, *Gesamtkunstwerk* oftentimes seems to function as a means of identifying an aesthetic-political pathway that leads either to or from Richard Wagner (if not as a shorthand term of reference for his works in general).⁷ The road toward Wagner is relatively well trodden;

it focuses for the most part on the German Romantic tradition and those thinkers' understanding of earlier Greek and Roman ideals of political and artistic unity.⁸ Wagner's particular "brand" of Gesamtkunstwerk, as Nicholas Vazsonyi calls it, was a uniquely innovative means of packaging ideas about art and universalism that had origins in the eighteenth century in both Germany and France, a point echoed by David Roberts.⁹ That brand had and continues to have important aesthetic and political resonance for the middle of the nineteenth century, as seen in Udo Bermbach's specific focus on the 1840s and 1850s in *Der Wahn des Gesamtkunstwerks* and his attention to the political dimensions of Wagner's aesthetic project.¹⁰

The path away from Wagner gets a bit thornier. After his death, Gesamtkunstwerk becomes thickly entwined with Wagnerism as an international, and particularly pan-European, cultural-intellectual phenomenon.¹¹ For example, while Timothée Picard's primary focus is on the "totality" of the Gesamtkunstwerk (as is evident from his use of *L'art total* in his title), he also sees it as one of several ways Wagnerism and Wagnerian tropes persisted, particularly in literature, long after the composer's death. Kevin C. Karnes, following Picard, seeks to return Wagner to the center of his study of the arts in fin-de-siècle Vienna, highlighting in particular Wagner's influence on the emergence of a "utopian imagination in Vienna's creative culture."¹² Marcella Lista, likewise, has illuminated the relationship between the notion of Gesamtkunstwerk (and its reinterpretation) and the emergence of early twentieth-century avant-garde movements.¹³ And in *Modernism after Wagner*, Juliet Koss proposes that Wagner's specific concept of Gesamtkunstwerk continued to provide a framework for understanding the interrelation of various art forms from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1930s, including the very European workshop that was the Bauhaus.¹⁴

In all these works, Wagner's remains the version of a total work of art to adopt, adapt, or reject outright. Collectively these scholars point toward a broader European understanding and employment of the idea of the total work of art after Wagner's death, a project that embraces cultural production up to the end of the twentieth century and beyond.¹⁵ Scholarship presenting variations of Gesamtkunstwerk maintains these broadly international perspectives in terms of the type of artistic creation examined. In essence, the total work of art has developed into an "aesthetic aspiration to borderlessness," both in terms of disciplines and nationalities.¹⁶ Anke Finger and Danielle Follett's collection, *The Aesthetics of the Total Artwork*, highlights this broadening of perspective that enables the concept to be extended to many fields while it pushes the examination of Gesamtkunstwerk from modernity into postmodernity.¹⁷

Thus, in a European and international context, the road away from Wagner is one that runs ever on. In the German context, however, the road seems to have a very definite dead end. It ends in 1933, or perhaps more properly in

1935, with National Socialism and *Triumph of the Will*. Even in works such as Josef Chytrý's *The Aesthetic State*, Gesamtkunstwerk only plays a part insofar as it relates to Wagner and further to National Socialism.¹⁸ To be sure, scholars have noted the impact of Gesamtkunstwerk on the work of Brecht, Kandinsky, Schoenberg, and many others who shared neither Hitler's philosophy nor the nastier elements of Wagner's worldview. However, even these efforts to include progressive creative activity in the narrative of Gesamtkunstwerk ultimately become part of a trajectory that smashes into the triumph of a totalizing and totalitarian aesthetic vision. In the words of Adrian Daub, efforts to rescue the total work of art in Germany from a fascist fate belong to the "losing side of the Gesamtkunstwerk."¹⁹ Ralf Biel, echoing Jürgen Söring, is even more deterministic: "[T]he idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ... mutates step by step into the total artwork of German totalitarianism."²⁰

We would beg to differ. Even as much of the scholarship on the total work of art in the last twenty years or so has been explicitly European, the redolence of "Teutonic profundities" remains.²¹ Of course the centrality of Wagner, German modernism, and National Socialism to most discussions of the total work of art during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries inevitably nudges any study toward a German center. But much of the research, especially that of more recent vintage, seems not to consider German cultural production since 1945 to any great degree; furthermore, the scholarship on Gesamtkunstwerk that views the idea as an ongoing theme or phenomenon within German cultural history in particular is underdeveloped.²² This collection is a step toward correcting that oversight. Above all, pushing the trajectory of Gesamtkunstwerk in the German-speaking world beyond World War II forces us to consider the longer life of Daub's "losing side of the Gesamtkunstwerk" and how artists and audiences, in the context of ambitious, large-scale, audience-focused works, have come to terms with Nazism's legacies.

This volume thus explores Gesamtkunstwerk primarily within a German context. Collectively, the chapters reflect on German cultural history and the relationship between culture and politics in German-speaking Europe. We understand this scope mainly in two ways. First, expectedly, the essays focus on events and developments that took place in German Europe or were intimately associated with it. Second, we include essays that examine artistic engagement with creative works of Germanic provenance. Our chronological focus, from the early nineteenth century through to the early twenty-first, also makes clear that the evolution of German thinking about the total work of art has been varied and multidirectional. The road runs in many directions, and National Socialism neither exhausts the possibilities along the way nor serves as the terminus.

