

## System analysis as text analysis.

### Richard Wagner viewed from Cosima Wagner's Diaries\*

#### *Análisis de sistemas como análisis de textos.*

#### *Richard Wagner visto desde los Diarios de Cosima Wagner*

Christian Kaden

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Alemania.

*In memoriam*

Recibido: 15-08-2015  
Aceptado: 12-09-2015



---

#### Abstract

Cosima Wagner, Franz Liszt's illegitimate daughter, went down in history as the second wife of the great German composer Richard Wagner and as a leading advocate of his work after the death of the musician. Traditionally, Cosima has been regarded as a fundamental source of inspiration for some of the musical works of the artist, but perhaps her influence on Wagner's personality went far beyond. The aim of this research is to propose a particular vision of the influence that Cosima had on the thought of the composer and his works through a sociometric analysis performed from a content analysis of several texts extracted from her personal diaries. This special influence Cosima had over Wagner explains some of the musical, political and social opinions that were behind many of his works, especially in "Das Judentum in der Musik".

**Key words:** Richard Wagner, Cosima Wagner, Sociology of Music, Content Analysis, Das Judentum in der Musik

---

#### Resumen

Cósima Wagner, hija ilegítima de Franz Liszt, ha pasado a la historia como la segunda mujer del gran compositor alemán Richard Wagner y como una importante defensora de su obra tras la muerte del músico. Tradicionalmente se ha considerado a Cosima como una fuente de inspiración fundamental para alguna de las obras musicales del artista, pero quizá su influencia en la personalidad de Wagner fue mucho más allá. La presente investigación propone a través de un análisis sociométrico realizado a partir de un análisis de contenido de varios textos de los diarios personales de Cosima Wagner, una visión más particular de la influencia que Cosima tuvo en el pensamiento del compositor y en sus obras. Esta influencia especial que Cosima ejercía sobre Wagner explicaría algunas de las opiniones musicales, políticas y sociales que estaban detrás de muchas de sus obras, en especial en "Das Judentum in der Musik".

**Palabras clave:** Richard Wagner, Cosima Wagner, sociología de la música, análisis de contenido, Das Judentum in der Musik

---

#### Sumario

1. Introducción | 2. Methodology | 3. A matrix of a matrimonial dispute | 4. Expanding the research | 5. Conclusions

---

#### Cómo citar este artículo

Kaden, C. (2016): "System analysis as text analysis. Richard Wagner viewed from Cosima Wagner's Diaries", *methaodos. revista de ciencias sociales*, 4 (1): 10-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17502/m.rcs.v4i1.100>

---

\* El profesor Christian Kaden falleció el 11 de diciembre de 2015 mientras trabajábamos en el desarrollo del presente monográfico, por lo que no pudo ver terminado su artículo ajustado al formato que exige [methaodos.revista de ciencias sociales](http://methaodos.org) en sus normas editoriales. El Consejo de Redacción de la revista ha optado por respetar todo lo posible su texto original, incluyendo las anotaciones y referencias bibliográficas que el profesor hizo a pie de página. Desde aquí queremos agradecer al profesor Kaden su compromiso, implicación y buen hacer para con este proyecto.

## 1. Introducción

On November 21, 1874, Richard Wagner, already in Bayreuth, completed the score of "Twilight of the Idols". His wife with a note in her diary adjured that it was a "thrice holy, memorable day"<sup>1</sup>. At the same time in Villa Wahnfried there is trouble in the air.

"Towards noon"<sup>2</sup> Cosima brings the newspapers and a letter from her father Liszt into Wagner's studio. In order not to burden Richard with curiosity – the most recent days were full of the throes of inspiration –, she avoids any glance toward the sheets of music lying visible. Richard demands "explanations". He is "offended", "it is finished" – and he continues with a serious reproach: "If a letter from your father comes, then all sympathy, everything is whisked away"<sup>3</sup>. Cosima suppresses a reaction. As Wagner repeats the accusation, she breaks out in tears – which will not end for hours. In this process, as so often happens, her pain turned into celebration, she is so "happy" with him, folding "her hands thankfully", in her persuasion, "first (...) to atone with her worry for the completion of the great work". Soon the children find out about this; they "cry along with us, but they are soon comforted". Richard does not dive in. "With a final bitter word" he goes to bed. Cosima takes refuge at the piano, in "the sounds of Tristan"<sup>4</sup>. Only about two weeks later, ex post facto, does she add to the diary the report, Richard gave her a hug later with the words, "we love each other too intensely: this is the cause of our suffering"<sup>5</sup>. At this moment Wagner's gesture must not have persuaded his wife: from November 22 to December 3, 1874, she goes on strike, she ignores her diary.

