

Digital Diva: Opera on Video

{ CHRISTOPHER MORRIS }
{ UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK }

What is it about video recording that brings out the purist in theater practitioners and theorists? Time and again they reinforce a hierarchy that relegates the recording of theater to a derivative and debased status in relation to the unique and inimitable condition of a live performance. Whether produced for archival, documentary, or research purposes, recordings are seen to offer only the faintest trace of something now lost, something now properly preserved only in the ever-fading record of human memory. “Performance,” writes Peggy Phelan, “cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance.”¹ For director Peter Brook, theater “is an event for that moment in time, for that [audience] in that place—and it’s gone. Gone without a trace . . . the only record is what they retained, which is how it should be in theater.”² An investment in this essential yet ephemeral quality of the live event—what Phelan calls the “ontology of performance”³—is a recurring theme in theater and performance studies, standing at times like theater’s line in the sand, beyond which media technology holds no sway.

The extent of these reservations—not to say opposition—is documented and explored in a series of articles in *New Theatre Quarterly* by Gay McAuley, Annabelle Melzer, and Denise Varney and Rachel Fensham.⁴ Video recordings, Varney and Fensham show, are derided for robbing the spectator of a choice of perspective and imposing the camera’s gaze for their selective representation of the *mise-en-scène*, for the loss of a variable and unknowable temporality of the live to a congealed representation of the past, and of course for the lack of the presence of the performer. In part, these characteristics are presented as an absence or failure inherent to video. They can also be attributed, as Melzer points out, to its successes, in the sense that the well-honed techniques of film and video may be understood to sit uncomfortably with theater. Melzer cites Jonathan Miller’s take on this problem:

After years of trial and error, film editors have evolved practical rules of assembly so that when the eye is directed unaccountably towards one group of characters, excluding all the others, the viewer’s sense of narrative continuity is left

undisturbed. It is the very success of this surreptitious technique that irreversibly changes the dramatic identity of the stage work.⁵

Either way—as an inherent loss in the medium or as the successful refinement of idiomatic techniques—the result, Melzer concludes, is the same: a fundamental incompatibility between video and theater.

Not that these concerns represent a monolithic, unyielding opposition to video. Melzer points out, for example, that Brook's observation on the irretrievable present of performance was made in 1969; by 1977 he was expressing enthusiasm for what he called the "filmed document."⁶ Yet Brook's use of the term "document" says much about the perceived relationship of video to theater. As Varney and Fensham point out, video became increasingly accepted by Brook and others, but only as a tool for practitioners to study the craft of theater or to facilitate the revival of a production. McAuley considers another possibility: that theater on video may be a valuable teaching and research tool. However, here too, the function of video is perceived in documentary terms. Offering practical advice for academics seeking to record productions in university settings, McAuley stresses the need for medial "transparency" so as to avoid interfering with the "theatrical experience."⁷

Only when the focus shifts to the wider dissemination of theater on video do other priorities emerge. In her discussion of theater on television, for example, Melzer cites director Richard Kalisz, who argues that television should adopt a very different approach to theater from the kind recommended by McAuley:

One cannot stress enough to the TV producer that, contrary to the cinema, theater distrusts realism. Its strength, beauty, and justification lie precisely in its theatricality. If you want to make a movie out of it or a TV production, you will only produce a work of inferior quality, which will deceive the audience about the nature of the work. The TV producer should therefore take care not to make us believe that the televised play is the real theater performance but its reproduction.⁸

Far from transparent documentation of theatrical performance, then, television should assert its own mediality—its remove from the theater—so as to avoid a derivative and ultimately deceptive transparency. With respect to the established practices of television, though, this is a moot point. True, television has a history of effacing its own mediality in favor of a mode of documentary realism, and the medium adopted much of its early presentational style from theater (a style that lingers to this day in the sitcom), yet it also thoroughly transformed theatrical grammar and techniques to its own ends. Always heavily invested in drama-based genres, television has continually drawn on a fund of dramatic material that often overlaps with theater, but, like cinema, it has assimilated those sources into its own medial environment, what Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin call

“remediation.”⁹ One result is that television broadcasts of staged productions—as opposed to studio adaptations of plays or dramas conceived for television—are not at all common.¹⁰ Opera, however, is an entirely different matter—isn’t it always?

THE OTHER OPERA BOX

When Kalisz opposes the theatricality of the stage to the realism of cinema and television, he touches on a debate with a long pedigree. As Mervyn Cooke shows, similar arguments were already being applied in the 1930s to the cinematic adaptation of opera. Kurt London, for example, expressed the view that the “unreal world of opera and the naturalistic film have nothing whatever in common.”¹¹ That reservations like this have not deterred filmmakers from engaging with opera is evident from the rich history of cinematic adaptations of opera, but this is a repertoire that raises questions beyond the scope of this essay—one with a well-developed literature of its own.¹² Much less developed is the literature on opera productions that are televised and released on commercial video, even though this, and not cinematic adaptation, has become by far the dominant mode of audio-visual remediation of opera.¹³ Although never more than an occasional feature of television schedules, live opera productions have been televised since the earliest days of the medium. Once featured as part of “cultural” programming on the major national broadcasters (NBC in the United States, BBC in the UK, ZDF and ARD in Germany, NHK in Japan, not to mention the broadcasters of the Soviet bloc), opera gradually became confined to cultural/educational broadcasters like PBS in the United States, the Franco-German channel Arte, or the German/Austrian/Swiss partnership 3Sat.¹⁴ More recently, it has found a home on niche pay-TV channels like Sky Arts in the UK or Unitel Classica in Germany. It is hardly a triumphant history, yet it dwarfs the broadcast history of spoken theater. Still, as Jennifer Barnes points out, opera conceived for television has had a fitful history, held back in part by expensive production costs and small audiences.¹⁵

An important legacy of this history of television broadcasting from the opera house, at least since the adoption of video, has been the commercial release of tapings for home video. This began in the era of the video cassette and continued with the DVD, so that the catalog now amounts, on my admittedly rough estimate, to well over one thousand titles—a small number compared with feature films, but by no means insignificant.¹⁶ And this is more than an accumulated archive available for researchers; opera on DVD may represent a mere niche compared with feature films, but it is evidently a sustainable market, judging by the continued participation of a number of prominent labels, including EMI Classics, TDK, Arthaus Musik, Opus Arte, Kultur International, and the Universal Music

Group labels (e.g., Deutsche Grammophon, Decca).¹⁷ This combination of broadcasting and commercial distribution of discs finds a precedent in audio recording: live and taped transmissions from opera houses were a long-established feature of radio schedules by the time television emerged, and although the record industry cultivated a culture of studio-based recordings, tapings of live performances were not uncommon.