The essays here contribute to trends in the extant literature that acknowledge but also reconsider Wagner's central presence in the discourse and writing on

Gesamtkunstwerk, both inside and outside “Germany.” They question the need to understand Gesamtkunstwerk only as an idealization of totality, above all in the sense of an impulse towards creating monumental, synthetic works where the component parts are neatly integrated into an overarching whole. Perhaps, following early twentieth-century artists like Wassily Kandinsky, we need also to be attuned to readings of “totality” that strive not for unity in art, but only inclusivity—to the point even of embracing discord and incongruity.²³ At the very least, it seems that we need to be aware of the degree of conflict inherent in the creation of Gesamtkunstwerk. Along these lines, Matthew Wilson Smith has recently argued that dialectical struggles in the name of total aesthetic experience—art vs. commerce, organicism vs. mechanization, political ideologies of the left vs. the right—have determined the history of the Gesamtkunstwerk.²⁴ He suggests, thus, that the key to understanding this evolution is to look for the clashes beneath the smoother external surface of the work itself—that is, to study the way a would-be Gesamtkunstwerk attempts to mask the conflicts fundamental to its meaning. It is in the “relationship between the total work of art, technology, and mass culture” where Gesamtkunstwerk’s functional and creative history is most clearly found.²⁵

Put another way, a total work of art could be likened to *Lohengrin’s* swan: appearing all serene above the waterline but frantically paddling against the current below. That image points not only to the dynamism of the underlying creative process but also leads us to question the semblance of overall coherence in the final result, at least in those takes on Gesamtkunstwerk that strive for synthetic unity. The term may be parsed in other ways too. For, when considering Gesamtkunstwerk, the question of what “gesamt” means remains critical: most commonly translated to mean “total,” it may also be understood in terms of the “communal” or the “collective,” as Josef Chytrý, Marcella Lista, and Matthew Wilson Smith have pointed out.²⁶ Anke Finger refines this distinction slightly, observing that where a “Gesamt-Kunstwerk” may represent a single work presented as a total artwork, a “Gesamtkunst-Werk” should be understood as a “collaborative product.”²⁷ Deconstructing the components of the term differently points toward any number of analytical pathways, some easier to navigate from the perspective of one discipline than from another. But all raise fundamental questions about the consequences of an image of surface unity, however completely achieved, that covers up (or attempts to cover up) the struggle to paddle against currents generated by the tensions among the various component elements.

This collection is itself a collaborative product that aims to propel Gesamtkunstwerk into new and less charted waters. It began as an informal conversation at the end of a panel devoted to music, history, and cultural studies at the 2009 German Studies Association Conference in Washington DC, when it was suggested that the panelists ought to organize a series of conference

sessions to explore and question the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk as multidisciplinary praxis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Taking cues from all the above-mentioned studies, the present volume collectively investigates a large number of Gesamtkunstwerk's potential and actual permutations. It does not provide its own complete or totalizing account of Gesamtkunstwerk in German-speaking Europe, and this is intentional. The diverse approaches to, and understandings of, Gesamtkunstwerk over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are themselves indicative of twists and turns in the evolution of German culture itself in the same period. Thus, at the same time that this series of essays collectively explores Gesamtkunstwerk against the backdrop of a highly dynamic cultural landscape, it seeks to shed new light on our understanding of that cultural heritage.

First, these essays demonstrate that politics—broadly construed—has been critical to the total work of art in both theory and practice. Gesamtkunstwerk is not just about creating multimedia, synthetic products: it involves art with a purpose, even when the politics are worn lightly. That a total work of art ought to have a political message may not seem much of a news flash, but in our view the types of political messages associated with it have been too narrowly categorized, and again have been made to follow a very specific evolutionary route running from revolutionary idealism in 1849 to totalizing authoritarianism in 1935. Scholars' ongoing emphasis on totality, and especially a very specific understanding of that totality as the central definitional thrust of the term, one that is unitary rather than collaborative, has also tended to obscure the fact that many different types of political messages can find their way into Gesamtkunstwerk.

Second, we seek to focus more attention on the consumption of Gesamtkunstwerk—above all in the sense of how audiences received such works and, even more so, actively collaborated in investing them with meaning. Gesamtkunstwerk has been intimately reliant on reception, not merely the creation of would-be “total” worlds or worldviews.²⁸ This book's focus on Gesamtkunstwerk's communal and collective elements keeps the spotlight, so to speak, on the performance—the reality of making and presenting a work—and on the audience. Many of the essays have profited from the categorization of the total work of art advanced in Anke Finger and Danielle Follett's collection. Their proposed trinity of elements—aesthetics, politics, and metaphysics—provides a useful, informal baseline from which to analyze potential “total works of art.” Nevertheless, one of the conclusions that emerges from the contributions here is that two more elements should be added to the mix: process (or production) and experience (or reception). Indeed, the contributors to this volume show clearly that the practical factors of creation help shape how we understand the constitution of a total work of art in the moment, and how the practice (and practicality) of creation affects the end result.