Eight years later, on February 13, 1883, the last day of Wagner's life, the scene repeats itself: more precisely than one would think possible. Here however we must rely on the report of their daughter, Isolde<sup>6</sup>. The similar contour of events, however – together with the confirmation of central assertions by Siegfried, the Wagners' heroic son<sup>7</sup> – makes both representations credible. According to these sources, in the morning of February 13, an intense conflict between Richard and Cosima must have taken place. Richard planned to invite the flower girl Carrie Pringle, who filled out her dirndl dress, to Venice, to the Palazzo Vendramin. The lady of the house probably raised an objection. Again Wagner becomes petulant and breaks off all bridges to his wife, for example, by not appearing at the table for meals. For her part, Cosima grasps into the arsenal of women's weapons: deeply depressed she goes to the grand piano – and plays first before the eyes and ears of little Siegfried (who is toying around on the instrument), Franz Schubert's "Praise of Tears". In the meantime, the master was working incessantly on a text "On the feminine in the human". It cannot be ruled out that it was precisely as he wrote that the emancipation of women takes place with "ecstatic convulsions (...) love-tragedy", (for these were the last words he wrote)<sup>8</sup> that he died of a heart attack.

It would be short-sighted to classify these marital quarrels as harmless episodes. The causes are minimal. They have volcanic effects in Wagner's atmosphere. It is noteworthy that wife and daughter document this – and that it is Cosima herself in the role of the suffering heroine who shows her fateful side. If viewed in this manner, the diaries seem notably authentic and veracious. The form is as it were a frame of reference in order to validate Wagner's thought and writings, to test their practical validity for existence. Even more: they allow us to reconstruct techniques for living and lifestyle. Here the full extent of the facts as documented individually suggests that the regular must crystallize out of what seems accidental. For Wagner behavioural norms of this sort literally extend throughout his work and biography. The prosaic events that shape his daily life shed light on his opera production, but also on his writings on art, which do not primarily serve factual arguments, but rather the battle with (perceived or actual) adversaries. Everything that Wagner does in private and also in public is an important factor in social dynamics.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, (eds.) M. Gregor-Dellin and D. Mack, 2 vols., Munich, Zürich 1976, p. 871.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 872.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Martin Gregor-Dellin, *Richard Wagner. Sein Leben, sein Werk, sein Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1987, p. 764ff.

<sup>7</sup> Siegfried Wagner, *Erinnerungen*, (ed.) B. Zegowitz, Frankfurt am Main 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Gregor-Dellin, *Wagner* (as in fn. 6), p. 764; Sven Friedrich, *Wagner, Richard*, in: *MGG (New Edition)*, (ed.) L. Finscher, *Personenteil*, vol. 17, Kassel etc. 2007, p. 304.

## 2. Methodology

In the following paragraphs, we introduce a procedure that allows for the modelling of these processes. This procedure is sociometric system analysis. It is suitable for direct observation of acts of communication, but also for the examination of text documents to the extent that they portray these actions and discourses. I place a special emphasis on the "sociometric" approach, which was established by the Romanian psychologist Jakob Levy Moreno<sup>9</sup>. In contrast to the network analysis in favour today which employs angles, nodes and similar social abstractions<sup>10</sup>, this always keeps persons in view: with their constraints, their decisions, their individual freedom of choice. This is essential for an understanding of Wagner's behaviour. For it cannot suffice to describe the "*Sosein*" of activities, i.e., their essence. We must track their motivations, their mental background.

The point of departure for sociometric modelling is some very simple assumptions, which for precisely this reason place only a minimum theoretical strain on the procedure<sup>11</sup>. The relationship between two individuals is understood as an option matrix (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Option matrix

		Actor 1	
		+	-
Actor 2	+	++	+-
	-	-+	--

Source: Own elaboration.

For each actor, it contains two basic valences that refer to the partner. A plus action of partner 1 confirms the status of the second partner. A minus action demands that he change his behaviour. Since both actors influence each other mutually, the result is four value constellations: ++; --; +-; -+.

Plus-plus describes cases of mutual agreement, of positively concordant behaviour, of love and requited love. Minus-minus records mutual rejection, concordant in the negative; for the most part, this escalates, leads to enmity, hatred and war. In systems theory, plus-plus events and minus-minus events are considered cumulative feedback<sup>12</sup>. Positive reinforcement is the element of growth processes or, e.g., successful sexual encounters. Negative escalations lead to reduction, to destruction and elimination. In biology, of course, both types of accumulation, development and decay are naturally indispensable.

