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TDR: The Drama Review, Volume 59, Number 4, Winter 2015 (T228), pp. 51-66
(Article)

Published by The MIT Press



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Figure 1. A cinematic tableau vivant in the opening scene of *Rigoletto a Mantova*. *Rigoletto a Mantova*, act 1, 2010. (Broadcast still courtesy of RAI/Rada Film)

It is midnight on Sunday, 5 September 2010, and I have just finished watching the last of three staggered broadcasts of *Rigoletto*, one devoted to each act. It had begun the night before, continued at lunchtime on Sunday and now concluded late at night. The location of the filming? Not an opera house or studio but actual locations that feature in the libretto. Introduced by Italian President Giorgio Napolitano as an event of national and European significance, and broadcast, we're told, to 148 countries, *Rigoletto in Mantua* featured Plácido Domingo in the title role, conductor Zubin Mehta, direction by Marco Bellocchio (*I pugni in tasca*) and cinematography by Vittorio Storaro (*Last Tango in Paris*, *Apocalypse Now*). The project was conceived by RAI (Radiotelevisione italiana) television producer Andrea Andermann and followed a pattern familiar from his earlier projects: a *Tosca* set in Rome (1992) and a *La traviata* in Paris (2000). There has since been a *La Cenerentola* filmed in Turin (2012).

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This is site-specific opera, but not for an audience on site. These are productions conceived for television and made possible by media technology. Singers, for example, perform their roles in interiors and confined locations witnessed only by a camera crew, while the live orchestra is remotely located, linked to the singers via headphones and monitors. Among the locations of *Rigoletto in Mantua* are the city's Palazzo Ducale, once home to the Gonzagas and celebrated for its architecture and frescos. It's here that some of the key scenes of *Rigoletto* are set and it is this elaborate complex of buildings that will share star billing in the production: foregrounded in the promotional material, featured in documentaries and media features. But this site-specificity is combined with an over-determined temporal specificity. Like Andermann's earlier productions, the performance and broadcast is staggered so that each act coincides with the time of day specified in the text. Act 1 of *Rigoletto in Mantua* was performed and broadcast live in the evening, the time textually specified for the action. Act 2, set the following morning, was broadcast that next morning, and the broadcast resumed late the same evening with the nocturnal act 3.

In the place and at the time of the opera: what to make of this conceit? Why the investment in this strange form of overdetermined presence and liveness, in sites that perform their fictional doubles? In one sense the productions seem to illustrate in the most vivid terms Philip Auslander's negative economy of liveness, predicated as it is on the live remainder produced by the mediating/mediatizing intervention of technology.¹ Shorn of the "bodily co-presence" that Erika Fischer-Lichte takes as a defining condition of performance (2003:301),² Andermann's productions insist on a kind of hyperpresence (if the production's *here* is not the spectator's, it is the text's) and a hyperliveness (this performance is not only happening in the spectator's now, but also in a textual now: morning in the text is morning in the performance). I find these qualities provocative, not least because they touch on some of the wider implications of opera's recent embrace of new media technologies (witness the live cinecasts in which opera has played a leading role and opera's increasingly sophisticated utilization of live webstreams). What does it mean for concepts like liveness and presence when US West Coast devotees of the *The Met: Live in HD* now speak of a "morning at the opera" (the 1:00 p.m. New York performances equate to 10:00 a.m. in San Francisco), or when companies like the Bayerische Staatsoper offer webstreams of their performances for free but only live (they are not repeated and can't easily be recorded), or when webstreams, like the Royal Opera's "Opera Machine," offer viewers the possibility of choosing camera angles, selecting commentaries, and even following the prompt book? In each case media technology has been mobilized in ways that invest in, and potentially reshape, the experience of the live and the present. Andermann's productions equally depend on media technology to make possible the production and broadcast of multi-site, on-location performance. Here the technology is put to the service of a claim to a peculiar kind of performance-based presence and liveness: at the time and in the place. I want to consider and unpack this claim. How does the performance site figure in this presence and liveness? What are the implications of the encounter in *Rigoletto in Mantua* between live event and historic monument, between opera's high-culture trappings and a tourist site, between performance concept and photogenic setting?

Critics have accused site-specific theatre — opera included — of a superficial attitude to locale, of using sites as mere atmospheric backdrops. There is more than a hint of this when the all-star cast and crew claim Mantua's Palazzo Ducale as their stage. Like some tourist spectacle, *Rigoletto in Mantua* unfolds amidst the palazzo's famed frescos and marbled columns. Inhabited by the living bodies of performers and remediated in the flickering images of television, the site is a monument "brought to life," as the marketing rhetoric puts it when sites are appropriated

1. As Auslander puts it: "Prior to the advent of [recording] technologies (e.g., sound recording and motion pictures), there was no such thing as 'live' performance, for that category has meaning only in relation to an opposing possibility" ([1999] 2008:56).

