Aural Dramaturgies: A New Approach to the Operatic Soundscape

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I seek to reorient the way we think about operatic sound. My study is divided into five chapters, and each approaches the idea of what I refer to as opera's aural dramaturgies from a different vantage point. Using Shakespeare's and Verdi's *Macbeth*s as case studies, the first chapter focusses on 'Texted Sound' and seeks to explore how composers, playwrights, and librettists encode sonic detail and information in the 'texts' themselves. Chapter 2 explores 'Staged Sound' by focussing on opera's libretto and score as a template for performance rather than an unchanging work. I address the acoustic sound design properties of a particular staging of Beethoven's *Fidelio* to suggest how performance of sound-as-staged can impact our understanding of works we might otherwise think we know well.

The second half of my dissertation asks questions about our understanding of operatic sound in the age of its technological reproducibility. Chapter 3 serves as a transition and explores 'Acousmatic Sound' (a phenomenon whereby we hear sounds without seeing their sources) from several vantage points. I begin by examining the concept in an age prior to modern audio reproduction technologies and then shift to an exploration of how operatic sound was marketed, discussed, and produced once put on disc. Chapters 4 and 5 are conceived as a broad, two-part study on 'Remediated Sound'. I start by looking at Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's cinematic adaptation of *Parsifal* and consider how the tools available to the film director likewise enable a new approach to aural dramaturgy, different from what is possible on-stage. The final chapter explores operatic livecasts: simultaneous high-definition screenings of theatrical events directly to cinemas and other arthouse venues. With a focus on a particular screening of Wagner's

Die Walküre, I analyse the paratextual broadcast material companies like the

Metropolitan Opera use to frame these simulcasts and argue that the features, coupled

with our physical and theoretical displacement from the 'live' performing venue, also

affect our acoustic experiences. By shifting focus to these still-undertheorized aspects of

the operatic soundscape, my study seeks to show that the artform is capable of affecting

us in ways we have yet to fully appreciate.

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I would also like to offer a loving and heartfelt thanks to my family. Their unwavering patience and devotion to the seemingly endless process that has been my post-secondary education is humbling and inspiring, and I do not take it for granted; I would certainly not have made it this far without them. Seven years ago, I was able to offer the final dedication of my master's thesis to my partner, whose words of encouragement and affection, I suggested, never ceased to inspire me to greater hights. 'Above all, this is for you', I wrote then. I consider myself profoundly blessed to be able to close with that same dedication here, too.

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<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

Dramaturgy, as we currently understand the term, is frequently traced back to the work done by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing during his employment by the Hamburg National Theatre, which operated between 1767 and 1769. The collection of essays he penned during this time came to be known as *The Hamburg Dramaturgy*; they represent one of the first sustained critical engagements with the artform. Lessing's work helped theatre-goers understand the newer and more complex plays that German authors had begun writing at the time, and also, importantly, suggested how central theatre could be to society more broadly speaking. Today, especially in the United States, dramaturgy often tends to be associated with the pre-production side of theatrical or operatic endeavours. The typical responsibilities of a dramaturg might include researching a work's production history, comparing and selecting a specific edition (and/or translation), offering their interpretive understanding of a work to the director and performers, and more public relations-like endeavours. They might give pre- or post-performance lectures, write programme notes for the company, and work on other sorts of community outreach with the aim of helping audiences come to better understand the ideas presented onstage.

As Berthold Brecht's work with his Berliner Ensemble began to catch on in the latter half of the twentieth century, the idea of 'production dramaturgy' helped solidify the idea that dramaturgy was something that occurred inside the theatre and not just at its peripheries: it encompassed work done from a staging's planning phase all the way through to its final productions. Most recently, a number of scholars and practitioners have sought to further expand our understanding of the concept, popularising the idea of

'physical dramaturgy' as a supplement to the scholarly research more typically associated with the job. As Rachel Bowditch, Jeff Casazza, and Annette Thornton phrase it, physical dramaturgy attends to 'a kinaesthetic and embodied understanding of a theatrical production'.[1] In an edited volume collecting the stories and methodologies of a number of present-day practitioners, they assert that physical dramaturgy serves as a bridge 'between traditional dramaturgy and the performer—between the text and the audience'. In terms of what audience members are seeing onstage, they suggest that traditional dramaturgy serves as the *what* to physical dramaturgy's *how*.[2] The term is useful in that it identifies a specific subset of dramaturgical practices which performers and practitioners, critics, scholars, and audience members alike can all choose to concentrate on when performing, discussing, or otherwise experiencing a given production.

My present study seeks to add a further *dramaturgy* we might attend to when speaking of particular plays and operas: aural. Where physical dramaturgy focusses on kinaesthetic and embodied aspects of theatrical productions, I wish to bring attention to aurality; I contend that careful attention to sound as such can shape our understanding of the works we hear in theatres, opera houses, and beyond. The operatic soundscape consists of much more than just tuneful melodies and orchestral accompaniment, after all; libretti and stage alike are often filled with many other sorts of signifying sounds (and, oftentimes just as important, silences). How we come to know these works through sound can shift further still if, as is increasingly the case, we engage with them outside the theatre—whether on disc, at the cinema, or through hybrid formats such as live-streaming

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[1] Rachel Bowditch, Jeff Casazza, and Annette Thornton, 'Introduction', in *Physical Dramaturgy: Perspectives from the Field*, ed. Rachel Bowditch, Jeff Casazza, and Annette Thornton (New York: Routledge, 2018), 2.
[2] Ibid., 5.

video. Just as dramaturgy as a term has proven difficult to define conclusively, I offer no hard and set series of ideas here about who or what might be responsible for a work's aural dramaturgy. Rather, I choose to focus on a variety of acoustic phenomena, all of which have a bearing on the sonic landscape of the works we see and hear on stage. Some of the sonic properties I will discuss are the purview of authors, librettists, and composers; others only come about in performance and may thus be tied to the visions of a particular director or actor; some might be tied to the properties of the venue in which we experience the shows in question, while others might come about only when the genre becomes remediated through other technological means. Sound mixers, audio engineers, and others besides can all similarly contribute to the broader picture of 'aural dramaturgy' I sketch here. By attending to acoustic properties that still remain seldom discussed in existing scholarship, I seek to open up entirely new dimensions of operatic experience for analysis.

More specifically, my aim is to address the current state of opera from both a popular and a critical perspective. On the one hand, I believe that the sorts of questions sound scholars grapple with can help us better come to terms with how we have adapted the operatic experience to a media environment radically different from when much of the canon originally premiered. Work in sound studies has increasingly begun to bleed over into musicology; its interdisciplinary approaches to noise and silence, technologies of audio-visual reproduction, natural and man-made soundscapes, and other related phenomena have increasingly captured the interest of a field whose primary focus is at its core full of that very Shakespearean 'sound and fury' that sound scholars have been studying for decades. Nevertheless, and despite the increasing attention to sonic detail in

theatre and performance studies scholarship, opera studies has been slower to bring sound

studies into its fold.

On the other hand, I am also seeking to further shift the focus of scholarship away

from the more positivist or score-based understandings of operatic sound that have

otherwise remained dominant in the field. Such a reorientation will help us both as

spectators and as scholars in understanding the oftentimes radically different approaches

to aural dramaturgy in the opera house, an important aspect of performance that can be

every bit as 'unsettling' in a performance as David Levin's work on staging and *mise-en-*

scène suggests for the visual aspects of the artform.[3] Put differently, I seek to reorient our

understanding of the operatic soundscape to better understand how acoustic aspects

beyond the strictly musical can unsettle our operatic experiences.

'Opera is inherently interdisciplinary', Nicholas Till has quite rightly suggested,

and it 'therefore demands a wide range of critical approaches'.[4] In light of this, and in

consideration of the cross-disciplinary work I also seek to do here, the sources I draw on

are not limited to the work of musicologists and opera scholars. Though sound studies

has seldom sought out operatic test subjects, many in that field could quite fruitfully

apply their inquiries and methodologies to the artform if they so choose. In *Spaces Speak,*

Are You Listening? (2007), for example, Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter's study of

'aural architecture' approaches 'the experience of space by attentive listening', and Emily

Thompson's *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2002) also devotes a considerable amount of

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[3] For Levin's work in this regard, see *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[4] Nicholas Till, 'Opera Studies Today', in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. Nicholas Till (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

time to the acoustics of various building spaces.[5] Though symphony halls garner more attention than their operatic equivalents, one could easily begin formulating a number of related questions as a result of these studies. How might audience perception be affected by the venues in which one consumes opera? Many theatres built in the past century are considerably larger than the smaller spaces used previously, and this would clearly have a bearing on the way singers perform and emote, the level of detail that set and costume designers might employ, and how voice and orchestra alike manage to fill the space of the hall. In his work on Shakespeare and opera, Gary Schmidgall makes similar points and shows how these and related questions are equally applicable to both spoken *and* sung theatre. He reminds us, for example, of the 'all too common distortion of voices, and of operas themselves, induced by performance in a cavernous site' and, quoting Royal Shakespeare Company co-founder John Barton, suggests 'we are so often controlled by the buildings we perform in. When a theatre is big it takes over and transforms us and becomes our lord rather than our servant'.[6]

Perhaps unexpectedly, ethnomusicologist Steven Feld's idea of 'acoustemology' has also proved central to my thinking about operatic sound. Though he had been writing about 'anthropologies of sound' since the 1970s, his switch to the neologism (which combines the ideas of 'acoustics' and 'epistemology') came around 1992. Feld has defined the term as a theory of 'sound as a way of knowing' that enables one to inquire into 'what is knowable, and how it becomes known, through sounding and listening'. He suggests his work looks into sounding as 'simultaneously social and material', and as 'an

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[5] Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening? Experiencing Aural Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), ix.
[6] Gary Schmidgall, *Shakespeare and Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 164–65.

experimental nexus of sonic sensation'.[7] Most importantly, he argues that an anthropology of sound must acknowledge the 'critical importance of language, poetics and voice; of species beyond the human; of acoustic environments; and of technological mediation and circulation'.[8] Notwithstanding the sounds of the occasional owl in my first chapter's look at *Macbeth*, non-human species will not play much of a role in the present study; the other aspects Feld outlines, however, will. Put another way, my decision to focus on what I am calling 'aural dramaturgy' might well be reframed as suggesting an 'operatic acoustemology': I seek, in other words, to explore how we come to know and understand the artform through sound.

In the realm of musicology and opera studies, Nina Eidsheim's *Sensing Sound: Signing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (2015) brings us the closest to an understanding of operatic acoustics from a sound studies perspective with a visceral, phenomenological approach to the genre. The pieces she considers are mainly avant-garde and modern, and while analyses of such works may not always easily translate to repertory operas, the approach she takes is thoughtful and nuanced.[9] Likewise, Emily Wilbourne's *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell'Arte* (2016) represents another attempt at bridging this disciplinary divide, and provides a promising example of the insights to be gained by wedding opera with sound studies. In contrast to Eidsheim, she discusses the opposite end of the artform's history, focussing on the *commedia dell'Arte* and its influence on seventeenth-century operatic practices. Her

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[7] Steven Feld, 'Acoustemology', in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 12.
[8] Ibid., 14.
[9] Eidsheim's work elsewhere on Marian Anderson is also relevant to my present study. For more, see 'Marian Anderson and "Sonic Blackness" in American Opera', *American Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (September 2011): 641–71.

look at some of the genre's earliest soundscapes has likewise proved influential to my project.

Examining more canonical work, Arman Schwartz's study of *Puccini's Soundscapes* (2016) considers the composer's fascination with modern sounds and technologies. His contention that close attention to the composer's 'soundscapes' might 'lead to new interpretations of his operas, and to new ways of "hearing" the century in which he lived' closely aligns with my own aims.[10] Elsewhere, Ryan Ebright has used *Doctor Atomic* as a case study to show how contemporary opera has increasingly sought to employ sound design and sound technicians to create 'new dramaturgies that remap visual and aural space in opera'.[11] His emphasis is particularly on electroacoustic music and *musique concrète*-like cues written into the score (and other production materials) of the opera. Ebright's work remains among the few notable studies that seek to address questions of operatic acoustics in a fashion similar to my own (indeed, questions of sound design will also prove central to my discussion in Chapter 2). It is worth noting that these studies focus primarily on pieces written during the early twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Though my own investigation will likewise discuss works and stagings from both the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries, I will dedicate a sizeable amount of space to reconsidering canonical operas written *within* this timeframe, including works by Beethoven, Verdi, and Wagner. In addition to considering how the operas were conceived and produced in their own times, however, it is also central to my study to

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[10] Arman Schwartz, *Puccini's Soundscapes: Realism and Modernity in Italian Opera* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2016), 3. Schwartz similarly also makes a plea for musicology to 'play a more active role in the discourse of sound studies than it has done so far' and that 'the obverse should be true as well' (p.5).
[11] Ryan Ebright, '*Doctor Atomic* or: How John Adams Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Sound Design', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 31, no. 9 (November 2019): 99.

compare and contrast the early reception histories of these works with our own experiences in the present; *our* acoustemological understanding of the artform is as central to my study—if not occasionally more so—than to how audiences of centuries' past may have heard them.

Work outside the realm of musicology and opera studies is likewise crucial to my project, and it is my hope to show how sound studies scholarship applied to other humanities-based disciplines has already yielded insightful results that help uncover the plethora of sonic detail in works we might otherwise perceive as silent. David Toop's *Sinister Resonance* (2010) offers one such important example, and was another study central to my understanding of how we might approach operatic sound from unconventional angles. His analyses of paintings, literature, and poetry are inflected through his many decades as both avant-garde performer and sound studies scholar. In his writing, Toop suggests that sound 'can be identified as a sub-text' and offers 'a hidden if uncertain history within otherwise silent media'.[12] He has also written an opera that will factor briefly into my third chapter, but his scholarship is important for its consistent ability to reveal the sound in objects and artforms we frequently consider silent and/or unmusical.

Mladen Ovadija's *Dramaturgy of Sound in the Avant-Garde and Postdramatic Theatre* (2014) and Adrian Curtin's contemporaneous *Avant-Garde Theatre Sound* are two notable examples of the slow but promising uptick in theatre and performance studies research that seeks to remedy the longstanding neglect of the aural in their

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[12] David Toop, *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener* (London: Continuum, 2010), xiii.

discipline by entering into a productive dialogue with sound studies work. Ovadija, for example, argues for the centrality of sound in both the performative and architectural aspects of contemporary theatrical practice, and Curtin, too, offers a broad, multidisciplinary approach to the study of theatrical sounds of the past century.[13] There is a considerable overlap in their research; much as with Eidsheim's text, the two scholars focus primarily on pieces for the 'contemporary' stage. (Though some of the works considered may date back to the earliest years of the twentieth century, the operatic repertory as it currently stands makes these works seem more modern than they are in the strictly temporal sense). Likewise, Sam Halliday's *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (2013) demonstrates the useful application of sound studies-based questions to other areas of inquiry, much like Toop's scholarship, and offers aurally sensitive close readings of literature and poetry, as well as an attempt at connecting these literary analyses with more musical ones.

Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999) has also played a formative role in my thinking about operatic sound, but more as it has been filtered through the scholarship of David Levin's work on opera staging and William Worthen in his *Shakespeare Performance Studies* (2014). Rather than using the original term to refer to a particular body of works written by a small group of authors within a relatively narrow timeframe, these scholars have sought to broaden our understanding of 'postdramatic theatre' to serve instead as a way of understanding certain contemporary approaches to dramaturgy, *mise-en-scène*, and theatricality in both spoken and sung theatre. Worthen's

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[13] The phrase 'aural dramaturgy' also occurs at one or two instances in Curtin's text, but he does not theorise on the term as I attempt to do here, however.

scholarship on Shakespeare also points to yet another connexion to be made here, particularly since Shakespeare studies, much like opera studies, has wrestled with questions of staging and interpreting a relatively small body of texts in often radical and unorthodox ways. Schmidgall's study of the similarities between Shakespearean and operatic dramaturgies, as well as the shared dramatic, literary, and acoustic properties of both canons, has already been mentioned above, but Shakespeare and opera will also meet in Chapter 1, and thus suggests the need for a more sustained dialogue with work in that field.

Lastly, work by several other sound scholars that have informed my research bear mentioning. If there is one place where opera and sound studies interactions would seem to be most obviously compatible, it is in discussions of the voice and its relationship to the body. Works such as Brandon LaBelle's *Lexicon of the Mouth* (2014) and Christof Migone's *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body* (2012) are perfect complements to the colloquy convened in a contemporaneous issue of the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* that was entitled 'Why Voice Now'.[14] The several contributors to that forum consider the recent increase in studies of the voice in opera scholarship and musicology more broadly, and this topic—especially the voice as filtered through technological media—will also prove relevant to later chapters of this study. The gendered bodies, doubled bodies, unseen bodies, and remediated bodies I discuss in the chapters to come all serve as a reminder of the cross-disciplinary interest operatic sound

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[14] Martha Feldman, Brian Kane, Steven Rings, and Emily Wilbourne contributed to the colloquy. For their essays, see *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 653–85.

can offer to those interested in exploring the relationship between the voice, bodily co-presence, performance, and technology.

In a broader undertaking, John Mowitt's *Sounds: The Ambient Humanities* (2015) similarly approaches the material and embodied nature of sound in a way much akin to Eidsheim's work with avant-garde opera. Mowitt suggests, for example, that 'materiality is questioned differently by being approached through sound' and further goes on to assert that one aim of his book is to help us come to an understanding of how sound studies might 'refresh the way we think about what it meant to . . . articulate cultural practices and their sociohistorical contexts' through sound.[15] Though my present study does not seek to explicitly place sound studies scholarship in the service of opera—I will not be trying to read any opera or staging through the lens of a particular scholar's methodologies, for instance—I bring attention to their research because it offers a productive framework for considering questions of voice, gender, space and place, the impact of remediation on theatrical performances, and other avenues besides.

My study is divided into five chapters, each approaching the idea of opera's aural dramaturgies from a different vantage point. Chapter 1 focusses on what I broadly refer to as 'Texted Sound'. Using Shakespeare's and Verdi's respective versions of *Macbeth* as case studies, it seeks to explore how composers, playwrights, and librettists encode sonic detail and information in the 'texts' themselves. I outline the ways in which sound factors into the world of both play-script and operatic libretto alike, focussing on how Shakespeare and especially Verdi manifest their conception of the story through sound as

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[15] John Mowitt, *Sounds: The Ambient Humanities* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 12–13.

well as music, text, and visual staging. Bells serve more than just mimetic functions in both *Macbeth*s, for instance, with their sounds (or lack thereof) serving to draw us into the same confusing and disoriented state as the titular character. The mournful sighs and owl shrieks, intermittent, off-stage knocking, and other noises likewise speak to aspects of the work's soundscape that underscore effect and meaning. So too do stage directions which call for voices to be 'veiled', 'hollow', and 'suffocated' operate in tandem with Shakespeare's and Verdi's often quite specific word choices. These choices, right down to specific vowel sounds in some instances, serve to arouse discomfort and unease for characters and audience members alike. They also raise provocative questions connecting gender, power, and sanity in both the play and in its operatic adaptation. Viewed holistically, the works in question contain meticulously curated soundscapes, but ones that are often passed over in equal measure by more traditional text- or score-based studies of opera. I suggest that the genre's aural dramaturgies exist in a dialectic relationship not only with words and music, but with a broader array of acoustic strategies, ones that can help invoke and underscore a playwright's or composer's larger dramaturgical vision in their work as a whole.

The second chapter follows the broader 'performative turn' that has taken place in the humanities in recent decades. If Chapter 1 still considers a 'work' (i.e., *Macbeth*) as it has more conventionally been understood in scholarship, Chapter 2 explores opera's libretto and score more as a 'template for performance' by focussing on a particular realisation of Beethoven's *Fidelio*. Rather than coming to understand the operatic soundscape as its original creator(s) envisioned it, my focus shifts to the more ephemeral idea of an aural dramaturgy curated by an individual director and sound designer for a

staging that existed only for a limited time and in a limited space (the potential for recording to undermine this ephemerality notwithstanding). My focus in Chapter 2 is thus on what I refer to as 'Staged Sound', and analyses an unconventional staging of *Fidelio* performed at the Salzburg Festival in 2015. For the production, director Claus Guth and sound designer Torsten Ottersberg strip away all of the spoken dialogue from the composer's *Singspiel*, offering instead a soundscape of howling winds, thumping heartbeats, and other ambient and technological sounds to connect one musical number to the next. By offering my own critical analysis of the production's successes and failures, and surveying noteworthy critical reactions, I argue that the acoustic design of the production offers a productive starting point for reassessing sonic aspects of Beethoven's operatic dramaturgy, and staging practices more generally, in the twenty-first century. Contextualising the production's textual alterations with other nineteenth- and twentieth-century precedents, as well as within other stagings by Guth, I argue that the acousmatic sounds and silent body doubles of the production allow for a defamiliarized and psychologically probing interpretation. Specifically, the altered soundscape adds a new physicality—almost palpable—to the feelings and emotions set to music by Beethoven, providing a different sort of bridge between numbers that allows for a connexion beyond that which words and/or music alone can provide. The result is a unified vision of Beethoven's opera that enables us to confront our own listening habits and in turn reassess how we come to understand the artform (and/or the opera itself) through sound-as-staged.

The first two chapters, taken together, help chart a somewhat 'timeless' journey, in a sense, of operatic sound's transformation from page to stage. Questions of text- and

performance-based sound might just as easily focus on the piece's premiere, centuries

past, or on revivals and new stagings taking place in our own time period. The second

half of my study, however, is more time-sensitive in that it asks questions about our

understanding of operatic sound in the 'age of its technological reproducibility', to

borrow from the title of Benjamin's famous essay. Chapter 3 serves as a pivot of sorts,

then. Adopting film scholar Michel Chion's definition of acousmatic sound as 'the

auditory situation in which we hear sounds without seeing their cause or source', it

begins by examining the phenomenon in an age prior to the days of modern audio

reproduction technologies and then shifts to an exploration of how public opinion about

operatic sound came to be understood once it began to be disseminated on disc.[16] Unlike

the other chapters, this exploration happens not through one extended case study, but

through a brief history localised through four episodes. I begin by looking at the

marketing work done by record labels like the Victor Talking Machine Company and

compare their rhetoric to the way thinkers like Theodor Adorno were writing about sound

on disc. Following this, I shift to examining opera's aural dramaturgies from the

production end, first with a look at conductor Leopold Stokowski's pioneering

experiments in the early electronic recording era of the mid-1920s, and then via the

application of stereophonic sound to the long-playing record in the 1950s and '60s, as

seen through the work of Decca audio producer John Culshaw. As a whole, the chapter

suggests that acousmatic opera came to re-define how audiences were able to engage

with the genre without recourse to the sights and sounds one might typically experience

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[16] Michel Chion, *Film, A Sound Art*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 465.

in-house. I argue that recording triggered a re-evaluation of opera as an artform that privileged aurality above all else.

Now firmly rooted in technologies of mechanical reproducibility, Chapters 4 and 5 continue exploring the operatic soundscape from angles other than the text- and performance-based approaches in the first half of my study. These latter two chapters consider how remediation, the process Bolter and Grusin define as 'the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms', has come to impact our understanding of the operatic soundscape.[17] This broadly-conceived, two-part study on 'Remediated Sound' tackles more explicitly how opera has thus far been able to interact with twentieth- and twenty-first-century media technologies. Chapter 4 begins with a brief overview of operatic remediation writ large, but focusses primarily on the format of the opera-film: cinematic interpretations of repertory classics, recorded either in a studio or on-location (as opposed to in-house tapings live at the theatre). Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's 1982 film of Wagner's *Parsifal* serves as the case study. For the film, the director memorably utilises a separate cast of singers and actors, and the way in which Syberberg exploits this separation of operatic sights and sounds results in an aural dramaturgy unlike even the most radical stage productions of the time might have imagined (a pair of male and female teenaged actors take turns playing the titular character, still sung by a middle-aged baritone, for example). Syberberg's interpretation also has strong ideological leanings. After exploring how this work ties into his broader cinematic oeuvre, I examine how he utilises Brechtian techniques and the asynchronization between

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[17] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 273.

audio and visual layers in this film to explore issues related to gender and race that have adhered to Wagner's music-drama (and the composer himself) since its own premiere a century prior. The chapter argues that the additional tools available to film directors can impact our acoustemological understanding of opera in ways different from live theatrical performances.

The question of setting—of how and where we experience these works—then comes to fore in my final chapter, which explores the world of the operatic livecast: simultaneous, high-definition screenings of theatrical broadcasts from companies like the Metropolitan Opera or the Royal Shakespeare Company directly to cinemas and other arthouse venues throughout the world. What happens to our understanding of opera (or theatre) when the repertoire in question is no longer experienced in unamplified, proscenium-style venues, but screened in multiplexes that offer specially-mixed surround-sound audio and high-definition video? Chapter 5 seeks to answer these questions by looking at a 2019 staging of Wagner's *Die Walküre*, simulcast as part of the Metropolitan Opera's *Live in HD* series.

In this chapter, I focus specifically on the company's paratextual framing devices—the mixture of live and pre-recorded material designed to be streamed to hosting institutions before performances and during intermissions—and argue that this material, coupled with the implications of our physical and theoretical displacement from the 'live' performing venue, affects how we come to understand the work. Wagner's opera is perhaps an ideal case study in this regard, as his famous desire to decouple sight from sound in his Bayreuth orchestra pit finds new meaning here in this technologically remediated simulcast performance that challenges the unity of sight and sound otherwise

associated with 'in-person' attendance. As with the previous chapter, then, Chapter 5 continues to explore what it means for a majority of opera fans to now be encountering these works in acoustic environments that will inevitably differ from the experience of hearing a fully 'embodied' voice filling the hall. By addressing the broadcast's format hybridity and site-specific viewing habits during a screening at a local performing arts venue in Charlottesville, Virginia, I show how these framing devices seek to counter the scepticism with which the 2019 production, a revisionist interpretation by director Robert Lepage, was greeted by theatre-goers and critics. Because the simulcasts now reach far more viewers than in-house performances do, I argue that this paratextual material has the ability to shift audience understanding and reaction to a far greater degree than has previously been acknowledged.

Finally, perhaps a word or two on terminology and methodology is in order. While the objects of inquiry for opera studies are often rather clearly defined, my re-focus on what I have termed its 'aural dramaturgies' are clearly less so. Because of the ubiquity of sound and the nearly limitless ways we might choose to define the term, authors writing in the discipline of sound studies, for example, must adopt various definitions and methodological approaches to their work. Philosophical discussions of aurality and listening, historical surveys of technology, a study of South American rainforest soundscapes, and reports on the acoustic properties of building spaces all necessitate different approaches, after all, as do more recent inquiries of sound within the field of disability studies. Scholars seeking to address the gendered nature of 'sound' and 'noise', and those investigating various connections between noise and religion, race and ethnicity, and countless other topics must invariably differ in approach and methodology,

too. For the same reason, I have chosen to address the idea of operatic sound from the different vantage points outlined above. Each chapter represents one possible avenue for exploring the operatic soundscape in a way that has hitherto been neglected within the discipline. Most of my chapters conclude with sections outlining the myriad other ways of thinking about (texted, staged, remediated) sound that I have had to neglect for reasons of space and time as well, suggesting further avenues still left underexplored within each type of approach. My study thus makes no claims to completeness or comprehensiveness; rather, it suggests a number of possible paths forward. By shifting focus to these still-undertheorized aspects of the operatic soundscape, I hope to show that the artform is still capable of affecting us in ways we have yet to fully appreciate.

CHAPTER 1

Sound and Fury—Signifying Nothing? Texted Sound in Shakespeare's and Verdi's

Macbeth

At the time Verdi's *Macbeth* premiered in 1847, there had been almost no

tradition of Shakespeare in performance on the stages of any Italian city-states: only one

unsuccessful performance of *Othello* in Milan in the years leading up to Verdi's opera.[1]

Libretti like Francesco Maria Piave's thus played an important role in introducing authors

like Shakespeare to Italian theatre-goers. Julie Sanders has argued that, 'while the

influence of Shakespeare on music has been considerable, the domain of musical

interpretation, not least opera, has had its impact in turn on the performance and

understanding of many Shakespeare plays'.[2] *Macbeth* is certainly a case in point.

International audiences in the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, and elsewhere

could have seen Tomasso Salvini, one of the most renowned Shakespearean actors of the

day, performing his Macbeth in Italian (even opposite English-speaking actors and

actresses), and spectators as far away as Australia might have also begun noting parallels

between spoken and sung Lady Macbeth interpretations in subsequent stagings of

Shakespeare's work when Adelaide Ristori performed her renowned interpretation in

those countries. This suggests even more reason to consider composer and playwright in

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[1] It is worth pointing out that there *were* printed editions of the works in translation, however. Verdi made use of *Macbeth* editions by Michele Leoni (1814, rev. 1822) and Carlo Rusconi (1838), for instance. Giulio Carcano's was not published until 1848, thus postdating the premiere of Verdi's opera by a year, but some have argued, given the friendship between the two, that he may have shared his work-in-progress with the composer, as there are some affinities in phrasing between the two. For a succinct discussion of Italian Shakespeare translations at the time, see William Weaver, 'The Shakespeare Verdi Knew', in *Verdi's* Macbeth*: A Sourcebook*, ed. David Rosen and Andrew Porter (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), 144–48 and, for a more in-depth analysis, Matthew John Ruggiero, 'Verdi's "Macbeth" and Its Literary Context' (PhD diss., Boston University, 1993).

[2] Julie Sanders, *Shakespeare and Music: Afterlives and Borrowings* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 108.

tandem. As Mariangela Tempera has remarked, Italy might be the only country where a correct reply to the question 'Are you familiar with Macbeth' is 'Which one?'[3]

I will thus be focussing on both Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as well as Verdi's adaptation for my first extended look at opera's aural dramaturgies in this chapter. As such, it will hopefully rectify the interdisciplinary communications impasse between musicology and Shakespeare studies I discuss in the next section below. More specifically, I will be focussing on the acoustic details of these works in a way similar to the way sound studies and performance scholars have already begun doing with more avant-garde theatrical and literary endeavours, outlined in my Introduction. In the first portion of this chapter, I will explore the ways in which sound factors into the world of both play-script and operatic libretto to show how Shakespeare and Verdi manifest their conception of sound through their texts and in subsequent performances of their works. I will then turn my attention to three scenes from Verdi's opera: the Act I duet, whose opening *scena* recreates Shakespeare's 'dagger speech'; Lady Macbeth's *brindisi*, which opens the Act II banquet scene; and the *gran scena del sonnambulismo* in Act IV. Verdi's letter to playwright and friend Salvadore Cammarano attests to the importance of the first and last of these scenes, arguing as he does that 'they are the two principal numbers in the opera', and a letter by Barbieri-Nini, Verdi's first Lady Macbeth, also confirms the matter.[4] There is also reason to believe that Verdi saw the (relative) failure of the French

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[3] Mariangela Tempera, '*Macbeth* Revisited: Verdi, Testori, Bene', in *EuroSHAKESPEAREs: Exploring Cultural Practice in an International Context*, ed. Mariachristina Cavecci and Mariangela Tempera (Bologna: Cotepra, 2002), 229.

[4] The letter to Cammarano, from 23 November 1848, can be found in *Verdi's* Macbeth*: A Sourcebook*, 67. Barbieri-Nini's letter can be found on p. 51 of the same. Subsequent references to the letters contained in this volume will simply be referenced as '*Sourcebook*', followed by the page number and include the date of the letter in question.

version of his *Macbeth* as tied to the sub-par realisation of these crucial scenes, as

attested to in a letter to his French publisher at the time.[5] As Christoph Clausen suggests,

these two numbers also exemplify the composer's 'growing interest in more nuanced

psychological complexities and his developing compositional skills for their

representation', a process further exemplified in the changes to the Parisian version's aria

for Lady Macbeth, 'La luce langue' (which, it should be noted, Verdi also versified

himself, in collaboration with his wife).[6]

My inclusion of the banquet scene may seem an unusual choice by comparison,

but Lady Macbeth's number is deserving of further attention for several reasons. Older

studies of the opera have been regularly dismissive of the number, but scholarly attention

has begun to re-evaluate its merits—a process I seek to contribute to here. The drinking

song helps get at issues of sound and gender in a way that prefigures Lady Macbeth's

more well-known sleepwalking scene in the fourth act, and there is ample evidence to

suggest how important the scene was to Verdi, too.[7] John Severn also points to its careful

dramaturgical placement in relation to Lady's other major scenes (and with regard to the

structure of the opera as a whole), and suggests moreover that it is 'one that contributes to

a moral engagement with Shakespeare's play'. 'A musically hackneyed tonic-dominant

diegetic number overlooked in adaptation studies is thus revealed as a dramatically

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[5] *Sourcebook*, 121. Letter dated 3 June 1865.

[6] Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied: Negotiating Historical and Medial Difference between Shakespeare and Verdi* (New York: Rodopi, 2005), 105. For a discussion of Verdi's prose and verse drafts of the scene, see David Lawton, *Macbeth*, vol. I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xx. References to measure numbers, as well as stage directions or other markings in the score, will be to this Critical Edition as well.

[7] See *Sourcebook*, 99 (8 February 1865) and 114–15 (25 and 28 March) for the exchange between Verdi and Escudier regarding this scene. The letters will also be quoted, in part, in the relevant portion of this paper, below.

significant turning point in the opera' he suggests of his own essay, and the same might hopefully be said as a result of the scene's inclusion here.[8]

The unifying presence across the three numbers under consideration is the drama's leading Lady. Though my analysis of the Act I duet will focus on husband and wife in more or less equal measure, the scenes taken as a whole paint a clear picture of how composer, librettist, and playwright alike use vocal utterance, linguistic and phonic techniques in both verse and prose, sonically-loaded stage directions, and other strategies to affect our acoustemological engagement with the work, and especially how we come to relate to the gendered and sexual aspects of Lady Macbeth's 'sound and fury'. As the following chapter will demonstrate, the creative minds behind both play and opera use textual references to noise and other acoustic phenomena to help underscore or reinforce how they—and we—understand the characters, their interactions with one another, and their soundworlds writ large.