<sup>9</sup> Jakob L. Moreno, Die Grundlagen der Soziometrie, Opladen, 1974.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Handbuch Netzwerkforschung, (eds.) C. Stegbauer and R. Häußling, Wiesbaden 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Watzlawick, Janet H. Beavin, Don D. Jackson, Menschliche Kommunikation. Formen, Störungen, Paradoxien, Bern 1969; Christian Kaden, Das Unerhörte und das Unhörbare. Was Musik ist, was Musik sein kann, Kassel 2004, p. 27ff.; on matrix and block diagram models, see idem, Musiksoziologie, Berlin and Wilhelmshaven 1984, p. 252ff.

<sup>12</sup> Compare entries on word "Rückkoppelung" ["feedback"] in the Wirtschaftslexikon.co 2013; also Watzlawick/Beavin/Jackson (as in fn. 11), p. 68f.

The remaining options fields are also indispensable however. They describe compensatory, balancing feedbacks. An offer of "plus" can be countered, e.g., with an impulse in the opposite direction, without this necessarily involving a hostile intention. The best proof of this is a constructive, objective criticism. Conversely, a plus can follow on a minus if, e.g., an accusation of Partner 1 is persuasively refuted by an argument of Partner 2. As a general principle, compensatory feedbacks cause processes of control such as in the case of a refrigerator, which does not intensify excessive temperatures, but rather sets limits to them. Only through control can a system achieve stability and maintain it<sup>13</sup>. As is well-known, trees may neither grow unbounded into the heavens nor simply die out (++) or (--). Over a longer period they remain in an -- ecologically balanced -- state of equilibrium. A similar principle applies to marriages: whoever pursues a lasting relationship, must not only endure confirmation of love (++) and in some cases arguments (--), but also first of all productive verbal disagreement and acceptance of an objection.

### 3. A matrix of a matrimonial dispute

When we construct our matrix of Wagner's and Cosima's matrimonial dispute of November 1874, it is crucial, as it were, to make the diagram fluid. Since at the individual stations of the action we must not only record what actually happened but also what on the part of both partners intentionally did not happen. I will simply label this type of omitted actions as zero points. Moreover the manner in which partners fill out the matrix of their relations can only be understood, if we document what the actors intend or how they evaluate the action of the other actor. I add this sort of "virtual", since mostly unexpressed, evaluations: in square brackets, when it is assigned to Actor 1, in round brackets when it is assigned to Actor 2<sup>14</sup>. In the case at hand, Partner 1 is identical with "Richard", Partner 2 with "Cosima". Figure 2 intends to represent the conflict conceived as a flow chart.

At the beginning there is a "non"-action by Wagner: he leaves the score of "Twilight of the Idols" simply lying on his desk (objective: zero). In spite of this he would like to know that this is understood as an offer of behaviour worthy of admiration (square brackets, plus).

Cosima can suspect nothing of this; hence she reacts -- regarding the offer -- neutrally (zero), considering the repression of her curiosity even as a virtue (round brackets, plus). In addition she hands him the letter from Father Liszt: for Richard, as she thinks, for amusement and relaxation (round brackets, plus).

Wagner interprets both, mistakenly, but explosively, as negative attacks (square brackets, double minus). As a result he crosses over to explicit attacks. When Cosima's explanations obviously do not calm him, he accuses her of lacking any sympathy for him (objective negative, at the same time negative in square and round brackets). "He" starts the dispute -- in such a way as if "she" (who up to now only intended the best) had begun it. Although Cosima continues to be silent (? and zero, in what is more likely a defensive move), Richard acknowledges this as complete contempt (square brackets, minus). Then he gears up with repeated accusations (thoroughly minus, with and without brackets). Then at last she cries; that is usually not conciliatory in communications between men and women (minus in square and round brackets). Especially the person, to whom the crying is directed experiences the tears as potential for pressure, if not as blackmail. Wagner continues sullen, [*discht*] as would have been said in his home province of Saxony], until evening. His balance sheet reads objectively in error, however subjectively gefühlsmächtig: Cosima had humiliated him once and again by ignoring the score, by delivering Liszt's letter, by ignorance of his first accusation, and finally by crying, which deprives him of every chance to make an argument. Cosima in turn, without any sense of guilt, feels offended on several grounds: by Richard's unexpected eruption and its double reprise. It is no wonder that for her the matter is not resolved.

---

<sup>13</sup> Still fundamental: Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory*, New York 1976; Oskar Lange, *Ganzheit und Entwicklung in kybernetischer Sicht*, Berlin 1969, p. 43ff.

<sup>14</sup> As far as I can see, the procedure in this form is not in general use, largely because it makes a continuous quantification difficult. Compare however the explanation on punctuation of sequences of events in Watzlawick/Beavin/Jackson (as in fn. 11), p. 57ff.