Third, this book considers Gesamtkunstwerk's aspirational nature. As we noted earlier, the total work of art has always worked better as ideal than blueprint.²⁹ This is true for both performers and scholars. Treating Gesamtkunstwerk as an ideal—stated or implied—that may inform the experience of cultural activity or practice opens up possibilities for employing it as a heuristic device to arrive at richer understandings of cultural phenomena and their specific social contexts. These possibilities are largely obscured if we focus on the nostalgic dimensions of Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk concept, that is, as a way to return to a world that has been lost. But, if we think about Gesamtkunstwerk as a collaborative model—not just among different branches of art, but also among creator, performers, and audience—then it can serve not so much as a criterion for deciding whether a work is or is not deemed to be a total work of art, but rather as a way to highlight and reflect on what the apparent similarities or dissonances between ideal and realization might mean. This approach also opens the way to exploring art works in terms of the total work of art, even if their creators did not conceive them as such, and to examining aspects of the collaborative process that do not even focus on the artwork itself. In their various ways, each essay in this collection engages with this notion of Gesamtkunstwerk as collaborative practice and communal experience. But if Gesamtkunstwerk emerges from these analyses as a stable ideal, it is one where the content and meaning have undergone and undergo continuous revision.

The book divides the eleven chapters into three parts. Part I considers the genesis or **Foundations** of Gesamtkunstwerk and its use by Richard Wagner; Part II looks at its deliberate re-engineering after Wagner's death, or **Articulations** of the idea; and Part III sees Gesamtkunstwerk as **Inspiration**, in which the authors probe the concept's aesthetic boundaries and its value for analyzing cultural production and consumption. In one way or another, all of these broad topics of investigation study the dialectic and myth of unity that seems to be inherent in the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk. They also demonstrate the ways in which the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk has remained an important theme in German cultural history since the early nineteenth century. A further testament to the breadth of Gesamtkunstwerk is the fact that this collection brings together scholars from a wide range of disciplines: history, music, dance, literature, and art history. Under these three headings, the essays that follow explore the ways in which (1) nineteenth-century thinkers and practitioners, including Wagner, created the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk; (2) artists in a variety of fields subsequently employed, reworked and extended the concept; and (3) how the idea's potent yet contentious afterlife may help us explore and understand dimensions of German cultural life from the early twentieth century to the present day.

Specifically in the “Foundations” section, the authors consider how early nineteenth-century Romantics developed the idea of a total work of art, revealing the utter lack of consensus on how to use the term.³⁰ As the contributors point out, the foundation of the Wagnerian total work of art, as it was understood by later artists, was built both on what he wrote in 1849 and what he later did on stage, particularly in *Parsifal*. For Nicholas Vazsonyi (Chapter 1), it is Friedrich Schiller’s vision of drama’s liberating potential that most effectively showed Wagner the path to imagining Gesamtkunstwerk as dramatic process and revolutionary participatory ideal. In particular, Vazsonyi stresses, Schiller (and other Romantics) inspired Wagner to regard performance as central to any understanding of the total work of art. Critically, this position implies that the audience is itself an essential element in the realization of Gesamtkunstwerk. As Vazsonyi puts it, the ultimate goal of any performance, particularly anything aspiring to the status of Gesamtkunstwerk, was “the fundamental impact on the recipient” of the drama in question. The goal of such an impression was not merely to wow the viewers; it was to use the emotional response to the spectacle to drive home a moral point. Gesamtkunstwerk in performance thus creates a communal, shared experience as well as an opportunity to “catch the conscience” of the audience.

Sanna Pederson (Chapter 2) focuses directly on the two main texts where Wagner developed his ideas about the total work of art. She argues that while Wagner’s formulation of Gesamtkunstwerk in *The Artwork of the Future* (1849/50) was both strikingly original and politically radical, he rapidly retreated from that position. His text *Opera and Drama* (1851), in particular, presents a less revolutionary analysis where Gesamtkunstwerk as such is not even named. Pederson suggests, too, that Wagner had to change his earlier vision of Gesamtkunstwerk in part to fit his practice (or perhaps his planned practice, as he only actively returned to composition in 1854), having realized that his earlier cooperative and inclusive vision of art would inevitably founder on the shoals of actual performance. Even if Wagner found the ecstatic union of the three sister arts (music, dance, poetry) to be inspiring and seductive, when it came time to think practically about the realities of the artist as creator, it made sense to simplify. But the procreative analogy of the union of music and drama, while more compelling as a means of description of how to “create” an artwork, still left control in too many hands. Ultimately, Pederson concludes, Wagner opted for the creative force of one.

Anthony Steinhoff (Chapter 3) is not quite so pessimistic about the survival of Wagner’s early vision of Gesamtkunstwerk, although he locates its best expression some thirty years later than Pederson’s end point. Steinhoff agrees that, in assessing Wagner’s writings about the total work of art, we must distinguish between the theoretical and the concrete. “We may need to make a clearer distinction,” he suggests, “between the fundamental problems Wagner

hoped to address (the ‘thesis’) and the specific solutions (the ‘hypotheses’) he proposed to them.” Wagner did not stop thinking about Gesamtkunstwerk in the 1850s; rather he continued to investigate the notion from a variety of angles for the rest of his life. Steinhoff finds in *Parsifal*, Wagner’s final opera, the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk to be most completely realized. By then the Bayreuth “workshop” had given Wagner the requisite time and artistic conditions to develop his earlier vision of a revolutionary Gesamtkunstwerk into a performance that approached his unified vision of the musical, the aesthetic, and the dramatic, all reunited with a sense of political program.