2. All translations from German are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

for spectacle.³ But this performative bringing-to-life—always temporary, in play only so long as the performance lasts—depends on and only serves to reinforce other binaries of liveness that haunt opera in a peculiar way. I am thinking here of the palpable collision in operatic performance between history, tradition, and canon on the one hand, and virtuosity, spectacle, and the cult of the performer on the other. Nothing is more operatic than the juxtaposition of embedded traditions of stagecraft and musical execution with the thrill of the unpredictable, the promise of triumph, the risk of spectacular failure.⁴ In the site-specific *Rigoletto*, agitated bodies are closely framed by frozen interiors, flesh by marble. It's a juxtaposition starkly illustrated in the act 2 duet "Piangi, fanciulla," when a close-up reveals tears rolling down Domingo's face. If the tears are fleeting moments, no sooner glimpsed than gone, the backdrop that frames the close-up never seems more solid, more fixed and frozen. What we encounter in this viewing, simultaneously distanced and close-up, is a juxtaposition between the enduring, historic, rooted-to-site architecture and the seemingly unpredictable, contingent moment of performance in the foreground—between the monumental permanence of a Renaissance palazzo and the performative ephemeral—Live! Now!—of Domingo's tears.

But I want to suggest that the production, understood as a site of exchange between an "actual" place and its own fictional representation, unsettles this binary. We might understand the site as one that threatens to "deaden" theatre by flattening out the theatrical double: the performers find themselves not within a representation of the Palazzo Ducale, but in the thing itself. It is as though the flats and props of classic illusionist staging have finally traversed and collapsed the representative compact they had once sustained, but at the price of their own erasure. At the same time, this fusing of theatrical representation and the thing represented is no arbitrary imposition. The Palazzo Ducale was shaped by the Gonzagas as a mirror of the family's embrace of art and pleasure: it is the realization of power precisely as the capacity to embrace art and pleasure. Famously adorned with murals, themed rooms, and trompe l'oeil effects, the ducal complex was itself already theatre.⁵ However, the audience, remote from the site of production, finds itself excluded from the return of the real that the performers enjoy. Television establishes a new representative compact, substituting scenery flats with flat screens and dispersing spectatorship across myriad domestic spaces, each a theatre in and of itself. *Rigoletto in Mantua* plays on these ambiguities, situating living bodies in ever-shifting visual and acoustic tension with their monumental surroundings. At first glance, bereft of any obvious critical intent, the production actually poses questions that offer to unsettle some entrenched thinking about performance and media technology, presence and absence, animate and inanimate.

All Take and No Give

Paradoxically, site-specific theatre is in a strange place. The concept and practice of tailoring productions to locations outside traditional theatre spaces has never been more in vogue or more contested. It is a tension evident in Joanne Tompkins's introduction to *Performing*

3. Typical is the press release from UK theatre company HOME, which recounts how an office building was "brought to life in 2012 with the Library Theatre Company's acclaimed production of Jackie Kay's *Manchester Lines*" (HOME n.d.).

4. See, for example, Carolyn Abbate's account of a tense performance in "Music—Drastic or Gnostic?" (2004:505–36). Lurking behind the juxtaposition of weighty tradition and fleeting liveness is the sense that the tradition itself is living on borrowed time, that it is in fact a dead tradition. In this context operatic liveness comes to seem like an animation of the dead. See, for example, Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar's *Opera's Second Death* (2002), and Christopher Morris's "Songs of the Living Dead" (2003:74–93).

5. For a succinct overview of the architecture of the Palazzo Ducale and its use in performance, see Paola Besutti's "Spaces for music in late Renaissance Mantua" (2007:76–94).

Site-Specific Theatre.⁶ On the one hand, Tompkins can write enthusiastically about what she calls “the form’s current popularity” (2012:5), citing as evidence not only the profusion of practice and theory but also the recent appearance of a scholarly survey of the field geared to an undergraduate readership (always a sign that a field has arrived); on the other, Tompkins repeatedly qualifies her remarks with reference to the “instability” and “mutability” of the term and of the practices it signifies (5, 15). She reminds readers, too, that several essays in the collection voice concerns about the proliferation of site-specific theatre and call for a critical reevaluation in practical and theoretical terms. The book echoes a wider disquiet among theatre critics. “These days,” writes Andy Field of the *Guardian*, “‘site-specific’ can be just about anything that doesn’t happen in a theatre [...]. At best these productions—regardless of their merits—borrow the atmosphere and aesthetic of their new homes in a relatively superficial and inorganic manner, all take and no give” (2008).

In 2005, anticipating this debate, Gay McAuley called for a critical distinction between site-based and site-specific performance. If the former term implies a nontraditional setting or back-drop chosen on the basis of certain formal or aesthetic qualities, the latter, McAuley writes, should be reserved for projects that engage deeply with the history and politics of their location and are inseparable from that location, unable to travel (2005:35). Only this most embedded form of practice, she adds, lives up to the name and the claims made on its behalf. And this understanding of the term is in accordance with the widely cited definition of site-specific performance articulated by Mike Pearson and Mike Shanks as a *reciprocal* engagement between site and performance, one in which performance draws something from its site while in turn transforming that site by shifting perceptions and representations, engaging communities in ways that impact their understanding of space and even contributing to the ongoing production of that space (to borrow the language of Henri Lefebvre, whose 1974 *La Production de l’espace* assumes something of the role of master text in theories of site-specific performance). “Performance,” according to Pearson and Shanks, “is the latest occupation of a location at which other occupations—their material traces and histories—are still apparent: site is not just an interesting, and disinterested, backdrop” (2001:23).