Following the more in-depth analyses of these three scenes I will briefly survey a number of other areas for further study in my concluding section. Some, such as the role of the Weird Sisters or the Parisian ballet number stitched into Act III, will be unique to these works themselves, while others, such as questions of staging and nationalism, will be more broadly applicable to the aural dramaturgies of opera in general. As suggested in my Introduction, much of the current research that seeks to put sound scholarship to work in the fields of literary criticism and musicology has focussed almost exclusively on the modern era, often concentrating on pieces contemporaneous with, or following at some

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[8] John R. Severn, 'Adaptation Studies, Convention, Vocal Production and Embodied Meaning in Verdi's *Macbeth*: Rehabilitating the *Brindisi*, or, Lady Macbeth Unsexes Herself', *Australian Literary Studies* 29, no. 1–2 (November 2014): 41.

distance, the birth of sound recording technologies. This chapter seeks to demonstrate the viability of such an approach to texted sound in older works, much as Emily Wilbourne has already done in her own study, referenced below. Questions of vocal utterance, linguistic and rhetorical effects in verse and prose, word choice, and sonically-loaded stage directions will thus serve as points of departure for looking at Verdi's, Piave's and (at least in the case of the sleepwalking scene) Maffei's work on the score and libretto. 'Shakespeare's playtexts record past acoustic events, vivifying the past presences of different voices, tones, and intonations in the early modern theatre', Wes Folkerth has asserted. 'They also express, at various registers of theatrical and linguistic representation, their author's understanding of sound'. He suggests that one of the primary goals of his book is to 'find new ways of hearing the sounds that are embedded in these playtexts, and to identify the various ethical and aesthetic dispositions Shakespeare associates specifically with sound'.[9] Though ethics will take a back seat here, and with more of a focus on Verdi than on Shakespeare, I would suggest that this chapter seeks to do the same.

I. Shakespearean and Verdian Soundscapes

In his aptly named *The Sound of Shakespeare*, Folkerth also notes a 'recent spate of scholarly work that investigates the various aspects of the bodily experience of early modern consciousness' and suggests a 'need to recognise sound as an important, if not the most important, perceptual domain with respect to the creation and perpetuation of that experience, especially in considerably "oral" cultures such as early modern

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[9] Wes Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 7.

England'.[10]Along these lines, we might also note a similar increase in musicological and opera studies research attending to the phenomenological and experiential impact of musical performance and spectatorship. Unfortunately, work done by scholars in one field does not always inform the work of scholars in the other, even when the two might stand to benefit greatly from one another.

John Severn, for example, has lamented the fact that 'approaches to operatic versions of Shakespeare's plays have been characterised by both an apologetic avoidance of adopting a full-scale interdisciplinary approach and a hyper-awareness of the apparent need for such an approach'.[11] Christoph Clausen has similarly observed that 'what is absent from Verdian scholarship is not Shakespeare . . . but the bulk of Shakespeare criticism, especially of recent Shakespeare criticism. Familiarity with these readings', he suggests, 'could enrich comparative analyses of play and opera'.[12] But as Clausen also points out, this is not a unidirectional problem: 'as far as most Shakespeare specialists are concerned, the operas might never have been written', a fact he rightly sees as strange given the sizeable amount of interdisciplinary literature on trans-medial and international border-crossing within the field (studies of Eastern and Western film adaptations of Shakespeare, 'Shakespeare and pictorial art', 'Shakespeare and comic strips', and so on).[13] This reciprocal neglect seems particularly unfortunate in the case of a work like *Macbeth*, where the reception of opera and play in Italy were closely tied to one another.

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[10] Ibid., 70–71.
[11]John R. Severn, 'Adaptation Studies, Convention, Vocal Production and Embodied Meaning in Verdi's *Macbeth*', 28.
[12]Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 13, 14.
[13]Ibid., 13.

As I have suggested above, this chapter seeks to help rectify the problem by attending not only to the sound-world of Verdi's opera, but to that of Shakespeare's play, too.

'Although that which creates the linguistic style of each play is one of the least studied aspects of Shakespeare's works', Paul Pellikka has argued, 'it is certainly one not less deserving of study than the themes, images, and characters that the language also creates'.[14] Scholars, particularly those working in the digital humanities, have begun rectifying this issue in recent years, yet we might still discern a similar issue in musicology. His claim that 'devices of sound can enhance the underlying meaning of a passage' would of course come as no surprise to opera scholars, but what about non- or meta-musical sounds—the body in motion, the shape of the words spoken and sung? Marie-Pierre Lassus's book-length study of the linguistic and phonemic aspects of Verdi's *Macbeth* has inspired similar work by John Severn, and both will be discussed below, but even within the realm of so-called 'New Musicology', where the aversion to older positivistic and/or music-theoretical analysis has been strongest, the concentration on historical contexts, reception histories, and issues of gender and sexuality has yet to focus on the other ways in which non-musical sound can impact our opera-going experience.

Emily Wilbourne's nuanced look at the sounds of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition and early operatic repertoire represents a recent and important step forward in this direction, and her supposition that theatrical sound is a 'crucial addition' to an account of operatic meaning resonates strongly with my own goals here. 'When the focus

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[14] Paul Pellikka, '"Strange things I have in head, that will to hand": Echoes of Sound and Sense in Macbeth', *Style* 31, no. 1, Aesthetics and Interpretation (Spring 1997): 14.

shifts to the overall staging of sound—including voices, dialects, language, and noises of all kinds', she argues, 'music becomes but a single point on a continuum of meaningful aurality'.[15] Her study is also a welcome supplement to work by Julie Sanders, Christoph Clausen, Simon Williams, and other authors who have recently been endeavouring to bring the Shakespearean and operatic worlds into meaningful dialogue through their interdisciplinary scholarship. Seldom, if ever, however, do those authors highlight the fact that opera is an encounter with sounding bodies engaged in strenuous physical activities. Wilbourne's claim that 'voice is a palpable, material force, equivalent to gesture, though operating on an audible rather than a visible plane' meshes nicely with musicological scholarship by Carolyn Abbate, Nina Sun Eidsheim, and others who have already begun to bridge those gaps, if perhaps in a slightly different way than I aim to do here.[16] It would also seem to be in accord with the sound studies research of Bruce Smith, who in his landmark study on the soundscapes of early modern England insisted that 'to understand voicing and listening in early modern culture we have to keep our sight much more focussed than we are accustomed to on the material realities of metal, wood, air, and the members of the human body'. 'We are adept at reading graphemes as symbols of semantic concepts', he says, but 'what we need are ways of reading graphemes as indices of somatic experience'.[17]

Wilbourne's efforts to reconstruct a theatrical epistemology of sound that characterised performances on both the *dell'arte* and early operatic stages might also

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[15] Emily Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell'Arte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 16, 20.
[16] Ibid., 158.
[17] Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 129.

serve as a useful bridge-building device to connect with Shakespeare and the early modern theatrical soundscapes. Robert Henke's recent and concise overview of comparative studies on Shakespeare and the *commedia* tradition represents a good starting point for this sort of work, but triangulating Shakespeare, opera, and the *commedia dell'arte* would be another endeavour from the present one entirely and must for now remain a suggestion for future research.[18] Nevertheless, these connexions are worth bearing in mind as, to return to Wilbourne once more, 'the leap from spoken to sung drama is largely negated by an acknowledgement that the spoken theatre relied in large part on the communicative and signifying capacities of sound itself'.[19]

For this first chapter in my study of opera's aural dramaturgy, I will focus rather closely on the sounds embedded in the text(s) themselves. Pellikka, in his account of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, suggests 'some ways in which we might relisten to the language of this play, by putting our mind's ear to the effects of the enacted spoken word', but as Bruce Smith reminds us, 'the temporal patterning of sound in a given soundscape is not, after all, an exclusively human construct but a product of all the sounds, nonhuman as well as human, that happen to be present in the physical space'.[20] Recall that *Macbeth* opens with instructions of '*Thunder and lightning. Enter three* WITCHES' and closes with a *flourish* on horns while all exit, for instance.[21] In the realm of opera, scholars would certainly be comfortable extending this dictum about the importance of non-vocal sound

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[18] Robert Henke, 'Back to the Future: A Review of Comparative Studies in Shakespeare and the Commedia dell'Arte', *Early Theatre* 11, no. 2 (2008): 227–40.

[19] Emily Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell'Arte*, 153.

[20] Paul Pellikka, '"Strange things I have in head, that will to hand"', 29; Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, 45.

[21] Of course, stage directions can often be the product of editorial intervention, as will be discussed below. These, however, were at the very least already present in the first printed edition of the play (the First Folio of 1623).

to musical matters too, but again, the focus here will be on how sound—not just musical sound—affects our understanding of these works.

As suggested above, rhyme, metre, prose/verse distinctions (or recitative/aria distinctions in opera), aural rhetorical devices, and sound effects embedded in stage directions or hinted at in the texts themselves are all factors worth considering in both *Macbeth* texts. Nicholas Brooke, the editor for the Oxford Shakespeare's most recent edition of the play, points out that in addition to the myriad sound effects offered up in the stage directions, *Macbeth* also contains more musical cues than any other work in the playwright's corpus.[22] Similarly, as Marilyn Feller Somville argues, Verdi urges his singers 'to realise vocally by means of the right breath impulse, the right accent, rhythm, colour and intonation, the substance and meaning of particular words and phrases' through the 'vocal directions and the suggestive verbal cues in the score' (witness, for instance, the many indications to sing in a *voce cupa*, *voce velata*, *voce muta*, *suffocata,* and so on).[23] The specific instructions he gave to his singers for the scenes under consideration here will be remarked upon later; I bring them up presently to stress that the auditory aspects both unique and shared in each of these theatrical artforms can clearly affect our acoustemological understanding of the work(s) in question. Their aural dramaturgies shape the way we come to know these works in sound.

Given the 'performative turn' in theatre and music scholarship of the past several decades, there has been a notable shift from 'text' to 'performative work' or 'event' in academia recently, and authors have also sought to highlight the lived and embodied

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[22] Nicholas Brooke, ed., *Macbeth*, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35–36.

[23] Marilyn Feller Somville, 'Vocal Gesture in Macbeth', in *Sourcebook*, 240.

nature inherent to performance, however broadly defined. Within Verdi scholarship,

Francesco Degrada has recently suggested that

> Verdi never conceived of his scores primarily as 'texts': as fully defined documents with
> the function of transmitting to posterity his musical and dramatic ideas. On the contrary,
> he regarded them as practical tools. The primary function of his scores, more so of the
> manuscript copies made by his publishers, was to furnish a means of performance.[24]

Giles de Van and Garry Wills also stress Verdi's penchant to see himself above all as a

'man of the theatre'. Or consider, for example, how J.R. Mulryne and J.C. Bulman begin

their Series Editors' Preface for the *Shakespeare in Performance* books: 'Recently, the

study of Shakespeare's plays as scripts for performance in the theatre has grown to rival

the reading of Shakespeare as literature among university, college, and secondary-school

teachers and their students. The aim of the present series is to assist this study by

describing how certain of Shakespeare's texts have been realised in production'.[25]

Scholarship such as W. B. Worthen's *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern*

Performance (2003) and *Shakespeare Performance Studies* (2014) only further confirm

this trend in literary criticism. In the realm of music, Carl Dahlhaus suggests that the

favouring of *text* ('to be deciphered with "exegetical" interpretations', as he puts it) over

event ('the realisation of a draft') began in the nineteenth century, in part due to the rise

of Austro-Germanic instrumental music and the concomitant de-centring of the Italian—

specifically operatic—tradition as represented at the time by Rossini. The Rossinian

libretto, he argues, 'hinged on the performance as an event, not on the work as text

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[24] Francesco Degrada, 'Critical Performance', in *Verdi in Performance*, ed. Alison Latham and Roger Parker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 147.

[25] This can be found in the beginning of any of the various books in the series. I quote here from the second edition of their *Macbeth* volume, ed. Bernice W. Kilman (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), x.

passed down from time to time' or, again, as 'the realisation of a draft rather than an exegesis of a text'.[26] Similarly, Pellikka suggests that most of the studies on the language of Shakespeare's plays have been essentially textual ones, 'not ones based on the sound of the enacted spoken word, but rather on the contemplation of the printed word in the text'. Yet 'drama, above all verse drama, is the spoken word, or, more accurately, heightened spoken language for acting'.[27]

It is not my intention to undermine this performative turn and affect an about-face in how we think about the operatic repertory, nor do I seek to argue for a return to text-based analysis as the normative approach to understanding either genre. As will be discussed in the next chapter, staging—that *realisation of a draft*, as Dahlhaus might say—can introduce many variables and both enhance and/or undermine the supposedly 'original' or 'authorial' sound-worlds inherent in these playtexts. And it is of course also true that what we consider 'the text' today, especially for Shakespeare, has and continues to be affected by a great many editorial choices put into place over the ensuing centuries.

Abigail Rokison's discussion of lineation and punctuation in published Shakespeare editions shows this well, and will be discussed in more detail below. Patrick Tucker's comparative study of the First Folio of *Antony and Cleopatra* with that of the current Arden edition also revealed nearly 1,500 changes in punctuation, including over 200 additional exclamation points. Or, to take a more relevant (if less extreme) example, the seventeen lines following Duncan's murder contain twenty-two exclamation points in

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[26] Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 9. This *Stildualismus* analysis has been critiqued in more recent years, however, as in Nicholas Matthew and Benjamin Walton, eds., *The Invention of Beethoven and Rossini: Historiography, Analysis, Criticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[27] Paul Pellikka, "'Strange things I have in head, that will to hand'", 14.

the previous Arden edition (1951, rev. 1984), as against only two in the most recent

edition (2015) or four in the New Cambridge edition of the play (1997, rev. 2008).[28]

These changes would clearly have a bearing on how actors and actresses might approach

the lines in question and underscores the fact that that even such seemingly minimal edits

have a habit of accruing over a long span of time, resulting in interpretations of a 'text'

that had changed considerably from earlier copies.[29] Simon Williams offers a concise but

engaging overview of several major re-toolings of the play, including not only those by

Davenant, Garrick, and Schiller, but also by Verdi. Anthony Dawson offers a

comprehensive overview of *Macbeth* editions specifically that demonstrates the many

textual changes to the play-script over the years, and Philip Gossett, in discussing the

concept of the critical edition, has done so for Verdi's opera, too.[30] Using the cavatina of

Lady Macbeth's 'Vieni! t'affretta!' (her first number, immediately after reading

Macbeth's letter) as a representative example, he demonstrates how the composer's

inconsistency in notating slurs and staccati for the string section throughout demonstrate

that 'there are indeed examples in which Verdi clearly did not mean literally what he

wrote' and that a critical edition that 'preserved such absurdities would itself be absurd,

and we could not expect any serious musician to bother with it'.[31]

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[28] The scene in question occurs in II.iv.63–80 in the Arden edition, Third Series, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015). This edition will be my main point of reference throughout.
[29] Tucker's study is cited in Wes Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare*, 24.
[30] For more see Abigail Rokison, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking: Text and Theatre Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Anthony B. Dawson, 'Notes and Queries Concerning the Text of *Macbeth*', in *Macbeth: The State of Play*, ed. Ann Thompson (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 11–30; Philip Gossett, 'Critical Editions and Performance', in *Verdi in Performance*, op. cit., 130–44; Simon Williams, 'Taking Macbeth Out of Himself: Davenant, Garrick, Schiller and Verdi', *Shakespeare Survey* 57, Macbeth and Its Afterlife (2004): 56–68.
[31] For more, see Philip Gossett, 'Toward a Critical Edition of *Macbeth*', in *Sourcebook*, 199–209; here, 200–201.

For both playwright and composer, censorship was a major concern that would shape how audiences came to think of 'the text' and its sound, too. As Rokison reminds us, works for the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage might have been censored for political reasons or as a result of the 1606 'Acte to Restraine the Abuses of Players', which forbade oath-taking and the use of God's name in theatrical performances.[32] The 'Acte' was nearly contemporaneous with Shakespeare's writing of *Macbeth*, and, as the editors of the Arden edition point out, its effects could already be seen there. The secularised substitute 'upon my life' uttered by Lady Macbeth's maidservant as her mistress enters the stage sleepwalking, taper in hand (V.i.20), provides one such instance when compared with utterances like 'In God's Name', 'by Christ's blood', or 'Zounds' (a contraction of 'God's Wounds') uttered in earlier Shakespeare plays and often subsequently, if unevenly, edited out of later editions. Though issues of class or gender may come into play here, too (a 'gentlewoman', as the servant is listed, would be less likely to use the coarser language to begin with), the general trend is still worth bearing in mind.

Some of the censorship problems Verdi faced are already notorious: consider the many changes surrounding *Un ballo in maschera*, for example, or the adjustments necessitated in time and/or place for the action of *Rigoletto* and *La traviata*. As there was no united Italy to speak of at the time, the composer had to deal with varying moral, religious, and political censorship issues on a region-by-region basis; Austrian, Neapolitan, Florentine, and papal jurisdictions each had differing censorship guidelines.

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[32] Abigail Rokison, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking*, 48–49. Barbara Mowatt has studied the 'Acte' and its influence on Shakespeare's *Othello*, for instance, in 'Q2 *Othello* and the 1606 "Acte to restrain the Abuses of Players', in *Varianten-Variants-Varientes*, ed. Christa Jansohn (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2005), 91–106.

Thus, Roman censors would not permit witchcraft on their stages, and so the opening chorus became a band of gypsies telling fortunes through card reading. Might Verdi's scoring of the witches have played out differently if he had been writing for a band of fortune-tellers instead? The chalice (*calice*) Lady Macbeth raises in her Act II drinking song apparently raised concerns in Rome as well (because of the term's sacred connotations), and the *brindisi* instead begins 'Il nappo colmisi'. An 1849 production at La Scala forced the Scottish exiles not to sing of their *patria oppressa* or their *patria tradita*, but instead they lamented about being 'lost ones' and having had their faith betrayed (they now sing of 'Noi perduti' and 'La fede tradita'). Meanwhile, censors in Palermo and Messina (for productions in 1852 and 1853, respectively) insisted that Macbeth aspire not to the crown, but to the post of 'a very rich Scottish nobleman, King Duncan's first military general' named Count Walfred. The Weird Sisters' third prophecy became 'salve, o premiero guerriero del re!', while Banquo was prophesied to be 'not a count, but the father of counts' (*Non conte, ma di conti genitore*).[33] In perhaps the most radical alteration of all, *Macbeth* became *Saul*, an 'azione sacra' in two parts for another Palmero performance in 1853.

Despite these shifting notions of 'text' and the significance of performance thereupon, the words that poet, composer, and librettist wrote down nevertheless seem like a logical place to begin my re-evaluation of operatic sound. As Rokison asserts, editors and critics have increasingly 'veered towards a rejection of authorial authority,

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[33] For more, see 'A Note on Censorship' in *Sourcebook*, 356–58. Marcello Conati also notably details censorship issues with regard to *Macbeth* specifically in his 'Verdi censurato: *Macbetto* fra Papa e Zar', in *L'immaginario scenografico e la realizzazione musicale: Atti del Convegno in onore di Mercedes Viale Ferrero: Torino, Teatro Reggio, 5–6 febbraio 2009, Venizia, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, 5–6 Marzo 2009*, ed. Maria Ida Biggi and Paolo Gallarati (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2010), 181–89.

concluding, in the most extreme assertions, that "we know nothing about Shakespeare's original text"', yet 'theatre practitioners continue to mine the minutiae of the printed text for authorial clues for the actors'. Returning to Verdi, Degrada again points out that, regardless of how we choose to define 'the work', 'texts do exist, however, and they are still an indispensable part of the operatic process: whenever an opera is studied or performed, a text *has* to be used'.[34]

Bruce Smith posits that the early modern play-script was set up 'as kind of a scroll, as a shorthand transcript of spoken words that helps a reader literally to *re*member the play as he or she may have heard it in performance, as an experience of sounding bodies moving in space', and this would certainly seem applicable to the operatic libretto, too, especially at a time when libretti were printed and sold or distributed at operatic performances.[35] Likewise, as Linda Fairtile points out, the relationship between textual and musical norms in nineteenth-century Italian opera was such that 'the crafting of a libretto became, in a sense, the first step in composition'.[36] Verdi was certainly no exception to this rule: 'I wrote the whole opera in prose, with divisions into acts, scenes, numbers, etc., etc., then I gave it to Piave to put into verse' he wrote to Tito Ricordi in 1857, recounting the early creative process for *Macbeth* and the extent to which the acoustic sound-world he was creating would be a product of his words as much as his music. For the 1865 Paris revision, too, he sent a nearly complete version of the last two scenes to Piave, instructing him to 'turn the pages and you will find everything laid out in

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[34] Abigail Rokison, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking*, 40; Francesco Degrada, 'Critical Performance', 157.
[35] Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, 123. Emphasis in original.
[36] Linda B. Fairtile, 'Verdi at 200: Recent Scholarship on the Composer and His Works', *Notes* 70, no. 1 (2013): 16.

full. The lines need polishing and you will do it, but do it quickly'.[37] In fact very little was changed between what Verdi sent the librettist and the final product as it was given to the French translators. The fact that the composer often found himself rather involved with the libretto-drafting process underscores the logic of using the text as the first stopping point in a consideration of opera's aural dramaturgy. As Emily Wilbourne eloquently suggests, 'the aurality of the printed word is a forceful impetus to think through the script to the scene of performance and the importance of sound'.[38]

The templates Verdi and Shakespeare were providing to their players and singers are thus our point of entry for the three scenes to be considered in the following portion of this chapter, and there is an abundance of evidence to suggest that both composer and playwright thought about the sounds of their texts a great deal. It is by now a commonplace to point out that plays were primarily thought of less as physical spectacles and more as aural phenomena in early modern England, and Shakespeare himself amply demonstrates this in his oeuvre. As Bruce Smith notes, those plays whose prologues have survived into the printed editions of the canon all cast the works they precede as auditory experiences. He cites examples from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Pericles*, and *Henry VIII*, but there are more examples than these, and not just in the prologues. When Shakespeare's characters speak of plays to be performed within their own worlds, they do so in the same terms: thus Hamlet remarks to Polonius, 'We'll hear a play tomorrow', and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Duke Theseus says of *Pyramus and Thisby* 'I will hear that play'. Wes Folkerth suggests that 'the very *sound* of

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[37] The letters from Verdi to Piave (dated 11 April 1857) and Ricordi (dated 28 January 1865) can both be found, in English and the original Italian, in *Sourcebook*, 69 and 93, respectively. The second letter also provides the full scenario Verdi had drafted for these scenes.

[38] Emily Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of Commedia dell'Arte*, 26.

Shakespeare's verbal plethora would have been a large part of the attraction his plays held for contemporary audiences', and Julie Sanders likewise argues that the auditory nature of much early modern drama 'was consciously designed to be heard, and auditory prompts stirred the imagination of spectators'.[39] Folkerth also references ethnomusicologist Steve Feld, who in his pioneering study of the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea coined the term 'acoustemology' as a way of describing their sensual, phenomenological way of understanding the world through sound. He provocatively suggests that 'Shakespeare seems to have understood something very like Steven Feld's concept of acoustemology'.[40] Quoting the famous opening monologue of *Richard III* ('Now is the winter of our discontent…'), Folkerth also highlights the ways in which Gloucester is in reality describing a soundscape: 'we learn about that environment, and him, through his responses to the sounds he hears in it'. The 'vital relevance of the concept of the soundscape to literary studies is only just beginning to be recognised', he insists.[41] The same can be said of its relevance to opera.

Though the letter postdates his work on *Macbeth*, Verdi wrote to Giulio Ricordi while working on *Aida*:

> I would not want the *theatrical word* [parola scenica] to be forgotten. By theatrical words I mean those that carve out a situation or a character, words that always have a most powerful impact on the audience. I know well that sometimes it is difficult to give them a select and poetic form. But (pardon the blasphemy) both the poet and the composer must have the talent and the courage, when necessary, *not* to write poetry or music . . . Horror! Horror!

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[39] Wes Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare*, 101; Julie Sanders, *Shakespeare and Music*, 119.
[40] Wes Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare*, 106.
[41] Ibid., 8.

Appearing to not get through to his librettist, he wrote again a month later: 'It seems to me that the *theatrical word* is missing, or, if it is there, it is buried under the rhyme or under the verse and so doesn't jump out as nearly and plainly as it should'.[42] In a much earlier letter to Piave, he also suggests to the librettist that he should 'experiment and find a way of writing bizarre poetry' for the witches.[43] Statements like these paint a clear picture that Verdi was looking for his numbers to make a distinct acoustic impression on his audiences not just through the sound of their music, but of their words, too. That the composer attached great importance 'to the psychological, and hence the semantic, quality of certain sounds of the language', as de Van states with reference to the Act I duet, also more generally speaking seems apt for his adaptation of Shakespeare's play.[44]

But if we subscribe to Degrada's argument that Verdi saw his scores as templates for performance, the instructions he offered his singers should be of equal concern, and indeed there is plenty of evidence demonstrating *how* he wanted these words to sound. Even the singers he sought after were considered for their particular acoustic profiles. Thus 'No actor in Italy today can do *Macbeth* better than Varesi, both because of his way of singing, and because of his intelligence, and even because of his small and ugly appearance. Perhaps you will say he sings out of tune, but that doesn't matter since the part would be almost totally declaimed, and he is very good at that'. This emphasis on the declamatory nature of the part (at least as Verdi understood it) is something that I will come back to later as well. Regarding his choice for Lady Macbeth:

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[42] The letters, dated 10 July and 14 August of 1870, appear in translation in Gary Schmidgall, *Shakespeare and Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 65 and 344n, respectively. Emphasis in original.
[43] Verdi to Piave, letter dated 22 September 1846, in *Sourcebook*, 10.
[44] Giles de Van, *Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama through Music*, trans. Gilda Roberts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 362n51.

> Tadolini's qualities are far too good for that role! This may perhaps seem absurd to
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> you!!... Tadolini has a beautiful and attractive appearance; and I would like Lady
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> Macbeth to be ugly and evil. Tadolini sings to perfection; and I would like the Lady not
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> to sing. Tadolini has a stupendous voice, clear, limpid, powerful; and I would like the
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> Lady to have a harsh, stifled, and hollow voice. Tadolini has an angelic quality; I would
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> like the Lady's voice to have a diabolical quality![45]

Gary Wills, in his book comparing the works of Verdi and Shakespeare, claims on these grounds that the composer did not want 'fine singers' because 'he doubted he could prod such almost feral sounds from them', and Graham Bradshaw argues that Verdi 'did not want actor-singers whose acting would compensate for poor singing, he wanted singers who could act in or through their voices'.[46]

A reviewer commenting on the American premiere of Verdi's opera lamented that the composer 'understood the crescendo; he understands how to fill up the noise upon a climax, and he makes as many climaxes as possible' but in the end was mostly 'substituting sound for sense'.[47] Yet, as should already be clear, Verdi's steadfast passion for Shakespeare and his own keen interest in vocal quality, timbre, and instrumentation, combined with his commitment to crafting a libretto with equal attention to sonic detail through word choice, metre, and other acoustic properties, resulted in a rendition of *Macbeth* that could succeed at being just as unsettling and suspenseful as Shakespeare's

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[45] The letter describing his choice of Varesi for Macbeth is dated 19 August 1846, and that arguing for Barbieri-Nini over Tadolini for the role of Lady is from 23 August 1848. See *Sourcebook*, 7 and 67 for each, respectively.

[46] Gary Wills, *Verdi's Shakespeare: Men of the Theater* (New York: Viking, 2011), 35; Graham Bradshaw, 'Operatic Macbeths: what we could still learn from Verdi', in *Shakespeare in Performance: Macbeth*, op. cit., 55.

[47] The review, originally from *The New York Evening Mirror*, 26 April 1850, appears in John Graziano's 'The Reception of Verdi in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York', *Verdi 2001: Atti del Convegno internazionale / Proceedings of the International Conference, Parma – New York – New Haven, 24 January–1 February 2001*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin, and Marcia Citron (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2003), II, 815.

original. Giorgio Melchiori suggests as much in his contribution to the English National Opera guide to the work, implying that the composer knew he would lose something of the 'verbal richness' of the original when reduced to libretto form, but that he 'conceived a score that would more than compensate: it would recreate that visionary dimension through sounds'.[48] While it may be easy to agree with such an assertion, most of the 'sounds' Melchiori has in mind are probably more strictly musical in nature. I would suggest that the work's aural dramaturgy hinges on much more than that.

II. Aural Daggers, Acousmatic Owls: The *gran scena e duetto* of Act I

In a letter to Felice Varesi, the baritone who would be Verdi's first Macbeth, the maestro wrote to his singer about how best to approach the dagger scene:

> This is a most beautiful moment, both dramatically and poetically, and you must take great care with it. Note that it's night; everyone is asleep, and this whole duet will have to be sung sotto voce, but in a hollow voice such as to arouse terror. Macbeth, alone (as if momentarily transported), will sing a few phrases in full, expansive voice. But all of this you will find set out in [your] part. So that you'll understand my ideas clearly, let me tell you that the entire recitative and duet, the orchestra consists of two muted strings, two bassoons, two horns, and a kettledrum. You see, the orchestra will play extremely softly, and therefore you two will have to sing with mutes too. [. . .] At the end one should only barely hear the words while Macbeth (almost beside himself) is dragged off by the Lady.[49]

The attention to sonic detail here is noteworthy, as it highlights the many ways in which Verdi was thinking about the acoustic properties of this scene. He offers Varesi his insight not only into the orchestral texture at this point, but also the baritone's melodic

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[48] Giorgio Melchiori, '"Macbeth": Shakespeare to Verdi', in *Macbeth: Giuseppe Verdi*, English National Opera Guide 41, ed. Nicholas John (Surry, UK: Overture Publishing, 2011), 9.
[49] *Sourcebook*, 31, letter dated 7 January 1847.

line ('you will have to sing with mutes too'). What he is actually describing, though, is

much broader operatic soundscape, beautiful 'both dramatically and poetically'.[50] In an

1865 note to Escudier, as his work was being prepared for French translation, he insisted

that Lady Macbeth's cries of '*Follie, follie*' later in the duet must be kept at all costs: 'the

whole secret of the effect of this piece may well lie in these words and in the Lady's

infernal derision'.[51] As de Van sees it, 'the quality of the acoustic image, the closed

vowel *i*, which is propelled by the double liquid consonant preceding it and strongly

accented by the music, is combined with the semantic value of the word—madness,

nonsense—which conveys the hysterical nervosity with which "Lady" attempts to dispel

her husband's anguish after Duncan's murder'.[52] Verdi's interest in the aural dramaturgy

of his opera extended beyond issues of musical composition, then. Some might associate

this with the idea of *tinta*, a term used in discussion of the composer's works since his

own time and intended to draw attention to the distinct musical profiles present in each of

his pieces. Those evoking the idea of a work's *tinta* by and large tend to focus on its

music-theoretical structure, however—aspects of metrical, tonal, or modal unity, motivic

recurrences or reminiscences, and so forth.[53] As we see from Verdi's comments above,

though, his attention to sonic detail extended even to the acoustic character of individual

words and phrases, perhaps even individual letters, as well as to the sound (or 'grain', as

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[50] In a portion omitted above, he also seeks to draw the singer's attention to two poetic lines: 'Ah, this hand—The Ocean could not wash these hands of mine' and 'Like Angels of wrath, I shall hear Duncan's holy virtues thundering vengeance'

[51] Verdi to Escudier, letter dated 23 January 1865, in *Sourcebook*, 91. It should perhaps be noted, at this point, that the text remains consistent for this scene between the 1847 and 1865 versions of the opera.

[52] Giles de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, 77.

[53] For a more thorough discussion of *tinta* in Verdi, see David Rosen, 'Meter, Character, and *Tinta* in Verdi's Operas', in *Verdi's Middle Period: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 339–92.

Barthes might say) of the voice itself. In the composer's own words, we should 'bear in mind that every word has a meaning' here.[54]

Textually, the opening dagger scene is structured largely around lines of *endecasìllabi*, plus one written in *settenario*. The alternation of eleven- and seven-syllable lines was often used as an equivalent to blank verse in Italian spoken theatre at the time and thus mostly on par with Shakespeare's original. Within the larger operatic tradition, however, this metrical scheme (often referred to as *versi sciolti*) was by this time the well-established standard for recitative construction, and so its deployment here may also be logically explained on these grounds. In her discussion of the early operatic soundscape, Wilbourne could already describe the pattern as one that would 'strike an ideal balance between grace and structure of poetry, on the one hand, and an unpredictable patterning that recalled natural diction, on the other'.[55] Nevertheless, as Clausen points out, Verdi was able to make use of the 'liberal freedom' accorded by this verse structure 'to conjure up by musical means a serious unbalanced mind'. He enumerates several examples:

> the appearance and disappearance of rhythmic figures, through jagged, unconnected vocal lines, through the alternation of frenzied turbulence and oases of sudden calm, through unpredictable shifts of key, through orchestral colours which, and this was unusual at the time, are erratically disassembled and reassembled in ever-new configurations.[56]

Daniel Albright suggests that Verdi was looking for something that was 'unprecedented in the domain of nineteenth-century Italian opera, a set-piece that was melodically

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[54] Letter from Verdi to Barbieri-Nini, dated 31 January 1864, in *Sourcebook*, 40.
[55] Emily Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell'Artre*, 98.
[56] Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 141.

intense—not recitative—and yet took place in some boundary region between speech and song.'[57] Simon Williams similarly remarks that it is 'one of those moments where Verdi abandons the melodically structured forms of Rossinian opera for a nascent music drama in which the music has no form of its own but fills out the meaning of the words and highlights their dramatic value'.[58] While neither of these comments might strike us as technically accurate in terms of the poetry and verse structure, we can see how, by attending to the scene's disorienting and unsettling aural dramaturgy, one might still feel tempted to come to a similar conclusion. Though he was speaking of *The Tempest*, Kenneth Gross's discussion of a scene wherein an 'ordinary act of listening is transformed by the fiction', becoming 'something frightening, as well as absolutely uncanny' might just as easily be applied to either *Macbeth*, spoken or sung.[59] As I will highlight in more detail below, Verdi's masterful manipulation of texted sound disorients and unsettles the listener, just as is Macbeth himself at this point in opera and play alike.