**Figure 2.** Conflict between Richard and Cosima

Richard		Cosima	
Leaves the score lying out	0 [+]		
		Does not look, does not ask	0 [-] (+)
		Gives him Liszt's letter	+ [-] (+)
Demands explanations	- [-] (-)		
		Explains?	? [-] (+)
"It is finished"			
"All sympathy whisked away"	- [-] (-)		
		Suppresses pain	0 [-] (+)
Renews accusation	- [-] (-)		
		Cries	- [-] (-)
		Cascade of self-accusations	- [-] (-)
		Pain reinterpreted as pleasure	- [-] (-/+)
		Children see their mother crying, cry along with her	- [-] (?)
Goes to bed with bitter words	- [-] (-)		
		"Without complaint"	? [?] (-)
		Takes refuge at the piano	- [-] (-)
		The "poor little woman": suffering in love	- [-] (-/+)
<b>Basic definition:</b> "We love each other too intensely"		<b>Definition for the time being:</b> Diary is suspended	
[++] (?)		(--) [-]	

Source: Own elaboration.

Next she escalates into a series of self-accusations and verbal self-flagellation. These probably only have to do in part with actual self-abasement. Whoever sacrifices himself to flagellating convulsions, obtains "inverted" pleasure; that could even have satisfied the sexually reserved Cosima. In the first place, however – and this is probably confirmed with the Wagners – the victim can acquire social capital by self-sacrifice: with respect to the person who receives the gift or even calls for it. Moreover the children were let in on the fact and see the mother crying. Finally, when Wagner goes to bed still obstinate, Cosima takes refuge at the piano and forces poetical characters into the witness stand: namely Tristan and Isolde.

Although she purports to have no complaint, at the same time she describes herself as the “poor little woman”, who suffers in love.

But then – a bell sounds – Wagner’s attempt at reconciliation. In truth, it is no attempt at all. Perhaps he wanted to sleep and the hue and cry of the piano got on his nerves. For he does not apologize. Instead he makes his partner responsible along with him and makes her swear to a plus-plus love: “We love each other too intensely.” Soon enough I will claim that this plus-plus love is affection in a rudimentarily minimalized state. Cosima is however not appeased. She begins a strike, she stands by minus-minus. In light of the fact that she otherwise idolizes her husband without restraint<sup>15</sup>, this speaks loudly for her: very emphatically.

Figure 3. The summary

		Richard	
Cosima	plus plus	00	
	00	minus minus	

Source: Own elaboration.

Wagner and his wife communicate “on the main diagonal”: by way of a minus-minus escalation, which devolves into a plus-plus promise in the case of Richard, in the case of Cosima however, into the transformation of suffering into pleasure and the suspension of her diary keeping. “Compensatory fields that amount to a compromise remain essentially vacant”. What distinguishes resilient love: to receive guidance from the other and guide him in turn, balance in contradiction, is not experienced by Cosima and Richard. Even more: impulses that only are “only supposed” to indicate a disagreement (e. g. Cosima’s lack of reaction to the pages of music, which would scarcely have had to signify something more serious) are understood as enmity and promptly punished. In modern communication, this is the risk of every critical thinker who expresses himself candidly. What could be a helpful alternative is devalued with the argument of lack of alternatives or punished by marginalization: in science, the economy, in the daily course of politics. The logic of the main diagonal, as practiced by dictators and tyrants, but also often enough by the representatives of democracies, knows only opponents or combatants. It is the logic of exactly half of what can possibly be thought.

#### 4. Expanding the research

The objection suggests itself that here singular testimonies from the lives of prominent misfits are heedlessly over-interpreted. Hence I have examined two more extensive text samples in parallel to what I have presented. They include groups of 50 entries in Cosima’s diary, thus totalling 100 days of work. The periods examined are: 02. 10. – 20. 11. 1874 and 25. 12. 1882 – 12. 03. 1883. I reserve detailed commentaries for a special publication. Above all methodological problems must be specifically discussed. Of course, diaries, rather than letters and tractates reproduce communication between persons very directly. And the radius of the actors “around Wagner” expands considerably in this manner. However Cosima does not always document speech “and” reply; indeed Wagner’s own contributions provide only

<sup>15</sup> Compare Eckhard Roch, *Das Leben als Drama. Strukturen und Strategien in Leben und Werk Richard Wagners*, Dissertation Berlin 1984, p. 193ff.; also Dieter David Scholz, *Ein deutsches Missverständnis. Richard Wagner zwischen Barrikade und Walhalla*, Berlin 1997, Chapter 11: Scenes from a marriage: Cosima's Wagner and Wagner's Cosima.

the "starting point" of a real or potential dialogue. At the same time it is possible to draw conclusions from this: by judging whether a cumulative or rather a compensatory development of the communication would be probable.