Television and DVDs, however, represent only part of opera's embrace of contemporary video technology. No one remotely interested in opera will be unaware of the emergence and initial success of the Metropolitan Opera's live high-definition relays to cinemas throughout the world.¹⁸ Web-based technology has now reached the point at which high-quality live and delayed video of productions can be offered, whether free (in December 2008, the Opéra National de Paris offered, both live and for one month thereafter, a webcast of its production of *The Cunning Little Vixen*) or by subscription (witness the Metropolitan Opera's "Met Player" or the webcast of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* from the Bayreuth Festival in 2008). What all this suggests is that the issues raised by theorists and practitioners in relation to spoken theater—the loss of presence and spontaneity, the controlling gaze of the camera—return with a vengeance in the case of opera. The stakes, I will argue, are raised, for the issues go beyond documentation and scholarship to the very dissemination and phenomenology of opera. Opera on video now proliferates in so many forms that belittling it as a second-hand imitation, supplement, or record of something that happened elsewhere begins to seem hopelessly inadequate: its here and now is increasingly found in its remediated form. Not that this is some breakthrough to a sunlit future unencumbered by opera's sometimes maddeningly conservative values or its narrow and aging canon. Video has the potential to reinforce the operatic canon, and it happily effaces its mediality to simulate the perceived prestige and aura of opera. However, it can also critically expose opera and even point tentatively toward innovations that offer to reinvigorate a patient long dependent on the life support of government support, philanthropy, corporate sponsorship, and aggressive subscription campaigns.

IT'LL BE ALL RIGHT ON THE NIGHT

In his widely discussed *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Philip Auslander confronts the binary logic used to support ontological distinctions between live and mediatized performance. There is, he argues, no essential, a priori distinction between the two. Rather, the distinctions are historically and culturally determined; they are matters of phenomenology and ideology, not ontology.¹⁹ Auslander goes on to show, for example, that contemporary experience of live performance is saturated by media technology: video monitors and giant

screens, amplification, replays at sporting events (and, we might add, supertitles in opera). In this context, the notion of an unblemished “liveness” begins to seem increasingly purist and idealized. The very notion of the live, he adds, is not timeless but is itself a reaction to mediatized culture, a gesture toward a recovery of what now appears to be lost. Conversely, Auslander shows that the experience of immediacy and presence so associated with liveness is not confined to the live, that media technology, too, can generate—is designed to generate—precisely these impressions. Auslander’s strategy is not without its problems: his opposition to ontology, for example, is undermined by his reliance on what are ontologically based definitions of electronic media.²⁰ Still, he usefully, and I think persuasively, exposes some well-worn assumptions about live performance. One of these revolves around the perceived spontaneity and uniqueness of live performance as opposed to the technologically imposed duplication and repetition in mediatized forms. What is at stake here for Auslander is not the capacity of live performers to introduce variation and change, whether a planned alteration or a spontaneous gesture. The issue is the *appetite* for spontaneity. Martin Barker writes of the tendency in mainstream theater to minimize “random changes between performance.” Actors, he adds “will seek a plateau where everything in a production is controlled, where characterization is organic and consistent, movements are choreographed, timed and effective.”²¹

Barker could be describing the industrially scaled production of opera in one of the big houses. Historians of opera can of course point to opera’s tradition of interpretative freedom and performative display. Hasn’t opera historically served as a vehicle for vocal virtuosity, and don’t its formidable technical challenges form part of its allure? The answer is surely yes, but with qualification and limits. Any operatic performance is a fraught undertaking; even beyond the fabled high notes and roulades, the very technology of vocal production in opera tests the limits of the reasonable and the feasible. However, if this is part of the thrill of operatic performance, it is a thrill with a low tolerance threshold. The singer’s failure to “pull it off” may tellingly reveal the labor involved, may elicit sympathy. It also, however, generates displeasure that will be eagerly, even ruthlessly, flagged in audience reaction and in the critic’s pen. To acknowledge that opera’s fragile performative is ingrained in its traditions is not necessarily to assert that this is a valued spontaneity. Perhaps, in some ways, poor performances throw the successful ones into greater relief, but I doubt that performers willingly test this hypothesis from the negative side, or that audiences actually welcome the cracked high note.

No two performances are identical: accidents, health, fatigue, and errors of execution can all shape performance. In no way do I wish to suggest that they are, or that a series of live performances could ever be fixed in the way that a video recording is. But the differences between live performance and recording

are easily polarized into a rigid binary of live creativity versus technologically rendered repetition. If a recording fixes performance in an ossified form, it may not be as different from opera as we might like to believe. Our cultural practices—what we do with performance—have as much of an impact on its static quality as does any intervention by technology. Opera’s unwieldy dimensions and intensive demands open it up to wide-ranging variations in input and outcome, but they also encourage production on an industrial scale and with an industrial level of management and control.²² In this kind of environment, spontaneity is not necessarily valued as a virtue. Consider, for example, the familiar reality of contemporary casting: companies rely on the capacity of singers to fly from city to city to rehearse and perform, while the demand (and fees) for the services of the elite singers is boosted by this international demand. This has led to a degree of standardization, partly because in-demand singers (especially for difficult-to-cast parts) will typically perform the same role repeatedly in several venues, and partly because, as directors and conductors often lament, these singers will often arrive late in the rehearsal process, potentially jet-lagged and having only recently sung the same role elsewhere. Not all companies subscribe to this regime, of course, and festivals will often feature quite different working practices, but jet-set opera remains a reality for all the most prestigious opera houses.

MEMORY AND PROMISE

Another constraint on spontaneity, I would suggest, comes in the form of the contemporary culture of “director’s theater.” As much as the rise of the director and the concept production has opened up novel and challenging dimensions of theatricality to opera, the subordination of stock gestures and hammy expressiveness to directorial vision has introduced a form of standardization, not between productions, but between the performances in a production.²³ That is, the choreography and gestural vocabulary introduced by one of today’s celebrated directors may be open to negotiation during rehearsal, but it is rarely the singer’s prerogative to improvise from performance to performance. As anyone who has attended multiple performances of the same production can attest, conformity is the order of the day, variation the notable exception. Productions will be carefully documented so that they can be revived (note the language, like bringing back the dead) with or without the original personnel. Productions become works: no longer labor that is being done, but a trace of labor that has been done. They acquire the metaphysical aura so easily bestowed on dramas or musical compositions, a quality of “this has been accomplished.” The re-intervention of labor is required to transform them into an event, a happening, yet they live anyway, if only in a transcendental guise. Productions carry a memory and a promise, but they can remain that way—in fact, their aura may be enhanced if they remain

unrealized, unblemished by reality. Or they can be traded between opera companies like commodities: the most successful productions enjoy international careers that can span decades.²⁴

Video, too, carries a memory and a promise: a commodity, it is both an inert object and one that, with intervention, can be transformed into an event. Or it can sit on a shelf, the sight of its packaging triggering a memory of a past engagement or the promise of a future one. As Sean Cubitt shows, the possibility of repetition offered by video is just that: a possibility. Re-viewing is not some “essence in the medium” but a use to which it is put.²⁵ In the case of television broadcasts never released on home video, for example, we may have the opportunity for only one viewing; we may purchase a DVD and, for a variety of reasons, view it only once. Nor, Cubitt adds, is a repeat viewing of a video an actual repetition: it involves not only the viewed object but a viewing subject, whose engagement will never be duplicated. Only as a transcendental object is the video subject to pure repetition; reduced to some imagined essence, video becomes what Jane Feuer, writing on television, calls “ontology as ideology.”²⁶ Recognized as an engagement, an encounter with a video assumes all the hallmarks we associate with spectatorship: absorption, immediacy, affect, and so on.