Marie-Pierre Lassus, whose insightful linguistic analysis of the opera will also factor into later sections of this chapter, sees here an 'equivalence between the poetic structure and the musical structure thanks to a careful distribution of lyric moments undeniably inspired by the sounds of the text', drawing comparisons with the sleepwalking scene and suggesting certain lines in each that were either more spoken or sung based on phonemic patterns and verse rhythms.[60] It is an interesting comparison to

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[57] Daniel Albright, 'The Witches and the Witch: Verdi's *Macbeth*', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17, no. 3 (2005): 243.

[58] Daniel Albright, *Musicking Shakespeare: A Conflict of Theatres* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 167; Simon Williams, 'Taking Macbeth Out of Himself', 66.

[59] Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 203.

[60] 'On peut ainsi constater une adéquation totale entre la structure poétique et la structure musicale grâce à une répartition minutieuse des moments lyriques, indéniablement inspirés des sonorités du texte'. Marie-Pierre Lassus, *Le voix impure, ou* Macbeth *de Verdi* (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1992), 154.

make given Clausen's assertion that in the play, the dagger scene 'in some respects functions as an earlier dramaturgical complement to the sleepwalking scene' and that this is 'even more true' of the dagger scene in the opera.[61] In each case, the underlying creative impetus seems rooted in something beyond the music alone and helps contribute to an overarching and distinct acoustic profile of madness…or at least of near-madness. There is some debate regarding the generic status of Lady Macbeth's scene, and as we shall see, there are reasons to question Macbeth's own purported insanity here as well.[62]

As Elizabeth Hudson astutely points out, the dagger scene is 'sandwiched firmly between evocations of the "real" stage world, which work for characters and audience alike to establish a stark contrast with the fevered visual images of Macbeth'. The previous scene features what she calls 'the most utilitarian stage music of the entire opera'—the E-flat march that accompanies Duncan's royal procession (the scene, it should be noted, plays out as a 'dumb show': Duncan has no lines in the opera, nor do any other characters speak here).[63] The subsequent *scena* begins with Macbeth requesting that his servant ring a bell when 'all is prepared', as in Shakespeare, and the duet concludes amidst the sound of those bells ringing, along with a brief return to E-flat. 'The bell invites me', Macbeth insists in the play, but he then goes on to immediately connect its ringing with the metaphorical significance of the death knell used for mourning. He urges Duncan to 'hear it not' since it is meant to serve as a sign that the king is soon to be

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[61] Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 140–41.

[62] For a more extended discussion of the metrical forms and other poetic conventions adopted by Verdi, see Robert Moreen, 'Integration of Text Forms and Musical Forms in Verdi's Early Operas' (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1975), particularly 9–26. He also offers an analysis of the *gran scena e duetto*, with a breakdown like the one offered above, on p. 276ff.

[63] Elizabeth Hudson, '"…qualche cosa d'incredibile…": Hearing the invisible in *Macbeth*', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14, no. 1&2, 'Primal Scenes: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the University of California Berkeley', 30 November–2 December, 2001 (March 2002): 15–16.

summoned 'to heaven, or to hell' (II.iii.62–64). As Christopher R. Wilson and Michaela

Calore suggest, the 'powerful musical metaphor portending death acquires even more

significance' in this case since it is connected to a 'concrete aural counterpart in

performance'.[64] Arthur Kinney also points out that, while the First Folio provides the

direction '*A bell rings*', this most likely referred to a small handheld bell, usually used as

a stage prop used to signal events; here, however, Macbeth 'transformed the handbell as

an invitation to drink to induce sleep into an invitation to kill, to make sleep

permanent'.[65] Comments such as these strongly corroborate the argument I have been

making thus far: specifically, they confirm the importance of attending to all manner of

sonic markers, including and beyond the strictly musical, when analysing the aural

dramaturgy of a given work. The bell here is more than a mimetic signifier for Macbeth,

or for us; its presence in the soundscapes of both spoken and sung versions of the drama

allows audience members to understand the scene's interplay between real and imagined

daggers, real and imagined sound—drawing us into Macbeth's situation, questioning,

along with him, what is real and what is not.

As we transition out of that 'utilitarian' music of the dumb show and into the

dagger scene, the soundscape shifts considerably. Before Macbeth has uttered a word,

Verdi suggests in the score that the entire scene needs to be sung *sotto voce* and with a

hollow, or perhaps sinister, voice. This latter instruction is denoted for the clarinets and

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[64] Christopher R. Wilson and Michela Calore, *Music in Shakespeare: A Dictionary*, s.v. 'knell' (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 239.

[65] Arthur Kinney, 'Shakespeare's Bells', in *Shakespeare and Cognition: Aristotle's Legacy and Shakespeare's Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 80.

bassoons whose melodies we hear immediately prior to Macbeth's first words as well.[66]

As our soon-to-be-king begins speaking to this 'dagger of the mind', his sense of

reality—and perhaps ours, too—begins to disintegrate, a pattern made possible by the

interplay of sound and sense in this scene. With the increased distance between

Macbeth's inner thoughts and the activities of the external world of E-flat, musical

dissonances become more frequent and the harmonies underlying his vocal line more

unstable. As Macbeth implores the 'Immobile earth' to let his footsteps be silent

(*Immobil terra! A' passi miei sta muta!*), Elizabeth Hudson argues, 'Macbeth's inner

world meets the external stage world' and his 'psychic imaginings begin to be willed into

being.' From this moment on, 'Macbeth (and the audience) hear stage sounds, but those

"real" sounds now also figure in his imaginative world'.[67] Stage directions call for bell-

ringing and door-knocking at the very least, but the mournful sighs (*murmure*)—the

strange, uncanny cries Macbeth speaks of may be staged (voiced?) too, as might the owl

shrieks if directors so choose. The power of the text to evoke such a sinister soundscape

enables directors to influence how audience members view the stage action playing out

between husband and wife here: are all of the sounds they speak of real? Can we hear

them too? Are they only in Macbeth's mind? Or maybe his delusions start to affect his

wife and she starts to hear them too, even though we in the audience hear nothing and

know them to be the effects of a paranoid and guilt-stricken mind. The same might be

said of the many references to real or imagined knocking sounds throughout the play—at

least ten such stage directions exist in the Folio—or to the supposed clock-striking or

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[66] 'Tutto questo Duetto dovrà esser ditto dai cantata sottovoce, e cupa ed eccezione d'alcune brevi frasi, in cui si sarà marcato "a voce spiegata"'. The clarinet and bassoon parts (at m. 23) are marked 'cupo, più piano che sia possible' and 'cupo e più che si può', respectively.

[67] Elizabeth Hudson, '"…qualche cosa d'incredibile…": Hearing the invisible in *Macbeth*', 20.

bell-tolling Lady Macbeth hears during her sleepwalking scene (*One; two. Why / then 'tis time to do't*, V.i.35–36). Recall Julie Sanders' assertion, cited earlier, that auditory prompts 'stirred the imagination' of Shakespeare's audiences just as much as any stage business would have. With Verdi, too, these uncanny noises have the power to work with or against Verdi's score to create a sound-world as frightening as Macbeth thinks it is: or, conversely, by leaving the sounds unheard, cause us to question Macbeth's state of mind—as we will later question his wife's.

Clausen's description of this scene as 'an exercise in audience mystification' seems most apt: the extent to which the audience participates in Macbeth's 'hallucinatory uncertainty' can almost result in 'the opposite of a protective frame' otherwise offered in the theatre. He also argues that Macbeth's encounter with the dagger in the opera

> can simultaneously embody the vision in acoustic resonance and exploit the audience's uncertainty about what it is that is being embodied: a voice internal or a voice external to Macbeth; "but a dagger of the mind", an object of Macbeth's feverish fantasy, or an actual dramatic subject endowed with symbolic corporeality through sound, independent of and capable of interacting with Macbeth.[68]

Carolyn Abbate once memorably described a scene from Richard Strauss's *Salome* as a 'drama born of acoustic displacement', with the titular character giving us 'a deadly little melodrama of misinterpretation of mishearing, initiated by the silence that Salome tellingly identifies as a state of not being able to hear'.[69] Much of this could just as well be applied to Verdi's dagger scene, substituting in place of Jochanaan an owl shriek here, a tolling bell there. What Abbate seems to be pointing to, like Hudson and Clausen in

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[68] Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 145.

[69] Carolyn Abbate, 'Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women', in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 242, 247.

their abovementioned descriptions of Verdi's aural dramaturgy, is the power of the

acousmatic—sound without a visible point of origin (a topic to be treated at greater

length in Chapter 3)—to work in tandem with the other aspects of score and libretto to

affect our sonic understanding of a scene in ways that go beyond the traditional

'text/music relationship' we might normally speak of. Our ways of knowing these works

through sound are complex and multi-faceted.

Before proceeding further, it may perhaps be useful to lay out one other aspect of

nineteenth-century operatic dramaturgy so that the dagger scene and the ensuing duet can

be understood in its proper context. The description Verdi provides for this number, 'gran

scena e duetto', is in fact describing a larger, musico-dramatic unit structure used to set

up arias, and, as the case is here, duets or other ensembles. The 'recitative–aria' format of

the late Baroque and Classical eras is still essentially retained within this convention, but

is used to describe the nineteenth-century shift to larger-scale, multi-movement scenarios

as the preference for more integrated structures increased. Abramo Basevi in his *Studio*

sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi (1859), which has in recent decades become a touchtone

representative of 'contemporary' Verdi criticism, coins the term *la solita forma* ('the

usual form') to describe this pattern as it occurred in the composer's operas.[70] A unit

structure fleshed out in the fullest would contain five parts: (1) a *scena*; (2) the *tempo*

d'attacco; (3) the *adagio*, sometimes referred to as the *secondo tempo* to avoid the risk of

implying that these movements were always as slow as the first term might suggest; (4)

the *tempo di mezzo*; and (5) the *cabaletta* (or, in the case of ensemble scenes, a *stretta*

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[70] For more recent discussions of Verdi, Basevi, and the *solita forma*, see Harold Powers, "'La Solita Forma' and "The Uses of Convention"', *Acta Musicologica* 59 (1987): 74–109 , and Roger Parker, "'Insolite Forme," or Basevi's Garden Path', in *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 42–60.

and/or *coda* as well). The first portion, the *scena* was often recitative, written in *versi sciolti*, as is the case here. The subsequent sections (or as many as were present), were in *versi lirici*, rhymed metrical lines grouped in strophes. The *gran scena e duetto* follows such a pattern, with a coda serving as the fifth and final section of the number. The *tempo d'attacco* (starting at 'Fatal mia donna') is written in *settenario* (seven-syllable lines), the *adagio* in *senario doppio* (two groups of six-syllable lines, beginning with Macbeth's 'Allor questa voce'), and the last two sections in *ottonario*, the most common verse pattern in libretti at the time (section four starting at Lady's 'Il pugnal là riportate', and the coda with her 'Vieni altrove! ogni sospetto').[71] The verse structure is made clearest in the third and fifth sections, where each character alternates stanzas.

Abbate's description of *Salome*'s 'deadly little melodrama of misinterpretation of mishearing' would also seem most applicable as we shift to the *tempo d'attacco*, 'Fatal mia donna', wherein almost the entire section is given over to the couple discussing sounds they heard, thought they heard, did not hear, could not hear, and so on. Macbeth, after announcing *con voce suffocata* that he has 'done the deed', hears *un murmure* and asks quietly if his wife did not hear the same. She admits to hearing only an owl (no crickets as in Shakespeare) but wonders what it was her husband has said just prior. Macbeth, unsure of what she means, needs clarification. *Mentre io scendea?* ('While I was coming down the stairs?'), he asks, to which she replies in the affirmative. After a brief, four-line shift to matters of vision (*O vista, o vista orribile!*), they return to

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[71] It should also be noted that *versi* (lines) in Italian poetry are classified according to the location of the final accent. They can be either *piano* (on the penultimate syllable), *sdrucciolo* (on the antepenultimate), or *tronco* (on the last). Thus, a line with six, seven, or even eight syllables could still be classified as being in *settenario*, for example.

focussing on their soundscape, and to their hushed, *sotto voce* tones.[72] Macbeth, as in the

play, hears the attendants praying in their sleep and laments his inability to say 'Amen'

with them—*la parola indocile Gelò sui labbri miei* ('the stubborn words froze upon my

lips'). Lady responds with her first cry of 'Follie!', and Macbeth ponders once more why

he was unable to speak. His wife once again insists on his madness—*Follie, follie, che*

sperdono I primi rai del di ('madness which will be dispelled by the first light of day').

Again, Verdi found Lady Macbeth's cries to be crucial to the construction of the scene

here and insisted that his French translators keep the words as-is for the Parisian version

of the opera. In texts that would later become key works for sound scholars, R. Murray

Schafer and Barry Traux both use the term 'soundmark' to describe acoustic details that,

like a landmark, local residents of a community would come to specially regard and

associate with a particular site or point of origin. Like the fog horns and time-signalling

gunfire those authors describe, we might similarly regard these cries as Verdian

soundmarks—key moments unique to the text that help auditors both on- and off-stage

situate themselves within their surroundings. Here, the linguistically-transcendent cries

both for Verdi and for audience members signal more than just a wife's concern for her

husband's mental wellbeing.[73] As Hudson suggests, this climactic moment works to

'invoke a new psychic reality for the characters' wherein 'the invisible world is echoed

powerfully through the interactions of the characters with a variety of sound worlds'.[74]

The impact of the Verdian soundscape clearly derives from more than just musical

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[72] Macbeth's exclamation, at the 'vista orribile' (m. 120) is sung *a voce spiegata*, but we return to the *sotto voce* designation by m. 127, when Macbeth responds to his wife's suggestion that he does not have to see it.

[73] For representative writing on the term 'soundmark', see R. Murray Schafer, *The Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977) and Barry Traux, *Handbook for Acoustic Ecology* (Burnaby, BC: ARC Publications, 1978). Both publications have been revised and expanded in subsequent editions as well.

[74] Elizabeth Hudson, '"…qualche cosa d'incredibile…": Hearing the invisible in *Macbeth*', 15.

atmosphere or staging: there is something inherent in the words and sounds themselves that works to unsettle and excite us.

The opening number of the duet was a spectacular success at the 1847 premiere and, as contemporary accounts attest, was regularly encored multiple times on any given evening. One reviewer cited it as one of 'at least three excellent pieces' in the opera (the other two were the cutthroats' chorus in Act II and the sleepwalking scene), referring to this moment specifically as one 'where maestro Verdi has arrived at Shakespeare's sublimity'.[75] Barbieri-Nini, Verdi's first Lady Macbeth, notes in her reminiscences of the rehearsal process that 'you may think I am exaggerating, but it was rehearsed more than a hundred and fifty times so that it might be closer to *speech* than to *singing*, as the Maestro would say'.[76] Exaggeration or no, the importance Verdi placed on this scene is clear, and that so much of his work went into its specific acoustic qualities is worth stressing here. The *misterioso*, *sotto voce*, and *voce suffocata* indications in the score only begin to hint at just what sort of sound Verdi was hoping to draw out of his singers if the exceedingly high number of rehearsals is any indication.

Some of the scene's extraordinary success ('something unbelievable, something new, unprecedented' as Barbieri-Nini also recounted) might be attributed to its remarkable ability to recreate the sense of unease Shakespeare's original offers.[77] In a fascinating study on word frequency in the play, Jonathan Hope and Michael Whitmore note a marked shift towards definite article usage rather than indefinite articles when

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[75] Antonio Calvi, 'Prima rappresentazione del Macbeth del M. Verdi', *Il Ricogliotore*, 15 March 1847. Reproduced and translated in *Sourcebook*, 380.
[76] Reproduced in ibid., 51. Emphasis in original.
[77] Ibid., 52.

compared with Shakespeare's corpus as a whole. It might be easy to neglect function words in studying word frequency, they suggest, but it is precisely those which often 'raise the most interesting problems of explanation'.

> Common sense suggests that an increased use of definite articles should make the play more definite than Shakespeare's other work. This is puzzling, though, since the subjective experience of reading the play, as suggested by generations of literary scholars, is not one of definiteness, but rather of *indefinition* […]. This mismatch between subjective impression and objective finding is interesting, precisely because it is counter-intuitive and difficult to explain.[78]

Assessing this scene in its entirety (Verdi's five-part *scena* corresponds to II.ii in the play, though the first fourteen lines are mostly absent in the opera), the authors point out how Lady Macbeth references *the* owl that shrieked and *the* crickets that cried, *the* 'fatal bellman, / Which gives *the* stern'st good-night' (II.ii.4–5), and so on. As they suggest, the expectation in English is that '*new* information, like this, is introduced using indefinite articles, while *given* information (something we already know about) is marked with definite articles'. Her choice of determiner 'shifts the owl from the immediate, specific "now" of the play into a less determinate mythological space and time. The owl becomes an idea, rather than a thing', and 'this assumption of knowledge produces the murky, claustrophobic feeling critics have often detected in *Macbeth*: it gives the feeling that everything has been decided already'.[79] They point to other areas in the play where this tendency seems to take hold of the characters, too, as in the beginning of Macbeth's 'If it were done, when 'tis done' speech of the previous act (I.vii.1–7), where he references

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[78] Jonathan Hope and Alexander Whitmore, 'The Language of *Macbeth*', in *Macbeth: State of Play*, op. cit., 200. Emphasis in original.
[79] Ibid., 201.

th'assassination; *the* consequence; *this* blow; *the* be-all and *the* end-all; *this* bank and shoal of time; and *the* life to come, with the end result being a 'tension in the language' wherein 'unfamiliar, abstract concepts and formal terms are presented as if they were familiar, everyday things. The language behaves as if the things it talks about were certain, but it deals with abstracts, concepts, metaphors'.[80] Though the authors are talking about the 'subjective experience of *reading* the play', the same experiences might reasonably be expected, if not heightened, from its auditors, too.

Rokison, borrowing also from Robert Miola, has argued that early modern education and culture would have 'encouraged the development of "acute inner ears that could appreciate sonic effects" and lead to the acquisition of an "extraordinary sensitivity to language, especially to its sound"'.[81] While article choice might at first glance seem to be more of semantic than sonic import, it is worth bearing in mind that psychological studies suggest that our hearing of words, as opposed to imaging or reading them, yields a higher retention rate in our ability to recognise and/or recall that information that has been presented to us; a cursory glance at the texts might yield the ability to think retroactively (or even write) about these items Macbeth and his wife discuss with what we perceive to be the 'appropriate' articles—they talk about *an* owl, they hear *a* cricket, and so on.[82] But in fact the play or opera *as performed* enables interpretations that stress these words, or at the very least are more likely to cue us in to the discomfort we feel at hearing about *the* owl or *the* fatal bellman without knowing what or who these definite

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[80] Ibid., 202.
[81] Abigail Rokison, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking*, 88.
[82] For an indicative study, see Maura Pilotti, David A. Gallo, and Henry L. Roediger, 'Effects of hearing words, imagining hearing words, and reading on auditory implicit and explicit memory tests, *Memory and Cognition* 28, no. 8 (December 2000): 1406–18.

referents are alluding to specifically. Recall Wilbourne's earlier-cited comments on how spoken theatre 'relied in large part on the communicative and signifying capacities of sound itself' and how the aurality of the printed word proves a 'forceful impetus to think through the script to the scene of performance and the importance of sound', or even Somville's assertion that 'breath, accent, and rhythm were keys to understanding the meaning of words and phrases' in Verdi's opera. Within *Macbeth*, then, the language, function, and even enunciation of words often tell us something seemingly in contrast with the content of those words; 'the determiner calls attention to the fact that the listener does not know the noun being discussed, and indeed, could not know such a thing', to quote Hope and Whitmore once again.[83]

The attention to minute details of language in Shakespeare's playtext might be fruitfully compared to Lassus's study of Verdi's opera. She argues in this scene, for instance, that /t/ and /r/ phonemes mark the aggressiveness of Lady Macbeth when compared to her husband, whose vocal gestures betray a 'notable weakness'. In a line like Macbeth's 'Or consuman le streghe i lor misteri' (near the end of the *scena*, shortly before the first tolling of the bell) she likewise suggests that the combination of occlusive and nasal sounds in the text engenders a timbre capable of arousing in the listener 'the troubling sensation of fragility and sonic density'.[84] Such sonic fragility, I would suggest, is yet another way in which Verdi and Piave manage to use the acoustics of the speech to reinforce our understanding of Macbeth's characterisation at this moment: he is scared and frightened, beleaguered by feverish visions of chimeras, evil witches, a personified

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[83] Jonathan Hope and Alexander Whitmore, 'The Language of *Macbeth*', 204.
[84] '…une faiblesse notoire', Marie-Pierre Lassus, *Le voix impure*, 168; '…engendré ce timbre, propice à éveiller chez l'auditeur la sensation troublante de fragilité et de densité sonore', in ibid., 177.

and murderous Night gliding through the darkness like a ghost (*come fantasma per l'ombre si striscia*), and begging the earth not to echo his footsteps, all set to a musical line that Verdi suggests should be sung mysteriously (*misterioso*, m. 43). It is only at the tolling of the bell that his resolve begins to turn—*È desio…quel bronzo, ecco, m'invita!* As small of a detail as preference for definite over indefinite articles in Shakespeare's text, or the specific phonemic contents of Verdi's duet, might appear, taken together they serve as a testament to the fact that even the smallest of words and sounds can have a cumulative impact on the way we perceive a theatrical performance, spoken *or* sung.

Though space precludes a detailed analysis for each of the remaining three sections of the duet, there are some significant occurrences in each worth pointing out. Much as in the *tempo d'attacco*, composer and librettist alike devote a considerable amount of time to having their characters discourse upon sound and speech in the *adagio* (or *secondo tempo*). The shift from one section to the next is predicated on a corresponding shift in Shakespeare's original: specifically, when Macbeth stops reporting on what he has heard and said (or not said) and begins to report on the sounds he has imagined (*Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no More…'*, II.ii.36). As remarked upon earlier, the poetic structure changes in the libretto here as well, shifting from *settenario* to *senario doppio* (independent double-lines of six syllables apiece). Piave's strategy for this portion of the text is to adapt Macbeth's speech so that Lady speaks in verbal parallels to her husband's utterances, parallels mostly absent in the original (Lady Macbeth *does* respond to her husband's 'Methought I heard a voice cry' with 'Who was it that thus cried' [II.ii.45], but the other responses are all new). Noting that Lady's responses sound in isolation, as opposed to the orchestral support offered to her husband,

Hudson suggests that the impact of her speech here 'lies not just in the musical contrast, but in the quality of voice they invoke, together with the instrumentation'.[85] It should be recalled that Verdi, in an earlier-cited letter, suggested that the whole scene 'will have to be sung sotto voce, but in a hollow voice such as to arouse terror'. What might the lack of orchestral support for Lady suggest for our understanding of the scene? On the practical level, an unaccompanied line would no doubt aid in making sure the *sotto voce* speech/song hybrid Verdi called for would be conveyed to audiences, but this surely would not be the only reason, as Verdi's instructions related to the entire scene, and the accompaniment is only stopping for one of the two singers here. The orchestral support Macbeth receives might add weight and credibility to his fevered visions—the players supplying literal *and* metaphorical heft to his delirium. If so, the orchestral silence 'accompanying' Lady's part here would offer an appropriate pairing to her argument that his anxieties are unfounded and unsupported—that Macbeth's fears and the music supporting them are but sound and fury, signifying nothing. Verdi offers no solid answers to this in his own writings, but directors might certainly play to the strengths sound and silence offer up in the text. Again, the way in which we come to know this opera through sound is dependent on a variety of factors irreducible to text-music relations or music-theoretical analyses.

As the couple hears a knocking at the gate, real and imagined sound-worlds collide. The noise startles Macbeth, now alone (his wife has gone to attend to the sound), and causes him to reflect on his current situation, prompting the lines Verdi advised his singer at the time to pay great care to: *Oh, questa mano! / Non potrebbe l'Oceano /*

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[85] Elizabeth Hudson, '"…qualche cosa d'incredibile…": Hearing the invisible in *Macbeth*', 28.

Queste mani a me lavar (Ah, this hand—The Ocean could not wash these hands of

mine').[86] We can see at this point, as we transition into the *tempo di mezzo*, that the shift

that has occurred from the imagined sounds and imagined daggers of the *scena* to a

definitively real knocking that prompts Macbeth's introspective thoughts on the physical

daggers and murder he has just committed. As Hudson remarks, 'the sound path that has

been traversed is vividly illustrated; unlike Lady Macbeth, who, when Macbeth was in

the King's room, heard the orchestral evocation *as* the owl's lament; and unlike Macbeth

himself who first heard a bell and then evoked the sound of a bell, now stage sound and

orchestral sound unite, are heard together; the knocking and the woodwind chord

coincide'.[87] A commenter in England, at one of the first performances of Verdi's opera

there, suggested that 'the staccato exit of the guilty couple at the sound of the knocking'

(at the end of the subsequent coda: yes—*more* knocking was to come in the final portion

of the scene) was one of the more praiseworthy aspects of the work, especially given its

dramatic effect.[88] Many critics were quick to link 'Verdi' and 'noise' in their reviews, but

it was more often for the sake of the maestro's vocal writing or approach to

instrumentation. Shaw, for example, once said Verdi's 'worst sins as a composer have

been sins against the human voice', while another reviewer lamented that Verdi, 'like all

modern Italian writers, is a victim to a passion for instruments of brass and percussion'

and that 'this love of noise is the curse of our modern writers'.[89] Fewer take notice of the

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[86] For the sake of consistency, I adopt the phrasing as it appears in the translation of Verdi's letter in *Sourcebook*, 31.

[87] Elizabeth Hudson, '"…qualche cosa d'incredibile…": Hearing the invisible in *Macbeth*', 27.

[88] The review from the *Birmingham Daily Post*, dated 28 August 1860, is quoted in Paul Rodmell, '"Double, double, toil and trouble": Producing *Macbeth* in Mid-Victorian Britain', *Verdi Forum* 30 (2003): 30.

[89] Shaw's comments are quoted in Gary Schmidgall, *Shakespeare and Opera*; the other review appears in John Graziano, 'The Reception of Verdi in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York', in *Verdi 2001*, op. cit., 818.

broader Verdian soundscape, however. The knocking in the *tempo di mezzo* and the coda are merely one point of many in which composer and librettist were able to create a distinct and immersive sound world, from word choice and phonemic content to stage sounds and more.

III. 'Be large in mirth; anon we'll drink a measure the table round'

Unlike the dagger scene, Lady Macbeth's drinking song has been denigrated by music scholars and critics alike. In a recent monograph cited above, Geoffrey Riggs could still refer to it as 'perfunctory' and as a number that 'just barely passes muster', and Matthew Ruggiero, in a comparative study of the libretto with that of the playtext, says of the scene that 'it does not rise above the commonplace'.[90] Some in attendance at the opera's first performances were no less dismissive. One reviewer at the 1847 premiere opined that, with this scene, Verdi 'wrote no longer masterfully, but commercially', while another spoke dismissively of 'the jovial toast sung by [Macbeth's] wily spouse'. A journalist reviewing its Parisian premiere also claimed that 'Shakespeare . . . often eludes M. Verdi', and Christopher Wilson in 1922 claimed that 'very little of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* gets through' in this opera, no doubt because of scenes like this.[91] Certainly, at first blush the idea of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth leading a drinking song might seem out of place. Verdi and Piave took their lead here from her spouse's lines (III.iv.10–11), quoted in the heading above, and for the song's reprise from Macbeth's later exhortation,

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[90] Geoffrey S. Riggs, *The Assoluta Voice in Opera, 1794–1847* (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland, 2003), 189; Matthew John Ruggiero, 'Verdi's "Macbeth" Libretto and Its Literary Context' (PhD diss., Boston University, 1993), 175–76.

[91] The relevant portions of Enrico Montazio's and G. Stefanis's1845 reviews, as well as Paul Ferry's for the 1865 Parish production, can be found in *Sourcebook*, 385, 399, and 405, respectively. For Christopher Wilson, see *Shakespeare and Music* (London: 'The Stage' Office, 1922), 56.

just before the reappearance of the Ghost: 'Give me some wine, fill full. / I drink to the general joy o'the whole table' (86–87). This is seemingly little to go on given the length and prominence accorded the *brindisi* within the act. The scene could thus be held up by detractors as an example of a weak excuse for Verdi to acquiesce to operatic conventions that called for such a number, and as fodder for critics and scholars looking to lament the medial shift from spoken drama to sung, or the opera's apparent lack of fidelity to the source material.

Yet several authors have recently begun re-evaluating the number, showing that composer and librettist alike crafted a scene faithful to Shakespeare's original intentions in terms of Lady Macbeth's characterisation. Several key speeches or lines for Shakespeare's Lady that literary scholars have frequently looked to in the course of investigating the playwright's views on gender and femininity are absent in Verdi's adaptation—she does not explicitly call to be 'unsexed' in the opera, for example. Yet this scene, and early audience reactions to it, proves to be a valuable resource for re-examining interlocking questions of gender and noise in opera in much the same way as those omitted portions of the original playscript provides for literary critics. Before assessing the aural details of the drinking scene, it is worth bearing in mind that at least part of the reason for the critical (and no doubt scholarly) displeasure can be tied to matters of gender and sexuality: chastising the aural dramaturgy of Lady Macbeth and her drinking song in many ways appears to be a way of trying to make the prima donna's musical material conform to the more traditional *bel canto* singing style (male) audience members at the time expected to hear. As I will also discuss in my analysis of the sleepwalking scene, the notion of operatic 'noise' oftentimes contains gendered and

sexual implications, and this is certainly true for our understanding of Verdi's Lady Macbeth.

Jane Bernstein's insightful, comparative study on the sleepwalking scene and the potential 'demonic' connexions between Lady Macbeth and the Weird Sisters also suggests that, on the whole, the play is 'loaded with sexual ambiguity' and 'at the centre of this disturbance in normative gender roles is Lady Macbeth'.[92] This assertion certainly holds true for the opera's drinking song, too. As John Severn points out, conventions in the nineteenth century dictated who might sing a *brindisi*, and, until Verdi's *Macbeth*, the form was 'the preserve of male characters'. The scene, he argues, 'breaks incontrovertibly with convention in being sung by a female singer playing a female character, and a noble one at that'.[93] The distinction of 'character' is important here since the question of who sings was not tied to the performer's gender, but the character's: drinking songs written for so-called 'pants' roles—women playing the part of young boys—were occasionally permitted since the character represented on stage was understood as male. All of this becomes clear when we read the infamously scathing review by Luigi Casamorata, penned over the course of several issues in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* shortly following the work's premiere. He calls the scene 'another most unfortunate addition, or amplification' of the original and expounds upon why:

> That a young, mindless soldier like Orsini should sing a toast at a discretely ambiguous
>
> feast such as Negroni's, in *Lucrezia Borgia,* may pass; but that one should be sung by a

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[92] Jane Bernstein, '"Bewitched, bothered and bewildered": Lady Macbeth, sleepwalking, and the demonic in Verdi's Scottish opera', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16, no. 1&2, 'Primal Silences: Proceedings of a Conference Held at the University of California Berkeley', 30 November–2 December 2001 (March 2002): 31.

[93] John R. Severn, 'Adaptation Studies, Convention, Vocal Production and Embodied Meaning in Verdi's *Macbeth*', 32.

> Lady, a Lady Macbeth, and a Lady Macbeth become queen, it seems incredible that a
> human mind should even conceive; even so, one might suffer it if only she sang it seated
> at the table, like Orsini![94]

This break with gender and conventional norms for the *brindisi* can also be seen in the long-drawn-out debate between Verdi and Escudier when the composer was re-working the opera for Paris. On one hand, a desire on the part of the Théâtre Lyrique's impresario Léon Carvalho to shift the drinking song's second verse to Macduff' was likely tied to the fact that the tenor role in *Macbeth* was rather small and they wanted to give their *primo uomo* more to sing. That the opera notably lacked a strong tenor role was commented upon even by reviewers of the earlier Italian version: 'What, I ask you, is an opera without a tenor, or one, at least, in which he has but a role so secondary that it is only at the end of the work that we notice he was there'.[95] Yet Verdi, 'man of the theatre' that he was, knew that enlarging Macduff's role here, in a scene where the character does not even appear in Shakespeare's original, would be ill-advised:

> To have him sing the part of the *brindisi* in Act II would be a mistake and a dramatic
> contradiction. In this scene, Macduff is just a courtier, like everyone else. The important
> character, the dominating demon of this scene, is *Lady Macbeth*; and however much
> *Macbeth* can distinguish himself as an actor, *Lady Macbeth*, I repeat, dominates and
> controls everything. She scolds Macbeth for being *not even a man* and tells the courtiers
> to pay no attention to her husband's delirium—"it is a nervous affliction"—and to better
> reassure them she repeats the *brindisi* with the utmost nonchalance. In this way it is a

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[94] A sizeable portion of the six-part review is reproduced in translation in *Sourcebook*, 385–95; here, 387.
[95] Alessandro Gagliardi's review for the *Revue et Gazette Musicale,* 28 March 1847, is reproduced in *Sourcebook*, 379.