Some examples. Wagner's allergy to Father Liszt, who spent time in Palazzo Vendramin during the winter of 1882/83, is made evident when Liszt permits himself a beer on his evening round. Richard is indignant (apparently because the doctor has forbidden him to enjoy the drink); "a small argument" follows between him and Cosima (03. 01. 83)<sup>16</sup>. The day after Wagner recharges with the observation, Liszt is afflicted with "turbulent somnolence", i.e.: with galloping disorientation. Cosima summarizes: "His attitude with my father [is becoming] increasingly difficult and upsetting!"<sup>17</sup>. A minus-minus crescendo. Wagner's comments on his one-time friend and admirer Friedrich Nietzsche take a similar form. As it is well-known both relationships were destroyed "also" because Wagner accused the philosopher of onanism: in those times a judgment that could destroy an existence<sup>18</sup>. In the days before his death he claimed that Nietzsche suffered "complete lack of imagination" (07. 01. 83)<sup>19</sup>, "no individual thought", even "no own blood" (04. 02. 83)<sup>20</sup>. A gallery of abuses, which, as is well-known, Nietzsche answered after Wagner's death with a tirade of scandals, in order to give himself "a little relief"<sup>21</sup>.

Wagner's diatribes against his ostensible Jewish "friends" are of unparalleled viciousness: namely against the melancholy Kapellmeister Levi – the "poor Kapellmeister", as Cosima attests<sup>22</sup>. Once again on one of the last days of his life, Wagner attends the Director with a perfidious "anecdote": it is about an "Israeli" doctor, who wanted to marry "a Christian woman", had himself baptized, however lost all his Jewish patients. And so he was forced to deny himself the fulfilment of his desires for love<sup>23</sup>. Levi – as Wagner correctly supposes, the story affected him deeply<sup>24</sup> – became sick afterwards; the doctor diagnosed a "mood disorder" (10. 02. 83). "Richard almost regrets", according to Cosima, "having told him the story of Dr. Markus recently"<sup>25</sup>. He never gets past "almost". Hours later (on 11. 02. 83) the patient becomes completely bothersome for him; excited "to resentment", he calls out "you really should not have dealings with the Israelites!"<sup>26</sup>. That was exactly the style of speaking of the anti-Semite who in 1881 received the fire catastrophe in the Vienna Ringtheater with roughly 400 casualties with ostentatious lack of sympathy (16. 12. 81): because the audience had attended an "operetta" by Offenbach (in reality "Tales of Hoffman")<sup>27</sup>. Cosima, who countered him in the event of continuous anti-Semitic statements, that she found in Lessing's "Nathan" an "individual *German* characteristic of humanity" (18. 12. 81) – a rare example of a compensatory impulse from her side, German is italicized in the original –, is rebuked by Richard: it has "however no depth at all". And "in a violent joke" (sic) he draws the conclusion: "all the Jews should burn in a performance of 'Nathan'"<sup>28</sup>.

If we synthesize assertions of this sort in a statistical overview, we see that Wagner does not completely suppress compensatory relationships – in the last phase of his life even instances of critical self-blame become more frequent<sup>29</sup>. In spite of everything, by 1874, however more than ever by 1883, the cumulative initiatives have a two-thirds majority. Compensatory approaches, which in the best case come

---

<sup>16</sup> Cosima Wagner, Die Tagebücher (as in fn. 1), Vol. 4, p. 1085f.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 1086.

<sup>18</sup> Compare Marc A. Weiner, Richard Wagner and the Anti-Semitic Imagination, University of Nebraska Press 1997, p. 335ff.

<sup>19</sup> Tagebücher (as in fn. 1), vol. 4, p. 1088.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.1106.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, Der Fall Wagner. Ein Musikanten-Problem (1888), in: Kritische Studienausgabe, (ed.) M. Montinari, vol. 6, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Tagebücher (as in fn. 1), vol. 4, p. 1110.

<sup>23</sup> Wagner's statement vis-à-vis Paul von Joukowsky on 9. 2. 1883, Tagebücher (as in fn. 1), vol. 4, p. 1110.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 1111.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Tagebücher (as in fn. 1), vol. 4, p. 849.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 852.

<sup>29</sup> On January 2, 1883, Wagner is accused of his "bad character," you have to be "careful and indulgent" with him; and on 10. 01. it even reads, because of his "way of being" Cosima cannot "recover her strength"; Tagebücher (as in fn. 1), vol. 4, pp. 1085, 1089.