If Steinhoff cautions us not to fall into the trap of turning Wagner’s idea of Gesamtkunstwerk into an eternal verity, the chapters grouped in the “Articulations” part offer a series of reflections on Gesamtkunstwerk’s meaning and application post-Wagner. During the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, a time when his and Bayreuth’s influence were particularly controversial, many of those engaged with the production and reception of Gesamtkunstwerk fought against Wagner’s concept. Thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno expressed their concern over Wagner’s legacy.³¹ Meanwhile practitioners and observers increasingly paid attention to the political implications of Wagner’s ideas.

The articulations of Gesamtkunstwerk expressed here are, in their way, all essays on “the reception of Wagner-reception,” as Gerd Rienäcker first put it and as Amy Wlodarski points out in her contribution.³² For the artists working after the Great War, Wlodarski notes, the “received” Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk put enormous and, in their eyes dangerous, emphasis on music.³³ Its creative function as the dominant element in a total work of art threatened to leave the listener with dangerous cravings and numbed senses.³⁴ Integrating a greater number of disciplines and media into the total art work offered one way to prevent this harm. Bauhaus artists, for instance, were known for adding architecture and film to the three sisters of music, poetry, and dance. But the essential point upon which the artists discussed in this section of the volume saw their work turning remained the issue of unity or, in Joy Calico’s words, the “totalizing impulse.” As a group, the chapters in Part II reveal that the goal of unity (or totality) remained a central concern for these artists even as they rejected Wagner’s—or their understanding of Wagner’s—method(s) for achieving it.

Joy Calico (Chapter 4), notably, contends that Bertolt Brecht used Gesamtkunstwerk to express his own ideas about totality in opera and theater. Brecht, conventionally depicted as the polar opposite to Wagner in operatic terms, was engaging with a particular iteration of the total work of art, the “Nietzsche-Wagner brand,” as we might put it, which had come to stand in for Wagner proper. But if we look carefully, she points out, Brecht’s vision of theater has a great deal in common with Wagner’s early models of

Gesamtkunstwerk in terms of both theory and practice. Like Wagner, Brecht was also confronted with the problem of how to achieve his ideas on an actual stage. The pragmatic problems of production (of particular concern because Brecht could not supervise the staging of his works while in exile) have to be factored into how Brecht understood the theory of what he was achieving. For Calico, thus, Brecht's epic theater projects can be understood as consciously articulating the elements of a total work of art, albeit in a way as far from that of Wagner as possible. And yet in straining to pull away from "planet Wagner," Brecht's own totalizing impulse shows distinct similarities to the Schillerian ideals of a total work of art with drama serving as the sun.

In her exploration of Oskar Schlemmer and the Bauhaus theater, Melissa Trimingham (Chapter 5) notes that efforts to create a sense of unity within the Bauhaus were often haunted by the Wagnerian brand of Gesamtkunstwerk. Yet, she insists, the Bauhaus was also very much inspired by pre-Wagnerite ideals of unifying the arts in terms of the works that were produced there. In particular, Oskar Schlemmer's theatrical performances embraced the broad potential of the stage reminiscent of Goethe and Schiller—even as the performances deliberately downplayed music as part of the formal presentation. Schlemmer and others at the Bauhaus, however, did not ban music from their vision of the unified arts. Indeed, music played a central role in the everyday life at the Bauhaus. The collaborative and communal aspects of total work of art were part of the ordinary practice of those who worked—and partied—there. Nevertheless, Trimingham views the stage work of Schlemmer and his co-workers as a practical and material realization of the unity of the arts expressed by the early Romantics. That is, the modernist theater of Schlemmer and his colleagues, stripped of any nineteenth-century embellishment, nonetheless tapped "into a vision of cultural harmony" that reached back to before Wagner.

Even artists who explicitly rejected Gesamtkunstwerk as a Wagnerian trope nevertheless still made use of a "total" concept to create an artificial unity in their work, which in turn could inspire revolutionary thought. Indeed, as Trimingham tellingly remarks, "Wagner and the Bauhaus become radically different embodied manifestations of what is essentially the same impulse." This observation, and the other essays in Part II, point to the extraordinary political malleability of the total work of art. Gesamtkunstwerk could be used as effectively by those on the left as by those on the right, despite the legacy of National Socialist exploitation of Wagner. The analytical implications of these findings are particularly significant, for they suggest that we ought not to conflate the artistic drive towards unity with political definitions of "total" or "totalitarian" as was done by both Adorno and Benjamin. The framework they developed has encouraged a far more manipulative take on totality as it pertains to Gesamtkunstwerk than was necessarily present in the striving towards unity undertaken by the artists of the Bauhaus or in Brecht.³⁵

In her exploration of Alain Resnais' film *Nuit et Brouillard* (Night and Fog, 1955) with music by Hanns Eisler, Amy Wlodarski (Chapter 6) shows once more how the conscious rejection of Wagner's idea of Gesamtkunstwerk, in particular its alleged trance-inducing musical totality, could result in works that articulated a modernist vision of unity. For Eisler, as for Brecht and those in the Bauhaus, unity was best articulated in works that re-engineered the components of Gesamtkunstwerk to reject one form of totality while in a sense creating another. Eisler's film score (music), Wlodarski concludes, serves to bring together the elements of *Night and Fog*, so that it reads as a "political retort to totalitarianism" that undercuts "Wagnerian conventions," even while embracing some of the same techniques.