> beautiful, and coming from her lips it has great meaning; from Macduff, it means nothing
>
> and is a contradiction. True, or no?...Admit that I am right.[96]

Escudier broaches the subject again a month later, suggesting that at one point the

impresario took the initiative, trying 'a staging of his own in which he gave Macduff a

suspicious character, lightly suggesting that he distrusted Macbeth', and 'while Lady

Macbeth goes from one guest to another to calm them down', he had the Thane of Fife

sing the second verse of the drinking song. Escudier suggests being 'opposed to this

modification', but 'had to yield to the evidence'. Verdi once again seeks recourse to the

dramatic logic of the Shakespearean original to explain why this should not be. His

response is worth quoting at length:

> M. Carvalho's idea of having the tenor sing the *brindisi* is certainly ingenious, but I am
>
> still of the opinion that this detracts from the overall effect of the *finale*. It seems far more
>
> beautiful and theatrical to me that Lady, yielding to Macbeth's own invitation ('the
>
> cheerful brindisi let sound anew'), should take up the *brindisi* again and finish it.
>
> Moreover, if Macduff expresses suspicions, these words of his would be ill-suited to the
>
> brilliant music of the *brindisi*. And in the meantime, what would Lady do? Be a
>
> *pertichino*? That cannot be: in this scene Lady is, and must be, the dominant character
>
> dramatically as well as musically. In addition, doing this would also compromise the
>
> ensemble *finale* closing the act. Only then, and no sooner, should Macduff become
>
> suspicious and decide to leave the country. Have no fear for *variety* in these scenes, and
>
> reserve the climactic effect for the *finale*. [. . .] I understand perfectly that the purpose of
>
> all this is to give Monjauze something to sing, but these are personal considerations

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[96] Verdi to Escudier, letter dated 4 February 1865, in *Sourcebook*, 99. Emphasis in original. Verdi was responding to a letter of Escudier's, dated two days earlier, in which the publisher suggests that if the tenor 'were to take over the second strophe, instead of the soprano, the second time around the effect of it would perhaps be as great as the first time, and the tenor role would take on importance', in ibid., 97.

> which have nothing to do with the drama and which, I am convinced, are damaging to the drama itself.[97]

Reviews at the time attest to the fact that Escudier and Carvalho did not respect Verdi's wishes, despite their assurances to the contrary.[98] At least one journalist at the time remarked in comments similar to the maestro's that 'the dramatic logic [suffered] somewhat in consequence' of this change, but, believing it to be of Verdi's own design, he acquiesced: 'but that logic so often yields to musical requirements that it would be really childish to quibble with the composer over a change whose effect is so captivating'.[99] That this modification would have helped abate some of the sexual politics of giving the *brindisi* to a woman is likely, given also that a review of one staging at the time attests to Lady Macbeth's *cavatina* being cut 'after the pattern of all *cavatinas*', even as Macduff's reprise of the song was retained.[100] Even in the twentieth century, music journalist Spike Hughes suggests in his book on Verdi operas that having Lady sing the drinking song was attributable to an error of youth: 'an older, more experienced Verdi might have had Macbeth sing a verse of the Brindisi and so pointed to some of Shakespeare's original irony'.[101] Yet this overlooks the fact that an older, more experienced Verdi *did* revisit the opera, and, amidst the many significant changes made to the score and libretto, chose to leave the number as-is; indeed, as evidenced by the

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[97] Escudier's letter to Verdi, dated 25 March, and Verdi's response three days later, is reproduced in ibid., 114–16. As noted in an editorial footnote in the reproduction, a *pertichino*, in the operatic parlance of the time, 'referred to those onstage listening and occasionally adding comments while someone else sang a solo'.

[98] As Lawton points out (*Macbeth*, xxix), the manuscript libretti for the Paris version still assigns the *brindisi* to Lady Macbeth, but both the printed libretto and the Escudier vocal score have Macduff singing the second verse, and with an altered text to boot ('du vin et des amours').

[99] The review is credited to 'Ralph', *L'Art Musical*, 27 April 1865, and appears in *Sourcebook*, 406.

[100] Joseph d'Ortigue, *Journal des Débats*, 29 April 1865. Reproduced in ibid., 409.

[101] Spike Hughes, *Famous Verdi Operas* (London: Robert Hale, 1968), 62.

composer's letters to Escudier, the older Verdi was still quite insistent on the dramatic and musical effectiveness of leaving the drinking song to Lady Macbeth alone. Such wilful refusal to see the merits of the *brindisi* begins to hint at reasons other than 'fidelity to Shakespeare' as the source of uneasiness for commentators both historical and contemporary.

The scene's aural dramaturgy is thus worth further consideration, since, as Severn suggests, Verdi manages here to reinforce two themes of Shakespeare's play which are not immediately apparent by looking at the libretto (or, we might add, the score) alone. Not only does Lady Macbeth 'begin to unsex herself' by 'singing what should be sung by a man and commandeering the room with her movement in an unladylike manner', but also, in so doing, she 'underlines the theme of usurpation'. Just as the couple usurp the throne, he claims, 'so Lady Macbeth usurps the "right" of male characters to sing *brindisi*'.[102] The gendered-feminine nature of the soundscape here is thus more important than the music itself. The male critics in the audience held a set of expectations regarding what *bel canto* prima donnas might do and sing, but the *brindisi* challenged those norms, offering instead a 'dominating demon' who 'controlled everything' on stage, in Verdi's terms. That the same words and melody might have been fine for a male character tells us that it is the sound of the female Lady Macbeth that creates tension in this scene.

Severn's shorter essay on the drinking song draws heavily on the work of French musicologist Marie-Pierre Lassus, whose book-length study on Verdi's opera concentrates largely on linguistic and phonetic aspects of the text, as remarked upon

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[102] John R. Severn, 'Adaptation Studies, Convention, Vocal Production and Embodied Meaning in Verdi's *Macbeth*', 33.

earlier. Citing Verdi's letters to Piave and others involved in the early planning and staging aspects of the opera, as well as the composer's own contributions to the libretto, she argues that *Macbeth* evinces a 'deep sensitivity to timbre,' which he considered a principal agent of expression. 'The word is generally chosen by the composer for its emotional content . . . and for its specific acoustic quality'.[103] The fact that 'the sounds of words and the physical effort required to produce them [should] be treated as creators of meaning as well as the bearers of it', to quote Severn once more, would also seem to be in accord with scholars studying the Shakespearean playtext.[104] Pellikka argues that patterns of sound in the play 'reinforce the meanings of the words, intensify the saying of them, heighten their emotional significance, and often invest the words with ironic subtleties.'[105] Bruce Smith also points out that 'volume control is written into the scripts' of the early modern stage, given the relative volume of voiced and unvoiced consonants, as well as vowel sounds. Citing an example from *Hamlet*, he suggests that 'a concentration of consonants—particularly [m], [l], [n], and [ŋ]—positively require the actor playing Ophelia to speak relatively softly when she says '*M*y lord, *I* haue re*memb*ra*n*ces of yours / That I haue *lo*ng*e*d *long* to redeliver''.[106] In broader terms, sound scholars have recently begun studying voice and aurality as somatic experiences, too. Brandon LaBelle, for instance, has suggested that

> to theorise the performativity of the spoken is to confront the tongue, the teeth, the lips, and the throat; it is to feel the mouth as a fleshy, wet lining around each syllable, as well

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[103] '…témoignent d'une réceptivité profonde à l'égard du timbre, considéré ici comme principal agent de l'expression: le mot est généralement choisi par le compositeur en fonction de son contenu émotionnel . . . et de sa qualité acoustique spécifique'. Marie-Pierre Lassus, *Le voix impure*, 22.

[104] John R. Severn, 'Adaptation Studies, Convention, Vocal Production and Embodied Meaning in Verdi's *Macbeth*', 37.

[105] Paul Pellikka, '"Strange things I have in head, that will to hand"', 16.

[106] Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, 225–26. Emphasis in original.

> as a texturing orifice that marks the voice with specificity, not only in terms of accent or
>
> dialect, but also the depth of expression so central to the body.

He adds, moreover, that 'the mouth requires greater attention within discourses on the

performativity of the body and the politics of voice', a topic also taken up in Christof

Migone's *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body* (2012).[107] Along these

lines, Lassus and Severn show how such careful word choice—and even phoneme

choice—can impact our understanding of the characters in the opera, just as they can

when we hear Shakespeare's original.

Severn, for instance, points out that unvoiced stops—namely, /p/, /t/, /tʃ/, and

/k/—are particularly prominent in the *brindisi* (as they are in the sleepwalking scene, too)

and that these sounds must be negotiated carefully when singing, even more so in Italian,

where the interruption in sound-flow of a double consonant is particularly noticeable.

Librettists must therefore be 'careful in their distribution of these sounds', he suggests

while also noting that 'the interruption in airflow can be put to dramatic use, creating the

effect of a sob, or a break in the voice, especially when it occurs on an offbeat'.[108] The

first two measures of the song, for instance, feature a /k/ on the downbeat, with additional

stress added on the second iteration of the sound with Verdi's indication of a *marcato*

sign. This emphasis, Severn intimates, both vocally and musically 'suggests a powerful

character in control of her musical material' right from the start.[109] We can also observe

several examples of the sonic power of these consonants within the drinking song by

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[107] Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1, 2.

[108] John R. Severn, 'Adaptation Studies, Convention, Vocal Production and Embodied Meaning in Verdi's *Macbeth*', 36.

[109] Ibid., 37.

attending to a number of mid- to low-register trills Verdi asks for on words such as 'die' (*muoia*, m. 83), 'wound' (*ferita*, mm. 101–02), 'life' (*vita*, m. 104), and 'heart' (*cor*, m. 105). When one considers the words on which these emphasis-inducing trills occur, 'their presence, and the visible and audible difficulty in their production, appear to be dramatically significant'. Lady Macbeth is 'physically shaken by these murderous images' Severn asserts.[110] He also refers us to David Lawton's commentary on mm. 94–98 in the critical edition of the score (at the lines 'e regni / Qui solo amor'), highlighting multiple revisions at this point and suggesting that 'Verdi's aim was to create awkward and disconcerting shifts in the register'.[111] Again, the aural dramaturgy is meant to disturb, to offer up an equivalent soundscape to that suggested by Shakespeare's playtext for the climactic banquet scene. In the original, Lady Macbeth alternates between fiercely whispering to her husband, urging him to regain his sanity, and trying to cover for him, offering guests various excuses to explain away her husband's erratic behaviour. Now, the somewhat out-of-control ornamentations intruding into this deceptively cheery song seem to serve the same purpose, disclosing the unsettling troubles that lie beneath the festive occasion. As we saw with the earlier Act I duet, Verdi and Piave are able here to marshal specific phonemic qualities and vocal delivery styles to suggest an acoustic profile befitting this 'dominating demon'.

Noting the text/event dialectic discussed at the beginning of this chapter, it is also worth highlighting, that many of the apparent registral irregularities, awkward phrasings, and metrical anomalies are often edited by singers in performances, and especially for

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[110] Ibid., 38.
[111] Ibid., 39.

recordings. 'Adaptation scholars who rely on recordings of modern vocal performance',

Severn warns, 'must also take into account modern conventions, especially the

convention that a Verdian singer should sound in control of her musical material in

commercial recordings'. His elaboration is worth quoting in detail:

> The physical effort required to produce awkwardly placed trills and other ornamentation, to negotiate shifts in registration and to produce unvoiced stops and doubled stops (if indeed the singer follows the score) are all perceptible by audiences of live performances, but far less so for listeners to the disembodied voices of CD recordings—and sometimes not at all when recordings are digitally edited. The problem is particularly acute in the case of *Macbeth*, as recordings of the opera rarely follow Verdi's instructions in relation to the *brindisi*, tending instead to smooth out the unbalanced aspects of the carefully crafted score, creating something closer to the expected rhythmically regular diegetic song that allows the singer to appear to be in control of her vocal line.[112]

The topic of staging will be taken up in the following chapter, and the impact of

recording technology in Chapter 4. I bring up the point Severn is making here to highlight

that, yet again, we would appear to see conductors, singers, and stage directors

attempting to reign in a seemingly unruly Lady Macbeth, domesticating the unsettling

atmosphere Verdi sought to create through his close attention to phonic, musical, and

dramatic detail, offering in its place a more conventionally acceptable acoustic profile:

one fit for a queen.

'Acting singly or in combination,' Pellikka says of Shakespeare's play, 'many

verbal effects are at work to create the tonal fabric of *Macbeth*'. Later in the same article,

he also asserts that 'the effect of the sounds whispers through the verse lines, creating

echoes of sense as well as sounds. Those words linked by alliterative consonance are

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[112] Ibid., 40.

often the key words in the overall meaning of the lines and seem to need special emphasis'.[113] Madeleine Doran and David Kranz similarly offer a close look at the aural rhetoric and metrical features of the play, but if I may quote just one more study along these lines, I would like to return to the scholarship of Jonathan Hope and Michael Whitmore, who as we saw with the dagger scene, analysed word frequency in the play and compared it to that in Shakespeare's corpus writ large. The details of their study brought to light the text's unusual prevalence of definite articles ('the owl', 'the fatal bellman', and so on). Once again, they argue that 'this assumption of knowledge produces the murky, claustrophobic feeling critics have often detected in *Macbeth*: it gives us the feeling that everything has been decided already'. Put another way, they suggest that 'there is thus a tension in the language: unfamiliar, abstract concepts and formal terms are presented as if they were familiar, everyday things'. It 'behaves as if the things it talks about were certain', but in reality only deals with abstract concepts.[114] Though not all of the referents and (their attendant direct or indirect articles) appear in the opera's libretto, both Macbeths do refer to *the* owl ('il gufo', 'del gufo', and so on) at various points in the dagger scene, suggesting a similar aural effect there, too. Studies like Doran's and Kranz's, as well as Hope and Whitmore's, also recall Verdi's letter to Ricordi, cited earlier, about the importance of 'theatrical words' ('words that carve out a situation or a character')—yet another instance wherein composer and playwright were in accord.

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[113] Paul Pellikka, '"Strange things I have in head, that will to hand"', 16, 18.
[114] Jonathan Hope and Michael Whitmore, 'The Language of *Macbeth*', 202.

Wilbourne in her survey of *commedia dell'arte* performance practice suggests that this earlier theatre 'succeeded not in spite of its moments of unintelligibility, but because the sound of the words remained meaningful even where the words themselves were impossible to understand'.[115] Severn's and Lassus's studies on the phonemic and linguistic profiles of these numbers in Verdi's opera suggest the same. Gary Schmidgall gets at something similar when comparing the playwright's works with the operatic genre, insisting that 'an actor must bestir himself to recognise and explore the elaborate composition of sounds and convey not only the bare sense but also the various pleasures of vocalisation for its own sake. That aural pleasure is to be heard everywhere, even when a ghastly character like Lady Macbeth, Richard III, or Iago in the limelight, is both a Shakespearian and an operatic principle'.[116] Just as Shakespeare's plays each have distinctive aural and verbal profiles that set them apart from one another—each featuring their own soundscapes and acoustemologies, we might say—so too does the composer here construct a sonic world wherein Lady Macbeth's acoustic profile says as much about her character as the words and melodies she sings. From word choice and phonemic content to Verdi's descriptive timbral markers in the score, verbal (and written) injunctions to his singers, the operatic Lady's subversion of gender and feminine norms are coded into the very sounds of the text itself.

Before turning to my final scene study, I would like to revisit Severn's idea, quoted above, that this number represents a crucial moment for Lady Macbeth's characterisation within the opera and one that 'contributes to a moral engagement with

[115] Emily Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell'Arte*, 50.
[116] Gary Schmidgall, *Shakespeare and Opera*, 20.

Shakespeare's play'. It may seem difficult at first to find the value in this number's engagement with the original playtext, given the small reference to drinking Macbeth utters and which served as the basis for Verdi's and Piave's *brindisi*, but looking at its placement within the larger banquet scene proves enlightening. Gils de Van offers in his book an examination of the libretto's compression of the Shakespeare text at the point where Macbeth confronts the ghost of Banquo. This is listed as Scene VI in the libretto; the first verse of the drinking song and the interruption by the assassins occupy the two scenes prior, and the reprise of the *brindisi* and subsequent reactions by the dinner guests (i.e., the remainder of the act) is classified as Scene VII.[117] In his analysis, de Van italicises the lines that were 'transposed into the Italian rendering unchanged', a distinction I reproduce here, too:

> MACBETH: *Which of you have done this?*
> CHORUS: *What*, my good lord?
> MACBETH: *Thou canst not say I did it: never shake*
>   *Thy gory locks at me*.
> CHORUS: Gentlemen, rise; *his highness is not well.*
> LADY MACBETH: *Sit*, worthy friends; my lord is often thus,
>   And hath been from his youth. Pray you, keep seat.
>   *The fit is momentary*; upon a thought
>   He will again be well. If much you note him
>   You shall offend him, and extend his passion.
>   Feed, and regard him not. [to *Macbeth*] *Are you*
>   *a man?*
> MACBETH: *Ay, and a bold one that dare look on that*
>   *Which might appal the devil.*
> LADY MACBETH: O, proper stuff!
>   This is the very painting of your fear:
>   This is the very air-drawn dagger which you said
>   Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts,
>   Imposters to true fear, would well become
>   A woman's story at a winter's fire,
>   Authorized by her grandmam. Shame itself.
>   Why do you make such faces? When all's done,
>   You look but on a stool.
> MACBETH: Prithee see there!
>   *Behold, look, lo,* how say you?
>   [to *Ghost*] Why, what care I? *If thou canst nod,*
>   *speak too.*

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[117] I draw on the scenic divisions as listed in the 1847 libretto, reproduced in *Sourcebook*, 471–78.

> If charnel-houses and *our graces must send*
> *Those that we bury back*, our monuments
> Shall be the maws of kites. [Exit *Ghost*] (III.iv.49–70)[118]

As Clausen points out in his own analysis of the scene, Lady Macbeth is given 'a more undaunted mettle' at this point in the opera, 'not by transferring to her some of Macbeth's lines, but by omitting the entire private exchange between the Macbeths immediately upon the guests' departure'. Part of this, he concedes, would be due to operatic convention and the need to tighten the dramatic pacing, but one of the resulting consequences is that, contrary to her Shakespearean counterpart, Verdi's Lady Macbeth has 'no opportunity to falter'.[119] Her scepticism about the ghost 'seems less forceful in the opera' when compared with Shakespeare, though, as Clausen also suggests: 'the very painting of your fear', 'a woman's story at a winter's fire', 'you look but on a stool' are all gone. Yet musically, Lady's *brindisi* helps restore her important presence at the banquet in an acoustically nuanced way. I have argued above that phonemic and semantic decisions relating to word-choice and acoustic affect have been carefully structured in the drinking song. That the two rounds of the drinking song occur at 'crucial dramatic junctures' (to quote John Knowles) within the banquet scene would seem only to underscore this idea further: since each appearance of the *brindisi* 'corresponds to a toast in the original version', Knowles argues, 'Verdi respects both the spirit and the letter of his model'.[120] In Severn's own aurally-sensitive analysis of the scene, he posits that the 'choice of phonemes in the libretto and Verdi's detailed instructions for ornamentation,

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[118] Gilles de Van, *Verdi's Theater,* 81–82. Note that for the sake of consistency, I have amended the lineation and punctuation of the scene in question to accord with that of the (Third Series) Arden edition of the play, which has been my main point of reference throughout.
[119] Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 99.
[120] John Knowles, 'The Banquet Scene from Verdi's *Macbeth*: An Experiment in Large-Scale Musical Form', in *Sourcebook*, 288.

expression and phrasing signal a character engaged in a struggle to maintain self-control, whose fearfulness frequently threatens to break through the façade of fearlessness'.[121] Earlier, we saw how her unaccompanied chastisement of Macbeth in the Act I duet might have offered an acoustic counterpoint to her claim that her husband's fears—given added weight by the orchestra—were unsupported and unfounded. Now, her sonic profile is once again a clue to our understanding of her character. The progressive aural dramaturgy Verdi uses in the drinking scene to paint a picture of 'a Lady, a Lady Macbeth, and a Lady Macbeth become queen', in Casmorata's words, may have been at odds with what nineteenth-century opera critics had in mind as far as gender norms in the *bel canto* tradition were concerned, but then again, that was precisely the point of the scene for Verdi. Others have debated how in control our operatic Lady is in this scene; Clausen suggests that her music 'demarcates a territory of self-control on which Macbeth's encroaching disintegration is played out', for example). While that debate must remain outside the purview of this case study, questions linking sound, song, gender, and madness will certainly all continue to remain relevant as we consider the sleepwalking scene.[122]

IV. 'Foul whisperings are abroad': Gender, Noise, and Sleepwalking

Given the nature of operatic adaptation, much from the original play inevitably needed to be pruned as it was turned into a libretto. It is a truism that it simply takes longer to develop ideas musically than through the spoken word. That being said, the prominence Verdi gives to Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene might perhaps be

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[121] John R. Severn, 'Adaptation Studies, Convention, Vocal Production and Embodied Meaning in Verdi's *Macbeth*', 36.
[122] Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 157.

surprising at first, given its comparative length in Shakespeare's play. Unlike the drinking

song that the composer and librettist were able to extract and expand upon (based on only

one or two of Macbeth's lines), this scene is of course a prominent climax in the original;

still, the *gran scena del sonnambulismo* as it unfolds in Verdi's adaptation— for nearly

one-third of the final act—occupies considerably more time than in it does in

Shakespeare's work, where it accounts for only about one-eighth of the equivalent

material.[123] Again, this is tied closely to the aural dramaturgy of the scene. Verdi and his

librettists (his letters attest to bringing in Andrea Maffei to fix Piave's sub-par verse for a

number of scenes, this being one of them) manage to retain nearly all of Lady Macbeth's

lines, which means that to set all of that text to music required a lengthy set piece.[124]

Jane Bernstein, in her analysis of the scene, suggests that the operatic Lady

Macbeth's performance is 'centred not only on the voice but on the body of the prima

donna', and Daniel Albright argues similarly that the scene 'beautifully captures the way

in which the disintegration of customary melody reflects the disintegration of the body',

stressing also that 'the emphasis is on gesture and on the singer's physical body, [. . .]

pointing to ballet-pantomime instead of opera'.[125] In both cases these studies do fine

work highlighting the physical, bodily presence exerted by performers, similar to

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[123] Of course, there is something to be said about the brevity of the original, too. Shakespeare essentially silences Lady Macbeth following the banquet by making her disappear following the scene; she has no part in plotting to kill the Macduffs like she does in Verdi's adaptation. The force and intensity of this relatively brief scene is all the more powerful because of her prolonged absence from the stage prior to her re-emergence here.

[124] The extent to which Maffei was involved in re-tooling sections of the libretto is not entirely clear, but a letter of Verdi's to Tito Ricordi acknowledges at least *some* involvement: 'Since I found things to criticize in the versification, I asked Maffei, with the consent of Piave himself, to go over those lines, and rewrite entirely the *witches' chorus* from Act III, as well as the *sleepwalking scene*'. The letter appears in translation and in the original Italian in *Sourcebook*, 69, letter dated 11 April 1857. Emphasis in original. For other scenes showing signs of Maffei's intervention, see David Lawton, *Macbeth*, xxxiv.

[125] Jane Bernstein, '"Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered"', 45; Daniel Albright, *Musicking Shakespeare*, 184.

scholarship done in the same vein by Eidsheim, Trower, and Abbate, mentioned in my Introduction. I would also suggest, however, that we can also think of more than just the singing and the bodily gestures. The aural dramaturgy of this scene, like the others I have considered above, is impacted by more than just these two factors and impacts how we come to know and understand these characters through sound.

In Shakespeare's play, Lady Macbeth's text is entirely in prose, in accordance with other scenes of genuine madness in the author's oeuvre (as opposed to near- or feigned madness, which may still allow for speaking in verse. Compare Ophelia's madness with Hamlet's 'madness', for instance, or even Macbeth in the dagger scene, wherein his blank verse stands to suggest some greater degree of sanity than his wife's prose).[126] The Doctor observing her somnambulism switches to prose towards the end of the scene, but Lady Macbeth's shift to prose, as we might expect, serves a dramatic purpose here. For Clausen, the text 'derives much of its dramaturgical effectiveness from the jumbled together, freely associative thought process by which it enacts mental instability'.[127] From a poetic perspective, Lady's speech pattern in the opera is anything but 'jumbled together'. The rhyme scheme in place when she begins to sing is the standard *ottonari* pattern (eight syllables, accents typically falling on the third and seventh syllables), a metre so pervasive in nineteenth-century Italian libretti at the time that Arrigo Boito, Verdi's collaborator for his other Shakespeare operas, would condemn it as 'the most tedious asset in the entire metrical repertoire'.[128] The verse structure is quite intricate, too, with interlocking rhyme schemes that operate within and between the

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[126] Admittedly, some of Hamlet's 'mad' speeches also feature prose, as in his Act II exchange with Polonius for instance.
[127] Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 134.
[128] Clausen is offering an English paraphrase of the Italian original, quoted in ibid., 135.

six quatrains (grouped in three pairs), and with the material even more impressively

distributed in some instances over partial and/or shared lines between Lady Macbeth, the

Doctor, and the Lady-in-Waiting, all while maintaining its tight metrical formation, as

seen below.

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LADY:            Una macchia, è qui tuttora.        a
                 Via, ti dico, o maledetta!         b
                 Una…due…gli è questa l'ora!        a
                 Tremi tu? Non osi entrar?           c
                 Un guerrier così codardo?           d
                 Oh, vergogna!…Orsù, t'affretta!     b
                 Chi poteva in quel vegliardo        d
                 Tanto sangue immaginar?             c
MEDICO:              Che parlò?…
LADY:                Di Fiffe il Sire                e
                 Sposo e padre or or non era?        f
                 Che n'avvenne?…
                         E mai pulire                e
                 Queste mani io non saprò?           g
DAMA E MEDICO:   Oh terror!
LADY:                Di sangue umano                 h
                 Sa qui sempre…Arabia intera         f
                 Rimondar sì piccol mano             h
                 Co' suoi balsami non può            g
                 Oimè!
MEDICO:              Geme?
LADY:                I panni indossa                 i
                 Della note…Or via, ti sbratta!…     j
                 Banco è spento, e dalla fossa       i
                 Chi morì non surse ancor.           k
MEDICO:              Questo ancor?…
LADY:                A letto, a letto…               l
                 Sfar non puoi la cosa fatta…        j
                 Batte alcuno!…Andiam, Macbetto,     l
                 Non, t'accusi il tuo pallor!        k
DAMA E MEDICO:   Ah, di lei pietà, Signor!           k
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Verdi, moreover, reinforces sound with sense here. The rhymes can be distinctly heard

even through the intricate poetic structure, shifts in orchestral texture help reinforce the

movement of one stanza to the next, and textual pauses coincide with musical rests.[129]

The musical regularity that the composer affords Lady Macbeth in this scene may be

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[129] Along with Clausen, who offers an analysis similar to mine above (ibid., 135ff), Jonas Barish, following another such guide, also offers a comparable breakdown of the text-music relationship. For more see his 'Madness, Hallucination, and Sleepwalking', in *Sourcebook*, 150–51.

connected with operatic conventions associated with mad scenes, though whether or not Verdi intended this scene to be heard as such is a matter of some debate. The ties between music, sound, gender, and madness already apparent in my analysis of the *brindisi* will thus return later in this section, but sound and sense are linked through other musical means here as well. Bernstein points towards a particular musical figure, an ascending scale that outlines the tritone, as appearing at a number of significant points in the opera. This 'demonic musical cliché', as she calls it, not only marks the beginning of the sleepwalking scene (in the orchestra), but connects to several other key passages in the opera: we hear it during Macbeth's hallucinatory dagger scene and his death scene in the final act, and, as Severn has pointed out, it also appears in chromatic form during the *brindisi*.[130] It would thus be difficult to connect the sound exclusively to Lady Macbeth, 'dominating demon' though she may be, as it also figures in numbers involving her husband; nevertheless, the motive provides another auditory link that helps to unify the opera's soundscape through its recurrence at several crucial moments of high mental stress for both husband and wife.

As suggested earlier, Severn's thoughtful semantic and phonemic analysis of the drinking song was heavily indebted to Lassus's monograph, which studied the opera through a similar lens. Though Lassus does not treat the *brindisi* at length, she does offer a similar look at the sleepwalking scene. Much as in the drinking song (and as already commented on in that section), Lassus observes 'the existence of a troublesome tension felt by the listener on contact with the voice of the performer', in part because of the

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[130] Jane Bernstein, '"Bewitched, bothered and Bewildered"', 39 (musical example on p. 40); John R. Severn, 'Adaptation Studies, Convention, Vocal Production and Embodied Meaning in Verdi's *Macbeth*', 33.

effort and tension created through the sound of certain consonants that are more prominent in the scene than elsewhere (especially /n/, /r/, and /t/).[131] This also calls to mind those studies of Hope and Whitmore's, Kranz's, and Doran's, all of which likewise attest to the various ways in which word choice and other strategies of aural rhetoric affect our understanding of Shakespeare's work and contribute to our sense of unease in the play. Both Shakespeare and Verdi (with the help of his librettists) are thus able to create theatrical soundscapes to similar effect, despite the differences in medium.

As far as the phonemic properties of the sleepwalking scene are concerned, Lassus underscores that the prevalence of occlusives (consonants whose sounds are created by blocking, or occluding, airflow, such as the sounds produced with 'stops' /p/, /t/, and /k/, as well as 'nasals' /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/) reveals 'the force and violence deployed depending on the point of articulation and the specific acoustic characteristics'. She suggests, moreover, that the significant portion of double occlusives that characterise the acoustic profile of the somnambulism scene 'contributes significantly to the effect of tension produced by the performer's voice'.[132] David Lawton in the critical edition notes Verdi's 'search for novel vocal effects' in this opera and suggests that the most detailed markings the composer offers in this regard are to be found in the Act I duet and the sleepwalking scene. Comparing the phonemic analyses of the drinking and sleepwalking scenes, however, suggests to me that the *brindisi* also demonstrates such a quest for acoustic novelty, even if the markings there are less suggestive. Indeed, Lawton also

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[131] '…existence d'une tension pénible, ressentie par l'auditeur, au contact de la voix de l'interprète', Marie-Pierre Lassus, *La voix impure*, 41. The first chapter of Lassus's book is dedicated to the somnambulism scene and offers a more nuanced and detailed phonemic analysis of each strophe.

[132] 'Si l'on examine à présent les différentes espèces d'occlusives qui caractérisent le sonorité de la scène de somnambulisme, on peut mettre à jour la force et la violence déployées selon le point d'articulation et les traits sonores'; 'La proportion notoire d'occlusives géminées dans la scène de somnambulisme, contribue pour une large part à l'effet de tension produit par la voix l'interprète…', in ibid., 43, 44.

argues that, in the Act II finale, Verdi 'sought to delineate Lady Macbeth's character with specific vocal effects' and notes that the 'detailed phrasing and articulation marks should be studied in conjunction with what he wrote to Barbieri-Nini.[133] Just as with the *brindisi*, Verdi and his librettists choose to employ these 'problematic consonants' (to borrow Severn's term) even more often in the sleepwalking scene than they occur in regular Italian speech.[134] Severn's comments regarding how such phonemic difficulties impacted singers for the drinking song—evident through his study of recorded performances— might prove an interesting point of comparison with this scene, too, but must for now remain tabled; the question of recordings will my focus in later chapters. That we can observe these traits across a spectrum of scenes largely, if not exclusively, centred on Lady Macbeth throughout the opera suggests once again that composer and librettist alike had a specific plan in mind for how to make her role unique, not only as compared with other leading ladies in Verdi's early oeuvre, but also from the *bel canto* tradition from which he had begun distancing himself around this time. This is hardly a new claim, as work by Bernstein and countless others proves: what often remains unremarked, however, is that Verdi and Piave's strategy relied on means well beyond those typically discussed in earlier biographical and/or music-theoretical accounts of the composer's work. The selection of the very words themselves, including how to articulate them and to what end, combines with the orchestral effects, complex interlocking poetic exchanges

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[133] David Lawton, *Macbeth*, xl. The specific letter Lawton has in mind, dated 2 January 1847, can be found in *Sourcebook*, 28–30, though there are several other examples of such detailed instruction for his singers too, as will be seen below.

[134] John R. Severn, 'Adaptation Studies, Convention, Vocal Production and Embodied Meaning in Verdi's *Macbeth*', 36.

between characters, and sound effects both on- and off-stage to create an acoustic profile every bit as unsettling, if not more so, as Shakespeare's playtext itself.

If we cannot be positive that Verdi and his librettists had these thoughts in mind while drafting the libretto, there is still certainly ample evidence that the composer gave a great amount of consideration to the way these scenes should *sound*. Recall for instance the letter quoted earlier wherein Verdi asserts that the Act I duet and sleepwalking scene represented the 'two principal numbers of the opera' and that both of these pieces 'absolutely must not be sung': rather, he says, 'they must be acted out and declaimed with a very hollow and veiled voice [*una voce ben cupa e velata*]; otherwise, they won't be able to make any effect. (The orchestra with *mutes*)'.[135]

Then there is the famous letter to Escudier, worth quoting at length, in which he elaborates extensively on how the sleepwalking scene, 'always the high point of the opera', should be performed. He recounts first how the renowned Italian actress Adelaide Ristori, performing in Shakespeare's play (after his opera's Italian premiere, but before the Paris version),

> employed a rattle in her throat—the death rattle. In music that must not and cannot be done; just as one shouldn't cough in the last act of *La traviata*; or laugh in the 'scherzo od è follia' of *Ballo in maschera*. Here there is an English-horn lament that takes the place of the death rattle perfectly well, and more poetically. The piece should be sung with the utmost simplicity and in *voce cupa* [a hollow voice] (she is a dying woman) but without ever letting the voice become ventriloquial. There are some moments in which the voice can open up, but they must be brief flashes, indicated in the score. In sum, for the effect and the terror that this number should inspire, one needs a *corpse-like appearance, few gestures,* slow movements, *voce cupa, espressivo*, etc., etc…Note too that here, just as

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[135] Verdi to Cammarano, 23 November 1848, *Sourcebook*, 67. Emphasis in original.

much as in the Act I duet, if the singers do not sing sotto voce the result will be disagreeable, because there is too much disproportion, too much imbalance between the singers and the orchestra (the orchestra has only a few instruments and the violins are muted).[136]

This shows not only the composer's preoccupation with matters of gesture, movement, and instrumentation (I have omitted a good deal of the earlier portion of the letter, where he also describes the movements his Lady should make), but of the scene's aural dramaturgy as a whole. Again, Verdi had a very clear idea for what the soundscape of his *Macbeth* should be like, not only in terms of orchestral and melodic textures, but of sound more broadly defined as well. Verdi's letter also raises the issue of what we might term somatic sound—i.e., the sound of the body. The shuffling and dragging of the feet— as if in a trance—the incessant rubbing of hands, and so on: these bodily sounds might pass by audiences unnoticed, or, given the right venue, they might resound spectacularly. Even if inaudible, however, such gestures would still likely suggest the sonic/somatic experience they produce. A director intent on highlighting these somatic sounds could certainly link body, gesture, and voice to further enhance the acoustic profile of the sleepwalking scene writ large.