Vague and idealistic as much of this language is, it at least constitutes an attempt to wrestle with definitions, while the creative output of the more critically engaged practitioners—many of whom are also academics—offers to explore, reflexively, the nature and limits of the exchange between site and performance.⁷ The broader tendency, though, has been to ignore finer critical distinctions and define and promote a broad range of nontraditionally situated performances (many featuring little more than exotic locales) as site-specific. The appeal? A desire for innovation (or to be seen as innovative) perhaps, but clearly in Europe also a response to calls from government agencies and funding sources for access and engagement, buzzwords with particular implications for traditional artforms branded as elitist. The title of a recent strategy document published by the Arts Council of England, for example, says much about the current climate: *Great Art and Culture for Everyone* ([2010] 2013).

Getting Out of the House

Cue opera, the arch-villain of elitist culture. Though slow to pick up on the broader theatrical trend towards site-specific performance, opera companies are showing signs of embracing it with enthusiasm. Opera outside the traditional opera house hardly represents a recent break-

6. Some of the key titles in the field include Nick Kaye’s *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (2002); Cathy Turner’s “Palimpsest or Potential Space? Finding a Vocabulary for Site-Specific Performance” (2004:373–90); Judith Rugg’s *Exploring Site-Specific Art: Issues of Space and Internationalism* (2020); and Miwon Kwon’s *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002).

7. For example, Mike Pearson, one the leading practitioners of site-specific theatre in the UK, is also Professor of Performance Studies at Aberystwyth University.

through: performances in outdoor venues and temporary theatrical spaces (especially during festivals or carnival season) have been a historical feature of operatic production, while non-traditional spaces—the lakeside venue of the Bregenzer Festspiele, the outdoor courtyard theatre of the Théâtre de l'Archevêché in Aix-en-Provence, or the spectacles performed on the water's edge in Sydney Harbor—are familiar in contemporary practice. These, however, are all repeatedly used and custom-designed venues. Equipped with an infrastructure capable of emulating the conditions of the traditional opera house, they are effectively opera houses in themselves. We might think of this, in McAuley's terms, as *site-based* opera.

What has distinguished some of the more recent production trends is a move towards a much riskier utilization of sites—sites lacking any obvious performance infrastructure. If avant-garde music theatre celebrated its utilization of unusual spaces as a mark of its break from opera and its conventions, the more canonic repertoire of the major companies tended to remain firmly housebound. Given opera's technical and resource requirements, the reticence is perhaps understandable; in a sense opera is and always has been site-specific in its dependence on a particular configuration of space within a carefully designed and precisely mobilized environment. Thought of this way, moving opera out of the house is removing the specificity of medium, even if honoring the seeming sitedness of storyline. And abandoning these customized facilities in favor of ad hoc spaces brings with it formidable logistical challenges.

Nontraditional venues (and nontraditional utilization of theatres) have long featured in the programming of avant-garde music theatre and experimental groups. What is now generally termed site-specific performance can be understood in part as an extension of the experimental practices, cultivated from the 1960s onwards, of environmental theatre, itself a legacy of early 20th-century open-air productions (in 1920 Max Reinhardt famously staged Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Jedermann* on the steps of Salzburg cathedral and Nikolai Evreinov directed an on-site reenactment of the storming of the Winter Palace) and reconfigurations of the proscenium stage in the work of directors like Adolphe Appia and Vsevolod Meyerhold.⁸ Immersive performance, often associated with factory and warehouse settings and presented as nonlinear narrative, is increasingly familiar in operatic practice. For example, Punchdrunk Theatre, a company specializing in immersive theatre, collaborated in 2010 with English National Opera to commission an adaptation of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (music by Torsten Rasch) for performances in an unoccupied office block in the London docklands. Contemporary music theatre has also embraced digital technology to experiment with multisite, networked performances, immersive experiences such as soundwalks, and other forms of "locative performance."⁹ If these modes of music theatre have tended to cultivate a genre identity quite separate from opera, there has been a partial rapprochement in recent years, at least with the term "opera," if not with its traditions.¹⁰

What has emerged parallel to this body of newly commissioned work is a growing interest in the performance in nontraditional locations of works from the established operatic repertoire. Several alternative or fringe opera companies have formed with a specific mandate to do just that. Emulating silent disco, London's Silent Opera supplies its audiences with wireless headphones to allow it to present promenade performances of opera in the city's vaults and tunnels. Washington's DC Public Opera claims, "our productions bring opera out of traditional opera houses and into spaces more immediate to our audiences—including historical

8. See Arnold Aronson's *The History and Theory of Environmental Scenography* (1981) and Richard Schechner's *Environmental Theater* (1973).

9. This is a term widely used in the context of digital performance. See, for example, *The Mobile Audience: Media Art and Mobile Technologies* (Rieser 2011).

10. See, for example, Christopher Fox's "Rethinking Opera" (2010:22–23), and Áine Sheil and Craig Vear's "Digital Opera: New Means and Meanings" (2012).

sites, museums and public spaces” (2015). And New York City’s On Site Opera recently staged Rameau’s *Pygmalion* in the city’s Madame Tussaud’s Wax Museum, prompting David Patrick Stearns, music critic of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, to reflect on what he called the “increasingly fashionable endeavor” of liberating opera from its traditional performance settings (2014). In a largely unfavorable review, Stearns echoes the problem identified by Field: that the engagement with the venue is superficial, the choice apparently random. The latter charge could hardly be leveled against two productions of *Fidelio* in 2005 and 2006. With what might be characterized as an overdetermined realism similar to *Rigoletto in Mantua*, two small companies (Philadelphia’s The Other Company and Dublin-based Opera Theatre Company) each staged the opera in disused prisons. Larger, more mainstream opera companies and festivals have followed suit: the Aldeburgh Festival, for example, presented *Peter Grimes* (2013) on the pebbled Suffolk shores that feature in the opera, and Swiss television produced a trilogy of live site-based opera broadcasts: *La Traviata im Hauptbahnhof* (*La traviata* in the central station, 2008), *La Bohème im Hochhaus* (*A high-rise La bohème*, 2009), and *Aida am Rhein* (*Aida on the Rhine*, 2010).¹¹