That said, the impulse to push back against Wagnerian ideas (or at least a particular take on them) was not always as combative. Wayne Heisler (Chapter 7) investigates articulations of unity in the total work of art by reclaiming the "graceful Hellenic sister" all too often left by the side of the road in later iterations of Gesamtkunstwerk: dance. Perhaps more than Brecht or the artists of the Bauhaus, Heisler shows that twentieth-century dancers and choreographers found productive and positive ways to fuse Wagnerian models of totality and unity in their efforts to create ballet as a "total" theatrical form. At the same time, they gave new impetus to the ideas of Gesamtkunstwerk. In the case of dancers such as Martha Graham, and such choreographers as Maurice Béjart and Rudi van Dantzig, ballet as Gesamtkunstwerk resembled more "reconciled artworks" rather than total ones. Heisler suggests that this element of reconciliation can be seen particularly in the "song ballets," especially those based on Richard Strauss' *Vier letzte Lieder* (Four Last Songs). The ballets set to these particular songs, with their emphasis on the themes of grief and acceptance, demonstrate, in Heisler's view, a resurgence of a particularly Romantic variant of Gesamtkunstwerk that Wagner had bypassed, proving that, in some cases, recapitulation can be articulation.

The contributions to the third and final section, "Inspirations," all seek to push the envelope with respect to how we think about Gesamtkunstwerk and about aesthetic practice, cultural consumption, and audiences more generally. Each author approaches Gesamtkunstwerk not so much as a label to be affixed to an artistic endeavor, but rather as a complex of aesthetic-cum-political ideas that can be employed analytically, either en bloc or à la carte, to enrich our understanding of art and its sociopolitical contexts, especially over the course of the twentieth century. Admittedly, the cases examined in this section were never conceived, at least in any direct sense, as works of total art. Rather, by viewing them through the lens of Gesamtkunstwerk and, thereby, shifting focus from aesthetic model to analytical concept, the authors in this section seek to open up new perspectives on our understanding of the creative process, the connections between art and politics, above all in the age of mass media.

In this way these pieces appropriately echo the variety of Gesamtkunstwerke discussed in parts I and II, illustrating that a willingness to step out of Wagner's shadow can provide us with a more insightful and analytically useful vision of this concept.

Theorists ever since Schiller have invariably considered the audience as central to their understanding of a total work of art. But frequently their analyses treat the audience as if it receives a total work of art as an already completed unit. The contributors in this section argue that we must also consider the audience's active reception of the artwork as part of the artwork itself. Thinking about the audience, in turn, forces us to think about how "total" a total work of art actually was before it was seen or heard. To put the question another way: does Gesamtkunstwerk only take place between a person's ears or in front of a person's eyes? Is the act of consumption the crucial final piece of Gesamtkunstwerk? Or, to return to the title of Nicholas Vazsonyi's essay, is the play really the thing, or is it the audience?

In their respective chapters, Jenny Anger and Theodore Rippey engage directly with two basic means of reception: visual and auditory. Combining what David Roberts calls the "two great recurrent symbols of the total work of art"—the theater and the cathedral—in an analysis of Bruno Taut's 1914 *Glashaus*, Jenny Anger (Chapter 8) demonstrates how using a new term, *Gesamtglaswerk* (total glass work), offers a means of reclaiming the "utopian spirit" of unity in Gesamtkunstwerk.³⁷ In the case of Taut's piece, this spiritual recovery is achieved by combining the site-specific theatricality of the translucent Glashaus as an architectural space with the spiritual sense of "purity" and "unity" reported by those who visited it.³⁸ The medium through which this is accomplished is glass, thanks to the ways in which glass and light interact. In the *Gesamtglaswerk*, it is light, blended light, that spiritually unifies the arts, but with light and sight rather than music and hearing as the binding agents. *Gesamtglaswerk* incorporates the effects of collaborative production as well as the promise of that most utopian of projects: the political and spiritual unity of mankind.

For Theodore Rippey (Chapter 9), sound is the element at Gesamtkunstwerk's center, and not just as music. He argues that noise was also an important part of the soundscape, particularly for those in the 1930s who were inspired by Wagner's approach to sight and sound at Bayreuth and also committed to the ideal of Gesamtkunstwerk as "an object for and maker of an audience." The films *Kuhle Wampe* and *Triumph of the Will*, he contends, show how crowd noise functions as part of the performance the audience hears and as something that the audience contributes to the aesthetic, cinematic experience. Noise thus redirects the experience of the audience/viewer and adds something new to Gesamtkunstwerk's artistic "palette." This attention to sound and noise also leads Rippey to challenge the conventional wisdom that Leni Riefenstahl's

Triumph best realizes Gesamtkunstwerk's aesthetic ideal. Instead, he suggests that honor be bestowed on Slatan Dudov's *Kuhle Wampe*, on account of its more natural, inclusive approach to cinematographic sound. Not only does this analysis undermine *Triumph*'s putative status as the apotheosis of a totalitarian Gesamtkunstwerk, it reminds us yet again that the political range of the total work of art has too often been narrowly defined.