Bernstein suggests that Verdi's attempts at 'disguising the prima donna's voice' and giving her static melody lines in this scene was a deliberate attempt to 'transgress the boundaries of *primo ottocento* opera, transforming the traditional mad scene from a quintessential female moment to one of indeterminate gender'.[137] Or, to put in terms I have been using here, Verdi effectively uses the aural dramaturgy of this scene to

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[136] Verdi to Escudier, 11 March 1865, in ibid., 110–11. Note: the editorial brackets, ellipses, italics, and shifts into and out of Italian here are all as they appear in the source.
[137] Jane Bernstein, '"Bewitched, bothered and bewildered"', 45.

accomplish Lady's otherwise absent 'unsexing' scene from the playtext (I.v.38–50). In the parallel scene (I.vii in Verdi), only a portion of the soliloquy is retained, and while she does call on the *ministri infernali* for assistance, she does not ask to be unsexed, nor is any other of the sexual imagery—'compunctious visitings of nature', 'woman's breasts', 'milk for gall'—retained.[138] Severn, as pointed out earlier, suggests that the *brindisi* was actually the pivotal moment wherein Lady Macbeth was actively subverting gender norms, while for Bernstein, the sleepwalking scene was more indicative of that subversion. In both instances there is more at play sonically than just the melody (or lack thereof) and words that contribute to the characterisation of Lady Macbeth. Here, the operatic soundscape as we should understand it extends to the acoustic properties of the voice itself, as well as to the performer vocalising them. As in the Act I duet, Verdi implores his performers to enunciate in particularly marked and expressive ways. Both the Doctor and Lady-in-Waiting are instructed in the score to sing 'sempre *sotto voce*' as the scene begins, and the instructions precede Lady Macbeth's first lines (m.40) as well. Throughout her number, Verdi additionally insists the singer perform in a voice suggesting terror (*con terrore*, m. 77) and pain (*con dolore*, m. 87), as well as the by-now-familiar *voce cupa* (hollow voice, m. 92) designation suggested repeatedly in the duet. Rather than considering either of these scenes as *the* pivotal moment for her character, then, we might see *both* as evidence for the ways in which Verdi combines sound and sense to create an aural dramaturgy that 'unsexes' Lady Macbeth just as potently as her invocation does in the play. These two scenes, moreover, manage to accomplish this by playing with and subverting the gendered nature of the operatic

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[138] Verdi also notably drops the portion of the scene in which she insists she would have 'dashed the brains out' of her suckling child had she promised to do so (I.vii.54–59).

soundscape for each scene in question. For the drinking song, Verdi does this by having Lady appropriate the normally masculine role of leading a *brindisi* and by allowing her to assertively walk around and show her dominance throughout the number while doing so. With the *gran scena del sonnambulismo*, composer and librettist upset the soundscape audiences would have expected for the climactic 'mad scene' by once again offering a different acoustic experience from what other *bel canto* leading ladies of the time had been performing.

But is this a 'traditional mad scene', even if one of 'indeterminate gender' as Bernstein suggests? Madness, though increasingly gendered as female in nineteenth-century medical treatises and the popular imagination, was often represented through specific conventions, somewhat dependent on gender when performed on the operatic stage, and the question of whether or not Lady's sleepwalking scene even represents such a scene in the first place has been a matter of some debate. Jonas Barish suggests that it is not, and that Verdi 'makes no attempt to equate somnambulism with madness'. He 'shuns the devices of musical discontinuity that correspond to the discontinuities of Shakespeare's prose' (i.e., in contrast to the highly elaborate verse scheme Verdi and his librettists deployed, seen above).[139] As Susan McClary has argued, however, it is often the case that *acoustic* manifestations of madness on the operatic stage were a means of reconciling the delirious thoughts and deeds of the characters with a need to safeguard audiences from the dangerously affective emotional content being depicted. In her words, 'a composer constructing a madwoman is compelled to ensure that the listener experiences and *yet does not identify with* the discourse of madness', and that one of

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[139] Jonas Barish, 'Madness, Hallucination, and Sleepwalking', 151.

those ways was to ensure that 'the musical voice of reason must be ever audibly present as a reminder, so that the ravings of the madwoman will remain securely marked as radically "Other", so that the contagion will not spread'.[140] This might then account for the tight structural order imposed upon the scene in the libretto as compared to Shakespeare's prose, though it does not entirely solve the problem of whether this is a mad scene in the conventional sense.

There is also the fact that, as Lady's admonition of her husband's guilt-induced madness during the banquet scene suggests, this sort of madness was more the purview of males in nineteenth-century opera (as in Auber's *La muette de Portici* and Verdi's own *Nabucco*); women were more driven to madness because of love, like the heroines of *La sonnambula* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*, to cite just two of the most famous examples. As Clausen also indicates, most of the madwomen in the earlier *bel canto* tradition of Bellini and Donizetti differed from Lady Macbeth in that there is was prominence given to 'coloratura delirium', but here, such vocal writing is almost non-existent. 'Nor did a performance tradition develop', he points out, 'which might have turned the vague sketch inviting improvisation at the final cadenza into an extended display of pyrotechnics'.[141] Like the *brindisi*, then, we might choose to interpret this as a scene where the aural dramaturgy helps account for its uniqueness. Just as we saw that the words and conventions of a drinking song argued against hearing a *female* character in such a position, so too might the guilt-stricken Lady Macbeth, unsexed as Bernstein argues she is, perform in the role of an operatic mad*man* rather than mad*woman*.

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[140] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 86. Emphasis in original.
[141] Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 161.

This also suggests that the acoustic profile of this scene can be tied to questions of gender, voice, sound, and noise, as was the case with the drinking song earlier. Arguing against Catherine Clément's landmark *Opera, or the Undoing of Women* (1979), Carolyn Abbate suggests that operatic performance has the power to create

> a realm beyond narrative plot, in which women exist as sonority and sheer physical volume, asserting themselves outside spectacle and escaping murderous fates. For opera the question is: What happens when we watch and hear a female performer? We are observing her, yet we are also doing something for which there is no word: the aural version of staring. [. . .] As a voice she slips into the male/active/subject position in other ways as well, since a singer, more than any other musical performer, enters into that Jacobin uprising inherent in the phenomenology of live performance and stands before us having wrested the composing voice away from the librettist and composer who wrote the score.[142]

Clausen pushes back against Abbate, accusing her of suggesting that '*Music only* or rather *Voice only*' matters and that words seemingly do not: 'in other words, she risks replacing a one-sided attention to plot alone by an equally one-sided attention to voice alone'.[143] I would argue against such a reading of her claim, however. If the sleepwalking scene provides Lady Macbeth with a way to 'unsex' herself, as Bernstein posits, and as Severn suggests with regards to the *brindisi*, it is precisely possible *because* of the dissonance between words and sounds here. By perverting gendered and conventional norms, Verdi uses the acoustic dramaturgies of these scenes to tap into a characterisation of Lady Macbeth very much in line with her Shakespearean counterpart. Words matter, but *how* those words are sounded matters, too.

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[142] Carolyn Abbate, 'Opera, or: the Envoicing of Women', 254.
[143] Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 256. Emphasis in original.

V. Further Speculation

Early in his study of Shakespeare and Verdi, Gary Wills asserts that, 'all in all, the blend of illusion and professionalism, of artifice and heightened reality, of soaring poetry and melodic ambition, makes the theatre of Shakespeare and that of Verdi similar in many ways, obvious and hidden'.[144] The problem with such remarks, in my view, is that the focus inevitably tends to be much more on the obvious than the hidden. Or take Gary Schmigdall, whose study *Shakespeare and Opera* offers many fine and nuanced analyses of several operatic adaptations of the playwright's work, but who also tends to veer into generalising tendencies that often fail to convince due to the vague comparisons he seeks to draw: 'As in opera, too, the dramatic energies of a Shakespearean performance tend to be focussed and released scene-by-scene'.[145] He also attempts to link Shakespeare (specifically) with opera (generally) by noting common tendencies of passion, honour, 'virtuoso delivery', 'bursting hearts', and shared 'unwillingness to mask emotions', among others.[146] But how many other playwrights could we say these things of? Surely Shakespeare is not the only author who values passion, honour, and emotion in his or her plots, or whose writings we can hold up as virtuosic. Is a Metastasian libretto any less concerned with honour and emotion, or is a Schillerian monologue no less capable of 'operatic' virtuosity? As I have shown here, one productive way of placing opera and spoken drama in a meaningful dialogue is by focussing on the way composer, librettist, and playwright attend to aurality and create the soundscapes of their respective worlds. Consider Lassus's claim, for instance, that

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[144] Gary Wills, *Verdi's Shakespeare: Men of the Theater*, 18.
[145] Gary Schmidgall, *Shakespeare and Opera*, 68.
[146] Schmidgall makes these comparisons in ibid., 51, 57, 69, 76, and 95, respectively.

> the power of the Verdian creation is reinforced as and when we discover the link unifying
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> the phonetic structure with the poetic and musical structure, perceptible in the voice: only
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> the performer can sensitise us to this new dimension of the listening which lends the
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> composition all of its meaning.[147]

This seems to me a much more intuitive way of bringing Shakespeare studies and literary criticism more generally into the fold of opera studies. Before offering other concluding remarks, I would like first to discuss several further possible avenues of inquiry that this study of texted sound in Verdi and Shakespeare has left unexplored. Some, as suggested at the beginning of this chapter, are specific to the work in question, while others will have broad applicability to the larger question of operatic sound.

The first and perhaps most obvious omission in this discussion of *Macbeth* is the relative absence of the witches, alluded to only briefly above in sections on Lady Macbeth and those authors who have sought to draw connexions between them. That Verdi held the witches in high regard in his adaptation is testified to in his letters; he refers to them collectively as one of the opera's 'three characters' (the other two being Macbeth and Lady, of course) and insists that 'the witches dominate the drama; everything derives from them'.[148] Already in Shakespeare's time and shortly thereafter they were undoubtedly the play's most operatic feature. Daniel Albright observes that 'even in the 1610s, *Macbeth* was beginning to move toward opera', with the Sisters '[motivating] the opera lurking near the surface of the drama'.[149] Schmidgall says that their scenes were often conflated to a 'full-fledged masque' in the Restoration era, and

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[147] 'la puissance de la création verdienne s'est renforcée au fur et à mesure que nous découvrions le lien unissant la structure phonétique à la structure poétique et musicale, perceptible dans la voix: seul l'interprète peut nous sensibiliser à cette nouvelle dimension de l'écoute qui donne tout son sens à la composition'. Marie-Pierre Lassus, *Le voix impure*, 184.
[148] Letter from Verdi to Tito Ricordi, 4 February 1865, in *Sourcebook*, 99.
[149] Daniel Albright, *Musicking Shakespeare*, 143.

Anthony B. Dawson concurs, suggesting that 'the operatic opportunities offered by the witches' were 'given full voice' in Davenant's popular revival of the play in the 1660s.[150] Marvin Rosenberg even documents an 1864 staging that contained one hundred singing witches—a clear indication that, *pace* Christopher Wilson, 'the very Italian singing and dancing witches' would *not*, in fact 'seem out of place on a blasted heath', at least as many English audiences would have known Shakespeare's play for much of its stage history.[151]

Clausen's work, which I have been heavily indebted to, has much to say on the Weird Sisters in his own cross-disciplinary study of Shakespeare and Verdi. His focus on interlocking questions of gender, class, politics, and witchcraft was also foreshadowed to an extent in Daniel Albright's separate studies of both spoken and sung versions *Macbeth*. I have chosen to place my emphasis elsewhere, but, as I hope to have shown above, questions of gender and noise can be found in places devoid of witchcraft as well. Acoustically speaking, the Sisters in both iterations of *Macbeth* are marked off as Other, too. Their atypical metrical patterns in the play (oftentimes trochaic tetrameter catalectic) set them apart from the iambic pentameter of the mortals and is echoed in Verdi's and Piave's preference for *versi tronchi* for the witches (where lines end on accented syllables, as opposed to the then-standard stressed–unstressed *versi piani* endings), which as Clausen points out 'would have sounded distinctly odd to an Italian opera audience at the time'.[152] Verdi's instruction for Piave to 'adopt a sublime language' in the libretto

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[150] Gary Schmidgall, *Shakespeare and Opera*, 176; Anthony B. Dawson, 'Notes and Queries Concerning the Text of *Macbeth*',14. Along these lines, Barbara A. Murray also offers a detailed account of Davenant's 1664 staging in *Restoration Shakespeare: Viewing the Voice* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 2001), 50–63.
[151] Marvin Rosenberg*, The Masks of Macbeth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 508; Christopher Wilson, *Shakespeare and Music*, 56.
[152] Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 81–82.

everywhere except for the witches, whose utterances 'must be trivial, yet bizarre and original', can also be seen in the chorus opening Act III, where the text shifts to *quadrisillabi*—one of only two times in all of Verdi's output where that metrical pattern appears.[153]

The witches' scenes would also prove fertile ground for reinforcing that text/performance dialectic I have mentioned above, considering the extreme likelihood that at least some of the material dealing with the witches was added after the initial productions of the play—perhaps even during Shakespeare's own life, or at most shortly thereafter. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason address the topic in their introductory remarks to the most recent Arden edition of the play, and Anthony B. Dawson's article, cited earlier, also manages to address the issue in more detail. Regardless of how much of the singing and dancing was interpolated in subsequent performances, it remains a fact that much, if not all of it, remains in print in a majority of present-day editions, and many know the play with at least some of that material intact in performance, too. In any case, their presence was certainly a big draw for audiences for a majority of the play's history. Considering also that the Witches' Chorus in Act III of Verdi's opera was one of the few scenes in the libretto we know to be definitively emended by his friend Maffei, we even could draw a nice parallel between textual accretions and emendations in both spoken and sung versions of *Macbeth*.

To speak of additions and insertions is also to hint at another possible avenue for exploration: the interpolated ballet scene at the beginning of Verdi's third act. The dance,

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[153] For Verdi's instruction to Piave, see *Sourcebook*, 8, letter dated 4 September 1846. For an analysis of Verdi's use of various metrical forms see once again Robert Moreen, 'Integration of Text Forms and Musical Forms in Verdi's Early Operas', particularly 9–26.

a necessity for any serious Parisian opera staging, was based on the play's Hecate scene (III.v), itself another of those passages likely tacked on to Shakespeare's initial text at some later date. Verdi seems to take the scene seriously, though, suggesting that 'the appearance of Hecate, goddess of night, is good because it interrupts all those devilish dances and gives way to a calm and severe *adagio*' and adds that 'Hecate should never dance, but only assume poses.'[154] Clausen argues that it is one of the musical 'high points' in the Parisian version of the opera and 'establishes Hecate's control over the witches at greater length than does the play, while simultaneously de-emphasising her rage'.[155] 'Here, the fantastic is not wedded to but divorced from words', he suggests: 'it is the opera that performs a deed without a name; here, music is severed, not from actorial presence but from verbal signification'.[156] Considered in tandem with the orchestral 'dumb show' for Duncan in Act I (also present in the 1847 version of the opera), this scene might make for an interesting re-assessment of our understanding of the differing Verdian and Shakespearean soundscapes, of the musicality of the witches, and of Hecate as they had come to be staged in rather elaborate, almost operatic stagings of the play, as well as in the *actual* operatic adaption of it.

Though performances of Verdi's *Macbeth* today tend to favour the 1865 score over the 1847 original, this scene is oftentimes omitted in modern stagings, perhaps because it seems too out of place or an afterthought, but it is also indicative of the more generalised neglect of Verdi's ballet music on the part of opera houses internationally. As

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[154] *Sourcebook*, 90, letter dated 23 January 1865. Compare this with the resistance Verdi put up in 1879 for the French staging of *Aida*: 'It seems to me that *Aida* should stay as it is, and that by adding something one would spoil the architecture of the whole'. Similarly, in 1887, when asked to write a ballet scene for the Parisian premiere of *Otello*, he said, 'artistically speaking, it's a monstrosity'. Both quoted in Giles de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, 313.

[155] Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 89.

[156] Ibid., 90.

with Lady Macbeth's *brindisi*, however, scholars have recently begun re-assessing the composer's 'opera-ballets', as testified to in a portion of Latham and Parker's *Verdi in Performance* anthology that focuses entirely on that topic. While none of the authors there consider the scene in question from *Macbeth* at length, Knud Arne Jürgensen argues that it could be described as Verdi's 'first real attempt at writing "symphonic" ballet music', composed with idioms 'immediately recognised by his contemporaries as "music of the future"'. Marian Smith also suggests, in the same volume, that Verdi's approach to pantomime here, as well as in his ballet numbers for *Le Trouvère* and *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, 'might prove fruitful to anyone interested in Verdi's ideas about visual aspects of drama'.[157] A further exploration of the Hecate scene would thus not only provide an opportunity to investigate the opera's soundscape from a non-textual perspective, but also intersect nicely with recent attempts to rehabilitate the reputation of Verdi's dance music.

The chorus—particularly the chorus of the exiles in Act IV of the opera—represents another possible avenue for future study. From Attali's foundational *Noise: A Political Economy of Music* (1977) to Suzanne Cusick's multiple studies on music and torture, even Scott L. Newstock and Ayanna Thompson's *Weyward Macbeth: Intersections of Race and Performance* (2010), the link between music, sound, and politics is one that has been broached by scholars in musicology, sound studies, and literary criticism alike. Verdi scholars in recent decades have paid particular attention to ties between music and politics, given the role the composer may have played in the

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[157] Knud Arne Jürgensen, 'An Avenue Unexplored: The Divertissement and the Opéra-Ballet', in *Verdi in Performance*, op. cit., 94; Marian Smith, 'Drawing the Audience in: The Theatre and the Ballroom', in ibid., 118.

Risorgimento and the unification of Italy. Birgit Pauls and Roger Parker have argued that Verdi's ambivalence to the movement has 'been consistently ignored' by scholars seeking to find revolutionary connexions between the two, and they also suggest that 'there is precious little evidence of his operas ever having functioned as a crucial catalyst for Italian revolutionary sentiments', yet Clausen's rebuttal that 'art's political productiveness is neither reducible to relations of immediate cause and effect nor limited to cases where contemporary reception was explicitly political' is well-taken, too.[158] There is also something to be said about the fact that the speeches uttered by aristocratic thanes in the original are given over to a chorus of non-aristocratic refugees, however. The topic remains divisive and inconclusive.[159]

Even operatic studies seeking to connect music and politics seldom take note of non-melodic or textual/historical aspects most readily recognisable to audiences, however. Other signifying sounds are often left unattended to. In the spoken theatre, too, Kenneth Gross notes a 'deep association of war and noise' in *Coriolanus* and suggests that Shakespeare 'organises his theatrical worlds very much around structures of sound'. 'The bellow of the ordinance, the clash of armour, the cries of pain—enraged and in pain, attacking and dying—all formed part of a complex, even strategic symphony', he says, and we could just as easily apply this analysis to the final scenes like the 'battle-fugue' in Verdi's opera as well.[160] As Wes Folkerth points out, the Elizabethan political

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[158] Linda B. Fairtile, in 'Verdi at 200', 29–31, offers a succinct overview of authors who have recently debated Verdi's relation to *Risorgimento* politics.

[159] Pauls and Parker are quoted in Christoph Clausen, *Macbeth Multiplied*, 189. His rebuttal appears there as well. For more contemporary resonances of the topic of Verdi, nationalism, and our own century, see also Jean-Pierre Godebarge, 'The Italian Artist Tormented by Doubt: Visconti's Verdi, or the Permanent Quest for the Modern Perception of National Identity' and 'Laura Basini, 'Remembering Verdi in Post-War Italian Film, in *Verdi: 2001*, op. cit., 665–70 and 671–79, respectively.

[160] Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise*, 145.

establishment was also 'acutely aware of the ties between hearing and the recognition of authority', and he argues that shared acoustic experiences put listeners 'under the spell of a shared event' and effects a 'ritual solidarity' that twentieth-century leaders, like their early modern counterparts, 'have also been quick to mobilise'.[161]

In any event, some contemporary authorities certainly descried at least some sort of political statement underpinning the exiles' chorus. As mentioned earlier, Milanese censors in 1849 had the displaced Scottish citizens lament not their *patria oppressa*, but their own personal condition: the opening words were changed to *noi perduti* ('We lost ones'). Whether or not we chose to interpret 'Patria oppressa' as Verdi's expression of an Italy longing for independence, the scene also offers a way of tracking the changing soundscape of Verdi's operas, as the chorus was among the numbers subjected to rather significant revisions for the Parisian version of the work: the text remained unchanged, while the musical setting was altered considerably. Both Shakespeare and Verdi could thus be used as a starting point to think through the connexions between noise, music, politics, and sound on the theatrical stage, whether focussing on *Macbeth*, as here, or with other works like *Coriolanus* and the History plays, *Nabucco*, *Aida*, or any other number of politically-charged operas.

The ballet scene, the witches' chorus, and the much-revamped exile's chorus all also point to major changes between the 1847 version of the opera and its 1865 revision. Much of my analysis here has focussed on the work as it had initially come about, though I have attempted to point out any significant changes or discrepancies between the two versions when relevant. Nevertheless, more can be done with the Parisian version's aural

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[161] Wes Folkerth, *The Sound of Shakespeare*, 77.

dramaturgy in particular, and those three scenes mentioned above might be good starting

points in that regard. After all, while Verdi and his librettists made all of their revisions to

text and score for the Paris version in Italian (and indeed, it is that revised score and

libretto more commonly used in present-day stagings, too), the fact remains that the

Théâtre Lyrique still elected to stage the work in French.[162] Thus, not only would a

number of the phonemic and lexical issues discussed above need to be reconsidered, but

this would open up the whole question of the French Shakespearean tradition as well. For

now, it must remain an area for future research.

The topic of space and place—how and where we experience these works—is one

that will be broached in further detail in my fifth chapter, yet it too is worth mentioning at

this point, however briefly. Bruce Smith points out that the South Bank amphitheatres of

Shakespeare's time 'were in fact instruments for producing, shaping, and propagating

sound', and, as Andrew Gurr suggests, 'proximity to the source of sound used to be the

highest priority in the design of a theatre'. Playhouses, he asserts, were 'clearly designed

for the hearer rather than the viewer in Shakespeare's time.[163] Schmidgall also quotes

operatic soprano Kiri Te Kanawa, who in recounting her experience performing at the

Metropolitan Opera states 'we seem so far away, with the audience out in this incredible

black hole. You feel as if you are not quite getting to all of those faces . . . that a large

gesture is better than no gesture'. Extrapolating from this, he implies that 'larger

performing spaces may exacerbate the already heroic demands on Shakespearean and

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[162] Though Verdi had requested that the translation work to be done by Gilbert Duprez, a colleague he had worked with earlier in his career, the theatre commissioned their *Macbeth* translation from Charles-Louis-Etienne Nuitter and Alexandre Beaumont, the same pair responsible for the French version of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* four years earlier.

[163] Andrew Gurr, 'Why Was the Globe Round', in *Who Hears in Shakespeare: Auditory Worlds on Stage and Screen*, ed. Larry Magnus and Walter W. Cannon (Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 4.

operatic actors' alike.[164] The way in which each venue uniquely helps produce, shape,

and disseminate sound is another factor worth considering, especially when playwright

and composer were often working for particular theatres.

Shakespeare of course had the Globe and Blackfriars theatres, and Verdi often

worked with specific theatres in mind. On *Otello*, for instance: 'my opera is a drama of

passion, not a spectacle; it is almost an intimate drama. I even intend to reduce the size of

the Scala stage for the last act. I fear that the [Paris] Opéra stage will be too vast for

Otello'.[165] Conversely, while working on a subsequent production of *Macbeth* for the San

Carlo theatre in Naples, he remarked in a letter that 'the music beneath the stage [for the

'Show of Kings' scene] must be reinforced owing to the size of his venue.[166] Bruce Smith

devotes a chapter to the acoustic properties of Shakespeare's two theatres in his *Acoustic

World of Early Modern England* (1999), and scholarship by Barry Blesser and Linda-

Ruth Solter (*Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?*, 2006), as well as by Emily Thompson

(*The Soundscape of Modernity*, 2002) all discourse upon the acoustics of buildings,

materials, outdoor locations, and other such details. The phonic properties of *Macbeth*,

both spoken and sung, play a large part in helping to create an unsettling atmosphere for

listeners, as discussed above, but surely the venue can make an impact, too. W. B.

Worthen considers a site-specific adaptation of the play called *Sleep No More*, staged by

the British Punchdrunk theatre company in New York City. That this immersive

experience would differ considerably from a production at the American Shakespeare

Company's reproduction of the Blackfriars theatre in Staunton, Virginia or a small,

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[164] Gary Schmidgall, *Shakespeare and Opera*, 164.
[165] Quoted in ibid., 230.
[166] Verdi to Cammarano, 23 November 1848, in *Sourcebook*, 67.

amateur production housed in a local school or church, should hardly need mentioning, and this is true for Verdi's opera as well.[167]

To speak of space and place in our experience of the theatre is to get at one final aspect not considered in this chapter as well: that of staging. Mike Ashman has observed how, in Verdi scholarship dealing with performance histories, the first focus tends to be on singers and impresarios, then conductors, but rarely on the work of directors: staging lags behind.[168] In fact, Verdi himself, writing in 1848 (only a year after the premiere of his *Macbeth*) insisted that 'the *mise en scène* is the perhaps the most important thing and many operas survive because of it' and, told the impresario of the San Carlo opera house in Naples not to object to requesting extra rehearsals for his *Macbeth* (to be staged there the following year) because 'it is an opera a little more difficult than my others, and important for the mise-en-scène'.[169] Later in his career, Verdi's interest in dramaturgical matters manifested in the production of the *disposizioni sceniche*, detailed staging manuals modelled after the French *livrets de mise en scène* already popular at the Opéra at the time. These manuals, produced by Giulio Ricordi, have been the cause of much debate in recent scholarship regarding the extent to which directors and opera houses today should (or even could) use them as guides in their own productions. The earlier manuals, such as the one for the 1858 *Un ballo in maschera*, was rather brief (comparatively speaking), describing props, costumes, and scenery, as well as more detailed instructions for entrances, exits, and other on-stage movement. The thirty-eight-

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[167] For Worthen's detailed consideration of *Sleep No More*, see *Shakespeare Performance Studies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 80–147.

[168] See Ashman's 'Misinterpreting Verdian Dramaturgy: History and Grand Opera', in *Verdi in Performance*, op. cit., 42–46

[169] The first letter is quoted in English (and without a specific date) in Giles de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, 245; the second, addressed to Vincenzo Flauto and dated 23 November, appears in *Sourcebook*, 66. Inconsistent as it may seem, I have left the terms for *mise-en-scène* as they appear in their respective sources.

page manual would pale in comparison to that produced for *Otello* in 1889, however. At 111 pages, it offered an incredible amount of detail, including comments on character motivation, tone, facial expressions, more intricate details on movement—not only during song, but for dialogue as well—and more information besides. Gossett's chapter on the manuals in his *Divas and Scholars* provides a detailed overview of the historical context as well as their contents, as does a slightly earlier study by Parker in his *Leonora's Last Act*. Essays penned on the topic of the *disposizioni sceniche* by Hepokoski, Porter, and Rosen in the *Verdi in Performance* anthology also testify to these debates in recent scholarship. Taken together, and supplemented with the sound scholarship focussing on somatic sounds by LaBelle, Migone and others, they represent a starting point for further analysis of the aural details these manuals might have offered to performers.[170]

The value of the *disposizioni sceniche* for understanding Verdi's operas in performance does not extend to earlier works like *Macbeth*, however, as he and Ricordi had not yet adopted the practice at that time—nor do they aid us in thinking through present-day stagings, save for those of companies who wish to use them as a basis for their productions. As Linda Fairtile sums up, 'it is generally accepted that the application of the *disposizioni sceniche*'s prescriptive contents is neither practical nor desirable on today's stages, [but] scholars have long appreciated their value as historical documents'.[171] Though I will shift away from Verdi and Shakespeare, in Chapter 2 I will

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[170] Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 443–86; for Parker see 'Reading the *livrets*, or the chimera of "Authentic" Staging' in *Leonora's Last Act*, 126–48.
[171] Linda B. Fairtile, 'Verdi at 200', 28.

tackle the question of what happens when these texts are realised through performance, and thus questions of staging will come to the fore.

Artaud suggests that 'the objective work of the *mise en scène* assumes a kind of intellectual dignity from the effacement of words behind gestures and from the fact that the esthethic [*sic*], plastic part of theatre drops its role of decorative intermediary in order to become, in the proper sense of the word, a directly communicative *language*'.[172] The idea of leaving behind words in favour of a language of staging is alluring for the prospect of analysing opera's aural dramaturgy; as with my study of texted sounds presented in this chapter, it allows for a different kind of operatic acoustemology—of knowing these works through sound, and not just of the musical variety. And while my focus will no longer be on *Macbeth*, the same insights could easily be applied to both Shakespeare and Verdi's rendition of that work on stage.

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[172] Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 107. Emphasis in original.

CHAPTER 2

Nicht diese Töne: Staged Sound in Claus Guth's *Fidelio*

'Surely the world's operatic tragedy is that Beethoven never completed his *Macbeth*',

Christopher Wilson laments in his 1922 *Shakespeare and Music*.[1] Though I now move

beyond the story of the Scottish Play in the present chapter, our focus *will* be drawn to

Beethoven: specifically, to *Fidelio*, the only operatic endeavour he managed to complete.

The previous chapter focussed on questions of sound creation at the 'authorial' level—

namely, the sounds composer, librettist, and playwright set down in words and/or notes

on paper. Now, however, I will shift from scripted 'text' to performed 'event' ('drastic'

as opposed to 'Gnostic' views of music, in Carolyn Abbate's words) as I consider

operatic acoustemology through the lens of a specific realisation on stage, given at a

particular date, time, and venue.[2]

This is not to say that the questions and issues that I raised about Verdi and

Shakespeare in the previous chapter will become irrelevant. Speaking at a conference

marking the centenary of Verdi's death, David Levin argued that 'we need a more

nuanced terminology with which to conceptualise opera in production; but at the same

time we need a more variegated practice of *mise-en-scène* and, perhaps most crucially, a

more lively exchange between scholars and practitioners'.[3] Clemens Risi, responding to

Levin at the same panel, sought to do just that with a talk on interpreting opera's

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[1] Christopher Wilson, *Shakespeare and Music* (London: 'The Stage' Office, 1922), 58.

[2] For Abbate's critical reappraisal of hermeneutical musical scholarship and call to approach pieces as 'drastic' (music in or as performance) rather than 'Gnostic' (music as text with encoded meaning), see 'Music—Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 505–36.

[3] David J. Levin, '"Va, Pensiero'? Verdi and Theatrical Provocation', in *Verdi 2001: Atti del Convegno internazionale / Proceedings of the International Conference, Parma – New York – New Haven, 24 January–1 February 2001*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin, and Marcia Citron (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2003), II, 473.

'theatricality', an umbrella term meant to encompass aspects of performance, staging, corporeality, and perception. Performativity, another key term for Risi, is germane to my present purposes as well. Drawing on the work of theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte, he suggests a paradigm whereby

> the focus of perception is on [a performance's] sensuous qualities: on a particular shape of a body and the 'charisma' of the performer, on the specific mode in which a movement is carried out as well as on the energy with which it is carried out, on the timbre and volume of the voice, on the rhythm of sounds and movements, on the particular characteristics of the space and its atmosphere, on the move in which time is experienced, on the interplay of sounds, movement, lights, etc.[4]

The phenomenological and experiential nature of live theatre has been much discussed in theatre and performance studies, and musicology has followed suit in recent decades, often shifting away from music-theoretical and positivistic or biographical narratives to chart the ways in which 'musicking', to borrow Christopher Small's term, can be discussed with regards to the lived, personal experiences of performers and audience members alike. But the topics broached by Risi above—focus on the rhythms of sounds and movements, considerations of space and atmosphere, interaction between sound, light, movement, and so on—still remain less present in opera scholarship than in these adjacent fields. The texted sounds I discussed in the previous chapter truly come to life

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[4] Quoted in Clemens Risi, 'The Performativity of Operatic Performance as Academic Provocation: Response to David J. Levin', in ibid., 493.

when we begin to see and hear them realised in performance, and so my study of opera's aural dramaturgy now moves from page to stage.

From costume and set design to lighting and choreography, many people 'author' a production as we come to see it on stage. We might even add videographer and/or cameraman to the list for works viewed in mediated form (A/V recordings, telecasts, and other forms of operatic remediation will a topic of consideration in later chapters). In the course of preparing the previous chapter, for instance, I consulted no fewer than eight different realisations of *Macbeth*: four filmed stagings of the opera, plus one cinematic adaptation, two film versions of the play, and a live performance I attended. Needless to say, from one production to the next, each director, in consultation with cast and crew alike, made oftentimes considerably different decisions, in turn emphasising or downplaying different aspects of the story, perhaps cutting scenes or conflating numbers from both Parisian and Italian versions of the opera, and so on.

Nearly two decades ago, Abbate lamented that those who would analyse a specific opera staging, performance, or recording can seem to 'traffic in what is least important', despite the fact that some feel a specific realization is 'the only "music" worth worrying about'.[5] By and large, this criticism unfortunately continues to hold true. Given that the authors of the plays and operas most frequently performed in standard repertory theatres are no longer alive to oversee their own productions, the director more than anyone becomes the most likely focal point of secondary 'authorship' when discussing a staged work's realisation before an audience, though much recent

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[5] Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), x.

scholarship has sought to reinvest singers and other performers (whether instrumentalists, actors, etc.) with similar agency as well.[6] While directors of course feed off the input of dramaturgs, set and costume designers, choreographers, and all those other contributors mentioned above, the advent of cinematic *auteur* theory affords scholars in theatre and opera studies the opportunity to scrutinise the overarching trends of opera directors like those working in film and media studies might.