Lack of spontaneity in operatic performance also has roots in attitudes to textuality: our operatic culture is firmly under the spell of *Werktreue*, with its investment in the notion of serving and authentically realizing the operatic work bequeathed to us by notation and authenticated by tradition. If the term “post-dramatic theater” implies a liberation from the notion of producing a canon of works, then opera is resolutely “dramatic.” Still, this is no given, no essential characteristic. As Rachel Cowgill and others have shown, opera historically adopted the notion of *Werktreue*.²⁷ It could, in principle, reimbrace earlier practices in which the supplementation or substitution of text and music—drawing on other works, on a singer’s signature tune, on popular music—was part of the culture. It doesn’t, however. To question the inviolate nature of the operatic score strikes Roger Parker as “logical” and “important,” but he doubts that the ingrained habits of opera audiences will allow this “brave new world” to materialize in the immediate future and acknowledges that his own scholarly investment in operatic works tempers his enthusiasm for the idea.²⁸ So even our texts are standardized, repeated, trotted out year after year. We become more than familiar with them, and anticipate every detail, like a favorite film we have seen more times than we can count.

TROUBLE IN THE WINGS

That predictability was highlighted recently on UK television, when subscription satellite channel Sky Arts undertook an experiment. At the time, Sky Arts

consisted of two standard-definition channels and a high-definition channel which simulcasted programs from either of the two standard-definition channels. On February 4, 2009, it broadcast on one of its standard-definition channels and on its high-definition channel a live transmission from the English National Opera of a new production of *La bohème*, directed by Jonathan Miller. The remaining channel was devoted to live, uninterrupted backstage footage and interviews running concurrently with the performance. Viewers were thus invited to watch either channel, or indeed to alternate between them.²⁹ The coverage of the performance was a case of business as usual, featuring a by-now standard range and vocabulary of camera angles and edits. The backstage transmission, meanwhile, drew partly on the well-developed traditions of behind-the-scenes footage (shots of technical personnel at work, glimpses of the stage from the wings, visits to the dressing rooms) and partly on the style of reality television (handheld cameras, fast-paced edits, an occasionally intrusive interviewing style, the sense of catching personnel unawares). Like so many behind-the-scenes “revelations,” the broadcast wasn’t actually that revealing, and, like so much reality television, it seemed carefully choreographed.

Still, it imparted an excitement and tension that was engaging enough to encourage me to continue watching at the expense of the performance itself (bar a few samples of the other channel). The attraction had something to do, I think, with the contrast one might expect between stage and backstage, between organized chaos and the polished “product.” This apparent insider knowledge is surely part of the voyeuristic appeal of backstage access, an appeal that shouldn’t be confused with any attempt to unmask the illusion of performance; like the backstage musical, knowledge of this kind seems, paradoxically, to enhance the illusion. Equally compelling, though, was the contrast between the fraught, spontaneous feel of the backstage broadcast and the pedestrian, somewhat hackneyed coverage of the performance.³⁰ At several points in the backstage broadcast, the interventions of the presenter and camera team threatened to delay stage entrances, leading to some tense communications with the stage manager, while the sheer duration of the broadcast meant that extended stretches seemed unmanipulated, unchaperoned, and compellingly immersive. No doubt the novelty factor was important, yet novelty—or, better, innovation—may be precisely the point, for the contrast between the two broadcasts left me lamenting the all-too-predictable nature of *both* the production (yet another *Bohème*, yet more middling singing, yet more awkward acting) *and* its capture on video (yet more static three-quarter length shots with the typical closeup to register emotion, “unintrusive” editing, and flat, bland perspectives).

My sense of dissatisfaction was in fact embodied—dare I say, performed?—in the very format of the broadcast when a grumpy and rather reluctant Jonathan Miller was interviewed backstage at several points during the performance.

Clearly relishing the opportunity to raise eyebrows, Miller declared, with barely concealed glee, that, other than his own productions, he hadn't been to an opera in ten years; that he felt uncomfortable sitting in the audience with people he didn't know; that, despite the frequent revivals of his productions at ENO, he had had little to do with them; and that "traditional productions" of *La bohème* were "vulgar," "uninformed," and "bullshit."³¹ That this was hardly the sort of promotion of opera Sky Arts had in mind was demonstrated when presenter Penny Smith asked Miller why, given his negative attitude, viewers at home should "bother" with opera (she later thanked him sarcastically for his on-air profanity). My own reaction was to interpret Miller's commentary as rebounding on his own production: the video feed of the stage performance was inserted as a picture-in-picture—accompanied by discreet sound—in the corner of the screen (fig. 1). It was as though the author were looming over his work, which was visually framed by the backstage footage, but also verbally framed by Miller's critique of opera. As Miller lamented the status quo, I could see only the status quo playing out in that small video box.

IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

Another binary much in evidence in discussions of liveness concerns the communal aspects of performance. Isn't an audience a form of community, in contrast to the isolated and fragmented spectatorship of video? This is partly a question of a spectator's awareness of other spectators, but also of their collective engagement with performers: applause, silence, sounds of disapproval, and the



Figure 1 "La bohème" Live on Sky Arts, Sky Arts/BSkyB 2009.

silent “buzz,” “atmosphere,” or “feeling” that performers and audiences often cite. Video appears to rule out all of this: a community of spectators is only imagined, or represented as an audience that once existed but is now dispersed; performers will not hear us or feel our presence, no matter how loudly we cheer at the screen. The consensus seems to be that, thanks to these limitations, video recordings can no longer be considered performances: Erika Fischer-Lichte, for example, defines performance as the “bodily co-presence of actors and spectators” [*leibliche Ko-Präsenz von Akteuren und Zuschauern*].³²

Yet, as Herbert Blau observes, theater is predicated on the separation between performer and audience: to collapse that distance is to short-circuit the very “experience of fracture” that fuels theater in the first place.³³ Auslander reminds us, too, that this is an issue that needs to be carefully contextualized. Performer/audience interaction is not the same thing in cabaret, he points out, as it is in a stadium rock concert.³⁴ In this regard—as in so many others—opera is profoundly conflicted. We have all read accounts of, and may have experienced, the archetypal opera audience: loud, energetic, quick to voice (dis)approval—involved. Aren’t we informed that, historically, the behavior of opera audiences has served as a social barometer, has verged on the riotous, has been a catalyst for revolution? And weren’t opera singers the prototypical star performers for whom audience response was a kind of lifeblood? However, there is another operatic audience: middle-class, well-heeled, reserved, polite, and aloof. The auditoria of the major opera houses are some of the most cavernous of any theater; they are vast, impressive, impersonal spaces that dwarf the spectator. Seated in the “gods,” I will see only tiny, distant figures moving about on the vast stage. Even in one of the more expensive seats, I will typically be separated from the singers/actors by the chasm of the orchestra pit, while the proscenium arch, the overwhelmingly favored design of the opera house, carefully frames and separates the spectacle, and with it the performers. This is not to suggest that interaction is impossible, merely that the environment, at least in the large houses, is formal, grand, and imposing—an environment that encourages submission and passivity, where subjectivity is confronted by a sense of institutional authority. Passive behavior is surely encouraged, too, by the comfortable seats and by the darkness (once a novelty but now, it seems, unquestionable).