More than any other contributors to this collection, Julia Goodwin, Margaret Eleanor Menninger, and David Imhoof resist the centripetal force of Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk by situating their analyses of total works of art at the point where it is furthest away from the artist's control. Their respective essays contend that the process of consumption completes the Gesamtkunstwerk; that is, that reception is a crucial part of performance. The essay by Goodwin/Menninger (Chapter 10) re-centers music within the total work of art in a manner that Wagner would likely have endorsed. But they propose a new way of using the ideals of unity so prized by the early nineteenth-century Romantics. Namely, they propose that we understand performances of memorial music designed for ceremonial acts of reconciliation as enactments of total works of art themselves. Using the example of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*, they show that the choice of specific performers, "symbolic casting," was also an important factor in the creation of these total works of art, which strove to be transformational for the psyche as well as for the spirit. Memorial music itself, Goodwin and Menninger suggest, becomes Gesamtkunstwerk through the articulation of specific conditions for particular performances and through the experience of reception.

In his piece, David Imhoof (Chapter 11) likewise shows how audiences, especially in their roles as consumers of mass culture, worked to manufacture a sense of unity around particular musical films. He reveals that German viewers' familiarity with stories, soundtracks, and stars of musical films provided hooks that enabled them to connect their specific experiences of these movies with their broader cultural consumption habits. Through such links, consumers could foster a semblance of unity in their cultural lives. Placing virtually all the agency for creating a total work of art in the hands of the audience, Imhoof takes us farthest from the creators of artistic products discussed elsewhere in this collection. His radical emphasis on Gesamtkunstwerk as a mythical whitewashing of complex connections and contradictions in cultural life may be the logical extension of Gesamtkunstwerk as *Lohengrin*'s swan serenely covering the vigorous paddling below the surface. Ultimately Imhoof maintains that using Gesamtkunstwerk as an analytical lens can help us understand the ways that mass consumer culture functioned in Germans' lives.

The idea of Gesamtkunstwerk continues to inspire and vex us. Humans still thrill to the promise of experiencing a moment of transcendent unity through

art, despite all the evidence of the potential for misuse and the passionate arguments against the dangers of totality. Perhaps the tendency to cling stubbornly to the ideal of Gesamtkunstwerk remains in part because it is so difficult to pin down objectively. Indeed one might almost be moved to remark, as Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart did in 1964 about obscenity, that we know Gesamtkunstwerk when we see it.³⁹ Strange as it may sound, this use of an uncertain yet certain definition has more merit than is immediately apparent. Like the fragmentary origins of the idea of the total work of art, Stewart's decision was one of seven separate opinions deciding the case. Moreover, Stewart's phrase has developed a life of its own, not only in everyday speech but also in legal opinion.⁴⁰ Beyond these rather surface points of similarity, however, Stewart's "analytical category" is worth revisiting, especially in the context of using the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk for analysis, both from the point of view of the final recipient—the audience—and that of the scholar. In an article on the linguistic afterlife of Stewart's decision, legal scholar Paul Gerwitz declares that he wishes to "identify and celebrate various ways in which non-rational as well as rational elements enter judicial decisions."⁴¹ Here is the place where Stewart's decision can be helpful. Like him, we are "faced with the task of trying to define what may be undefinable," even if we recognize the absence of any universally agreed upon criteria. That act of recognition is based in part at least on instinct and emotion as much as on conviction.

If we go along with the idea that we know a Gesamtkunstwerk when we see one, or perhaps experience one, we are ultimately acknowledging the force of irrational and individual subjectivity as an indispensable component of the notion of "totality" (or "integration" or "commonality") inherent in the total work of art. If we further agree that the pursuit of unity remains a pedal point in the harmonic structure of the total work of art, we might conclude that the way to find that utopian total is within the fractured individuals we are. Embedded within the idea of knowing what one sees when one sees it are some important resonances which we hope this volume will address. In the case of Gesamtkunstwerk, we know it when we see it; yet when we do, we all see it differently. It is in collaboration that the outlines of a total work of art are clearest. Only from a cooperatively constructed foundation can the chorus of articulations and inspirations begin. In that sense, this volume may be understood as a *Lehrstück* in the way that Brecht envisioned it—what Joy Calico calls a means of "communal participation." It is our collective hope that a project initially designed for the education of the participants has moved some way toward being a full-fledged performance. Its potential to rise to heights beyond that we leave to the experience of the reader.

Notes

Although the introduction bears only one of our names, it and the entire project have been a joint venture; my thanks to David Imhoof and Anthony J. Steinhoff.