Such scholarship may chart similarities or recurring themes and motifs over the course of a director's different stagings—either of the same work at different points in time or for different companies, or of different works altogether (say, his or her staging of a Mozart opera in Salzburg as against a Wagner opera in Stuttgart, or of two different Wagner operas for the same company, and so on). Other paths of inquiry, both broad and narrow, exist as well. More focussed investigations might trace how a particular opera has been realised over the years (forthcoming scholarship by Ryan Minor on *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, for example, or by Richard Will on *Don Giovanni*), while broader studies might cover unconventional staging practices in general and with less regard for a specific composer, opera, or director. Levin's seminal *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinski* (2007) remains a touchstone study in this regard. Though this manner of performance- or director-centric scholarship has caught on

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[6] On the agency of singers, see for instance John Roselli, *The Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Suzanne Aspden, *The Rival Sirens: Performance and Identity on Handel's Operatic Stage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Karen Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performance in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and, most recently, Margaret Medlyn, *Embodying Voice: Singing Verdi, Singing Wagner* (New York: Routledge, 2019); as well as shorter studies such as Carolyn Abbate's 'Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women', in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music*, ed. Ruth Solie, 225–58 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Henson's, Medlyn's, and Abbate's scholarship in this regard will be discussed in further detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

to some degree in German-speaking lands (perhaps owing to the degree to which German directors and opera houses themselves have often led the way in these 'unsettling' stagings), English-language scholarship has been slower to follow suit, the authors above remaining the exception rather than the rule. Here, then, Beethoven, his librettist, and their source material will take a back seat as I consider the aural dramaturgy of a particular realisation of *Fidelio*.

The American mezzo-soprano Marilyn Horne once complained of the production-focussed nature of opera reviews, claiming that 'critics spend the first two-thirds of their review on the production, and mention the singers at the end'.[7] Though I would suggest that this is far less true of present-day reviews (even if, to quote David Littlejohn, we are living in the 'age of the producer'[8]), there can be no doubt that productions that diverge from 'traditional' staging practices and *mises-en-scène* are often the leading cause for operatic scandal, and thus both popular and critical attention, in any given season or at any given opera house. Of course, the star tenor might fail to hit that High C in his Act II aria, that soprano might trip over a set piece, or the last-minute change in conductor might be cause for temporary alarm, but seldom do critics become more up-in-arms over a performance than when operatic repertoire classics become 'unsettled' (to once again borrow Levin's term) through innovative dramaturgical practices. Such was the case with

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[7] Quoted in Jay Nordlinger, 'Rewriting Beethoven', *National Review*, 7 September 2015, http://www.nationalreview.com/sites/default/files/nordlinger_salzburg090715.html.

[8] David Littlejohn, *The Ultimate Art: Essays Around and About Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 51. The 'producer', in Littlejohn's British parlance, holds approximately the same responsibilities as opera directors in the United States, where producers have a slightly different set of obligations.

Claus Guth's 2015 staging of *Fidelio* at the Salzburg Festival, which met with mixed but ultimately harsh and uncomprehending reviews at the time of its premiere.

Perhaps even more offensive to audiences and critics than the dramaturgical changes of setting and scenery was Guth's decision to excise all of the opera's spoken dialogue and to replace it with a variety of ambient noises and other sounds. This heightened the general intolerance or aversion to the already unconventional production even more, for it went against the seemingly unspoken dictum that, whatever changes might be made to the staging and performance of these works, the composer's score—the essence of the 'work' itself (or so it goes for those in the 'Gnostic' camp)—would still remain unchanged. *If I don't like what I see, I can always close my eyes and focus on the musical genius of Mozart/Wagner/Puccini/et al*. Not at the Salzburg Festival in the summer of 2015: there, even the text was tampered with! What these reviewers either pick up on or fail to attend to in this staging (and in their subsequent reviews) says much about our listening practices and how audiences engage with the multi-medial artwork that is opera. It likewise resonates with arguments made by Roger Parker, who suggests that these sorts of reactions are indicative of a 'dangerous complacency' that has 'unnecessarily restricted' the growth of the artform in recent years.[9]

By first offering my own critical analysis of its successes and failures and then turning to several noteworthy critical reactions to this staging, I hope to highlight how a consideration of the acoustic changes made in this production can be another productive starting point for reassessing the sonic aspects of opera in the twenty-first century.

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[9] Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song: Operatic Visions and Revisions from Handel to Berio* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 5.

Michael Steinberg has suggested that the chief aim of so-called *Regietheater* productions, in which a director's reading (or *Konzept* as it is often called) of a given opera takes centre stage, is a 'defamiliarization' and a 'desentimentalisation of the past and its alleged securities'. If successful, he asserts, it provides 'a reorientation and a newness, a *raison d'être*, to the dialogue of past and present'.[10] When such stagings receive scholarly or critical mention in the press, however, it is almost invariably the visual which attracts the lion's share of attention; such criticism often neglects the ways in which sound, too, can factor into a director's *Konzept*, as I argue that it does here.

With such a radically altered soundscape from the *Fidelio* we typically experience, the acoustic profile of Guth's production challenges not only the way we have come to expect to *see* a canonical opera staged, but how we come to *hear* these standard-repertory works as well. This sound-and-silence-based *Konzept* allows the director to offer a defamiliarized and psychologically-probing interpretation in a way that is germane to my exploration of opera's aural dramaturgies. Judging from a number of critical reactions to an opera that has long been held up as a conservative paean to female marital fidelity, it would also seem that the removal of this dialogue and the compromised happy ending might have amounted to an ideological critique of sorts, at least for some. Whether the critique is levelled against such social institutions, the implausibility of the 'rescue opera' genre, the artform in general, or some combination of the above suggests—à la Steinberg—that at the very least it has indeed successfully managed to de-sentimentalise the past and its alleged securities. From newly-created,

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[10] Michael P. Steinberg, 'A Season in Berlin, or Operatic Responsibility', *New German Critique*, no. 95 (Spring–Summer 2005): 58. Of note, Steinberg's article also provides a more in-depth look at the origins of the *Regietheater* movement as a whole, which space limits me from discussing here.

acousmatic sound that affects and disturbs the characters to silent body doubles who at times communicate through gesture alone, the aural and visual dramaturgies of Guth's realisation work in tandem to present a unified vision of Beethoven's opera in a way that enables us to confront and challenge our entrenched listening habits and in turn reassess how we come to understand the artform through sound.

I. Invisible Sounds

The first thing we hear after the overture is static, white noise. This begins in tandem with movement from the large, black monolith placed centre stage on a rotating platform and pictured in Image 2.1 below.

Image 2.1 Leonore before the monolith in the opening scene of Claus Guth's 2015 *Fidelio*.[11]

From the way Leonore looks at it, the simultaneity of sound and movement suggests that the structure could well be the source of the unusual noises, as well as the disturbing or

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[11] All images in this chapter are personal screen captures taken from video recordings listed in the Videography sections at the end of this study.

disorienting effects these ostensibly acousmatic sounds seem to have on her and others throughout the opera. Jaquino, too, looks physically unwell in Guth's staging due to all of the sonic events unfolding unseen around him; as if suffering from a migraine, he clutches his head, and the stage directions suggest someone knocking on a door offstage. Leonore will suffer similar headaches at the end of the act as well, though those mental disturbances will coincide not with Beethoven's score but with new, high-pitched sounds. This aural dramaturgy seems of a piece with Guth's earlier work with Israeli composer Chaya Czernowin on her *Pnima…ins Innere* (Munich, 2001), discussed in more detail below. Though space precludes a more extended look at that opera, its dialogue-less plot, with only acousmatic vocalise and electro-acoustic instrumentation, resonates with the newly-invented soundscape of Guth's *Fidelio* staging. There, too, the off-stage sounds seemed to affect the Old Man's mental state. Laughter, screams, chanting or intonation, and other vocalisations often set off the character's feelings of fear, isolation, and anxiety. These acousmatic sounds—noises we hear with no visible point of origin—are as crucial to the director's aural dramaturgy for Czernowin's opera as they would later be for his *Fidelio* staging, as we shall see.

After the latter opera's opening duet, Guth's sound designer Torsten Ottersberg shifts the soundscape, presenting us with a recording of heavy breathing, first heard by itself and then in tandem with the sounds of a ticking clock. *Whose breath are we hearing*, we might wonder, *someone onstage or off?* Which would be more disturbing: the thought that we are now privy to the biological sounds of someone we see before us, or the thought of hearing someone lurking offstage? The breathing continues, but is harder to hear once the clock begins making its noise, competing for our attention and

raising similar questions about its sonic origins. These details are worth our consideration in light of what comes next. Marzelline's aria references how 'a girl may say only half of what she thinks'—certainly relevant in this production of a *Singspiel* in which nearly all of the spoken content has been removed and only the *singen* remains. The heavy breathing and ticking clock seem representative of the young girl's apprehension over her love for 'Fidelio', the disguised Leonore, who has dressed as a man and taken on a masculine pseudonym to work in the jail where her husband has been unjustly detained for an extended period of time. She writhes around on the floor with sexual excitement as her aria continues and she contemplates her future, suggesting some sort of psychosomatic link between the work's aural dramaturgy and its physical manifestation on stage. The ambient sounds thus retrospectively make sense not only as a literal interpretation of the sentiments espoused in the number's now dialogue-less lead-in (i.e., she is now literally '[saying] only half of what [she] thinks'), but also within a more metaphoric interpretation of the aria's words and music. Marzelline's heart beats faster as she contemplates the passage of time, which will lead to a future in which she and her beloved are united in marital bliss. As suggested earlier, the desire to offer psychologically-probing interpretations of opera characters is, in many ways, *de rigueur* for *Regietheater* productions these days; however, discussion of such interpretations is often tied solely to the visual aspects of the production. Here, Guth's soundscape helps to underscore how directors can offer similar insights through aural means as well.

At a slightly later point, after the well-known Act I quartet, we hear high winds roaring, a sound we first encountered following Marzelline's aria, and which would not be out of place in a standard production of *King Lear*. As in Shakespeare's play, it might

stand in for the tempestuousness of the emotions on stage and the events which follow. The winds are soon replaced by a piercing, high-pitched tone, however—a sound one reviewer supposedly mistook for the sound of an audience member's malfunctioning hearing aid, as will be discussed below. Acousmatic though the tone may be, however, Rocco (the head gaoler and Marzelline's father) clearly grips his chest in tandem with its onset as if he is 'flat-lining' and having a heart attack. Once again, this points to a close dramaturgical connexion between the unseen sounds and the way characters onstage relate to them, thus helping us expand even further Roger Parker's claim that 'we can indeed rethink operas by rethinking their music'.[12] Not quite in the score but also not quite 'staging', Guth's and Ottersberg's sound design makes legible what Rocco is going through onstage in a way that neither text, music, nor stage directions attend to in the 'original'.

The acousmatic is put to good dramaturgical use in more straightforward ways as well, as when Don Pizarro receives notification of the impending visit of Don Fernando, a minister of the king and friend of the imprisoned Florestan, whom Pizarro now resolves to kill quickly before Fernando discovers his incarceration. The letter is now recited by a voice offstage in hushed tones, suggesting a cinematic narration sequence or Pizarro's internalised reading of the missive. The acousmatic voice thus offers a more plausible, twenty-first century realisation of the scene than a more typical dramatic, on-stage recitation of the letter out loud might provide. In her scholarship on filmic renditions of operas, Marcia Citron refers to such voice-over narration as 'interior singing' and asserts that it provides directors with a way to reveal more about their characters. But these

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[12] Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song*, 119.

techniques, appearing for example in Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's cinematic adaptations of *Madama Butterfly* (1974) and *Le nozze di Figaro* (1975) are reserved by the director for a re-tooling of Puccini's and Mozart's arias, not recitative or spoken word.[13] Guth's production shows that the acousmatic approach can be equally as effective when applied to 'plain' text; one could well imagine its equal effectiveness when Lady Macbeth receives her husband's letter early on in Verdi's opera, too.

The heavy breathing also returns in the second act as Leonore, still disguised as 'Fidelio', approaches her husband, who does not yet recognise his wife. As with the first time, the connexion to the *mise-en-scène* is almost palpable. Here, Leonore's heart is racing as she finally manages to make it to the prison's dungeon, whereupon she sees the starved and dishevelled prisoner that she hopes is her spouse. Likewise, Florestan's breathing may itself be heavy and strained for one or more reasons. It might demonstrate anxiety, fear, or apprehension, for example: aside from Rocco coming to feed him or someone else arriving to torture him, Florestan would not have had many visitors during his internment, or at least any benevolent ones. In Guth's production the prolonged isolation, solitude, and separation from his beloved 'angel' of a wife have caused him to become quite mentally unstable as well—the libretto marks his announcement of the vision as one uttered 'in a state bordering on madness but still calm'—so this may also factor into the discomforting, apprehensive sounds we hear.[14]

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[13] See, for instance, Citron's *When Opera Meets Film* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), or her earlier chapter 'The Elusive Voice: Absence and Presence in Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's Film *Le Nozze di Figaro*', in *Between Opera and Film*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa (New York: Routledge, 2002), 133–53.

[14] The libretto reads 'In einer, an Wahnsinn gränzenden, jedoch ruhigen Begeisterung'.

The acousmatic respiration and its foreboding link with the couple's mental states are further reinforced after the dramatically-crucial offstage trumpet signals the arrival of Don Fernando. At this point, Florestan begins rocking back and forth on the floor, perhaps in fear that he is hallucinating all of these unseen noises and that he may therefore be imagining the people and fate-altering trumpet call, too. He has already sung of dreaming about an angel who resembles his wife, after all. For her to now actually appear and rescue him, putting her life on the line for his sake at gunpoint, would indeed be a surreal situation for someone even had they not been locked away in an isolated, underground jail for months on end. For Christopher Hatch, the climactic trumpet call 'distances the audience from the characters' psychological involvements and physical predicaments, offering instead a universal assurance'. In telling terms given this production's interplay between newly-interpolated sounds and silences, Hatch suggests that

> the wordless, tuneless, instrumental sounds speak with greater incisiveness and starker dramatic clarity than have any of the characters, who during the preceding scenes too often sang to deaf ears or in solitude. Thus an instrumental line outdoes vocality and here, at the very climax of the action, voices a thought beyond song.[15]

In Guth's production, however, the acousmatic sounds of the trumpet seem to reinforce the psychological and physical predicaments Florestan faces. The breathing comes back once again after the trumpet flare, connecting Guth and Ottersberg's new soundscape with that of Beethoven's in a way that allows the aural dramaturgy of the Salzburg

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[15] Christopher Hatch, 'The Wonderous Trumpet Call in Beethoven's *Fidelio*', *Opera Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (January 1999): 14.

staging to offer insights into the opera's characters that traditional productions cannot easily match.

Following this, the couple's famous duet ensues, the curtain falls, and for several brief moments we are treated to another bout of silence. Audience murmuring and shuffling aside, this is a more proper, staged silence than most other moments in the production, which usually feature at least some sense of ambient noise constructed by the sound designer. Conductor Franz Welser-Möst follows this up with the nearly fifteen-minute orchestral *Leonore No. 3* overture, an unsanctioned interjection or disruption to the story's unfolding action made popular by Mahler but which has been out of fashion as an 'insertion number' of sorts in more recent stage productions (even the Metropolitan Opera's current staging, which began its run in 2000, allows the final act to go on uninterrupted). Supreme as it may have been of the many overture attempts Beethoven wrote for the opera, to insert such an extended orchestral passage between the opera's climax and its final resolution makes for a marked halt to whatever dramatic momentum had been building up to this point. Its inclusion here is interesting in light of the many other 'unsanctioned' aural insertions Guth and Ottersberg provide us with, however. Alternatively, given the generally positive reception the Overture has been met with both popularly and critically in concert hall renditions, and given Welser-Möst's disagreement with Guth's interpretation of the opera (discussed in more detail below), we might see this as the conductor's pushing back against the non-canonical noises of director and sound designer by adding his own preferred non-canonical noise to the mix.

As the curtain rises one last time following *Leonore No. 3*, audience members begin to hear the work's concluding chorus extolling the virtues of freedom and of

marital fidelity. But here, as with so much of the other sound in this production, this closing number too becomes largely acousmatic in nature. The principals sing their parts onstage, but the vast majority of choristers (i.e., the would-be freed prisoners and townsfolk) are kept in the wings for Guth's staging, as Image 2.2 illustrates below.

Image 2.2 The chorus remains invisible to the eye, with only the principals on stage for the finale

This now-otherworldly chorus seems to be the breaking point for Florestan, who once again must imagine that he is hearing voices. He takes only a few steps with his wife before collapsing and perhaps dying from sensory overload, much to the shock of the other gathered characters, and likely to audience members as well since Florestan's death is not called for in the libretto or the score. As suggested above, Guth's decision may appear opaque at first, but given the tendency towards ideological and socio-political critique in *Regietheater* stagings, several possible readings emerge. This undercutting of the happy ending may serve as a way to either question the 'traditional values' espoused by the choristers, whose now-acousmatic voices seem to take on an air of authority by becoming abstracted sounds untethered to physical bodies, or to the neat-and-tidy ending

called for in the sub-genre of rescue opera. Perhaps Guth's Florestan is right in thinking that such a resolution could only take place in his head! This of course could be said about the probability of operatic plot conventions writ large. Indeed, Guth's 2009 *Così fan tutte*, also for Salzburg, similarly asks us to question Mozart's conventional happy ending, too; the lovers circle each other throughout the finale, the men singing to one woman and then the next in turn. As they take a seat on a large couch at the end of the number, the blocking and their coordinated hair colours suggest new pairings (blondes Ferrando and Fiordiligi, brunettes Guglielmo and Dorabella), while colour-coordinated costuming and physical gesturing suggest perhaps another: as seen in Image 2.3, at least one pair of the original lovers still exchange glances even as they sit with their new mates.

Image 2.3 Ferrando is paired with Fiordiligi and Guglielmo with Dorabella in Guth's *Così fan tutte* staging

It is thus not implausible to read into the unconventional ending Guth offers in *Fidelo* a critique of the status quo, whether that be in terms of social mores or dramatic

conventions. What is most important, however, is that, unlike in *Così*, here the critique is conveyed by the aural just as much, if not more so, than through the visual.

In *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (2013), Sam Halliday makes a connection which at first blush might sound unusual: between Richard Wagner and Pierre Schaeffer. More specifically, he links the theoretical writings and compositional practices that brought about the Bayreuth theatre's subterranean orchestra pit with Schaeffer's compositions and scholarly theorising about acousmatic sound. Halliday suggests that Wagner desired specifically an unseen orchestra in order to prevent audiences from 'being distracted by the music's mere "mechanical" source', thus anticipating Schaeffer's views on acousmatic listening. In Halliday's words, Schaeffer believed that 'listeners freed from concern with sound's production and dissemination would become more attentive to the sounds themselves'.[16] Guth's *Fidelio* staging provides a solid litmus test for such assertions with its radically altered soundscape. The fact that some of the reviewers considered below were able to discern a cause-and-effect relationship between the acousmatic nature of the closing chorus and Florestan's final collapse suggests that audience members and critics alike were indeed capable of connecting the dots between the aims of this production's aural dramaturgy and the corresponding stage action. But if I have considered how the aural dramaturgy of this *Fidelio* realisation has used the power of acousmatic sound to disorient and 'unsettle' characters and audience members, there is another unusual aspect

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[16] Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity: Representing Sound in Literature, Culture and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 80.

of the director's staging that bears further scrutiny as well: namely, the silent character doubles that people the stage throughout.

II. Silent Echoes and Character Doubles, in *Fidelio* and Beyond

For his Salzburg staging, Guth decided to add 'shadow' doubles for both Leonore and Don Pizarro. These new, silent characters may have been perplexing to some of the opera-goers (and, later, DVD viewers), and their presence or impact on the plot may not have come across to spectators as readily as the director may have envisioned. They were certainly perplexing for the reviewers. Anthony Tommasini found the doppelgängers 'annoying' and A. J. Goldman did not know what to make of their presence on stage.[17] Jay Nordlinger '[didn't] much care' to even bother trying to understand why Leonore's shadow was 'constantly flashing her hands'—a tactless way of referring to sign language if ever there was one.[18] Tasmin Shaw was somewhat kinder in her review, admitting to being 'momentarily moved by the thought of Beethoven's deafness' when witnessing this form of communication grafted into a performance of the composer's only opera. But still, she too admits to being 'otherwise uncomprehending' of the role these doubles play in the production.[19] Yet they can be seen as part of a broader dramaturgical strategy within Guth's directorial output writ large. Followers of his career may recognise this tactic as one deployed in other recent productions of his, and may thus not have been quite as puzzled by these silent characters showing up here as others were.

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[17] Anthony Tommasini, 'When Love Can't Quite Save a Wretched Prisoner', *New York Times*, 8 September 2015, C3; A. J. Goldman, '*Fidelio*', *Opera News* 80, no. 2 (August 2015), http://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2015/8/Reviews/SALZBURG__Fidelio.html.
[18] Jay Nordlinger, 'Rewriting Beethoven', op. cit.
[19] Tasmin Shaw, 'Beethoven Beneath the Monolith', *New York Review*, 2 September 2015, http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2015/09/02/beethoven-beneath-monolith-fidelio/.

The director employs many of the same dramaturgical strategies of body-doubling, silent characters, and stylised hand-gesturing for his 2001 version of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*, one of his earliest stagings to be recorded. Though not communicating through sign language, as in *Fidelio*, the chorus of priestesses who sing after Iphigenia's opening number, for instance, gesticulates in what Tommasini, reviewing that premiere, describes as 'stylised but compelling and lifelike gestures', seen in Image 2.4.[20]

Image 2.4 Priestesses mimic Iphigenia's hand gestures in Guth's staging of *Iphigénie en Tauride* (Opernhaus Zürich, 2001)

The use of such gesticulation is in fact quite similar to the way Guth would realise many of the choruses for his dramatized version of Handel's *Messiah* the following decade, as we shall see shortly. It also resonates with (and may in fact be inspired by) several Peter Sellars productions that also make use of slow, stylised gesture. Sellars's 1999 adaptation of Handel's *Theodora* for the Glyndebourne festival (Image 2.5) is perhaps most

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[20] Anthony Tommasini, 'Classic Tales (in Video and Velvet)', *The New York Times*, 16 August 2000, E1.

indicative of this, especially since his decision to stage this 'Dramatic Oratorio' also anticipates Guth's determination to mount a production of what was originally an unstaged work.[21]

Image 2.5 Choral gestures in Peter Sellars's staged version of *Theodora* (Glyndebourne, 1999)[22]

Regarding this earlier Sellars production, Susan Rutherford claims that 'the use of gesture liberated the bodies of the singers in a quite profound and moving way' and allowed them to operate as 'a pure *extension* of voice, another register in this most human instrument of creativity.' 'It is tempting to argue', she suggests, that these movements 'released the sound and improved the singing'.[23] Though we need not debate whether gesticulation

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[21] For more on the historical precedent of staging Handel's oratorios, see Winton Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 122–27.

[22] The production was released by Kultur (catalogue number D2099) in 2004.

[23] Susan Rutherford, '"Unnatural gesticulation" or "un geste sublime"?: Dramatic performance in opera', *Arcadia* 36, no. 2, Staging Opera as Interpretation/Opernaufführung als Interpretation (2001): 254. Emphasis in original.

improves the quality of singing in Guth's productions, the connexions Rutherford draws between gesture and voice are germane to our understanding of opera's aural dramaturgy. Her argument that Sellars's work 'energises the dynamic between voice and body, remaking older associations between gesture and sound in new original forms' is readily apparent in Guth's realisations and resonates with Clemens Risi's observation that the voice exists at the intersection of aural and visual perception.[24] Though he was not speaking about either of these directors, Risi's argument that such staged gesture 'makes musical structures visible and gives the audience a heightened experience of them' and that 'unusual movements make an almost tactile perception of the music possible' also suggests a close link between aural and visual dramaturgies in these works.[25]

Body doubles are not characteristic of Sellars's style, but they feature heavily in Guth's stagings, where they also silently interact with their singing counterparts from time to time, as in *Iphigénie* and *Fidelio*. The Austrian director also inserts new, silent characters who do not otherwise appear in a given work's list of *dramatis personae*, as in his productions of *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Messiah*, too. In Gluck's opera, he adds silent versions of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, who occasionally show up alongside the doppelgängers of Iphigenia and Orestes. While the chorus sings of the need to 'avenge both nature and the gods of wrath' (*Vengeons et la nature et les Dieux en courroux*) in Act II, we witness over and over again a condensed or summarised cycle of the violence that led the house of Atreus to their present state: Agamemnon stabs Iphigenia to sacrifice her, Clytemnestra stabs Agamemnon in revenge, and she is in turn killed by Orestes.

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[24] Ibid., 255.

[25] Clemens Risi, 'Swinging Signs, Representation and Presence in Operatic Performance: Remarks on Hans Neuenfels, Jossi Wieler, and a New Analytical Approach', *Arcadia* 36, no. 2, Staging Opera as Interpretation/Opernaufführung als Interpretation (2001): 366–67.

Orestes' body double slides the knife down the table back to Agamemnon and the affair plays out several more times. In the final instantiation, Orestes' doppelgänger hands the knife to the baritone otherwise singing his role; the singer then participates in the murder directly, as seen in Image 2.6.

Image 2.6 Top: Iphigenia stabbed by Agamemnon. Bottom: Orestes' doppelgänger hands his 'real' counterpart the knife to kill Clytemnestra

Though no similar 'flashback' sequence occurs in *Fidelio*, we will later see 'Shadow Leonore' hand her singing counterpart a gun. Looking at Guth's stagings writ large, then, we might posit that the interaction between singing and silent versions of the same character often represents conscious and subconscious states of action or being. Those acting in silence may at times move about without their vocal counterparts knowing—out of sight, perhaps, but not out of mind. Thoughts and deeds are then inevitably made manifest and shift into the foreground when song and silence come into contact with each other on-stage. As in *Fidelio*, aural, visual, and physical dramaturgies work hand-in-hand to underscore Guth's characterological insight for the opera(s) in question.

Also worth noting in this regard is Guth's 2006 staging of *Figaro* in Salzburg. For Mozart's opera, he inserts a silent, winged cupid character whose various interventions and machinations help to move the comedy along. Dressed identically to the adolescent Cherubino but unseen by all of the characters onstage, he proves to be very much responsible for many of the *Folle Journée*'s events, just as the page boy is himself. Serving as a sort of libidinous, universal subconscious who compels many of the characters to act on their inner desires, this new addition to the opera's plot might serve for audience members as a connexion to the amorous 'Little Cherub' native to Da Ponte's libretto. In this regard Guth's new, silent addition seems to echo the Eros character Joseph Losey created for his film version of *Don Giovanni* (1979). Often dressed identically to his master, the handsome youth is frequently seen by his side, and in several instances performing duties that would otherwise fall to Leporello in stage productions. Indeed, his presence is so striking in Losey's film that the director even gives the final shot over to him: the last thing we see is his shutting the imposingly large

doors of Giovanni's abode while the last strains of Mozart's music play out. Guth

likewise adds a character to his staging of Schubert's *Fierrabras* (Opernhaus Zürich,

2005/6), though in this instance, the character is anything but silent. Inserting Schubert

himself into the production, Guth provides the composer with no music to sing but

assigns to him a copious amount of spoken dialogue—lines originally uttered by any

number of characters—and thus allows him to interact regularly with the singers.[26] How

silent characters can alter our understanding of opera's aural dramaturgies is most

effectively demonstrated in the director's staged version of Handel's *Messiah* (Theater an

der Wien, 2009).

Though Handel's oratorio features no specific characters per se, the decision to

distinguish between distinct personages based on the work's four main soloists was not a

difficult leap. In this instance, Guth turns the oratorio into a story of grief and mourning

following the suicide of a family member. Handel's work now follows the story of a

recent widow, along with her husband's siblings and kin, as well as the preacher whose

singing of 'Comfort Ye My People' was staged as a funeral service to set the scene. The

characters take turns singing, offering solace to one another over their shared loss and, in

the later parts of the oratorio, turn their attention to the hoped-for coming of the Saviour.

But in Guth's dramatic setting of the oratorio, there is an additional character not

otherwise given any text or music to perform but whose presence on stage is both

frequent and significant (see Image 2.7). Most likely an angel who attempts to

communicate via sign language with those in mourning at their moments of deepest

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[26] To cite one simple example, Guth re-assigns words and phrases from both Eginhard and Emma to
Schubert in the first bit of dialogue in the opera (between Nos. 1 and 2).

despair, she offers a reminder of the omnipresence of God's love and compassion, even when we don't seem to notice its silent presence beside us.

Image 2.7 The chorus often mimics the sign language of a silent character Guth adds to his staged version of Handel's *Messiah* (Theater an der Wien, 2009). At other times, the chorus uses more abstract gestures like those seen in Image 2.3

Her part is played by Nadia Kichler, an actress deaf since birth, and her performance in the Handel was praised by one reviewer as 'gracefully blur[ing] the boundaries between dance and speech' and whose signing was described rather poetically by another as 'strikingly lovely' and 'so haunting [in] her wordless communication with some unseen world that she brings an unbearably moving beauty to the dark night of the soul unfolding around her'.[27] Her presence clearly struck a chord with Guth, too, as the director chose to recast her in the role of Leonore's silent doppelgänger in *Fidelio*. In the Beethoven, she may well be associated with the otherworldly yet again. As commented

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[27] Chanda VanderHart, 'Blurring lines between speech, dance, and musical forms; a staged *Messiah* at Theater an der Wien', bachtrack.com, 16 April 2014, https://bachtrack.com/review-messiah-guth-wien-apr-2014. Joe Banno, 'Handel, G.F.: Messiah (Staged Version) (Theater an der Wien, 2009)', DVD Review, *The Classical Review* (May 2011), available at http://www.naxos.com/reviews/reviewslist.asp?catalogue id=703104&languageid=EN.

on above, it hardly seems coincidental that her first appearance in the opera's second half

coincides with Jonas Kaufmann's Florestan singing about his vision of sensing 'a soft-

whispering air', 'an angel, so like Leonore, my wife' (Image 2.8).[28]

Image 2.8 Florestan sings of seeing an angel like his wife, whose shadow counterpart actually appears, communicating via sign language, in the prisoner's cell

But this angel also plays a more direct role in the action here than her

otherworldly counterpart in *The Messiah*, and more than the cupid-like figure inserted

into Guth's *Figaro* for that matter. At one point she actually hands the 'real' Leonore a

gun, much like we saw Orestes' body double do with a knife in the director's *Iphigénie*

staging. In Gluck's opera, the singer's acquisition of the weapon from his doppelgänger

might be seen to work on a more metaphorical level, with him slowly coming to grips

with his past actions: no longer is his double responsible for killing his mother, but he

himself takes ownership of the deed.[29] This accords with the general tendency of

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[28] His lines in the libretto read 'Und spür' ich nicht linde, / Sanft säuselnde Luft? [. . .] Ein Engel, Leonoren, der Gattin, so gleich . . .'

[29] In *Fierrabras*, Guth has his newly-inserted Schubert character hand Florinda a dagger during her Act II aria 'Die Brust, gebeugt von Sorgen'. Though the case is different there (it is not a doubled character urging on their singing counterpart), the sense is similar, given Florinda's desire, espoused in the number,

Regietheater stagings, mentioned earlier, to offer some manner of insight into the psychological motivations of its characters; here accomplished through the actions of the doubled protagonists. In *Fidelio* the weapon plays a part not in Leonore's past, but her future, as she later uses it to best Pizarro's double during their confrontation (which culminates with the offstage trumpet signalling the arrival of Don Fernando), seen in Image 2.9.

Image 2.9 Leonore receives a gun from her mute doppelgänger (top), which she uses to turn the tide in her later confrontation with Don Pizarro and his knife-wielding double (bottom)

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to spread terror and wrath with the rage of a Fury (*Und mit der Furien Wüten verbreit' ich Schreck und Tod*).

In a more abstract sense, we might read this interaction, then, as Leonore steeling her resolve for her climactic gender-reveal and confrontation with her husband's tormentor.

To be sure, most of Shadow Leonore's interaction with the onstage characters is more ambiguous or decidedly one-sided than this, with her (mostly) unseen presence and uncanny body on stage in stark counterpoint to the many acousmatic sounds that saturate this production. These are not the only instances in which Guth uses doubles to flesh out a character's past (or present) in his stagings. Recent productions of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* (Vienna Staatsoper, 2014) and *La clemenza di Tito* (Glyndebourne, 2017) do so as well, the former supplemented with doubles more along the psychologically-probing vein of *Iphigénie* and the latter featuring childhood doubles in flashback-like scenes invented by the director. But here, the aural dramaturgy of their silence is so striking, in my opinion, precisely because it routinely refuses the unity of sight and sound we might otherwise expect. At the same time as we are presented with a myriad of seemingly sourceless sounds in this staging, we get two onstage bodies whose presence (to audiences at least) is glaringly obvious, but who produce no sound at all. They remain just as invisible to the characters onstage as the source of the acousmatic sounds those same characters hear and react to. Hedda Høgåsen-Hallesby has recently addressed the notion of silent characters who appear within opera productions, often at the behest of a stage director (i.e., not called for in the original score or libretto), positing that such figures 'raise the question of what it means to be a character and to communicate *within* opera'. Pertinent as this point may be to the specific question of what role these shadow characters play in Guth's *Fidelio*, the author's larger argument is also of significance to the present discussion. Specifically, she suggests that 'the combination of silent side texts

and embodied retellings offer the possibility for a canon critique from within'.[30] In this one argument, then, we seem to arrive at a blending together of topics covered by Abbate (on silence), Eidsheim and Shelly Trower (on embodiedness), and Parker (staging as canon critique), among others.[31]

To be sure, this may not help us arrive at any definitive answers regarding the role of the doppelgängers here beyond their serving as general manifestation of our desire for further insight into the psyches of the protagonists; nevertheless, their presence should at the very least be somewhat less mystifying in light of Guth's other endeavours. It is also worth bearing in mind that we need not have a definitive 'meaning' in order to understand that their presence can have an effect on our acoustemological understanding of these operas. Though most of his added characters are silent, and it may seem curious to focus on mute characters in a study of operatic sound, the above analysis should indicate that silence can be every bit as pivotal to understanding a given production's soundscape as speech, music, and other acoustic phenomena. Clichéd as it may be to figure sound and silence as two sides of the same coin, the doubled characters evince just as nuanced an attention to the opera's aural dramaturgy as the aforementioned acousmatic sounds do. If reviewers (as we shall see) can dismiss large swaths of *Fidelio*'s sound design as 'silence' despite the clearly worked-out and pre-planned work of Guth and Ottersberg, and if we can still take away meaning from a *Singspiel* absent of all its

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[30] Hedda Høgåsen-Hallesby, 'Salome's Silent Spaces: Canonicity, Creativity, and Critique', *Opera Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Autumn 2015): 228, 224.