Of course, repertoire has some impact here. Number operas offer spaces—almost cues—for audience response, and that kind of feedback has to be acknowledged as a tangible form of interaction, one that holds real potential to contribute to the performance. Through-composed opera is quite different, though. Here, apart from act endings, applause or any other detectable reaction is rare; this is a format dedicated to self-enclosed wholeness, effectively locking out audience participation and encouraging passive engagement.³⁵ In this context, the gap between opera in live performance and opera on video narrows. If video reduces

engagement to a one-way process, live performance offers only the potential for a two-way engagement, a potential that *may* not be, and arguably often *is* not, realized.

The classic operatic environments have consequences as well for spectators' engagement with each other. Susan Bennett points to an auditorium design "which assures anonymity (and thus assurance) in the larger collective," while Keir Elam notes that the spectator "has his own well-marked private space, individual seat, and relative immunity from physical contact with his fellows (and even from seeing them)."³⁶ The outcome, he adds, is to "emphasize personal rather than social perception and response." However, this division between the personal and the public needs to be carefully scrutinized. The dearth or absence of explicit social interaction—conversation, visual engagement, physical contact, gestures—is not in itself an impediment to awareness of community. This is the cornerstone of Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism: that nations are "imagined communities." They are imagined, he explains, "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."³⁷ Communities are formed, in this view, not via actual contact and engagement, but through the formation of a consciousness of the social.³⁸ Transposing this to the environment of the theater, we might say that consciousness of my fellow spectators is not necessarily diminished by my inability to see, converse, or mingle with them. I form a sense of collective involvement by imagining the collective and my place within it. It is an arrangement that is symptomatic of the modern condition: I experience social interaction while preserving my private space. My point, though, is that the imagined community that is the audience need not be confined to the physical space in which I find myself.

MEANWHILE

This is something that confronted me recently when I accompanied a group of students to the Met HD broadcast of *La Damnation de Faust* in November 2008. Unlike television broadcasts or DVDs, which tend to be viewed in solitary or small-group settings, simulcasts to cinemas involve spectatorship within an explicit audience setting. That in itself raises interesting questions: my students wondered, for example, whether the audience in the cinema would applaud at the end of the performance (they did) and whether there might be social interaction in the lobby during the intermission (there was). But the cinematic setting of the event also raised other issues. Unlike most screenings in the cinema, which involve the projection and re-projection of films housed in the cinema, this was a satellite relay of an event taking place simultaneously thousands of miles away. It would happen at a scheduled time, and it would happen once. This

sense of the now was conveyed in part by the images of the gathering Met audience screened as the cinema audience gathered, but also by an on-screen countdown clock showing the time remaining to the start of the performance. In one sense a practical warning, the countdown clock also generated for me an acute sense of spatial collapse combined with temporal unity. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's reading of modern temporality as "homogeneous, empty time," Anderson interprets simultaneity in relation to the term "meanwhile."³⁹ The emergence of modern temporality depends, he argues, on an understanding of simultaneity as "transverse, cross-time, marked . . . by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar."⁴⁰ This sense of "meanwhile," he adds, is what allowed newspapers to contribute to the formation of national communities beginning in the eighteenth century. Widely distributed geographically, the newspaper is nevertheless imprinted with a date that limits its relevance, roots it in time, and signals that it is being read at the same time by others who are elsewhere—who together now form an imagined community.

Contemporary media technology has made this commonplace, ensuring that even the contrast between night and day is no barrier to simultaneity. Thanks to time zones, events anywhere on the globe—including operatic performances—can be experienced as a simultaneity. This isn't new—*Saturday Afternoon at the Met* has been a feature of radio schedules for decades—yet the extension of the technology strips away the familiarity and reintroduces a sense of wonder. The Met audience gathers in New York at lunchtime, and I assemble with a separate audience at suppertime, yet this becomes a single *event*, a shared experience, a performance. We may read the globalized character of this event as the homogenizing march of what Cees Hamelink has called "cultural synchronization," or we may welcome what Charles Acland, writing about the cultural impact of the cinema megaplex, has termed a productive "cosmopolitanism."⁴¹ Something of the character of community is there, however, despite the physical dislocation.

If the cinema simulcasts have a media genealogy reaching back to live radio broadcasts, Acland reminds us, too, of the resemblance of live digital cinema to television, in the sense that the transmission of an event via satellite to cinemas worldwide becomes a form of broadcast. Cinema simulcasts blur the boundaries between the broadcast audience (dispersed in domestic settings) and the theater-like audiences of cinema (assembled in a darkened public space and seated in rows of seats); what we get is an audience of dispersed gatherings. And if audiences for television broadcasts of opera lack these explicit public settings, they nevertheless maintain a sense of "meanwhile," of gathering in a temporal sense despite the lack of spatial containment.⁴²

But what about opera on DVD? How can there be any sense of the communal experience of audience when DVDs tend to be watched in such individualized circumstances? The effect of "meanwhile" is surely lost when there is no

simultaneity of engagement, no time-specific relevance (as in newspapers) that might focus the engagement temporally. One answer might be to consider the phenomenology of spectatorship, to acknowledge the possibility that even this solitary consumption of video is a form of performance that involves the community of owners/consumers/fans, not to mention the whole consumerist ritual of searching for, purchasing, unwrapping, watching (or waiting for the right time to watch) a DVD. Taking audio recordings as an example, Auslander argues that “regardless of the ontological status of recorded music, its phenomenological status for listeners is that of a performance unfolding at the time and in the place of listening.”⁴³ Despite the corporeal absence of the performer, then, some form of performance might take place—a performance based not on a direct and immediate encounter but on more complex and deferred forms of engagement, dispersed in time and space. And if we accept this engagement as performance—at least as one possible form of performance—might we need to reconsider the sorts of communities that performance entails or presupposes or generates? This is what Theodore Gracyk suggests when he writes of audio recordings, that “the audience does not disappear simply because it does not gather together in one place at regular intervals.”⁴⁴ In addition, Herbert Linderberger points toward the same experience when he likens the imagined audience of opera to another genre:

But the rock concert may well provide the closest analogy to the communal experience of opera. . . . Both manage to retain something of the communal experience even when their music is simulated by electronic means by the listener alone with a CD or DVD, for the presence of others somewhere sharing this experience (whether in a live performance or in solitary contemplation) remains at the edge of the listener’s awareness.⁴⁵

Isolated from any literal audience both in time and space, the solitary spectator may still engage with an imagined community, just as the spectator in the opera house may form a sense of communal engagement in the passive and isolated environment of the opera house.