1. While it ultimately proved necessary to incorporate this English rendering of Gesamtkunstwerk into the collection's title, this chapter, and many of the contributions that follow, view "The Total Work of Art" as only one of several possible ways of translating and thinking about Gesamtkunstwerk. Thus, throughout the volume, we have opted to retain the original German term, supplementing it as appropriate with the standard English translation.
2. "Ein mythischer Begriff in Erzählungen am Kaminfeuer..." See Harald Szeemann, "Vorbereitungen," in *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk: Europäische Utopien seit 1800*, ed. Harald Szeemann (Aarau, 1983), 17.
3. See Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York, 2007) especially 157–86; and Margaret Eleanor Menninger, "The Classroom as a 'Total Work of Art': Pedagogy, Performance and 'Gesamtkunstwerk,'" *Ubiquitous Learning: An International Journal* 3, no. 3 (2011): 97–104. I am grateful for the thoughts of Mark Guzdial and Amy Bruckman on the application of the concept of Gesamtkunstwerk to education and technology. See also Mark Guzdial and Allison Elliott Tew, "Imagineering Inauthentic Legitimate Peripheral Participation: An Instructional Design Approach for Motivating Computing Education," *ICER '06 Proceedings of the Second International Workshop on Computing Education Research* (New York, 2006), 51–58.
4. See Nicholas Vazsonyi, "The Play's the Thing: Schiller, Wagner, and Gesamtkunstwerk," in this collection.
5. In their introduction, Danielle Follett and Anke Finger suggest detonation: "Dynamiting the Gesamtkunstwerk: An Introduction to the Aesthetics of the Total Artwork," in *The Aesthetics of the Total Artwork: On Borders and Fragments*, ed. Anke Finger and Danielle Follett (Baltimore, 2011), 1–25. See also Roger Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem Gesamtkunstwerk: Studien zu einer ästhetischen Konzeption der Moderne* (Hildesheim, 2004), 18.
6. David Roberts, "Review Essay: The Total Work of Art," *Thesis Eleven* 83 (November 2005): 104.
7. See, for example, Sven Oliver Müller, *Richard Wagner und die Deutschen: Eine Geschichte von Hass und Hingabe* (Munich, 2013), 25–45 passim.
8. See Simon Shaw-Miller, "Opsi Melos Lexis: Before and Around the Total Work of Art," in *Rival Sisters, Art and Music at the Birth of Modernism, 1815–1915*, ed. James H. Rubin and Olivia Mattis (Farnham, 2014), 37–51.
9. Nicholas Vazsonyi, *Richard Wagner: Self-Promotion and the Making of a Brand* (Cambridge, 2010). See also Timothée Picard, *L'Art total: grandeur et misère d'une utopie (autour de Wagner)* (Rennes, 2006), 23–26; and David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca, 2011), 15–33. The point about French interest in Gesamtkunstwerk is also made very specifically for early nineteenth-century French literature in Matthias Brzoska, *Die Idee des Gesamtkunstwerks in der Musiknovellistik der Julimonarchie* (Laaber-Verlag, 1995).
10. Udo Bembach, *Der Wahn des Gesamtkunstwerks: Richard Wagners politisch-ästhetische Utopie*, 2nd, revised and expanded edition (Stuttgart, 2004).

11. Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis, 2010), xi. See also David Clay Large and William Weber, eds, *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca, 1984).
12. Kevin C. Karnes, *A Kingdom Not of This World: Wagner, the Arts, and Utopian Visions in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (Oxford and New York, 2013), 3 and 30–31. See also Picard, *L'Art total*.
13. Marcella Lista, *L'Œuvre d'art totale à la naissance des avant-gardes 1908–1914* (Paris, 2006).
14. Koss, *Modernism*.
15. See, for example, Danielle Cohen-Levinas, ed., *Le Renouveau de l'art total* (Paris, 2004).
16. Finger and Follett, *Aesthetics*, 4. Walter Scheel echoes this suggestion remarking that, with respect to art, “Totale Kunst—oder der Traum von ihr—hat mehr mit individueller, schöpferischer und grenzenloser Freiheit zu tun...” Scheel, “Zum Geleit,” in Szeemann, *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk*, 8.
17. In addition to the work in Finger and Follett, see particularly Georges Banu, “Gesamtkunstwerk et kabuki,” and Hélène Bouvier, “Le théâtre à Madura (Indonésie), un totalité artistique et sociale,” both in *L'Œuvre d'art totale*, ed. Denis Bablet and Élie Konigson (Paris, 1995), 325–32 and 333–40; as well as Marcella Lista, “Des correspondences au *Mickey Mouse Effect*: l'œuvre d'art totale et le cinema d'animation,” in *L'Œuvre d'art totale*, ed. Jean Galard and Julian Zugazagottia (Paris, 2003), 109–38.
18. Josef Chytrý, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest of Modern German Thought* (Berkeley, 1989). This is not to say that other models of totalitarian rule are ignored. On Stalin, see Roberts, *Total Work of Art*, 207–31. Other arguments in favor of a natural link between Gesamtkunstwerk and totalitarianism may be found in Hans Jürgen Syberberg, “Hitler und die Staatskunst: Die mephistophelische Avantgarde des 20. Jahrhunderts,” in *Realismus: Zwischen Revolution und Reaktion 1919–1939*, ed. Günter Metken (Munich, 1981), 382–87; and Erich Michaud, “Oeuvre d'art totale et totalitarisme,” in Galard and Zugazagottia, *L'œuvre*, 35–66.
19. Adrian Daub, *Tristan's Shadow: Sexuality and the Total Work of Art after Wagner* (Chicago and London, 2013), 76.
20. Ralf Beil, “For me there is no other work of art’: The Expressionist Total Artwork—Utopia and Practice,” in *The Total Artwork in Expressionism: Art, Film, Literature, Theater, Dance and Architecture, 1905–1925*, ed. Ralf Beil and Claudia Dillmann (Darmstadt, 2011), 39. Beil references Jürgen Söring, “Gesamtkunstwerk,” in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. 1, ed. Klaus Weimar (Berlin, 1997), 711.
21. Roberts, *Total Work of Art*, 144.
22. Bazon Brock's consideration of the work of Hans Jürgen Syberberg and Anselm Kiefer offers a counterexample. See Brock, “Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk: Pathosformeln und Energiesymbole zur Einheit von Denken, Wollen und Können,” in Szeemann, *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk*, 22–39.
23. See, Élie Konigson, “Introduction” and Didier Plassard, “Approches de l'art monumental: Kandinsky et la synthèse des arts,” in Bablet and Konigson, *L'Œuvre*, 13–19 and 111–28.
24. The contributors in Denis Bablet and Élie Konigson's edited volume explore the quest to create a “total work of art” for the stage, although Odette Aslan and Didier Plassard prefer to call the result “complete theater” and “monumental art” respectively. See Odette Aslan, “Le *Christophe Colomb* de Claudel, du théâtre ‘complet’ à l'acteur total,” in Bablet