[31] Parker's scholarship, as well as Abbate's, will also be considered in more detail below; Eidsheim's *Sensing Sound* is considered in more detail in my Introduction. For Shelly Trower, see *Senses of Vibration: A History of the Pleasure and Pain of Sound* (New York: Continuum, 2012).

dialogue, it stands to reason that silent characters can effect an opera's aural dramaturgy as much as their singing counterparts.

III. Critical Reactions

Before offering some concluding remarks, it will be productive to survey popular and critical reactions to the acoustic shifts effected by Guth and Ottersberg. Focussing on the production's reception allows us a chance to assess the ways in which its aural dramaturgy was understood by those in attendance. It also enables us to track the ways in which these reviewers often pass over many important facets of the opera's soundscape that I have been stressing throughout this chapter, and it underscores the need for a broader reorientation of our listening practices within the opera house and without. While those in attendance may not have been familiar with some of the other Guth productions considered above, the reviewers underscore much about the way we currently consume and come to know opera from an aural standpoint.

Anthony Tommasini, writing for the *New York Times*, for instance, views Guth's acoustic changes as ultimately a failure, simply a replacing of one cliché with another. Dramatically uninspired, derivative, and stagnant as Beethoven's text may have been, he argues, the 'subdued rumbles, industrial creaks and clanks, moaning and breathing' that replaced them were 'dull, like snippets from some faceless sci-fi film score'.[32] But are they really 'more cliché than the usual spoken exchanges'? Granted, Guth's 2006 collaboration with Israeli composer Chaya Czernowin gave Salzburg audiences a foretaste of Viennese Classicism mixed with 'harsh' avant-garde sounds a decade prior,

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[32] Anthony Tommasini, 'When Love Can't Quite Save a Wretched Prisoner', C3.

but that was a different sort of operatic venture. Billed as *Zaida/Adama*, Czernowin's

scoring was promoted in a way that Ottersberg's sound designs here were not: as the

fleshing-out or filling-in of a project that Mozart had ultimately abandoned and left

incomplete. After all, Czernowin's contributions (the 'Adama' portion), featured an

original storyline as well, set in relief against that of Mozart's characters and music. The

way the production played out showed the parallels between the two stories of male and

female lovers separated and longing to reunite. In the present case, however, Beethoven

was billed as the artist, and if we were to think of someone other than the composer

himself 'calling the shots' in this production, we would most likely be thinking of Guth

rather than Ottersberg.

Tasmin Shaw describes Ottersberg's contribution to the production as 'sonic

installations', an interesting phrase that perhaps suggests that the characters themselves

are aware of the noises happening when they fall silent after their singing.[33] Certainly,

given the omnipresence of the monolith and the characters' movement towards and

around it, a connexion may be made between its mysterious presence and the sounds

themselves, foreign as both are to Beethoven's original. Shaw, like Tommasini, finds the

auditory conceit both unclear and unacceptable, arguing that 'characters describe their joy

and pain as *namenlose* (inexpressible), their happiness as *unaussprechlich* (unutterable)',

and insists that, if it is music's job to portray what 'mere words cannot', then 'the contrast

between mere mechanical noise and music cannot serve the same dramatic function'.[34]

This fails to convince, however. In fact, it would seem an even stronger method of

[33] Tasmin Shaw, 'Beethoven Beneath the Monolith'.
[34] Ibid.

contrast than the original and traditional (in the most clichéd sense) dialogue might allow for. Perhaps the disparaging 'mere' in Shaw's review is more useful as applied to the spoken words themselves: if dialogue and semantic thought cannot do the feelings in this *Singspiel* justice, why belabour the words in the first place? By excising the text leading up to these 'transcendent' musical moments, one could see Guth as giving primacy to that same experience Beethoven seeks to highlight. Words are not enough, so here they are passed over as excessive, perhaps even irrelevant—'*O Freunde, nicht diese Töne*!' Now, wordless introspection and silence on the characters' parts (i.e., while we hear Ottersberg's ambient sounds) suddenly and unexpectedly lead to the bursts of musical inspiration as they express that joy/sadness/etc. which they had just been contemplating. Spoken words alone would not do their thoughts justice, so they are not uttered. Song, however, is another matter.

One can hardly ask for a better counter to Marilyn Horne's complaint that journalistic opera reviews are too production-focussed than A. J. Goldman's writing on the Guth staging for *Opera News* magazine. After an introductory paragraph which compares *Fidelio* to the 1949 Orson Welles film *The Third Man*, Goldman spends five additional paragraphs going through a detailed account of each star singer's performance before the director's name is even mentioned, and this with less than 150 words remaining in the review. It might even be difficult to get a sense for the controversy of the staging in this article, surprising for a magazine funded by the Metropolitan Opera, which is hardly a venue that regularly supports or showcases controversial *regisseurs* such as Guth (compare his recent 2017 staging of *La bohème* for the Paris Opéra, set in outer space, with the Met's forty-year-old, period staging by Franco Zeffirelli, itself

based on a production the Italian director had devised in 1963). Goldman even speaks

positively of some of the director's previous work at the Festival—a 2008 production of

Don Giovanni, for example—describing it as 'wonderfully inventive'. In the present case,

Goldman lauds the effectiveness of this 'bold, unconventional strategy' in staging

Beethoven's opera. Replacing the spoken dialogue with 'an unsettling soundtrack of

noises and sound effects, including whisperings, far-off artillery and whispering wind' he

says, 'created a palpable sense of menace when combined with the monochromatic set

and costume design'.[35] Though Goldman does admit to being confused by some of the

director's 'other inspirations', his tone is hardly disparaging when discussing this and

other, similarly unconventional, aspects of Guth's *mise-en-scène*. After pondering why

Leonore and Don Pizarro were 'shadowed by pantomime versions of themselves' and

'what exactly Leonore's shadow was trying to communicate in her flurry of sign

language', he concedes simply and non-judgmentally that we will probably never know.

This is far gentler criticism than Tommasini's. The *New York Times* critic describes

'Leonore's annoying shadow grab[bing] attention at the front of the stage' and 'making

exaggerated sign signals to the audience'.[36]

These references to 'unsettling' and menacing sounds in the Guth production

resonate with notions of the uncanny as espoused in David Toop's scholarship about

sound, silence, and music. Indicative in this regard is the focus on 'the spectral qualities

of sound, disturbing noises, eerie silences and the enchantments of music' in *Sinister

Resonance* (2010) and the back-of-book description on *Haunted Weather* (2004), which

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[35] Ibid.
[36] Anthony Tommasini, 'When Love Can't Quite Save a Wretched Prisoner', C3.

describes the work as one that explores the 'ways which the body survives and redefines its boundaries in a period of intense, unsettling change and disembodiment.'[37] I will briefly consider Toop's work as sound scholar, performer, and, like Beethoven, one-time opera composer, in the following chapter, but his ideas are relevant here, too. The concept of unsettling sound also comes up in some of Abbate's writing, and in an especially poignant way for our present considerations. In her book-length study *In Search of Opera* (2001), she begins musing on a subject broached above, and in my previous chapter as well: the musicological shift in attention from abstract 'works' to performances as embodied acts. Inspired by the scholarship of Lydia Goehr, she begins by positing whether or not such 'works' might best be viewed as 'aftershocks that give voice' to the 'uncanny phenomenon' of operatic performance.[38] The 'uncanniness' of music is in some senses a fundamental given, Abbate says, and she speaks of 'being possessed by a musical work' as something that happens all the time for performers and audiences alike.[39]

Perhaps we can extend this propensity towards otherworldly possession to the characters onstage, too. As discussed earlier, they certainly seem to be affected by many of the noises we hear in this production. At the very least (and unlike the original dialogue, which would have been coming from the stage), the fact that the new sounds in this performance are all acousmatic likely aids in the sense of eeriness Goldman discerns here. Now, the 'unsettling soundtrack of noises' and 'palpable sense of menace' created by Guth and Ottersberg are sounds divorced from their visual points of origin, which is

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[37] David Toop, *Sinister Resonance: The Mediumship of the Listener* (New York: Continuum, 2010), ix; idem, *Haunted Weather: Music, Silence and Memory* (New York: Serpent's Tail, 2004).
[38] Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, xiii, 9.
[39] Ibid., 10.

not something we expect coming into a production of *Fidelio*. With Richard Strauss's *Salome*, we might be prepared for such instances of *acousmêtre* as it is all but written into the libretto (Jochanaan singing unseen from a cistern for much of the drama) but not in Beethoven. In the present case, the sounds disturb because they are unexpected and unsourced, and this is precisely why it helps bring fresh new insights to the opera's music and characters alike—a fact reflected in Goldman's own relatively positive review.

But if Goldman and Shaw all find at least some balance between praise and criticism in their writings, Jay Nordlinger's response in the *National Review* was decidedly one-sided. Speaking of his confusion over the doubling of Leonore and Pizarro, he answers his 'why?' with an immediate 'I don't know, and, frankly, I don't much care'.[40] Though his gripes clearly have a personal element to them—he admits to *Fidelio* being his 'favourite opera ever'—his 'harrumphing', in his own words, is not reserved only for productions which would dare to present an unacceptable realisation of his favourite opera, but for so-called 'interventionist' productions in general. 'If stage directors really want to create new operas', he gripes, 'they should write their own. Their obsession with painting moustaches on Mona Lisas is both childish and reprehensible'. This was in response to Guth's much earlier *Figaro* staging, discussed above, and he admits to complaining just as much of the director's Salzburg *Don Giovanni* as well (the same one extolled by Goldman). Focussing once again on the Beethoven, he says of his confusion at the presence of the newly-created 'shadow' counterparts to Leonore and Pizarro:

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[40] Jay Nordlinger, 'Rewriting Beethoven'.

> I could probably crack open my programme, to see what the director or someone else has
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> to say. But I'm too stubborn to do that: I think that theatre's meaning should be fairly
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> plain from the stage. I do not think a play or opera should require Cliffs Notes—and this
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> goes double or triple for a canonical work like *Fidelio*.

While the other reviewers make at least some reference to the interviews with Guth and

members of his production team offered in the programme books (alas, texts not offered

with the DVD release), Nordlinger here implies—almost states outright, really—that they

are beneath him. It would seem he has gone into the performance with a self-admittedly

stubborn refusal to understand or engage with the production: even opening his

programme book is too laborious. This is also ignoring that plot synopses, themselves a

type of 'Cliffs Notes', are regularly offered at many concert and theatre performances and

are not generally considered offensive by audience members. If we are permitted a gloss

that lets us know what one artist was trying to convey, where is the harm in doing so for

another?

Like returning to a museum to see a famous Picasso or Da Vinci, Goldman would

have his operas unchanged from what he perceives, somewhat erroneously, to be

unbroken staging conventions dating back to Beethoven's own day. His lack of attention

to detail flows over into his commentary on the production's aural dramaturgy as well,

mentioning that Guth has removed Beethoven's dialogue—a decision 'maybe not so bad'

in theory, he admits—with 'long silent pauses' that 'stick out like sore thumbs, stopping

the opera (on which Beethoven worked so hard, to get right)'. For one, this seems

contradictory. Suggesting that the removal of the dialogue might not be a bad thing still

amounts to endorsing a staging that would alter the dramatic flow of the opera 'on which

Beethoven worked so hard, to get right'. But even more important is the claim that the

dialogue was replaced with *long silent pauses*. To be sure, there are a small handful of moments that truly do utilise silence in the production: after Florestan's second-act aria 'In des Lebens Frühlingstagen', for instance, and following the couple's later duet 'O namenlose freude', discussed earlier. But, as suggested in my own observations throughout this chapter and in those of the other reviewers cited above, a vast majority of the 'gaps' between numbers are filled in with a variety of ambient, and sometimes not-so-ambient, noises. This redefinition of noise as silence seems to hearken back to the compositional output and musical philosophies of John Cage, who once famously asserted that 'silence is all of the sound we don't intend'.[41] Though this staging's soundscape was carefully crafted and unequivocally intended by Guth, Ottersberg, and the rest of his production team, the critic views it as so inconsequential that the sounds *must* have been inadvertent and thus qualify as the equivalent of silence. This move, however, essentially negates much of the work's aural dramaturgy and silences the team's take on the opera as a whole.

Granted, Nordlinger goes on to refer to 'big, amplified spooky noises' in his next sentence (without any sense of contradiction to having just described the noises as silences, and with yet another reference to the uncanniness of these acousmatic sounds to add to our ongoing tally), but here too the tone is one of derision. He claims that such a move is 'fashionable in opera productions now', again without offering any examples to back up his claim, and 'swear[s] that, at first, [he] thought a hearing aid had gone haywire,' demonstrating his failure to connect sight and sound. His classification (at least

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[41] Quoted in Douglas Kahn, *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999), 163.

initially) of these new additions of Ottersberg's as 'long, silent pauses' speaks volumes of Nordlinger's failure to listen critically to the aural innovations this production has to offer, writing off noise, non-music, as equivalent to (or perhaps worse than) silence—not even worth noticing.

What few compliments he offers are often half-hearted or quickly passed over. Averring that he 'did not deplore [the staging] wholesale', Nordlinger admits that 'Guth and his team do interesting things with light and shadow. The production is noirish'. Though the first claim is easy enough to agree with, I would call to question which elements exactly he found evocative of film noir. Tommasini, as we saw, made the comparison to a classic film in the genre, but his observation sought to draw parallels with *Fidelio* generally, not Guth's staging specifically. In any case, these portions of the review pass by fleetingly and without further qualification. What exactly is 'noirish'? What 'interesting things' happened with the light and shadow, the work of lighting director Olaf Freese? We are left guessing. Likewise, his assertion that Guth's *Fidelio* 'is no Euro-dreck' and that 'Herr Guth is a serious and talented man' is immediately qualified with the same …*but stay in your own lane* mentality mentioned earlier: 'I wish he and his confreres would apply their talents to new works—plays, operas, TV shows, videos?—of their own. If you don't like Beethoven's happy ending, don't go to, or direct, Beethoven's opera'. The contempt is almost palpable, and also ignores the fact that many of these directors *do* frequently work with contemporary artists and/or in other media. Guth's first claim to fame, in fact, came from his staging the world premiere of Berio's *Cronaca del Luogo* (1999), also coincidentally at Salzburg, and he was likewise responsible for the world premiere stagings of Jan Müller-Wieland's *Das Gastspiel* and

Kain (Munich and Hamburg, 1992), Chaya Czernowin's *Pnima…Ins Innere* (Munich, 2000), Peter Ruzicka's *Celan* (Dresden, 2003), and numerous others, right up to Michael Jarrell's *Bérénice*, which premiered at the Paris Opéra in September 2018. That this paean to female marital fidelity is Nordlinger's favourite opera, and that he is penning this most negative of reviews for the decidedly conservative-leaning *National Review* is perhaps no surprise, either. As suggested earlier, we might see Guth's intervention into the opera's ideological and conventional ending as a questioning of socio-political mores, as well as a critique of dramatic practice. It would not be out of the question to discern in Nordlinger's objections something of his own ideological concerns.

Hammering home his distaste, the reviewer speculates that Franz Welser-Möst's conducting, which the critic likewise found much to lament about, could have been tied to the (allegedly) subpar staging: 'it crossed my mind that he was trying to make up for, or distract from, the travesty on the stage'. Though it is accurate that Welser-Möst did not share Guth's interpretive vision—he claims in the programme that 'Beethoven isn't concerned with penetrating the minds of his characters' or concerned with 'individual destinies'—the reviewer would clearly have been unaware of such an artistic disagreement, above programme notes as he seems to be. Nordlinger's comments thus hit the mark to a certain degree, but do so for the wrong reasons, betraying an unwillingness to engage with this realisation's aural dramaturgy in any meaningful way.

If I dwell on these reviews at length, it is to once again stress that there is a copious amount of sonic detail inherent in these stagings that are often largely passed by in both popular and critical reception of opera performance. Even if we take Marilyn Horne at her word and expect reviews to focus 'two-thirds of their time on the

production', the above critics seldom engage with sonic aspects of the work besides to tell us which performers were in particularly good or bad form for the evening or how the orchestra may have sounded—and this for a production with a radically different aural dramaturgy from the norm! Scholarly work attending to such unconventional productions are often similar in the sense that the emphasis tends to be on the visual changes effected by a given director. But if we take as axiomatic that *Regietheater* stagings often seek to defamiliarize and de-sentimentalise 'the past and its alleged securities', as Steinberg has suggested, or to 'unsettle' our preconceived notions about a performance text, as Levin might say, then it is by no means a given that the only way of doing so is through recourse to sight alone. Such near exclusive emphasis on the visible aspects of opera staging does a disservice to director and sound designer alike, whose aural dramaturgies can at times be just as arresting to our ears as the sets and costumes are to our eyes.

IV. Revolution or Revelation?

The question remains, then, as to how revolutionary Guth's and Ottersberg's additions to the score really were. Unlike Nordlinger, who seems to suggest that there has been only one way to produce *Fidelio* from Beethoven's time to our own, this was hardly the first instance of the work's spoken dialogue being tampered with in performance. For one, cuts to 'plain speech' portions remain common in *Singspiel* productions to this day, as stagings of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* amply demonstrate. But whereas these excisions might be seen above all as time-saving measures, other modifications and augmentations were possible as well. Even as early as the nineteenth century, Beethoven's dialogue (or rather those of the various librettists employed to work on and subsequently revise the text) was frequently replaced with

composed recitative, much like the text in Bizet's *Carmen* would famously be altered later in the century.[42] Michael William Balfe's 1851 modifications to the score thus also added sounds where Beethoven had only speech, and this well over a century and a half before Guth and Ottersberg did so. Roger Parker also broaches the topic of altered operatic sound in discussing the generalised critical responses levied against 'interventionist' stagings, calling arguments such as the ones offered by Nordlinger above 'triumphantly rhetorical' and 'assumed to have no answer because they invoke something "we all" regard as untouchable' (i.e., the score). But in striking such a pose, Parker argues, such rhetorical posturing

> set[s] conveniently to one side (or simply deem[s] irrelevant) a number of historical circumstances: that their stern attitude to the untouchability of musical texts has its own history, and one of comparatively recent making; that Mozart's (and everyone else's) operas were routinely adapted during his lifetime and long after to suit local conditions and tastes; that Mozart himself was at times a willing helper to this process, adding freely to his own works and those of others.[43]

It should also be noted that, as a directorial conceit, Guth's practices are far from new, even within the restricted category of *Fidelio* stagings. Walter Felsenstein's 1956 filmic adaptation cut freely, shortened numbers (like the trio), and rearranging the order of others, for instance.[44] More radically still, Wieland Wagner's realisations of the opera in the 1950s frequently omitted the dialogue. In his original 1956 Stuttgart production, he

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[42] Joseph Sonnleithner wrote the libretto for the opera's 1805 premiere, and Stephan von Breuning helped make various smaller edits as Beethoven revised the work as it would appear in its 1806 version. For the composer's more substantial changes in 1814, he enlisted Georg Friedrich Treitschke to further revise the text.

[43] Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song*, 5.

[44] The adaptation was released on DVD by Opus Arte in 2008, catalogue number 101 301.

opted for a narrator who would occasionally provide audience members with 'a minimum

of essential information' between musical numbers, as Shaw points out in her review.[45]

When he later staged the opera in Brussels, the narrator was dropped, replaced instead

with what A. M. Nagler describes as 'short dialogues with less emphasis on the oratorical

aspects'.[46] Wieland's nephew Gottfried also staged the work (Bonn, 1979). He, too, cut

the dialogue and updated what texts he did choose to keep; he also surprised audiences by

using the *Leonore* overture at the opera's conclusion. For a 1968 *Fidelio* in Kassell,

director Ulrich Melchinger likewise abandoned the libretto, substituting instead prose and

poetry by Brecht, Apollinaire, and others, and when Nikolaus Lenhoff directed the opera

in Bremen (1979), he had the dialogues replaced with text penned by Hans Magnus

Enzensberger. The text, as Nagler describes, was 'spoken by a basso who sat in the front

row of the orchestra and who, at the finale, turned out to be the minister and as such

finally climbed up on the stage'.[47] Similarly, Ulrich Weisstein laments that another

Fidelio staging—this time a 1991 production by Hans Hollmann for the opera house in

Graz—is, like Guth's, robbed of its happy ending: 'all was not well because it did not end

well', he suggests. Because the realisation of this 'German national opera' (in his terms)

took place in what he describes as a 'fully encaged metal structure, filling the stage up to

its very rafters', Weisstein opines that Florestan and his wife 'slink, scot-free and

unobtrusively through a side door, leaving the other prisoners behind'. This leads to the

conclusion that 'good old *Werktreue*, once an ideal or, at least, a principle strictly to be

adhered to by any stage director worth his salt, [. . .] plays a negligible role in current

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[45] Tasmin Shaw, 'Beethoven Beneath the Monolith'.
[46] A. M. Nagler, *Misdirection: Opera Production in the Twentieth Century* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1981), 60.
[47] Ibid., 63.

stagecraft'.[48] Thus, even if we narrow our scope on directorial intervention to *Fidelio* alone, Guth's supposedly unheard of trespassing against 'Beethoven's intentions' in 2015 has precedents dating back at least six decades.

This staging may not be revolutionary, then, but it is certainly revelatory. Here, the acoustic, the acousmatic, and the dramatic all work in tandem to present a unified vision of Beethoven's opera in a most inventive and uncommon way. But if, as I have argued in this chapter, Guth's and Ottersberg's soundscape is crucial to how we understand this production, and if their sonic intervention into *Fidelio*'s aural dramaturgy is not entirely foreign to the history of the work's staging, then this demonstrates that a careful attention to the operatic soundscape is vital to our most basic listening habits. If critics and audience members came away not entirely sure what to make of an opera sans dialogue and augmented with unusual, 'non-operatic' sounds, it should not be taken as a 'childish and reprehensible' directorial conceit, but rather as a call to reassess the ensconced listening habits we as audience members have fallen into over our many trips to the opera. If anything can help re-focus our listening, it is a production that challenges not only the sights of these well-worn repertory staples, but their sounds as well. Høgåsen-Hallesby argues that 'the idea of a canonized work, maintained by the unaltered score, offers an authorization for creative recontextualization on the stage',[49] but as Roger Parker boldly suggests, why stop there?

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[48] Ulrich Weisstein, 'How to Stage or Not Stage an Opera: Some Methodological and Historical Observations on a Performing Art, with Examples Drawn from Weber's *Freischütz*', *Arcadia* 36, no. 2, Staging Opera as Interpretation/Opernaufführung als Interpretation (2001): 275, 265.

[49] Hedda Høgåsen-Hallesby, 'Salome's Silent Spaces', 224.

> We transpose, abbreviate, reorchestrate; we offer synthesizer-assisted
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> performances, piano-accompanied performances. Why is changing the music a
>
> bad thing? Is nothing to be gained by opening these scripts to more radical
>
> metamorphoses, especially since reverent museum performances are always
>
> available as recordings?[50]

Opera is to many people an aural experience above all else. It should follow then that any

production which makes us attend so closely to what we hear coming from the stage as

Claus Guth's Salzburg *Fidelio* does must be counted as an operatic success, scandal or no

scandal, and his newly-created soundscape, in tandem with the new, silent characters,

does just that.

V. Roads Not Taken

As with the previous chapter, this look at staged sound does not pretend to be

exhaustive. The complex revision history of *Fidelio*'s score and libretto was hinted at

above, but could potentially prove, like Verdi's revisions to *Macbeth*, to considerably

alter the sounds we hear from the stage and orchestra pit alike. That the work existed in

two rather discrete forms (1805 and 1806) before the more definitive revisions of 1814

means that, as with Verdi's opera, there are now often many options for directors and

conductors in choosing which texts they are to let resound in the theatres where they

perform.[51] Wesler-Möst's decision to insert the *Leonore No. 3* overture into the second

act represents but one of many such possibilities and was discussed above, but a more

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[50] Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song*, 119.

[51] As recently as 2017, for example, the Theater an der Wien staged a production of the 1805 version under the title *Leonore*. There is likewise a long, if not robust, history of audio recordings of the 1805/06 versions, and even some featuring recitative.

extended look at the sonic discrepancies between *Fidelio* editions remains beyond the scope of this present study.[52]

Likewise, though singers and performers have factored into the equation in greater detail than in Chapter 1, so too does this discussion of staged sound place the agency of singers (and their contributions to a given production's distinct soundscape) somewhat upstage when compared with the work of the director and sound designer. The topic of the performer will return in connexion with technological and remediated sounds in later chapters. My present discussion of the silent body doubles covered in some detail above should also serve as a reminder that silent performers can likewise alter our understanding of a work, however—sometimes in equal degree to even the noisiest of performers—and that sound and silence are often two sides of the same coin where opera's aural dramaturgy is concerned.

It may be useful to close by returning to Sam Halliday's proposal, cited earlier, that Pierre Schaeffer believed that 'listeners freed from concern with sound's production and dissemination would become more attentive to the sounds themselves'.[53] It is my contention that Guth's *Fidelio* succeeds in just this way. By excising the dialogue of this repertory staple, the director and his production team are able to produce a staging that unsettles our expectations in much the same way that the more visually-focussed

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[52] Perhaps the most detailed analysis of the musical and textual differences between the three versions of Beethoven's operas is to be found in Willy Hess, *Das Fidelio-Buch: Beethovens Oper* Fidelio*, ihre Geschichte und ihre drei Fassungen* (Winterthur, Switzerland: Amadeus, 1999). For more succinct discussions, see Paul Robinson's Introduction and Winton Dean's chapter 'Beethoven and Opera' in the Cambridge Opera Handbook for *Fidelio* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–6, 22–50, respectively. An equally interesting take on the socio-political implications involved in the changing texts and scores can also be found in Lewis Lockwood, 'Beethoven's *Leonore* and *Fidelio*', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2006): 473–82.
[53] Sam Halliday, *Sonic Modernity*, 80.

assessments of David Levin's suggests for his own case studies. Here, though, our listening habits are challenged in addition to our more general role as spectators. By altering the work's aural dramaturgy in a way that was fundamentally different from what audience members might have expected going into the theatre, we can begin to see how Høgåsen-Hallesby's notions of canon critique through staging sound and silence in new ways, and Parker's claim that we can 'rethink operas by rethinking their music', might be effected through such staging techniques as practiced by Guth and Ottersberg. The acousmatic acoustics and silent-but-significant character additions offered in this *Fidelio* suggest that the highly variable nature of staged sounds are just as important to our understanding of opera's aural dramaturgy as the seemingly less variable 'texted sounds' of the previous chapter were, questioning as Guth does those very texted objects we were able to take for granted earlier.

CHAPTER 3

Acousmatic Sound: An Interlude

Star-Shaped Biscuit (2012) is the only opera by prolific author and composer

David Toop (b. 1949). It was performed only a limited amount of times and, perhaps in

part due to the site-specific nature of its original premiere, has not found a place in the

standard canon, making it difficult to discover for a wide audience. At present, the piece

exists only on the composer's SoundCloud website. Of course, its fragmentary existence

is not an entirely new problem. For centuries, scores, libretti, and sketches (later,

photographs) of set and costume designs also left much to the imagination, even when

supplemented by journalistic or word-of-mouth reports from the theatre. If a work was

not performed, our minds were needed to fill in the blanks, but twentieth-century sound

reproduction technologies would change all this. The status of Toop's opera thus

represents a modern fate for compositions that fail to obtain a place in the repertoire.

There are photos, media reports from the premiere, and other such documentary evidence

to paint a broader picture of *Star-shaped Biscuit*, but with no circulating score or libretto,

not to mention officially-sanctioned video documentation, coming to know the opera

through sound represents the best available option. Only in the last century or so has such

a situation become possible.

To be sure, critics like George Bernard Shaw had already advocated in favour of

the acoustic dimension of opera. Indeed, he repeatedly championed the knowledge (or

aesthetic pleasure) gleaned through the sense of hearing above all others. Even before the

widespread dissemination of operatic excerpts on wax cylinders and shellac discs, he

famously proposed that the best thing to do at the opera house was to kick up one's feet and listen with eyes closed: 'If your own imagination can't do at least as well as any scene painter', he quipped, 'you shouldn't go to the opera'.[1] In a sense, we might see Shaw as participating in a much older philosophical debate on the nature of learning and whether or not the aural or the visual should be privileged. This sort of posturing may also be associated with what Jonathan Sterne has dubbed the 'audiovisual litany', in which thinkers champion sound over a supposedly ocularcentric status quo, idealising hearing as more organic and 'manifesting a kind of pure interiority'.[2] As I will discuss below, such campaigning for opera as a primarily *aural* artform would greatly increase with the advent of recording technology. Divorced from the bodies who bring works to life, operatic voices on cylinder, record, compact disc, MP3, and other such technologies represent a distinctly different sort of acousmatic sound than those considered in the first two parts of this study.

It is not my intention here to offer an in-depth study of the ways in which recording has impacted music or culture generally; this has been done by many scholars already.[3] Rather, I seek to highlight the ways in which opera's aural dramaturgies are specifically impacted when we experience these works as acousmatic phenomena—heard

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[1] Quoted in Joshua Jampol, 'Patrice Chéreau, or truth, opera, and the director: In Wagner's footsteps', in *Living Opera* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 36.

[2] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 15.

[3] For more general histories, see Timothy Day, *A Century of Recorded Music: Listening to Musical History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past*, op. cit.; Mark Katz, *Capturing Sound: How Technology Has Changed Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkingon, and John Rink, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Regarding opera more specifically, see Richard Leppert, *Aesthetic Technologies of Modernity, Subjectivity and Nature: Opera, Orchestra, Phonograph, Film* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015) and Karen Henson, ed., *Technology and the Diva: Sopranos, Opera, and Media from Romanticism to the Digital Age* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

on disc, sans live bodies performing before our very eyes and ears. As the chapters which follow are explicitly focussed on operatic consumption in the age of its mechanical reproducibility, this seems the ideal place to pause and nuance our understanding of the phenomenon of acousmatic sound as it was understood prior to the advent of modern recording technology, and after. Recording has allowed for the development of a distinct type of understanding of opera's aural dramaturgy that differs from our acoustemological engagement with the artform both at live, in-person performances and from remediated viewings at home, in cinemas, classrooms, or any other 'off-site' screening venues that can offer a more fully multi-sensory experience.

Rather than focusing on an extended case study, as in the other chapters, I will offer four differing perspectives on disc recording, primarily operatic but occasionally orchestral as well. After a brief consideration of the term 'acousmatic' and its applications outside the specific realm of audio reproduction technologies, the second portion of this chapter will explore how public opinion about operatic sound came to be understood when shorn of its visual corollary. I will focus first on the marketing side, showing how creators like Edison and corporations like the Victor Talking Machine Company tried to promote their discs through opera early in the century, and then shift focus to how such strategies came to be understood by thinkers like Adorno, whose own complicated and changing opinions about remediated listening at times seem similar to the advertising rhetoric he would have surely critiqued. In the last section, I will look at the work of two specific practitioners—one conductor and one audio engineer—whose works helped redefine how we came to experience opera's aural dramaturgies, first at the birth of the electronic recording era in the mid-1920s, and then via the revolutionary

application of stereophonic sound to the long-playing record in the 1950s and '60s. In each instance, we will see that recorded opera came to re-define how audiences were able to engage with the artform without recourse to the sights and other sounds typically associated with in-house attendance. Recording, in other words, enabled a re-evaluation of opera that privileged aurality above all else.

I. Early Acousmatics

Though Michel Chion attributes the term 'acousmatic' to Pierre Schaeffer, who coined it circa 1952, Chion's theory of the concept is far more notable; his landmark book *The Voice in Cinema* (1982) helped bring the term into wider circulation within film and media studies. As he has more recently defined it, 'acousmatic' pertains to 'the auditory situation in which we hear sounds without seeing their cause or source'. He goes on to note that it is 'one of the defining features of media such as the telephone and radio, but it often occurs in films and television, as well as in countless auditory situations in everyday life when a sound reaches us without our seeing its cause (because the latter is out of sight—behind us, behind a wall, obscured in a tree, in the fog, etc.)'.[4] As Chion and countless others since have told us, the phenomenon has been (apocryphally) traced back to Pythagoras, who supposedly lectured to certain of his students, dubbed *akousmatikoi*, behind a veil so that they might focus on the content of his speech without the added distractions of his physical appearance.