HYPERMEDIACY

Underlying all of this is the assumption that opera on video is all about immediacy, that it compensates or substitutes for a more direct encounter, captures traces of an event, erases spatial and temporal dislocation. However, what if video acknowledges and foregrounds its own intervention, its own mediality? This is what Bolter and Grusin term “hypermediacy.”⁴⁶ Typified by computer operating systems (with their multiple windows and toolbars) and in cable news channels (characterized by graphics, ticker-tape straps, windowed video, and so on), hypermediacy is remediation that declares itself. The Sky Arts presentation of the

backstage footage of *La bohème*, with its framed video insert from the stage performance, suggested something of this hypermediated quality. A more substantial example, though, is to be found in the Bel Air Classics DVD of the Olivier Py production of *Tristan und Isolde* from the Grand Théâtre, Geneva. Video director Andy Somers breaks with convention not only by utilizing unusual camera angles and edits, but by interspersing the standard video footage with night-vision cameras, slow-motion, and hand-held cameras. The effect is nowhere more pronounced than in the fight scene at the end of Act III. The high-tech, industrially themed set, designed by Pierre-André Weitz and starkly lit by director Py, features a shallow layer of water on which the carefully choreographed fights (clearly enacted by dancers) unfold. As banks of fluorescent lights flash on and off, fleetingly illuminating the scene, Somers adopts a rapid shot rhythm comprising an unusually large number of camera positions (both from the front and side of the stage). Interposed are slow-motion sequences of combat, over-exposed shots, shaky hand-held footage, out-of-focus glimpses of combat, while brief night-vision shots momentarily reveal what's taking place within the shadows.

The effect is to draw attention to the medium, highlighting the range of manipulations at the video director's disposal and creating anything but the transparent impression of being there, even if the techniques in some ways mirror the furious action and lighting effects onstage. That this is far from business-as-usual is evident from the critical reaction. Critic Carter Chris Humphray interpreted Somers's video direction as avoiding a direct account of the *mise-en-scène* in favor of an engagement with Py's directorial vision, while Miquel Cabruja noted that the video direction went "beyond the scope of the standard opera video," characterizing it as an "artistic reflection on art."⁴⁷ Consumer feedback on online retailer web sites like Amazon has been considerably less complimentary, with the most damning judgments reserved for the video direction.

Why such resistance to these video productions? Part of the problem lies in the nature of video literacy, or what Varney and Fensham call "videocy."⁴⁸ If there is a governing videocy evident in consumer reactions to opera on video, it appears to revolve around the dictum "get out of the way." The Met HD simulcast of *Tristan* in March 2008 featured similar techniques, though on a more modest scale: video director Barbara Willis Sweete tiled multiple images of the production, expanding and contracting the dimensions of the video tiles, and creating a range of collage effects.⁴⁹ As though to explain the intervention, the simulcast featured an interview with Sweete during the intermission by General Manager Peter Gelb. Reactions were again strongly divided: while one blogger praised the video direction under the title "One Giant Leap for Opera Video," another complained of "distraction and interference."⁵⁰ Summing up the critical tone, Sarah Noble called for Willis Sweete to be banned from the Met simulcasts: "I've said it before and I'll say it again: creativity in these broadcasts is admirable, but the

overarching aim is surely faithfully to recreate the in-the-flesh experience of opera at the Met.”⁵¹

Opera filmed or videotaped in the studio or on location is obviously one alternative to this logic of simulation. Another, altogether more unusual, alternative was broadcast from Zurich on September 30, 2008. In a cooperative venture between Schweizer Fernsehen, Arte, and Opernhaus Zürich, a performance of *La traviata* was presented in the Zurich central train station and broadcast live in high definition.⁵² Fully costumed and set amidst the cafés and concourses of the train station, the production was accompanied by cast interviews and commentary between scenes. The audience in the station, clearly a combination of curious commuters and more dedicated spectators, formed circles around the various scenes of action, but their capacity to witness the production as a whole depended on their ability to jostle with other spectators and indeed with less-interested commuters, who are pictured attempting to make their way through and around the assembled crowds.

In fact, movement and dispersal were central to the production and broadcast: scenes took place in multiple locations, so that spectators had to keep relocating; the principals moved through the crowd as they sang, tracked by handheld cameras; remote cameras on tracks glided above the concourse, offering sweeping views of the station; and, most intriguingly, in act 2, scene 2, cameras caught up with a clearly agitated Alfredo in the lower concourse, where, still in character, he hurriedly brushed past host Sandra Studer, explaining that Violetta was waiting for him (fig. 2).



Figure 2 “La traviata” im Hauptbahnhof Zürich, Schweizer Fernsehen/Arte 2008.



Figure 3 “La traviata” im Hauptbahnhof Zürich, Schweizer Fernsehen/Arte 2008.

It is as though the whole broadcast mirrored the flow and movement of the station itself—Alfredo even becomes an anxious commuter in a hurry. However, it also mirrors the mobility and dispersal made possible by, and characteristic of, video. In this sense, it is the very antithesis of the opera house, with its proscenium stage and immobilized audience. However, it also relocates liveness, in that the production plays to and for the camera, while the audience in the train station are given only partial glimpses. That the video production plays on its mediality is demonstrated in one characteristic shot (fig. 3).

A combination of imagery reflected in and perceived through a café window, the shot embodies the production, layering and mixing performers and audience, performance space and environment. In the foreground, the grey-haired spectator gets up close and personal (having worked his way into the camera shot at every opportunity), while more distant spectators congregate under the advertising screens and platform signs, their united gaze marking them as spectators and distinguishing them from the flow and hubbub of a busy train station.

BEING THERE

Still, these self-consciously “videoistic” productions remain the exception in the context of a set of practices and conventions—beginning with television and carrying over to home video—that have been consistently predicated on the notion of virtual attendance at the opera. Writing in the early nineties on television broadcasts of opera, Jeremy Tambling identified what he considered their

“parasitic” quality. Video productions, he observed, strove hard to generate the impression that the spectator was there in the opera house.⁵³ Little has changed. Experimentation of the kind evident in the Py/Somers *Tristan* flies in the face not only of tradition but of marketing: the front cover of the DVD identifies the opera company, principal cast, conductor, and the stage director, but not the video director. No surprise, then, that one of the themes of consumer criticism of this disc is frustration at an inability to get the measure of the *mise-en-scène* as a whole. This is the corollary to video’s capacity to simulate mobility and intimacy: a lack of spatial orientation and contextualization.

Much more typical of current practice is the DVD release of Peter Konwitschny’s production of *Götterdämmerung* (filmed October 2002 and January 2003) from the Stuttgart Staatsoper. It begins with an external static shot of the opera house, followed by a sequence of interior shots of the assembling audience accompanied by the sound of the orchestra warming up. Konwitschny blurs the beginning of the performance with a pantomime, featuring the Norns, which begins as the audience members are taking their seats; the music then begins unexpectedly without any introductory applause, conductor Lothar Zagrosek having already quietly taken his place in the pit. The video production follows all this closely, continuing to alternate between shots of the Norn pantomime and the audience until the music begins. From that point, all attention is focused on the stage, with a video style similar to the Sky Arts broadcast of *La bohème*. The impression is one of “being there.” We are guided on a narrative of attendance at the opera, first approaching the house, then entering the auditorium, taking our seat, and finally focusing on the stage.