to one third of real or possible communication acts, are seen most strikingly in the settlement of business transactions<sup>30</sup>. Hence it is not surprising that Wagner's cumulative orientations, the reduction of the socio-matrix to plus-plus- or minus-minus fields, are found again also in artistic productions. The contours are especially clear – as Eckhard Roch was able to demonstrate<sup>31</sup> – in "Tristan und Isolde", where slavering aversion of unrestrained desire is bound together with annihilation of both in a final death from love. Here too the actors do not abandon the main diagonal of the matrix. At all events all action is suspended in Act 2 of the opera, when after a blaring mating call, the night of forgetfulness descends. In fact, the diary entries provide evidence that "Tristan" was understood by Cosima and Richard as a kind of personal behavioural paradigm. That which comes onto stage supplied by daily experience, as an after-image as it were, acquires retrospectively the character of an ideal. "We will be thus", Richard announced to his wife, on the evening of January 14, 1883, as he invented "lovely melodies" at the piano. Cosima responded as if she was in the middle of the said love opera: "Yes, this is what we would sound like"<sup>32</sup>. And Wagner, some days later: When he got together with Cosima, their relationship was "full of mystery", "thoroughly Tristan", "the artwork was bread that had already been eaten" (06. 02. 1883)<sup>33</sup>.

Such is the "Art of the Future", in its essence, life anticipated, even if it bears the signs of its times and their blemishes. Empirically and practically we must nonetheless act according to the imperative of art, as if the confusion of the world is redeemed in it. Life and art "only appear to complement" each other. In fact they are reflected in one another: cumulatively, concordantly. Therefore the artist feels it necessary to establish with the attitude of a commander that the drama and the music and only these represent the "accurate" side. Among other things, this explains the imperial character of Wagner's operas and their theoretical justifications.

An important point: in Wagner's operas actors romp about who are laughed at. They do not constitute caricatures however, but rather they are images of the enemy made flesh and blood: this applies to Mime, to Alberich, to Beckmesser (whose Jewish connotations I maintain, in disregard of all attempts at pacification by the Germanistic guild)<sup>34</sup>. Recall also profoundly evil women such as Ortrud or murderers such as Hagen. In the cases of one and all of them categorical thinking takes hold, unfolding at the same time in the *Communist Manifesto*: whoever is not a friend, must be liquidated or expropriated as an enemy.

This axial logic is also articulated with literal shamelessness in Wagner's writings on art. Their structure of opposites – once again I will cite Eckhard Roch<sup>35</sup> – appears to establish symmetries between the ONE and the OTHER. But the OTHER must be defeated, the opposition must be "resolved," expelled by the elimination of the "false." In times when Hegel was still remembered in undisguised form, and people wanted to believe in the reconciliation "through mediation" (the contradiction with tendency to elimination is itself a dialectical contradiction),<sup>36</sup> this could only cause a polarizing reception. Moreover top-notch composers had not expressly worked toward the triumphal primacy of art, but rather towards a "compensatory interplay" between the ideal and the prosaic. For Mendelssohn the path led through among other things pursuit of religious meaning<sup>37</sup>; for Schumann it was a matter of the spell cast by the

---

<sup>30</sup> Compare entries from 24.10. and 26./27. 10. 1874, in: Tagebücher (as in fn. 1), vol. 2, p. 861f.

<sup>31</sup> Roch, *Das Leben als Drama* (as in fn. 15), p. 133ff.; idem, *Psychodrama. Richard Wagner im Symbol*, Stuttgart and Weimar 1995, pp. 330ff.

<sup>32</sup> Tagebücher (as in fn. 1), vol. 4, p. 1091, subsequent entry.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 1108.

<sup>34</sup> However compare Dieter Borchmeyer, *Richard Wagners Antisemitismus*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (14. 5. 2013); idem, *Beckmesser – der Jude im Dorn?* in: *Bayreuther Festspiele 1996 (Festspielführer)*.

<sup>35</sup> Roch, *Das Leben als Drama* (as in fn. 15), p. 9ff.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Sloterdijk however has shown (*Kritik der zynischen Vernunft*, vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main 1983, p. 94), that the "dialectical criticism," as propagated by Marxism, "sees itself as the only illumination in the night of 'correct falsehoods' – and in its pursuit of "domination of things"["Herrschaft über die Dinge"] describes itself "from the beginning [as] knowledge of domination" (ibid., p. 185).

<sup>37</sup> Recall the project (in the end failed, but pursued with great enthusiasm) of renewal of the liturgical music in Prussia, which was inspired by Friedrich Wilhelm IV, and for example produced psalm settings for the Berlin Cathedral Choir; cf. David Brodbeck, *A Winter of Discontent: Mendelssohn and the "Berliner Domchor,"* in: *MSt*, 1-32; also Juliane Gabel, *Friedrich Wilhelm IV. und die Ästhetisierung der Politik*, Master's Thesis, Humboldt-Universität Berlin, 2012.



poetic on the actual<sup>38</sup>. In the case of Wagner, in contrast, whose manner of thinking and acting was profoundly based on a one-sided, reduced way of life, this way of life is sugar-coated by the artist, so that the work offers itself as the "the bread of life, which is already eaten" as I have demonstrated.