Pearson’s vision of the traces left in a space by the various events and lives that have occupied it suggests a kind of haunting, and this is a trope that Pearson elsewhere employs more explicitly when he characterizes the creative work as a “ghost” at large on a site (1997:95–96). It is an image, as Cathy Turner points out, that has endured in the discourse of site-specific performance, but in ways that leave open the question of who and what haunts, “whether the site haunts the work or vice versa” (2004:374). Haunting is foregrounded in *La Bohème im Hochhaus* when a figure in the costume of a 19th-century seamstress (Mimi) walks the corridors of a contemporary high-rise. That some of these scenes should be presented in the form of CCTV footage only heightens the effect by alluding to “found-footage” representations of the supernatural used in contemporary cinema and television, although this may give the production more credit for critical awareness and conceptual focus than it deserves (the costumes probably have more to do with the origins of the production in a staging of the opera for Konzert Theater Bern than any critical take on period and history). What is clear from the discourse generated by the project is that the issue of “access” loomed large: in one publicity piece published on the Swiss government website swissinfo.ch, *La Bohème im Hochhaus* is praised for presenting “high culture in the democratic medium of television” (Künzi 2009). To suggest that the ghost in this production might be opera itself—a genre often reputed to have died with Puccini—is perhaps cruel and certainly out of step with the innocence of the production. Yet there are hints of something intriguing when project manager Thomas Beck recounts, in terms reminiscent of E.T.A. Hoffmann, his founding vision of a “klingende Hochhaus” (resonating high-rise). And, as though to illustrate the idea, a CGI promo sequence depicts the apartment building breaking away from its foundations as it resonates with Puccini’s music (SRF1 2009). The final scenes of the production equally suggest that human figures may not be the only actors (or should we, following Bruno Latour and the impulses of new materialism, speak of “actants?”¹²). The death of the consumptive seamstress Mimi, typically presented in the opera house in historical-naturalistic fashion as an exhausted final collapse on her death-bed in a bohemian garret, is here staged as a final journey: at the bus stop outside the apartment complex Mimi boards a bus

11. Noting the growth in theatrical performance in urban environments, Imanuel Schipper draws particular attention to the proliferation of these projects in Zurich. Schipper’s characterization of the train station in *La Traviata im Hauptbahnhof* as a “substitute opera stage” is fair up to a point, but his observation that the production endeavored to “keep the scene free from the mixing of art and everyday life” overlooks a number of key scenes in which spectators crowd intimately around the performers and take up observing positions in and around the everyday locales (cafés, waiting areas) that are the production’s “set” (Schipper 2014:18–19). For more on the train station project see my “Digital Diva: Opera on Video” (Morris 2010). On *Peter Grimes on Aldeburgh Beach*, see Danielle Ward-Griffin’s “Virtually There: Site-Specific Performance on Screen” (2014).

12. Latour defines the actant as “something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, nor of humans in general” (1996:373).

marked Endstation (Terminus).¹³ At first glance tongue-in-cheek, the gesture takes on a more chilling air as the bus, seemingly bereft of any other passengers or a driver, departs the empty concourse into the night.

Life Becomes Death

If *Rigoletto in Mantua* shares with *La Bobème im Hochhaus* a traditional, even innocent, approach to the operatic text, it also echoes some of the Swiss production's more intriguing qualities. Both feature an interplay of animate and inanimate fuelled in part by a televisual conception that juxtaposes and textures visual styles and traditions. Bellocchio's direction of the singers, for example, draws on a certain kind of cinematic or televisual naturalism based on contemporary body language and a use of space redolent of documentary, news-gathering, even reality TV: we move with and among characters in a space that is represented as three-dimensional, unconfined by a proscenium or wings. With close-ups and mobile, intrusive footage shot in the thick of the action, cameras closely follow the singers as though they were disgraced politicians being followed on the street or the subjects of a reality-television series. This mobilization of television again raises the question of "access" and, as in *La Bobème im Hochhaus*, a telling tension surfaces. Transmitted live throughout Europe by a network of publicly funded, free-to-air broadcasters, the event was nevertheless wrapped in a "high-culture" aura, not least in the reverent introduction by the Italian president.

This impression of a project caught between audiences and traditions is mirrored internally: the shooting "as if real" in the thick of the action strangely collides with the utterly theatrical stock gestures and mannerisms that are part and parcel of operatic acting (at least when not marshaled or kept in check by directors seeking other styles of gesture and movement). Far from improvised and ephemeral, these behaviors are almost hard-wired through practice and training, even demanded by vocal technique. The performers and their operatic mannerisms, their gestic habitus if you will, never seem more exposed than when captured by the TV cameras. Lacking the mediating effect of spectatorial distance (as in the opera house) or of the more distant camerawork typical of much opera on video (and in fact characteristic of Andermann's previous productions), *Rigoletto in Mantua* offers a forensic examination of operatic practice, something tenor Vittorio Grigolo, the Duke of Mantua in the production, recognized in an interview, pointing out what he regarded as the challenging need to somehow control his gestures and play to the camera (Christine p 2011). That is, the conventions of opera become a problem in this setting, as though the catch-you-in-the-act aesthetic of reality TV caught singers in the act of repeating entrenched practices that seem, in this view, not only ritualistic but robotic—as though operatic performers were the living dead, an idea sketched by musicologist Carolyn Abbate (2001:9).