Konwitschny’s production is provocative and reflexive, but not so the video production which is content to efface its own mediating role.⁵⁴ This is surely an example of what Bolter and Grusin term “transparent immediacy,” a form of remediation that conceals or downplays its own remediating character in favor of the impression of direct access. This is the default mode in video productions of live performances (which are themselves the dominant form of opera on video). In this sense the “live performance” purist has little to fear from video, at least in terms of competition with the opera house, for video producers seem content to imitate attendance at the opera—a mere copy of an authentic original. This is true as well of the Met HD simulcasts. As Ellis Jacob, president and CEO of Canada’s Cineplex Entertainment, put it, “The combination of the Met’s superb musical productions combined with our giant screens and Dolby Digital Surround Sound will make these events the next best thing to actually being there.”⁵⁵

In this economy of simulation, opera on video mobilizes its medial properties according to a logic of compensation. The flatness of the screen is typically reckoned as one of the deficits of cinema and television: three-dimensional embodiment become a two-dimensional image. Yet the overwhelming reliance on the

proscenium arch as the configuration of the performing space in opera creates a picture-frame effect not unlike cinema, while the often considerable distance from the spectator to the stage effectively flattens out the stage.⁵⁶ In principle, different seating positions in the theater would offer the spectator different perspectives of the *mise-en-scène*, something radically altered by a flat screen which divides perspective into two disjunct perspectives: one on the screen and another through the lens of the camera. In reality though, the opera spectator is confined to one perspective on the stage (the practice of relocating to better, empty, seats during intermission notwithstanding). This combination of distance and immobility is a characteristic for which opera on video can appear to compensate with its multiple perspectives, angles, and proximities. In the case of multichannel audio, the goal appears to be an immersive sonic experience, as though regenerating the acoustic environment of the opera house with discrete channels engineered and situated to simulate front and centre sources (stage and pit) as well as reflected sound from side and rear. In practice, it is considerably less subtle than that, often producing an exaggerated, special-effects account of operatic sound, with voices and orchestra and relative placements all sonically isolated in ways rarely heard in the opera house. It is an example of what Michel Chion has termed “rendering,” the simulation of sounds not with the emphasis on fidelity but on effect, or what Baudrillard termed the “hyperreal”: more “real” than reality.⁵⁷

Any consideration of this logic of compensation is bound to summon what is, without doubt, one of the core concepts occupying contemporary performance and media theory: presence. It is a concept that has generated countless arguments under the shadow of the weighty scholarly suspicion of Jacques Derrida, whose entire philosophy is motivated by a critique of the “metaphysics of presence.” Roger Copeland, for example, draws on Derrida to remind us of the layers of mediation—social use, spatial configuration, convention—that attend even our apparently most immediate engagement with theater. “The innocent eye,” he writes (and we might add innocent ear), “never existed.”⁵⁸ Copeland detects in the longing for theatrical presence a remnant of the modernist striving for media purity: “If the essence of the medium is defined as ‘presence’ then the theatrical modernist will reaffirm this ancient wisdom with a vengeance.”⁵⁹ But does the notion of presence really need to be policed with such force? It is possible, as Michelle Duncan has done in relation to opera, to take up a more nuanced position, engaging productively with aspects of theatrical presence without surrendering to a naive faith in unmediated reality or metaphysics. As Duncan points out, many of the struggles waged in Derrida’s name have done so with the mistaken view that Derrida opposed presence.⁶⁰ Derrida’s critique is directed at the founding of Western metaphysics, on notions of unmediated presence, wholeness, unity, and immediacy, not at the possibility of experiencing immediacy or the materiality and corporeality of presence as such.

THE ABSENCE OF PRESENCE?

Still, Copeland's evident exasperation at what he sees as the fetishization of theatrical presence is understandable. It is nowhere more evident than in the wedge driven between theater and video. That video is marked by the *absence* of presence—by the absence of corporeal immediacy that the theater promises—seems to define its relationship to the theater. For Blau, there really is no substitute for theatrical presence:

For all the recycling of liveness, or the remediation . . . it's hard to imagine any image on the screen, however violent, lustful, demonic, barbaric, no less intimate or lyrical, that could match the close-up effect upon spectators of an actor who, as in the extremities of performance art . . . actually cuts his wrist or slits another's throat or (as a friend of mine did) swallows a bottle of pins . . . right there before your eyes."⁶¹

Images, it seems, are always just that; only theater is actually in your face. But there are other ways of conceptualizing presence, and not all insist on a binary between the live and the mediated. In what amounts to a plea to reconsider our engagement with the material and tangible, Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht calls for recognition of the “provocative instability and unrest” produced by the encounter between “meaning effects” (the traditional focus of humanities research) and “presence effects,” moments of intensity that elude meaning, provoked precisely by our immersion in meaning culture.⁶² For Gumbrecht, though, a recognition of “presence effects” would not amount to any privileging of liveness. Rather, he defines a “strange logic” in which the abundance of mediatized images and sounds, far from leading us toward a permanent disassociation from reality, sustains and nurtures a desire to reconnect with “the things of this world.”⁶³ That is, the relationship between presence and mediatization is not linear but circular:

[I]t matters, I think . . . to allow oneself to be touched, literally, by the intensity of a voice that comes from a compact disk or by the closeness of a beautiful face on a screen. This is not exclusively an effect of the technology involved. It also has to do with our habit of concentrating more on the faces that we see in a film or on the screen than on the faces of those with whom we sit at a table or to whom we make love—a “bad habit” no doubt, yet better than a complete oblivion of closeness. So I am trying to neither condemn nor give a mysterious aura to our media environment.⁶⁴

Gumbrecht's desire to resist the temptation simply to demonize or embrace mediatization echoes the wider concerns outlined by Bruno Latour. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour seeks an alternative to modern humanism and its attempt to isolate and distill the essence of humanity through a process of purification: from nature, from machines, from the inert, from everything deemed

nonhuman. Just as Copeland detects a modernist desire for purity of medium in the theatrical suspicion of mediatization, so Latour identifies a drive toward purity in the wider project of modernity:

Modern humanists are reductionist because they seek to attribute action to a small number of powers, leaving the rest of the world with nothing but simple mute forces.⁶⁵

What this has achieved, he counters, is merely the reduction of humanism to something “fragile and precious.” Latour stresses, instead, the hybridity that constitutes the human:

The human is in the delegation itself, in the pass, in the sending, in the continuous exchange of forms. Of course it is not a thing, but things are not things either. Of course it is not a merchandise, but merchandise is not merchandise. Of course it is not a machine, but anyone who has seen machines knows that they are scarcely mechanical.⁶⁶

Far from disrupting or dismantling the human, hybridity fashions it, and, as Latour stresses, this hybridity is borne out of mediation with and through domains that are traditionally cordoned off as “nonhuman” and, in the case of machines, considered threatening.⁶⁷

In this sense, the term “media technology” constitutes a double threat to the traditional humanism evident in so much scholarship on theater and performance: not only does it threaten as a machine but its explicit function is to (re)mediate, raising the specter of dispersal, of distribution, of blurred boundaries—of *transmission*. The practices and assumptions associated with opera on video invite investigation and critique. That so much of the video recording of opera arguably reinforces the cultural investment and privileging of liveness only raises the stakes. Reconsidering a purified vision of performance, dropping the defenses erected against media technology, acknowledging that remediation is not always merely derivative—these are gestures that might begin to allow us to take stock of what should be, more than ever, a key focus of opera studies.