- and Konigson, *L'Oeuvre*, 195–214; and Plassard, “Approches de l’art monumental.” See also Cohen-Levinas, *Renouveau*.
25. Smith, *Total Work of Art*, 3 and 6.
 26. Chytry, *The Aesthetic State*, 289; Lista, *L'Œuvre*, 11–15; Smith, *Total Work of Art*, 8–9. See also Beil and Dillmann, *The Total Artwork*, 14.
 27. Anke Finger, *Das Gesamtkunstwerk der Moderne* (Göttingen, 2006), 80. Variations of this observation may also be found in Odo Marquard, “Gesamtkunstwerk und Identitätssystem: Überlegungen im Anschluss an Hegels Schellingkritik,” in Szeemann, *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk*, 40–41.
 28. In literature, for example, Proust, Mann, and Tolkien all imagined worlds that have caused scholars to designate them as total works of art. See, for example, Antoine Compagnon, “L’hypertexte proustien,” in Galard and Zugazagottia, *L'œuvre*, 93–108, as well as the discussions in Picard and Daub.
 29. It should be noted that in its entirety, *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk* was an exhibition of utopias in Europe since 1800, and that the project itself was supported by the European Union as a gesture towards unifying European arts from both the West and the East. See Scheel, “Zum Geleit,” 7–10, Szeemann, *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk*.
 30. In doing this, the authors tend not to follow David Roberts’ lead in assigning credit for the idea to both German and French sources.
 31. Adorno posits that “the totalitarian and seigneurial aspect of atomization, that devaluation of the individual vis-à-vis the totality” and further contends that “Wagner’s anti-Semitism,” expressed in part through the music dramas, “assembles all the ingredients of subsequent varieties.” Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* (London, 2005), 40–41 and 16. Then, in the 1963 essay, “Wagner’s Relevance for Today,” he asserts, “The form of nationalism that he embodied, especially in his work, exploded into National Socialism.” Adorno, “Wagner’s Relevance for Today,” in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert and trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002), 585. See also Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), 217–51; and the related discussion in Roberts, *Total Work of Art*, 238–44 and 255; as well as, among others, Harald Szeemann and Jean Clair in Szeemann, *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk*, 16–21 and 93–104 passim; and Fornoff, *Sehnsucht*, 526–87.
 32. Gerd Rienäcker, *Musik Theater im Experiment; fünfundzwanzig Aufsätze* (Berlin, 2004), 201.
 33. Juliet Koss called the assessment of many of these artists a “reverent misunderstanding” of the term. Koss, *Modernism*, xvi.
 34. Koss, *Modernism*, esp. 245–73; and Koss, “Invisible Wagner” in Finger and Follett, *Aesthetics*, especially 168–69 and 187–90.
 35. Although Fornoff concludes his book with a study on the links between Gesamtkunstwerk and the Hitler and Stalin regimes, he does not hold that the total work of art naturally tends towards totalitarianism. He observes, “Auf diesem Wege wird sich zudem zeigen, dass das Konzept ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ insofern quer zum politischen ‘Links-Rechts-Schema’ steht, als sich in ihm emanzipatorische und reaktionäre, progressive und regressive, demokratische und antidemokratische Aspekte und Tendenzen durchdringen und nahezu unentwerrbar miteinander verknüpfen,” *Sehnsucht*, 553. This remark also has resonance with Walter Scheel’s declaration,

- “Der totale Staat is Antithese, ist Feind der totalen Kunst.” Scheel, “Zum Geleit,” 8, in Szeemann, *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk*.
36. Dance reinterpreted as movement was a part of the larger Bauhaus universe. See Koss, *Modernism*, 207–14 and 232–43.
 37. Roberts, *Total Work of Art*, 159.
 38. Adolf Behne, “Das Glashaus,” *Die Umschau* 18 (1914): 712–16.
 39. The key statement in Stewart’s opinion finding that the film *The Lovers* (directed by Louis Malle) was not obscene, which overturned two previous court decisions, reads as follows: “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description [of obscenity]; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that.” *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184 (1964) at 197.
 40. As of 1996, the phrase had been used in over 150 separate opinions in the federal courts. See Paul Gewirtz, “On ‘I Know It When I See It,’” *The Yale Law Journal* 105, no. 4 (1996): 1024–25.
 41. *Ibid.*, 1025–26.
 42. Stewart, *Jacobellis v. Ohio*.

Margaret Eleanor Menninger is Associate Professor of History at Texas State University and Executive Director of the German Studies Association. She has published on the history of cultural philanthropy in both the United States and Germany and was a contributor to *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia*. Her forthcoming book is entitled *A Serious Matter and True Joy: Philanthropy, the Arts, and the State in Nineteenth-Century Leipzig*.