As a cinema director active in the classic era of Italian neorealism, Bellocchio had once combined close camerawork and operatic acting to quite different ends: in the final scene of his *I pugni in tasca* (Fists in the Pocket, 1965), the protagonist commits suicide while listening to Verdi on the record player (in this case, *La traviata*). Here the extreme close-ups convey a sense of formal loss of control, mirroring the frenzied protagonist's state of mind, while the actor's gestures pointedly ape operatic excess. Translated from the medium of film to video and from a cinematic context to mainstream television, this critical intent seems lost. Here extreme close-ups and hand-held cameras cannot help but summon the intrusive, voyeuristic gaze of news gathering and reality TV. Meanwhile, no mockery or irony attends the operatic gestures, here delivered in business-as-usual fashion, as though the operatic stage had merely relocated temporarily. This is live coverage of zombie performers.

13. Arman Schwartz makes the telling observation that "[Puccini's] operas often seem—unlike those of, say, Mozart or Verdi—ineradicably, embarrassingly dependent on their original *mise-en-scène*" (2013:163).

This kind of footage is married in the nocturnal scenes of acts 1 and 3 to the seemingly incompatible aesthetic of cinematographer Vittorio Storaro, with its high-contrast lighting and moody, monochromatic color palette. This is Storaro's famously "painterly" style, here justified, mirrored, and augmented by the broadcast's setting, which offers a backdrop of *actual* painting, the frescos (versus painterly sets with paintings of paintings, i.e., reproductions). At times reminiscent of high cinematic style, at others of reality television, *Rigoletto in Mantua* is at once period drama and rolling news coverage documenting events as they unfold.¹⁴ The combination of the high-art monumental background, Storaro's cinematic signature, and Bellocchio's reality-TV direction can be jarring, particularly when the close camera-work reveals beads of sweat and threatens to dispel the illusion and reveal the labor of singing and acting. The display of virtuosity is arguably something that opera has historically allowed to remain visible, even when reforms in staging practice (such as those introduced by Wagner at Bayreuth) sought to accentuate the illusionism of the operatic stage. Nor is this kind of exposure of labor an unfamiliar spectacle in opera videos and broadcasts of live staged performance. Yet there remains in those videos a telling tension between raw revelation and slick presentation (precise edits, smooth camerawork, careful lighting of the actors), and this is a characteristic that *Rigoletto in Mantua* seems to inherit and further complicate with its pastiche of textures and modes. That it should gesture to cinema as well as television recalls another heritage: the opera film shot on location and mimed to a studio-recorded dub-track.¹⁵ In *Rigoletto in Mantua*, as in the dubbed films, the opera stage, audience, and even monitors and cables are conspicuously absent. However, *Rigoletto in Mantua* repeatedly swaps its cinematic mask for a televisual one, and in so doing resembles nothing so much as theatre. If the standard critique of reality TV is that its slice of the real is actually heavily staged, here a combination of reality TV and cinema unmasks the labor behind the staging, offering a glimpse of the apparatus that this polished production otherwise keeps hidden. The finale of act 1, filmed in the Palazzo del Tè, brings all these textures into close alignment. Count Monterone, father of one of the duke's many victims, curses the duke and Rigoletto; arrested, he now stands defiant in front of the duke as Rigoletto flees, terrified of the curse. Amidst the photogenic juxtaposition of textures and color palettes (the camera follows Rigoletto through a variety of spectacular interiors as he flees), a closeup of the exchange between the Duke and Monterone reveals the sweat on the singers' brows and flying spittle from some committed singing.

What this scene stages, then, is a double encounter: one between actors, the other between actor and scenic surroundings. The latter has always played an especially important role in a genre that has historically foregrounded the spectacular in its *mise-en-scène* and journeys (to exotic lands, to the domains of the gods) in its plots. Storaro's cinematography seems to pick up on this, highlighting the issue of motion in theatre and cinema. Scenes are lit and staged as paintings, as *tableaux vivants*, while lighting animates the historical surroundings with the trappings of human subjectivity. If light and shade on faces is typically understood to accentuate mood, struggle, and drama in neo-Aristotelian terms, so the lighting here *characterizes* the very architecture, endowing it with dramatic meaning, even with agency. It is as though the dynamics of the *tableau vivant* were reversed: still things come to life. Confronting the purported permanence and deadness of the monument, Rebecca Schneider is struck by a sentence from Michel de Certeau: "The passing faces on the street [...] seem to multiply the indecipherable and nearby secret of the monument" (1984:15). This "passing" encounter between living and dead suggests for Schneider not merely a passive registering of the monument but a mutual constitution: "[A] monument is given to retain its secret, its monumentality, in and through passage, or the live act of passing by. Animate and inanimate, moving and stilled, are not in this sense diametrically opposed as much as part and parcel of inter(in)animation" (2011:145).