NOTES

Christopher Morris is a lecturer in music at University College Cork, where he also teaches courses in film studies. He has published on opera, film music, and music in German modernism, including *Reading Opera Between the Lines: Orchestral Interludes and Cultural Meaning from Wagner to Berg* (Cambridge University Press, 2002). He is the reviews editor for *The Opera Quarterly*.

1. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), 146.

2. Peter Brook, “A Talk with Peter Brook,” *American Theater III* (1969–70): 16–23.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Gay McAuley, “The Video Documentation of Theatrical Performance,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 10, no. 38 (1994): 183–94; Annabelle Melzer, “Best Betrayal: The Documentation of Performance on

Video and Film, Part 1," *New Theatre Quarterly* 11, no. 42 (1995): 147–57; Melzer, "Best Betrayal: The Documentation of Performance on Video and Film, Part 2," *New Theatre Quarterly* 11, no. 43 (1995): 259–76; Denise Varney and Rachel Fensham, "More-and-Less-Than: Liveness, Video Recording, and the Future of Performance—Live and Mediatized Performance, and the Need for a Theory of 'Videoocy,'" *New Theatre Quarterly* 16, no. 61 (2000): 88–96.

5. Jonathan Miller, *Subsequent Performances* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), 52. Quoted in Melzer, "Best Betrayal," 152.

6. Peter Brook, "Filmer le Théâtre," *Cahiers Théâtre Louvain*, XLVI (1981), 41. Quoted in Melzer, "Best Betrayal," 148.

7. "The challenge for makers of archival recordings," McAuley writes, "is to document as fully as possible the pertinent elements of the theatrical experience, without excessive distortion due to the nature of the recording medium, and to keep this recording medium as transparent as possible while nevertheless exploiting its strengths." McAuley, 192.

8. Richard Kalisz, "Televised Theatricality or Televised Theatre?" in *Theatre and Television*, ed. Robert L. Erenstein (Amsterdam: International Theatre Bookshop, 1988), 80. Quoted in Melzer, "Best Betrayal," 150.

9. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

10. An exception is Germany's ZDF Theaterkanal, a cable/satellite channel devoted to broadcasts of theater productions and documentaries on theater. It stands out, however, as a rarity.

11. Kurt London, *Film Music: A Summary of the Characteristic Features of its History, Aesthetics, Techniques and Possible Developments*, trans. Eric S. Bensinger (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), 139–40. Quoted in Mervyn Cooke, "Opera and Film," in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera*, ed. Mervyn Cooke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 272.

12. See, for example, Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Rose Theresa and Jeongwon Joe, eds., *Between Opera and Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005); Ken Wlaschin, *Encyclopedia of Opera on Screen: A Guide to More Than 100 Years of Opera Films, Videos and DVDs* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); and Cooke, "Opera and Film."

13. Examples of recent scholarship that addresses issues raised by opera on video include David J. Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); the sixth chapter of Lawrence Kramer's *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Jeremy Tambling, ed., *A Night in at the Opera: Media Representations of Opera* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994).

14. The BBC continues to offer occasional opera broadcasts (usually on its digital arts/culture/documentary channel BBC4), although the commitment has been in gradual decline. Norman Lebrecht recently summarized the BBC's attitude to opera on television as "two decades of neglect." Norman Lebrecht, "Sopranos on Screen," *Evening Standard*, February 11, 2009, <http://www.thisislondon.co.uk/standard-home/article-23639169-details/Sopranos+on+screen/article.do> (accessed April 4, 2009).

15. Jennifer Barnes, *Television Opera: The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2002). Part of the economic rationale of recording a staged production in an opera house is, of course, economic. The same rationale has led to the demise of studio-based audio recordings of opera.

16. This number includes not only complete opera performances, but also compilations, gala concerts, and so on.

17. Opera is now beginning to feature, as well, in the emerging Blu-ray market.

18. If media reports are to be believed, the success of this venture has largely been in the publicity it has generated for the Metropolitan Opera, not in revenue. A number of other high-profile companies, including the Royal Opera House, broadcast selected performances to cinemas. The announcement in 2009 of NT Live, a series of live broadcasts to cinemas from Britain's National Theatre, now looks like an attempt to play catch-up with opera. Unlike opera, though, the NT Live involves adaptation of the staging conditions: according to the National Theatre web site, "The performances will be nominated in advance to allow cameras greater freedom in the auditorium; ticket prices for what will, in effect, be a studio audience, will be adjusted accordingly." <http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/44524/nt-news-and-information/nt-live.html> (accessed April 10, 2009).

19. Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 56, 62.

20. Collapsing binary oppositions between the live and mediated, Auslander shows that live performance shares its ephemerality with what he calls the “electronic ontology” of media technology. Although he goes on to question the strategy of making ontological comparisons (characterizing it as “not especially productive”), the move comes only after he has made considerable theoretical hay out of the ontology argument. Auslander, *Liveness*, 38–54, especially 43 and 51.

21. Martin Barker, “Crash, Theatre Audiences, and the Idea of Liveness,” *Studies in Theatre Performance* 23 (2003): 28. Quoted in Auslander, 63.

22. Technology could, of course, be viewed as the root of all evil in opera. If live performance is not so different from its technological remediations, so this argument goes, then it is to the detriment of live performance, which has been harnessed by the dehumanizing, industrializing forces of technology. The trouble with this neo-Luddite position is that it imagines a golden preindustrial age based on craft, spontaneous creativity, and rootedness in the community. From its very origins, opera was deeply invested in the technologies of theater (stagecraft, lighting, acoustics) and in the highly organized labor of theatrical and musical production (not least the rigidly controlled roles within the orchestra).

23. Auslander considers the issue of standardization with respect to franchised commercial theater. Auslander, *Liveness*, 53–55.

24. Willy Decker’s production of *Die tote Stadt* is a veritable minifranchise, having now appeared in San Francisco, London, Vienna, Salzburg, and Barcelona.

25. Sean Cubitt, *Timeshift: On Video Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 92–93. Quoted in Auslander, *Liveness*, 51.

26. Jane Feuer, “The Concept of Live Television: Ontology as Ideology,” in *Regarding Television: Critical Approaches*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1982), 12–22.

27. Rachel Cowgill, “Mozart Productions and the Emergence of *Werktraue* at London’s Italian Opera House, 1780–1830,” in *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries*, ed. Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Downing A. Thomas (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 145–86.

28. Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song: Operatic Visions and Revisions from Handel to Berio* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 12.