His auto-elevation to creator of social norms makes it plausible at the same time that Wagner is incapable of refraining from vilifying in his writings anyone who does not follow him. Both writings of the Jews are of course of central importance. Both writings? Yes, in fact. For what is commonly edited as addition or "Introduction" to the second edition of "Judaism in Music"<sup>39</sup> is an independent article, somewhat longer than the title writing, published separately as a letter to Marie Muchanoff, under the title "Elucidations on Judaism in Music"<sup>40</sup>. The fact that Wagner reedited in 1869 the first version of his pamphlet from 1850<sup>41</sup>, is viewed as irresponsible, if not culpable.<sup>42</sup> Only those in the know however have heard that Wagner systematically broadened his harassment in the said "Elucidations".

As is well-known, the first writing on the Jews is characterized by breath-taking scorn and physiognomic defamation of its victims: we can speak of a social homicide, along with Daniel Goldhagen<sup>43</sup>. The language of the Jews figures as "jabbering" and "drivel". And the music of the synagogue is a "gurgling" and "yodelling", which confounds "mind and spirit"<sup>44</sup>. Who among the attacked would have been able or willing to dispute this – I will pass over in silence his comparison of the Jews with the "teeming multiplicity of bodies of worms"<sup>45</sup> (a comparison that Wagner repeated word-for-word in 1865 in an address to Ludwig II)<sup>46</sup>.

It is precisely the speechlessness of the defamed, who are most likely dumbfounded, that is used as a reproach against them in the "Elucidation" tirade. Wagner's scenario of enmity and "accumulative rhetoric"<sup>47</sup> is only completed in outline-form, but he bears in mind the possibilities of creation of a systematic model. Foremost: there is evidently no regret for the categorical attacks from 1850, instead the slander that since that time the Jews have boycotted Wagner's works and theories<sup>48</sup>. Then he targets opponents, stating names and places: Eduard Hanslick as the relevant critic, Leipzig as the city that is musically contaminated by the Jews<sup>49</sup>. The danger of infection, according to Wagner, is so intense that in certain cases it is necessary to refrain from racial distinctions. As though he knew of the Nazis' cynicisms, Wagner introduces a joker concept: that of the "music-Jews"<sup>50</sup>. According to him they carried out (in his words) "a reverse Jew-persecution"<sup>51</sup>. For the Israelites control everything and everyone on the German cultural scene: the professional musicians, the press, the publishing houses, even the theatre (in spite of or because it is directed by senile court bureaucrats)<sup>52</sup>. Wagner stands there like a monolith: himself alone against the culture world, himself alone against all others. His allies Franz Brendel and Franz Liszt are still mentioned<sup>53</sup>; Joseph Joachim, a Jewish friend, has dropped away<sup>54</sup>. Hanslick's damaging mind-set has

<sup>38</sup> Christian Kaden, Der ver-rückte Schumann. Horizonte einer historischen Anthropologie der Musik, in: ANKLAENGE 2009. Rudolf Flotzinger zum 70. Geburtstag, Wien 2009, S. 13-36.

<sup>39</sup> Borchmeyer (as in fn. 34), fn 4.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Wagner, Aufklärungen über das Judentum in der Musik (1869), in: Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen, vol. 8, Leipzig 1911, pp. 238-260.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Wagner, Das Judentum in der Musik (1850), in: Richard Wagner, Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen, vol. 5, Leipzig 1911, pp. 66-85

<sup>42</sup> Compare Jens Malte Fischer, Richard Wagners „Das Judentum in der Musik“. Eine kritische Dokumentation als Beitrag zur Geschichte des Antisemitismus, Frankfurt am Main, 2000.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Goldhagen, Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust, Berlin 1996, p. 118ff., 170ff.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Wagner, Judentum (as in fn. 41), p. 69ff.

<sup>45</sup> Richard Wagner, Judentum (as in fn. 41), p. 84.

<sup>46</sup> Christian Kaden, Musik, nahe bei der Macht. Gewaltpotentiale des Ästhetischen, in: Musik-Kultur heute. Bärenreiter-Almanach, Kassel etc. 1998, p. 31-54, here p. 48.