14. Marcia J. Citron has likened Andermann's *Tosca* (1992) to a news-gathering (2000:65).

15. Prominent examples include *Don Giovanni* (dir. Joseph Losey, 1979) and *La traviata* (dir. Franco Zeffirelli, 1982). For more on the opera film, see Citron (2000).



Figure 2. Reeling from Monterone's curse, *Rigoletto* pauses beneath the trompe l'oeil ceiling of the Palazzo Ducale's "Hall of the Giants." *Rigoletto* a Mantova, act 1, 2010. (Broadcast still courtesy of RAI/Rada Film)

Throughout *Rigoletto in Mantua* trompe l'oeil effects generate a striking interaction between the animate and inanimate. Walls seem to become extensions to scenes. In some scenes, this televisual trompe l'oeil takes place against the backdrop of paintings that are already trompe l'oeil effects in themselves. Act 1, scene 1 concludes with Rigoletto's face foregrounded against the false ceiling of the Palazzo del Te's Camera dei Giganti (Hall of the Giants), the gods in Olympus high above him while he, the hunchbacked jester, remains earthbound. On the walls around Rigoletto are the giants, who had presumed to climb to the gods and now face their wrath. In an earlier scene the deformed hand of one of the giants had seemed to reach out and touch Rigoletto. A passing encounter indeed.

I single out tableau vivant and trompe l'oeil not only because the production clearly plays on those effects but because both practices straddle borders between reality and illusion, and between the media of theatre, painting, and cinema. In the historical staging practices of opera, ensembles have often been configured as a kind of tableau vivant.¹⁶ Dramaturgically, they typically function as moments of reflection in which characters exteriorize their reactions, their state of mind, their relationship with others. Ensembles are, in short, multiple simultaneous soliloquies, seemingly demanding a stillness that arrests time to direct attention to affective states and interior truths. Equally, the history of illusionist staging is in part a history of trompe l'oeil effects. The interiors of the Palazzo Ducale once cast their shadows on the flats of illusionist operatic scenography, which in turn now recover their mass and form in the "actual" interiors they once represented.

As for film, Brigitte Peucker singles out these two effects as emblematic of the cinematic play with reality, in that both stage the very problem of representation, inviting a playful and

16. The classic account of historical staging practices in Italian opera is the three-volume series *The History of Italian Opera, Part II: Systems*, edited by Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, which consists of *Opera Production and Its Resources* (1998), *Opera on Stage* (2001), and *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth* (2003). Glossing on illustrations of stagings of *Rigoletto*, Carl Dahlhaus characterizes the quartet "Bella figlia dell'amore" as a tableau vivant (2003:146).



Figure 3. As *Rigoletto* dons his jester's garb, one of the murals in the "Hall of the Giants" seems to reach out and touch him. *Rigoletto a Mantova, act 1, 2010*. (Broadcast still courtesy of RAI/Rada Film)

pleasurable oscillation between belief and knowing resistance, between absorption and distance (Peucker 2006). How telling that one of the press reactions to *Rigoletto in Mantua* was the observation that Storaro's lighting had made these locations resemble a stage set for *Rigoletto* (Ozorio 2010). In a sense, this whole production pivots on a trompe l'oeil in that the gap between the scene of representation and its referent become ambiguous: the theatrical Palazzo Ducale becomes the historical Palazzo Ducale, and vice versa. Equally, the play on the animate and inanimate, characteristic of the tableau vivant, is central to the effect of the production. Live performers may play against and among inanimate backdrops, but that isn't the scene of performance, because *both* are remediated in the fluid visual representation that is the broadcast. If Storaro's cinematography is painterly—modeled in part on the kinds of Renaissance imagery that adorns the Mantuan interiors—then this is painting charged with movement, brought to life. And that in itself is clearly a notion intrinsic to Storaro's understanding of cinema as a medium. "Cinema is the 'Tenth Muse' for a specific reason," he tells us. "It is motion itself for the other arts." Yet Storaro also stresses the relationship of movement to mortality:

To me making a film is like resolving a conflict between light and dark, cold and warmth [...] There should be a sense of energy, or change of movement. A sense that time is going on—light becomes night, which reverts to morning. Life becomes death. (in Gentry 1985:85)

If there is something a little half-baked about this account—and we might balk at the breathtaking exaggeration of cinema's importance—Storaro nevertheless touches on something that chimes with the dynamics of *Rigoletto in Mantua*. Fluidity, in Storaro's view, is also circularity: the animate can quickly become the inanimate (and vice versa), the live performative a remembrance of what has been, the monument an agent of action. Cinematically represented as a shared and fluid site of encounter between actors and surroundings, performance and monument, *Rigoletto in Mantua* bridges and unsettles the animate and inanimate. Yet this cinematically represented encounter is itself an encounter—with theatre. In another circular gesture, cinema gives back to theatre (in the form of the "actual" Palazzo Ducale) what was already in theatre (the Palazzo Ducale of *Rigoletto*). That this encounter with theatre—live/living theatre—is marked in part by stock operatic conventions and the habitually repeated gestures of

operatic performers surely unsettles even further the established binary of live performance and the supposedly inert materials amidst which it takes place.