29. Sky Arts billed the double coverage as a “world first for broadcasting.” “La bohème live on Sky Arts,” <http://www.skyarts.co.uk/opera/article/>

la-boheme-live/ (accessed May 10, 2009). In fact, Schweizer Fernsehen (in cooperation with 3Sat and ZDF Theaterkanal) had already broadcast a live onstage/backstage broadcast of the Opernhaus Zürich production of *Die Zauberflöte* on March 1, 2007.

30. I recognize, of course, that the backstage footage had its own “script”: cameras didn’t simply wander at will hoping to find something interesting.

31. Jonathan Miller, interviewed by Penny Smith, Sky Arts broadcast of *La bohème*, February 4, 2009.

32. Erika Fischer-Lichte, “Die Oper als ‘Prototyp des Theatralischen.’ Zur Reflexion des Aufführungsbegriffs in John Cages *Europas 1 & 2*,” in *Musiktheater Heute: Internationales Symposium der Paul Sacher Stiftung Basel 2001*, ed. Hermann Danuser and Matthias Kassel (Mainz: Schott, 2003), 292.

33. Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1990), 10.

34. Auslander, *Liveness*, 66.

35. Wagner’s Festspielhaus at Bayreuth is the obvious paradigm for this kind of experience and environment. For more on this, see Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Carolyn Abbate, “Wagner, Cinema, and Redemptive Glee,” *The Opera Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (2005): 597–611; and Friedrich Kittler, “World-Breath: On Wagner’s Media Technology,” in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 215–38. See also my *Reading Opera Between the Lines: Orchestral Interludes and Cultural Meaning from Wagner to Berg* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and “‘Alienated From His Own Being’: Nietzsche, Bayreuth and the Problem of Identity,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 127, no. 1 (2002): 44–71.

36. Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London: Routledge, 1990). Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Routledge, 1980), 64–65.

37. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

38. For more on virtual communities and their relationship to traditional communities, see Anita Blanchard, “The Effects of Dispersed Virtual Communities on Face-to-Face Social Capital,” in *Social Capital and Information Technology*, ed. Marleen Huysman and Volker Wulf (Boston: MIT Press, 2004), 53–74.

39. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Cees J. Hamelink, *Cultural Autonomy in Global Communications Planning National Information Policy* (New York: Longman, 1983); Charles R. Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 235. My thanks to Alessandra Campana for drawing the Acland book to my attention.

42. Acland adds: "With digital delivery and projection releasing could become that much more like television programming. . . . To the existing tendency for rapidly revised runs and openings we can expect the sense of immediacy and 'liveness' of performance to be added." Acland, *Screen Traffic*, 222.

43. Auslander, "Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 14, no. 1 (2004): 1–13, 5.

44. Theodore Gracyk, "Listening to Music: Performances and Recordings," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 55, no. 2 (1997): 139–50, 148.

45. Herbert Lindenberger, "On Opera and Society (Assuming a Relationship)," in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 294–311.

46. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 31.

47. Carter Chris Humphray, *Classiquenews*, http://www.classiquenews.com/voir/lire_chronique_dvd.aspx?id=91 (accessed April 10, 2009). Miguel Cabruja, *Stereoplay*, http://www.stereoplay.de/musik/Forbis-Charbonnet-Dohmen-Fujimura-Reiter-u.-a.-Orchestre-de-la-Suisse-Romande-Jordan_-Regie-Py-Tristan-und-Isolde_2206132.html (accessed April 4, 2009).

48. Varney and Fensham, "More-and-Less-Than," 94–96.

49. Willis Sweete's direction was executed in real time; Somers's was a post-production edit.

50. Ruth Ellis Haworth, "The Met's HD Transmission Fails *Tristan und Isolde*," *Yappa Ding Ding*, <http://yappadingding.blogspot.com/2008/03/mets-hd-transmission-fails-tristan-und.html> (accessed April 14, 2009). See also a follow-up blog on Willis Sweete's direction of the transmission of *La Damnation de Faust*: "Is Barbara Willis Sweete Destroying the Met HD Program?" <http://yappadingding.blogspot.com/2009/01/is-barbara-willis-sweete-destroying-met.html>, and "One Giant Leap for Opera Video," <http://therehearsalstudio.blogspot.com/2008/03/one-giant-leap-for-opera-video.html> (accessed April 14, 2009).

51. Sarah Noble, "Es ist kein Laut zu vernehmen," *Prima la musica*, <http://>

primalamusica.typepad.com/primalamusica/2008/10/es-ist-kein-laut-zu-vernehmen.html (accessed April 7, 2009).

52. The entire broadcast is viewable online via the Schweizer Fernsehen web site: <http://www-internet.sf.tv/sendungen/latraviata/>.

53. Tambling, "Introduction: Opera in the Distraction Culture," *A Night in at the Opera*, 11. David P. Schroeder echoes this view when he writes of the desire to make opera on screen "a surrogate for live performance." David P. Schroeder, *Cinema's Illusions, Opera's Allure: The Operatic Impulse in Film* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 321.

54. That is, the sometimes unsettling, revisionist quality of Konwitschny's production is not mirrored in Hans Hulscher's video production, which is content to record what happened in the theater. Only during the closing moments, when Konwitschny "unstages" the destruction of Valhalla by emptying the stage to leave nothing more than a scrolling projection of Wagner's stage directions do we see anything out of the ordinary in the video production: as the audience read the stage directions, the camera pans across their faces in the now-illuminated auditorium. The same self-effacement is evident in Anton Reitzenstein's video production of Konwitschny's famously boundary-blurring production of *Don Carlos*. For all Konwitschny's questioning of the borders between performance and spectatorial space, the video seems content merely to document as transparently as possible, as though recreating the experience of being in the theater. For more on Konwitschny's production, see Clemens Risi, "Shedding Light on the Audience: Hans Neuenfels and Peter Konwitschny Stage Verdi (and Verdians)," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14, nos. 1–2 (2002): 201–10.

55. "Metropolitan Opera: Live in HD" Now Playing at a Theater Near You" (November 15, 2006), <http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/news/press/detail.aspx?id=2719> (accessed April 9, 2009).

56. For more on the proscenium arch in opera, see Sinead O'Neill, "Getting Out of the House: Opera and Site-Specific Performance," *The Opera Quarterly* 25, no. 3–4: 284–298.

57. Michel Chion and Claudia Gorbman, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 109–11. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 22.

58. Roger Copeland, "The Presence of Mediation," *TDR (The Drama Review)* 34, no. 4 (1990): 28–44, 42.

59. *Ibid.*, 31–32.

60. Michelle Duncan, "The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body: Voice, Presence, Performativity," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16, no. 3 (2004): 283–306, especially 294–96. Lawrence Kramer makes a similar point in "The Threshold of the Visible World": Wagner, Bill Viola, and Tristan," in *Wagner and Cinema*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Jeongwon Joe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 381–407 manuscript kindly provided by the author prior to its publication.

61. Blau "Virtually Yours," in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph

R. Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 542.

62. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 108.

63. *Ibid.*, 109.

64. *Ibid.*, 140.

65. Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 138.

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*, 137.