<sup>47</sup> Eckhard Roch, Akkumulative Rhetorik – Die Kunst, zu „revolutionieren“ in Richard Wagners Sprache und Musik, in: Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft 28 (1986), pp. 284-308.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Wagner, Aufklärungen (as in fn. 40), p. 239 ff.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., on Hanslick: pp. 243, 251, on Leipzig: pp. 240, 248.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp. 246-249.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 240, 245.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 245.

spread even to the aesthetician Friedrich Theodor Vischer, of German descent<sup>55</sup>, who tends toward formalism: Wagner invents a word for this "musical Jew-beauty" ("musikalischen Judenschönheit")<sup>56</sup>. Clearly the decisive factor, and here too the notable intensification compared to his Jew-baiting in 1850: the Jews are not only culpable for the general low level of German culture, they also have the say in London and Paris<sup>57</sup>; their crimes are politically organized and thoroughly calculated.<sup>58</sup>

The battle cry of an alienated artist against those who compete with him, a "polemic against musical Classicism", as naïve spirits imagine?<sup>59</sup>. Similarly to the text from 1850, Wagner cannot control his willingness for terror – and he envisions a redemption/solution of the Jewish question, a solution based on principles. In the first work he stated that the Jews must themselves bring about their "destruction" – in order to live on reborn in a renewed wider society.<sup>60</sup> Nineteen years later, Wagner is more "realistic" and operates with two options.

He contemplates on the one hand the "violent expulsion of the subversive foreign element", in order to prevent the "decline" of German culture.<sup>61</sup> Although Wagner doubts the feasibility of this "solution", it is unquestionable that his idea pursues a more brutal aim than mere resettlement. The alternative would be that the foreign "element [will] assimilate us in such a way that it matures in community with us to the superior education of our more noble human establishment"<sup>62</sup>. This is an extremely difficult business however. And as Cosima's confessions in her diary once again demonstrate, Wagner scarcely ever strived after dominance-free dealings with his Jewish "friends".

The second writing on the Jews is therefore not only an intensification of the first one, but rather lends it an overarching structure. And it is part of the rhetoric of the first text and of the second to stifle the "adversary": with argumentative mudslinging – in order to behave at the end as though the intention is to help him out. Once more we notice the convergence with the marital battles that have been analysed. They suggest that with his infamies both in daily life and also behind the screen of art theory, Wagner is very "serious". The midfields of the discursive, dialectical communications are very probably familiar to him. They have a significance for his music and its "Art of Transition," weight of which must be explored. But to the extent that Wagner's "logical" identity is involved (perhaps we should even call it "logogen" identity, following Georg Knepler)<sup>63</sup>: with regard to verbally-controlled behaviour and ratiomorphic decisions, the main-diagonal character is definitive. In this respect the Master from Bayreuth followed at the same time the milestones of the moderns. The strategies of class struggle have been mentioned, whose political mentalities continue to influence the present day. Also the logic of the performance society, which involves maximum profit and the simultaneous destruction of as many competitors as possible, is determined by escalation of profits (which lead to cyclical crises) – or in battles of elimination, which strengthen the monopolies. In this system stabilities are always transitory, always temporary; they are dominated by unbridled plus-plus or minus-minus. Wagner as economist of his art, and as economist of his way of life would therefore be its own research topic.

## 5. Conclusions

For the time being we will be satisfied with the insight that Wagner's behavioural dispositions in art and life grow from a *single* root. And that Cosima's diaries, which so purposefully present a view of the person's daily life, make the artist and theoretician clearly comprehensible for the first time. For a more profound interpretation of his works and writings, they are not a reservoir of contextual knowledge, but rather – almost – a primary source.

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 247f.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>59</sup> Wilhelm Seidel, Mendelssohn und das Judentum, in: Die Musikforschung 64 (2011), p. 6-23, here p. 22.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Wagner, Judentum (as in fn. 41), p. 84f.

<sup>61</sup> Richard Wagner, Aufklärungen (as in fn. 40), p. 259.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>63</sup> Georg Knepler, Geschichte als Weg zum Musikverständnis, Leipzig 1977, p. 587.

### **Brief biographical note**

Christian Kaden (1946 -2015): Doctor en musicología y antropología en la Universidad Humboldt de Berlín (1973). Profesor en el departamento de Musicología y Estudios de Medios de la Universidad Humboldt de Berlín donde desarrolló importantes líneas de investigación y enseñanza sobre la Sociología de la música. Miembro titular de la Academia de las Artes de Sajonia (2005-2013). Presidente del Departamento de Sociología e Historia social de la música en la Sociedad para la Investigación de la música de Alemania (1994-2001). Ha sido profesor invitado en Centro de investigación y desarrollo de la música de La Habana (1982), Universidade Nova de Lisboa (1989), Universidad de Graz (1992), Universidad de Heidelberg (1993), Universidad de Chicago (1995), Universidad de Hong Kong (2000), Universidad de Viena (2001). Sus líneas de investigación principales se centran en el desarrollo de la sociología de la música, la semiótica musical, la antropología de la música y la relación entre música y civilización. De entre su extensa obra cabe destacar: *Hirtensignale. Musikalische Syntax und kommunikative Praxis* (1977); *Musiksoziologie* (1984); *Des Lebens wilder Kreis. Musik im Zivilisationsproze* (1993), *Das Unerhörte und das Unhörbare: Was Musik ist, was Musik sein kann* (2004).