An emerging body of thought has sought to challenge the deep-seated binary between live subjects and inert objects, asking, as Jane Bennett puts it, whether we might speak of a “vibrant matter” that is neither divinely infused nor a “life force” as in the vitalist tradition, but a “vitality intrinsic to materiality as such” (2010:xiii). Aware of the formidable weight of the (human) subject-centered tradition arrayed against such a proposition, Bennett laments the hubris of anthropocentrism and the limiting effect of what she regards as a myopic exclusion in thought, action, and politics: “I will emphasize, even overemphasize, the agentic contributions of non-human forces (operating in nature, in the human body, and in human artifacts) in an attempt to counter the narcissistic reflex of human language and thought” (2010:xvi). How might a consideration of these “agentic contributions” inflect our understanding of a site-specific performance like *Rigoletto in Mantua*? What would it mean to speak of liveness in this context? If materials are not dead, might the liveness of *Rigoletto in Mantua* consist of more than the bringing to life of a site through the performances of living subjects?

Alive with the Sound of Music

And what about sound? Isn't this a classic instance of live, living, moving music bringing its environs to life? Isn't it, in large part, the sound of Verdi's music resounding through the marble halls that animates the space? I'm reminded of some recent European performance projects: in the Czech Republic, the project “Extinct Churches – Living Music” and the marketing of Derry/Londonderry, one of Europe's “Cities of Culture” in 2013, as a city in which “the walls come alive with the sound of music.”¹⁷ Is this to say that sound might register the site's agency? Theatre practitioner Minty Donald suggests as much when she reflects on her collaboration with five other artists on *Highb-Slack-Low-Slack-Highb* (2012), a site-specific sonic project in Glasgow. The project relayed a combination of field recordings of the River Clyde and musical compositions modeled on the river's tidal movement into urban locations, in part with the goal of challenging the fixity and boundedness of site with the fluidity of river and of sound (Donald 2014:98). But Donald declares herself equally charged by Bennett's entreaty to discover “everyday tactics for cultivating an ability to discern the vitality of matter” (Bennett 2010:119). Performed as a living entity coursing through and around the city, the river, and with it the natural environment of wind and tide, becomes something other than inert matter to be harnessed by living subjects. Like Donald's production but without its explicit critical aims, *Rigoletto in Mantua* imagines a supposedly inert space resounding with music. Here the music associated with the place in fiction returns to its imagined home, as though the actual space resonated with its theatrical double—as though original and copy were reversed and the Palazzo Ducale were an echo of *Rigoletto*.

Rigoletto in Mantua also shares with Donald's production a reliance on media technology. But unlike the Glasgow project, it is conceived as a mediatized production. No audience assembles within the walls of the Palazzo Ducale to hear them come alive with sound. Isn't the experience rendered secondhand, remote, electronically mediated, and therefore according to classic definitions of performance by Fischer-Lichte and Peggy Phelan, not performance at all (Fischer-Lichte 2003:292; Phelan 1993:146)? Even if an audience did gather, it wouldn't hear the orchestra. It's situated several hundred meters away in the Teatro Bibiena, its sound relayed via fiber optic cable to the singers' earpieces and to a mixing console, from which it is broadcast. Out of range acoustically, and relayed electronically, its remoteness actually presented technical challenges in the form of signal delay and synchronization. Because traversing the gap

17. On the Czech project see euromuse.net (2007); on the marketing of Derry/Londonderry see cityofculture2013.com (2013).

between those spaces involves time, even for electronic signals, it means a dislocation between sight and sound (the interiors we see aren't the interiors that resonate with the sounds we hear) and between sound and sound (each unfolding in its own site and time). Only in the synthesis accomplished by the broadcast audio mix is the pretense of wholeness restored; only the broadcast images bridge the remote locations.

Is this staging of dislocation — this obvious technological compensation for rupture — an example of what R. Murray Schafer called “schizophonia” ([1977] 1994:88), the severing of sound from visible source?¹⁸ As Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut point out in a study of the technology of duets between living and dead singers, the problem with schizophonia is precisely its assumption of the disruption of wholeness. With Deleuzian overtones, Stanyek and Piekut substitute “schizophonia” with “rhizophonia,” understood not as fragmentation of a purported whole but a more radical suggestion: that sound speaks insistently and habitually of dispersal and fragmentation (2010:19). When opera singers are networked with a remote orchestra, when cameras freely intercut the dramatic action with shots of an orchestra obviously located elsewhere, and when all this unfolds in the context of the production's double liveness of place and time, the effect ought to be striking. And yet these dislocations seem so familiar, given television's constant play with a tele-presence based on the capacity to span space and with a televisual liveness that trumpets its oneness.

What happens, though, when that oneness is lost, as in cinema or recordings? Aren't audio recordings, celluloid, and digital files, in their inert materiality, testimony to the unique presence of live performance and to their own dead durability? What viewers in the United States saw when they watched *Rigoletto in Mantua* on PBS in July 2011 was not “live,” but a recording made necessary by the inconvenient European schedule of the original transmissions. If this single evening (rather than staggered) broadcast rendered the conceit “at the times of the opera” meaningless, it drew on the capacity of televisual liveness to effectively relive the live: the broadcast hadn't been available in the US until then, and there was some anticipation of the event in blogs and media outlets. The relay also transformed the representation of Domingo's tear. In an interview conducted between the performances of acts 2 and 3, Domingo admitted that he had cried and would probably cry again. That interview, in its recorded version, included cutaways to the scene, forensically highlighting the event in a manner that seems anything but live. Yet the very analysis of the tear as an event *framed* and dislocated it from the interview, at once highlighting the immediacy of the interview *and* investing in the eventness of the performance precisely because it has been mediatized in ways familiar from live television. In a discussion of sports broadcasts Steve Wurtzler makes the point that “as the conventions of the televisually posited live come to constitute the way we think of the live, attending the game [...] becomes a degraded version of the event's televisual representation” [1992:92].

Besides, the recording itself, once available via the PBS website, is now no longer accessible. And aren't recorded media themselves vulnerable to all the anxieties associated with the disappearance and loss of performance? Auslander famously highlighted this problem (2008:49–50), but it's an issue that Storaro claims has haunted him for some time:

The day I became consciously aware [...] that the color images we put so much effort into visualizing, composing and realizing are, in reality, far less permanent than we imagine, I actually experienced something of a shock; I realized, to my horror, that all the color images I had helped to create, expending a great deal of energy while I lived, thought, and even slept, were proceeding unrelentingly on their journey of transformation, modification and decomposition, to the extent that they were continually fading, and would gradually vanish. (1990:136–37)

18. Schafer writes: “We have split the sound from the maker of the sound. Sounds have been torn from their natural sockets and given an amplified and independent existence” ([1977] 1994:90).

And if the vulnerability of film filled him with anxiety, Storaro would later see the problem as paling in comparison with digital media:

Film has already proven it can last a hundred years. The electronic system, or digital, has to improve its longevity. The systems are changing very fast, the material is not very strong. People are very ignorant in this area—they still believe that digital is permanent. That's a major mistake. (in Stuart [2007] 2011)

Deadness

I want, in conclusion, to push the argument a little further. The dislocations I have associated with *Rigoletto in Mantua*—the spatial effects, distant sounds, invisible sources—are these not tropes and technologies of opera? The unseen, moaning chorus representing the wind in act 3 of *Rigoletto* is precisely one of these technologies. Opera mobilizes its production spaces—historically, the proscenium stage with orchestra pit—to produce its effects. It is also mediated by the materials and spaces and resources available to it, and that includes idiosyncratic channeling of sound; the sound delays involved in the reflected orchestral sound at the Bayreuth Festival are well documented, but each house channels and distributes sound in its own way. As Alessandra Campana puts it, “[O]pera studies’ sophisticated ears, increasingly trained nowadays to attend to mediation and performance, are often deaf to the design choices that always shape in advance the very experience of sound, voice, and orchestra, both live and recorded” (2011:481–82). Live *and* recorded: presence and liveness are always engineered.

Opera studies has long acknowledged the genre’s historical attraction to audio-visual “breaks” (distant sounds, invisible sources) but most often within a methodological/theoretical frame that assumes some whole must be *broken*. Reflecting on this kind of assumption, Stanyek and Piekut posit the notions of “deadness,” a concept, they insist, that should not be taken as the other of “liveness,” but rather as the very enabling condition of the effect of liveness:

[D]eadness emerges out of what is for us an unhelpful and overvalued schism between presence and absence that undergirds much literature on performance. Deadness speaks to the distended temporalities and spatialities of all performance, much the way all ontologies are really hauntologies, spurred into being through the portended traces of too many histories to name and too many futures to subsume in a stable, locatable present. (2010:20)

Again, note the stress on “all performance,” here the common ground of the live and recorded, human and nonhuman, amidst the disjunctions of time and space that characterize and enable performance.

To concur with this understanding of performance is perhaps to read *Rigoletto in Mantua* against its own claims. Where the production claims a kind of hyper-live (at the time and in the place), I want to problematize its claims to any presence or liveness—not because the production is conceived for television and mediatized but because it shares with all performance the productive mobilization of asynchronicity and dislocation: *never* at the time nor in the place. I have resisted making claims for the production as radical or experimental; this is middlebrow television fare based on a genre at its most conventional. But this is precisely the point. It is in fact in its very conventionality that *Rigoletto in Mantua* is most provocative. Like Stanyek and Piekut, Steven Connor questions the notion of “schizophonia,” a term he had embraced in his influential *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (2000). His equivalent to Stanyek and Piekut’s “rhizophonia” is “panophonia,” and his conclusions about it are telling:

This is not, I hope, simply a weary reiteration of the familiar Derridean doctrine, that speech cannot reliably instance the values of immediacy and presence, given its infiltration by the displacements of writing. It is that the lack of such presence is now without serious meaning or consequence, considered simply as lack [...]. In the condition

of panophonia [...] voice is no longer exiled from its origin as it is in schizophonia, but everywhere finds a way of being at home. (2012:8)

Lack, absence, *not* being there—these are experienced not as shock or disruption or disturbance. It is in its very at-home-ness with purported losses and absences that *Rigoletto in Mantua* registers its currency with contemporary experience. My point is not that *Rigoletto in Mantua* represents a special case, an unusual iteration of performance; rather, that it highlights a wider contemporary economy of sight and sound that has implications for our understanding of performance and its (material) capacity to engage with apparent dislocations and remediations. And while I don't believe that the production sets out to problematize our understanding of the exchange between animate and inanimate, I do think that it stages a configuration, an encounter, that materializes and makes palpable this perception. What the questioning, corrective tone in the work by Bennett, Schneider, Connor, and Stanyek and Piekut suggests is that these problems have yet to register with theory in a meaningful way. There a precious understanding of liveness and presence still holds sway, and the exchange of human and nonhuman is glimpsed and heard as something still just out of conceptual reach—still taking place, so to speak, in another room.

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