Brian Kane has more recently critiqued academic overreliance on this foundation myth—which has been cited by scholars across a wide array of disciplines—pointing out

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[4] Michel Chion, *Film, A Sound Art*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 465.

that it has 'many trappings of theatrical fictions: curtains, offstage voices, a darkened auditorium, and the imposition of silence'.[5] He also charges Shaeffer, the term's latter-day progenitor, with a kind of terminological recklessness. More specifically, Kane takes the *musique concrète* founder to task for a lack of nuanced differentiation between acousmatic sounds that are borne through processes of technological reproduction and those which are more naturally occurring. 'Rather than theorise the acousmatic reduction in its specific relationship to modern audio technology', he argues, 'Schaeffer conceives of it as the reactivation of an ancient telos, an originary experience presupposed to retain in our practices, yet always available to be re-experienced in its fullness'. He continues:

> Instead of capitalising on this difference and distinguishing the manner in which new forms of technology produce *historically unique affordances or opportunities*, Schaeffer conjures technology into an archetype, disclosing a realm of essence that is always already present—and thus essentially ahistorical. [. . .] In other words, acousmatic experience is treated like a horizon of possibility that underlies certain kinds of experiences epitomised in modern audio, rather than as a field constituted through material engagement with various forms of technology, both visual and auditory.[6]

Such an argument might potentially be levelled at my discussion of *Fidelio* in Chapter 2. I did not previously take pains to distinguish there between those acoustic properties of Guth's and Ottersberg's soundscape which might have been more indicative of an 'ancient telos, an originary experience' (the voiceovers and offstage choruses) and those 'constituted through material engagement with various forms of technology' (the electronic sounds Ottersberg specifically crafted for the staging). Nevertheless, the

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[5] Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 53.

[6] Ibid., 39. Emphasis in original.

chapter's focus on fleshing out the second half of opera's page-to-stage journey, begun in Chapter 1, inclines more towards an alignment with the first of Kane's categories rather than the second. As I have already suggested, subsequent chapters will deal explicitly with the ways in which technologically inflected viewing practices shape our acoustemological understanding of these works in the twenty-first century. The aspects of Guth's staging considered previously might therefore best be viewed retrospectively as the tip of the acousmatic iceberg, addressing just one of several ways in which *Sound Unseen* (to borrow the title of Kane's book) can impact our understanding of opera's aural dramaturgy.

It is also worth keeping in mind the less technologically-driven sounds Chion that stresses in the latter half of his definition: those which are obscured for us because emanating from behind a wall; obscured by trees, fog, or some sort of obstacle; originating from behind us; and other such instances. In 2015, Steven Feld critiqued sound studies as being 'ninety-five percent sound *technology* studies'.[7] Such a claim may be an over-exaggeration, especially at this point, but it is worth stressing that there are certainly occurrences of acousmatic sound that are not reliant on technologies of modern sound reproduction. Writers, artists, and audiences in the nineteenth century were increasingly preoccupied with sound divorced from sight, and this helped lay the groundwork for the record industry's similar push just a few decades later.

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[7] Steven Feld and Panayotis Panopolous, 'Athens Conversation: On Ethnographic Listening and Comparative Acoustemologies', interview, 11–12 March 2015, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/545aad98e4b0f1f9150ad5c3/t/5543bb7de4b0b5d7d7bb3d58/1430502269571/Athens+Conversation.pdf. Emphasis added.

Richard Wagner, arriving late to a performance of Beethoven's Ninth, was compelled to listen to the symphony in the venue's waiting room, which was separated from the main hall by a half-wall partition. Amazed by his experience, he wrote to a colleague that, 'when freed of the visual aspects of its mechanical reproduction, the music came to the ear in a compact and ethereal sort of unity'.[8] Later, as the composer was building his own opera house, Wagner would famously go on to sequester his orchestra; their potentially-distracting playing would be relegated to the sunken pit at the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, which was specifically created to accommodate such revelatory hearing and viewing practices. Later still, after the somewhat disappointing premiere of his *Ring* Cycle—a subject to be taken up in more depth in Chapter 5—he even went so far as to quip that, 'having invented the invisible orchestra, I would like to create the invisible theatre'.[9] Without making any special pleas to 'the intentions of the composer', recordings would, in a sense, give us just that.

Wagner's contemporaries were also interested in championing a primarily aural engagement with music, operatic or otherwise. Brian Kane documents one such author insisting in 1825 'how much more atmospheric music becomes when it resounds unseen', and another, in 1865, arguing that 'the sonorous element in music' is 'the ultimate consideration. The visual element of the performance does not belong to the work's essence', and that it 'would be best' if the orchestral musicians were not visible at all during concerts.[10] Kane also highlights the concert reform movement that sprung up in

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[8] Quoted in Geoffrey Skelton, 'The Idea of Bayreuth', in *The Wagner Companion*, ed. Peter Burbridge and Richard Sutton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 390–91.

[9] As related by Cosima Wagner, *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, vol. II, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, trans. Geoffrey Skelton (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 154; entry dated 23 September 1878.

[10] Quoted in Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen*, 110–11.

the wake of Wagner's innovations and his sunken orchestra pit. Not only were new halls built similarly to the composer's, but old halls were increasingly retrofitted with screens, scrims, veils, and other devices to separate performers from concertgoers; some venues even put up floral music screens, where the smell of bushes and flowers could add an enhanced olfactory experience to the equation even as it sought to stifle the visual and embodied aspects of performance.[11]

Devices such as these also help us complicate the dichotomy between 'sound unseen' as technologically-driven or not. As Gundula Kreuzer's work on the so-called 'Wagner curtain' reminds us, things like curtains and gauzes are technologies, too—technologies which underwent considerable innovation during the time period in question.[12] Architectural advancements in building construction, electrical lighting, and sheet music are likewise all the products of different technologies that enabled opera-goers to enjoy the artform, to say nothing of the sometimes centuries' worth of technological innovation behind such instruments as the violin or trumpet. It is thus worth bearing in mind that even forms of acousmatic listening that are seemingly less dependent on modern advancements in sound reproduction technologies might still be classified as such; after all, 'sound reproduction', as Patrick Feaster reminds us, is a culturally contingent label whose meaning has shifted over time—'for instance, from "reproduction" on paper to "reproduction" as sound'.[13] But although acousmatic sound had featured in live stage performance for quite some time (recall instances from

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[11] A drawing of such a screen is reproduced in ibid., 104.

[12] Gundula Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian Technologies of Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

[13] Patrick Feaster, 'Phonography', in *Keywords in Sound*, ed. David Novak and Mat Sakakeeny (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 147.

Macbeth and *Fidelio*), the technologies employed to bring them about had often existed well before the codification of many operatic norms and were thus fundamental to how composers and librettists conceptualised such aural dramaturgy. Recording, in fact, made acousmatic opera *de rigueur* for consumers. Convincing enthusiasts that it was an adequate, or even better, way of experiencing the genre therefore caused a more fundamental shift in how the artform could be understood, sold, and marketed when divorced from the stage, even as the rhetoric employed to do so occasionally echoed nineteenth-century rhetoric.

II. Acousmatic Advocacy

Opera afficionados did not need to wait for the birth of sound recording in order to enjoy the genre outside the opera house. The sheet music industry's steady printing of piano-vocal scores, 'piano four hands' transcriptions, and other chamber arrangements allowed for amateurs to experience some version of their favourite numbers in the comfort of their own homes, though this manner of enjoyment of course still required live performers to bring those scores to life. Selling 'canned music' to consumers required a shift in marketing strategies. Even as advertisements implied that sound might trigger an auditor's memories of a specific work's look on-stage, audiences would need to be convinced that operatic sound was the most important aspect of the artform worth attending to—or indeed, that it might even be the essence of the artform itself.

Though Edison had originally envisaged his phonograph as a means primarily to take dictation and to preserve voices for posterity, it was not long before he began to see its other potential uses. As an aide of the inventor wrote to him in 1888, 'It seems to me that your Phonograph ought to be absolutely invaluable to professional singers, for the

reason that they can study the effect of their own singing. Of course, I do not mean to assert that a singer cannot hear his or her own voice, but it is a fact that they cannot understand and study their own defects as thoroughly as they could by use of the Phonograph'.[14] Though some singers were slower than others to embrace the phonograph (and Edison's aide does not hint at the commercial potential of opera on cylinder or disc—the format favoured by some of his competitors), even Adelina Patti, the last major operatic holdout, had done so by 1905. By then, and despite the many limitations of the medium which necessitated recording primarily arias and other short extracts, the first complete opera had already been released: the distinction went to Verdi's *Ernani*, released by HMV as a set of forty single-sided discs in 1903.

Even this early in the era of acoustic recording, some producers were carefully considering how the medium might best be used to capture operatic performances. For some of her recordings, Adelina Patti was placed on a 'small movable platform', as Simon Trezise relates, so that she might be pulled away from the recording horn in the event of any particularly high notes; conversely, they might wheel her closer for quieter moments.[15] At first blush, this may appear simply to be a practical-minded engineer thinking through the limits of early acoustic recording: lower frequencies were easier to pick up, and so men's voices tended to record better than women's, and brass instruments tended to record better than the more delicate sounds of strings, for instance, which in turn often necessitated reorchestrating to obtain performances that would fall within the optimal frequency range. Nevertheless, techniques such as these show how even during

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[14] Quoted in Greg Milner, *Perfecting Sound Forever*, 53.
[15] Simon Trezise, 'The recorded document: Interpretation and discography', in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, op. cit., 194.

the earliest stages of operatic recording, steps were occasionally still being taken beyond the sort of 'stand and deliver' type performances that would typify operatic recording practices well into the era of the stereophonic long-playing record over a half century later. In a sense, it foreshadows the even more deliberate panning effects John Culshaw would later experiment with in the LP era. Even in its infancy, early opera recordings had the potential to unsettle a listener's aural expectations through careful consideration of how best to exploit the technology at hand.

The invention of the microphone (and with it electrical disc recordings) in the mid-1920s proved revolutionary for reproducing operatic sound—and the sounds of other genres, too, of course. Microphones could capture a greater range of frequencies than could the horn—a key issue for operatic voices and repertoire more so than for other genres—and with greater fidelity to boot. Several new octaves could now be accommodated, and the technology only improved in the years to come. Frequencies of up to about 5,000 Hz were recordable early on, and by the end of World War II, that upper limit had tripled. The improved audio fidelity meant that operas could now be recorded in larger rooms, and with less need to reorchestrate for the sake of accommodating the acoustic horn's narrower frequency range. Columbia Records promised their new electric recordings would provide consumers with an ideal listening experience: a 1926 advertisement assured 'no sound of the needle, no scratching noise. You hear nothing but the music'.[16]

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[16] Quoted in Stephen C. Meyer, '*Parsifal*'s Aura', *19th-Century Music* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 167.

Nothing but the music may have been fine for the symphonic repertoire, which was also now being recorded with more regularity (owing to the heightened fidelity of electrical recording), but such a selling point would still come up short when dealing with an artform that had a distinctly visual component. As Donald Greig argues, hearing only the sonic aspect of a performance 'restricts the expression of the message' for singers, eliminating 'whole sets of kinesic and paralinguistic components which reinforce the acoustic content of the message', including facial expressions, gestures, phatic language, and other 'rhythmic indicators'.[17] Yet Edison, the Victor Talking Machine Company, Columbia Records, and others in the industry consistently and specifically tapped opera in their campaigns to promote this new form of acousmatic listening. Edison, as we already saw, was not initially sold on the idea of recording music on his cylinders, but already by the introduction of his Diamond Disc records in 1912—a decade before electrical recording—he was boasting that his latest product line would 'put before the world a phonograph that will render whole operas better than the singers themselves could sing in a theatre'.[18] Decades later, John Culshaw would make a similar argument in support of his stereo recording techniques: it was 'only in a recording' he insisted, 'that one could hear a voice from first to last in the condition that the composer had imagined while writing the work'.[19] Despite the drop in opera's 'prestige value' as a marketing tool by the time period in with Culshaw was working, such claims to the record's value—and

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[17] Donald Greig, 'Performing for (and against) the microphone', in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, op. cit., 19.

[18] Quoted in Greg Milner, *Perfecting Sound Forever*, 40.

[19] John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding* [1967]. Time-Life Special Edition (New York: Time Incorporated, 1972), 224.

how they aligned with 'the composer's intentions'—were still being made by those in the industry.[20]

A more extensive demonstration of this marketing strategy can be seen with the release of the Victor Talking Machine Company's *Victor Book of the Opera*, which they put out for many years in over a dozen editions, not to mention frequent supplementary addenda to keep up with the fast pace of record production. The absence of scenery and costuming could be 'atoned for', an early edition of the book argues, by the 'graphic descriptions and numerous illustrations' in their volume, which also provided plot synopses and, in some instances, brief portions of sheet music to accompany descriptions of the operas they were putting out on record—complete with catalogue numbers and ordering information for those records, too, of course.[21] In Richard Leppert's words, 'a tone of apology and regret for what is "missing" is readily apparent in early editions of the book'. The *text* of the book, he suggests, was intended to 'substitute for the missing *sight* of the musical *sound*'.[22] Consider also such prose as Victor provides elsewhere for an excerpt from Verdi's *Aida*:

> As the great tenor sings it the imagination is carried to the interior of some large
>
> cathedral, whose dimlit spaces and lofty pillars echo and re-echo the sonorous phrases.
>
> Almost one can see the great candles burning through a mist of incense while the white-

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[20] On the decline of opera's prestige value as a marketing ploy, see Richard Leppert, *Aesthetic Technologies of Modernity, Subjectivity, and Nature*, 163.

[21] *The Victor Book of the Opera: Stories of One-Hundred Operas with Five-Hundred Illustrations and Descriptions of One-Thousand Victor Opera Records*, rev. ed. (Camden, NJ: Victor Talking Machine Company, 1912), 9. Though there is no editor credited in the book, the early editions are known to be authored by Samuel Holland Rous, who also edited Victor's sales catalogues.

[22] Ibid., 103, 106. Emphasis added.

clad priests kneel in prayer and the sinner pleads for mercy in agony of repentance—

"Have pity, O Lord."[23]

One can (almost) see, indeed. As Leppert suggests, opera became 'the measure of the worth of sound recordings and, for that matter, the domestic ownership of playback equipment', evidenced also in David Suisman's study of Enrico Caruso and his promotion to international stardom thanks to Victor's aggressive marketing campaigns (Caruso's rendition of 'Vesti la giubba' was the first recording to sell one million copies).[24] Victor also released its operatic offerings through its more prestigious 'Red Seal' catalogue, artificially inflating its prices in order to place a premium, 'both monetary and symbolic, on opera and European classical music', in Suisman's words.[25] But Victor and Edison also had other strategies for selling acousmatic opera on disc.

The companies' Tone Tests (Edison's are sometimes referred to as 'realism tests'), largely held between 1915 and 1925, were designed to suggest that audience members would not be able to tell the difference between a singer performing live (sometimes hidden, like Pythagoras behind his supposed veil), and that same singer on disc. Such claims were then introduced into the packaging of the records themselves, as seen on the sleeve pictured in Image 3.1.

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[23] Quoted in ibid., 106. The text originally appears in a March 1919 edition of *New Victor Records*, the company's monthly catalogue.

[24] Richard Leppert, *Aesthetic Technologies of Modernity, Subjectivity, and Nature*, 113. Regarding Caruso, see David Suisman, *Selling Sounds: The Commercial Revolution in American Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009). Though Caruso first recorded the number prior to his work with Victor, his association with the label, and their subsequent promotion of him (including through further recordings of the piece), helped bolster sales of his recordings across the board.

[25] David Suisman, *Selling Sounds*, 112.

Image 3.1 Record sleeve for an Edison disc

One of the most interesting, and perhaps unexpected, aspects of the tests was that singers would often end up striving to imitate their remediated selves on record, altering the timbre of their voice in an attempt to perform on par with the records and thus increasing the likelihood that audience members would in fact have a harder time distinguishing between the two. Anna Case, one of the opera singers frequently credited with inspiring the idea of the tests in the first place, claimed, for example, 'of course, if I had sung loud, it would have been louder than the machine, but I gave my voice the same quality as the machine so they couldn't tell'. As Greg Milner points out, this was a 'subtle inversion of the whole point' of the tests, which were supposed to be designed to show that recordings could imitate life perfectly.[26] Now, life was imitating recording. Whether or not such marketing strategies explicitly worked, audience members, record critics, authors, and other thinkers did in fact begin subscribing to the notion that discs could be the ideal medium for experiencing opera, as we shall see shortly with the case of Adorno.

Initially, Victor needed to put out its book(s) to provide visual and textual supplements to make up for their recordings' visual lack. Both they and Edison also tried to combat the potential anxieties surrounding acousmatic listening by performing

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[26] Greg Milner, *Perfecting Sound Forever*, 7. Case's quotation is cited here, too.

thousands of Tone Tests throughout the country in an attempt to prove that audiences could not distinguish live from remediated singers. But there were also other reasons people began championing the idea of the opera disc. For an artform as complex as the western art tradition was, it might be argued, such works would best be understood through repeated listening—a feat difficult to achieve in concert halls (encores notwithstanding), but easily accomplished on record. Though framed more in terms of pleasure than of comprehension, there is a sense in which *The Victor Book of the Opera* touted this advantage in its pages, too:

> For every person who can attend the opera, there are a hundred who cannot. However, many thousands of lovers of the opera in the latter class have discovered what a satisfactory substitute the Victor is, for it brings the actual voices of the great singers to the home, with the added advantage that the artist will repeat the favourite aria as many times as may be wished, while at the opera one must usually be content with a single hearing.

Elsewhere in the volume, they similarly argue that a number coming at the beginning of an opera can seldom be enjoyed in person, 'especially in America, as it occurs almost immediately after the rise of the curtain, and is invariably marred by the noise made by the latecomers. With the Victor, however, it may be heard in all its beauty and the fine renditions by Caruso and Slezak fully appreciated'.[27] This idea of repeatability and its advantages was not only being advocated for by record companies, however; it found currency in more academic circles as well.

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[27] *The Victor Book of the Opera*, 9, 16.

Theodor Adorno's sometimes contradictory yet always thoughtful remarks about the technologies of record playing and its impact on the western canon prove an interesting corollary to the marketing forces of consumerism he also famously critiques. In the mid-1920s, relatively early on in his career, he took control of the *Musikblätter des Anbruch*, a forward-thinking music journal, and one of the first changes he insisted on implementing was that the periodical include a regular focus on recordings and phonograph technology. As he described it at the time, the desire to have this column came from a 'conviction that mechanical presentation of music today is of contemporary relevance in a deeper sense than merely being currently available as a technological means'.[28] This is not to suggest, however, that the author was always a strong proponent of the record and its impact on music.

Some of Adorno's most famous comments about the 'dangers' of music's reproducibility come from his 1938 essay 'On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening', wherein he declares records to have a deleterious effect on our understanding of works in the western art music tradition. In addition to tacitly promoting a reduction of the standard repertoire (orchestras will perform those works which sell well on disc), he suggests that the diminution of large-scale compositions to small, recordable excerpts helps to transform them into cultural goods, vulgarised and destroyed by 'irrelevant consumption'. 'A Beethoven symphony as a whole, spontaneously experienced', he tells us, 'can never be appropriated', whereas excerpting and arranging to fit works onto small, several-minute discs only 'seeks to make the great distant sound,

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28 Quoted in Thomas Y. Levin, 'For the Record: Adorno on Music in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility', *October* 55 (Winter 1990): 29.

which always has aspects of the public and unprivate, assimilable. The tired businessman can clap arranged classics on the shoulder and fondle the progeny of their muse', he laments'.[29] Yet while statements like these paint a fairly bleak picture, Adorno's comments elsewhere—both earlier and later—provide a more complicated understanding of record consumption as he saw it.

In 'The Curves of the Needle' (1927), his earliest essay focussed explicitly on the subject, Adorno insists that 'wherever sound is separated from the body … gramophonic reproduction becomes problematic'. On the whole, he suggests, music on disc 'has become so much more abstract than the original sound that again and again it needs to be complemented by specific sensory qualities of the object it is reproducing and on which it depends in order to remain at all related to that object'.[30] It is worth highlighting, however, that some of his criticisms appear to be about the increasing claims to fidelity made possible by the advent of electrical recording in particular. Earlier in the essay, Adorno remarks that 'as the recordings become more perfect in terms of plasticity and volume, the subtlety of colour and the authenticity of vocal sound decline as if the singer were being distanced more and more from the apparatus'. Besides calling to mind images of Anna Case literally being distanced more and more from the recording horn cited earlier, it also suggests that the graininess and sonic distortions of the acoustic era were in fact preferable since they could make fewer claims to some inherent fidelity or comparability to live performance. Early recordings were more easily described as what they were: imperfect reductions. 'The moment one attempts to improve these early

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[29] Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening, in *Essays on Music*, selected, with introduction, commentary, and notes by Richard Leppert, trans. Thomas Y. Levin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 298, 299.
[30] Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Curves of the Needle', in *Essays on Music*, op. cit., 274, 275.

technologies through an emphasis on concrete fidelity', Adorno argues, 'the exactness

one has ascribed to them is exposed as an illusion by the very technology itself'.[31] Yet the

gramophone was not without its benefits.

Several years later, Adorno wrote 'The Form of the Phonograph Record' (1934).

There, he suggests that, through the disc, '*time* gains a new approach to music'. It is 'time

as evanescence, enduring in mute music', he says. The idea of a record as 'mute music' is

suggestive, and, given also the object's ability to also transform the ephemerality of

music into something more concrete in the form of a disc, suggests a corollary to

Gurnemanz's famous words to the titular hero in Wagner's *Parsifal*: 'here time becomes

space'. In this essay, Adorno also recognises the phonograph's importance for the sake of

preservation, a benefit stressed also by Edison many decades prior. As Adorno puts it:

> There is no doubt that, as music is removed by the phonograph record from the realm of
>
> live production and from the imperative of artistic activity and becomes petrified, it
>
> absorbs into itself, in this process of petrification, the very life that would otherwise
>
> vanish. The dead art recuses the ephemeral and perishing art as the only one alive.
>
> Therein may lie the phonograph record's most profound justification, which cannot be
>
> impugned by an aesthetic objection to its reification. For this justification reestablishes by
>
> the very means of reification an age-old, submerged and yet warranted relationship: that
>
> between music and writing'.[32]

His prior stance on fidelity even seems to start shifting here, as when he likens

phonograph records to 'acoustic photographs that the dog so happily recognises'. The

reference here is ostensibly to an 1898 painting by Francis Barraud of his brother's dog

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[31] Ibid., 271.

[32] Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Form of the Phonograph Record', in *Essays on Music*, op. cit., 279.

listening attentively to *His Master's Voice* emanating perfectly (later advertising would have us believe) from a gramophone horn. It became more well-known after The Victor Talking Machine company incorporated it into its trademark when they started putting out records under that name.

Image 3.2 The painting that inspired Victor to name its record label 'His Master's Voice'

Adorno's comments are thus more likely to draw attention to the claims of fidelity made famous by the advertisements than to the original painting. But his stance would shift further still towards advocacy of music consumption—and more specifically operatic consumption—through electronic means.

By 1969, the year of Adorno's death, music technology has progressed still further, and the birth of the long-playing record in the 1940s brought with it even more insistent claims to fidelity, as well as the ability to record much longer stretches of music per disc. Less than a decade later, 'high fidelity' and 'audiophile' had become buzzwords within the industry, describing ideologies of faithful reproducibility and those who adhered to them (even as the ideologies themselves were hardly new and in fact inhered to the medium since its very beginning). The 1950s also brought with it the commercial

introduction of stereophonic recording techniques, allowing for an unparalleled degree of spatial differentiation in recording sound. I will consider these advancements in the following section, with regards to the work of record producer John Culshaw. They warrant mention presently, however, to contextualise the change of heart Adorno came to have towards music, and especially opera, on disc.

Given Adorno's well-known antipathies to popular music-making traditions of his day (including jazz), it can almost go without saying that his thoughts and concerns regarding music's technological reproducibility are often aimed particularly at works of the western art tradition. But Adorno also tackles the topic with regard to its impact on opera specifically. 'Opera and the Long-Playing Record' was written in 1969, the same year as the critical theorist's death. There, we see him champion the more progressive and perhaps even emancipatory aspects of the medium. He highlights our ability to re-hear music to whatever extent we would wish, for instance, and champions the fact that reaudition allows us to focus on any specific musical detail in a given piece, or on the specifics of a particular rendition. In Thomas Levin's paraphrase, listening in this way now suggests for Adorno 'not a trivialisation' of the music in question but works in favour of 'critical interrogation'.[33] Arguments such as these call to mind some of the selling points *The Victor Book of the Opera* put forth more than a half century earlier. For Adorno, the LP enabled 'the optimal presentation of music', allowing opera to 'recapture some of the force and intensity that had been worn threadbare in the opera house'. He continues:

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[33] Quoted in Thomas Y. Levin, 'For the Record', 42.

> Objectification, that is, a concentration on music as the true object of opera, may be
> linked to a perception that is comparable to reading, to the immersion in a text. […] LPs
> provide the opportunity—more perfectly than the supposedly live performance—to
> recreate without disturbance the temporal dimension essential to operas.[34]

The ability to listen undisturbed similarly recalls the *Book of the Opera*'s writing about the benefits of hearing 'Celeste Aida' on disc, and opera's true essence lying solely in the music recalls Shaw's earlier-cited comments, too. Even the comparison to reading and recording as text (or language) is familiar from Adorno's other writings. If his claims regarding the LP's ability to let us hear *more perfectly* than live performance seem an unexpected about-face from many of his earlier critiques levelled against the technology, the advancements in recording techniques that took place between these essays are worth bearing in mind, as they also play a role in the author's shifting opinions.

As 'The Curves of the Needle' seemed to be railing against electrical recording's inferiority to earlier acoustic practices, so too does Adorno's praise here rest on the actual format of the long-playing disc. *Now*, he seems to suggest, the claims to fidelity critiqued in his 1927 essay are being more faithfully realised on the part of record producers and engineers. In the 1969 essay, he still insists that 'as late as 1934 it still had to be claimed that, as a form, the phonograph record had not given rise to anything unique to it'. The LP's ability to 'capture extended musical durations without interrupting them and thereby threatening the coherence of their meaning' was nothing sort of a 'revolution', as Adorno—without pardoning the pun—puts it.[35] Though the LP undoubtedly aided our

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[34] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Opera and the Long-Playing Record', in *Essays on Music*, op. cit., 284–85.
[35] Ibid., 283. In the original, Adorno suggests 'greift der Ausdruck Revolution für die Langspielplatte kaum zu hoch'. The pun is also evidenced in the (sub)title of the article as it was first published: 'Die Oper

ability to hear much more extended musical compositions, it is a curious point to suggest, with regard to opera specifically as Adorno does, that they would now be uninterrupted, since of course operas featured much more music than could fit on one side of a long-playing disc. Decisions about when and where to cut would still come into play in the studio, if less frequently. Nevertheless, the records could run for much longer, allowing for fewer interruptions than previously.

Adorno's idea that the medium was ideally suited for opera, though, seems curious in an era where TV and movies had already been adapting the medium for quite some time, arguably more fully than an audio-only format could. Cinematic and televisual opera—subjects to be tackled in the two chapters to come—could at least offer a fully audio-visual experience, after all, even if in Adorno's time they did not allow for the same sort of repeatability the LP did. But his reasoning, put forth also in other essays written that year, seems to be harkening back to those much earlier arguments over which element should take precedent. 'What is most important is that all aspects of opera, including its theatrical aspects, must be subordinated to the primacy of music. Opera is only drama and only action to the extent that it is drama and action through music', he insists.[36] *Prima la musica*…we can almost hear the composers of centuries past say. But Adorno's insistence that 'one ought to do without optical stimuli' also conjures exactly the same logic those in the record industry sought to put forth in their own use of opera to legitimise the budding medium.[37] Claims such as these also reinforce Thomas Levin's suggestion that the culture critic's 'complex and changing relationship to the

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Überwintert auf der Langspielplatte': Theodor W. Adorno über die Revolution der Schallplatte', *Der Spiegel*, 24 March 1969, 69.
[36] Quoted in Thomas Y. Levin, 'For the Record', 43–44.
[37] Ibid.

gramophone' needs to be reconsidered; his 'dialectical interpretation of mechanical reproducibility' cannot comfortably be identified as clearly 'high' or clearly low' culture.[38] Affording cultural capital to the disc and/or record player could hardly be at the forefront of Adorno's mind, but the fact that his arguments regarding acousmatic opera at times seem to run parallel to what artists like Stokowski and producers like Culshaw were putting forth within the industry itself is striking. It is to these figures that I now turn.

III. Acousmatic Artisans

Leopold Stokowski's recording career, which ran from 1917 to 1977, spanned essentially the entirety of the music industry's analogue era. Had he lived long enough to see through the six-year contract he signed with CBS in 1976, he would have witnessed the dawn of the digital age as well (the first commercial CDs were produced in 1982). Along with Sir Thomas Beecham, Stokowski was one of first high-profile figures in the 'Classical' realm to embrace the new medium, at least as far as conductors were concerned. He spent his entire career both championing the format as a means of exposing more people to the western canon, and working with studio technicians, scientists, and engineers in pushing forward new technologies to make those consumer experiences more enjoyable. Though record companies and marketing departments shared these goals—especially the former—the latter was not an easy process to accomplish. Nevertheless, Stokowski was determined to see it through.

An oft-repeated story regarding the conductor's fascination with audio reproduction techniques involves his reaction to a sound engineer's work. Still early in

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[38] Ibid., 47.

his radio career, Stokowski was fascinated as he watched the engineer adjust the balance

and volume levels among various studio microphones for some of the very early network

radio broadcasts he was participating in at the time: 'He's the conductor and I am not', he

asserted, and he suggested not wanting the broadcast to go out under his name unless he

was the one controlling the dynamic levels himself.[39] Another frequent story along these

lines recounts how, in the recording studio, executives eventually gave Stokowski a fake

set of mixing equipment so that he would believe that he was the one controlling the mix

on the fly—a difficult to task to perform while also conducting, yet as he had insisted on

doing. Though this would seem to paint him as someone out of his element in the studio,

this was far from the case (and besides, he had quickly caught on to the ruse, too). As

Robert McGinn puts it, he was 'deeply interested in and worked hard at educating

himself in this field', enabling his eventual collaboration with the experiments carried out

at the Bell Laboratories' facilities to 'extend beyond mere facilitation'.[40]

Prior to his radio work, Stokowski had already produced both acoustic and

electric records in the studio. Unlike Adorno, he found the pre-electric era (and even the

early electric era) lacking in many ways. But whereas Toscanini famously vowed never

to record again after hearing how many concessions needed to be made to get a piece on

disc (a vow he did eventually break), Stokowski's dissatisfaction drove him to find a

solution. 'At first I refused to make records because they were so terrible. I refused to

distort the music. But then I realised how foolish I had been. I decided I should make the

records and try to find out why they were bad', he insisted. Along these lines, he served

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[39] Quoted in Albin Zak, 'Getting sounds: the art of sound engineering', in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Sound*, op. cit., 45.

[40] Quoted in Robert E. McGinn. 'Stokowski and the Bell Telephone Laboratories: Collaboration in the Development of High-Fidelity Sound Reproduction', *Technology and Culture* 24, no. 1 (January 1983): 45.

as the conductor for the first electronically recorded symphonic work on disc (Saint-Saëns's *Danse macabre*) and also the first electronic recording of a full symphony (Dvořák's Symphony No. 9), both in 1925. Hearing the Saint-Saëns recording, one reviewer at the time suggested that it was 'yet another piece of evidence that the gramophone is challenging reality at last'.[41] But for the conductor, the technology was still not what it could be. As laid out in an article published in 1932, Stokowski's 'ultimate aim' was 'to send, to project the finest quality of music that we can…to as many people as we can all over the world'. He insists then on finding the means to do so since 'at present they are imperfect and limited'.[42] In pursuit of these goals, he also participated in extensive experiments with Bell Labs in the 1930s, and with Hollywood film studios as well, including working on the first movie for which multitrack recording was used (*100 Men and a Girl*, 1937). He also encouraged early tape-recording experiments, championed the "Dolby A" noise reduction system in the 1960s, quadrophonic recording in the '70s (through Decca's 'Phase 4' initiative), and other areas besides. Though his career could thus be used to chart the advances of almost any aspect of analogue-era recording technology, I wish to focus on his early experiments in the 1920s and '30s, when electrical recording was still in its early stages.

Even before the era of 'high-fidelity' and 'audiophilia', Stokowski was mindful of how space and place could affect our understanding of recorded sound. Writing in 1935, he pointed out that 'a concert hall has thousands of feet of interior space. A living room has only a few hundred. They can never be the same'. He also added that he was 'not

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[41] Quoted in Albin Zak, 'Getting Sounds', 62.
[42] Leopold Stokowski, 'New Horizons in Music', *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 4, no. 1 (July 1932): 11–12.

even certain that the way we hear in a concert hall is the best and only way to listen'.[43]

Indeed, as part of his collaboration with Bell Laboratories two years prior, he was

stunned by the ability to listen to records binaurally (via headphones), insisting that they

'gave more of a sense of space, of direction and considerably more definition'. He found

it 'better in every way than monaural listening', suggesting that in mono 'the music

sounds concentrated and gives me a little sensation of being choked and crushed together.

Listening binaurally the music sounds free, spacious, and the choked sensation is gone. It

is as if one can breathe entirely freely'.[44] Such distinctions between binaural,

electronically mixed soundscapes and that of fixed-position, monaural sound continues to

play into debates about how best to experience opera, as I will discuss with regard to the

Metropolitan Opera's *Live in HD* telecasts in Chapter 5.

In the recording studio, McGinn tells us, Stokowski was 'not content merely to

conduct and leave all else to the engineers. Microphone placement, the seating

arrangement of his orchestra, sound reflectors, monitoring panels—the entire

paraphernalia of recording intrigued him'.[45] Had he incorporated more operatic repertoire

into his studio work, the techniques he might have employed could possibly have

anticipated much of what Culshaw did with the Decca label in the decades to come. Still,

this is not to suggest that genre was entirely absent from Stokowski's mind. Indeed, the

conductor was keen on revolutionising our consumption of that genre almost as much as

he was the orchestral repertoire.

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[43] Quoted in Greg Milner, *Perfecting Sound Forever*, 60.
[44] Quoted in Robert E. McGinn, 'Stokowski and Bell Laboratories', 49.
[45] Quoted in Ibid., 45.

In a July 1932 meeting of the Acoustical Society of America, the conductor
delivered his previously-cited talk 'New Horizons in Music'. In the same speech wherein
he lamented the 'limited and imperfect' technology of the day, he also spoke of his
'radical new approach to grand opera' and one of its 'most persistent problems': that of
'dramatic credibility'. Offering up an analogy decidedly tinged with misogynistic
undertones, he poses a hypothetical scenario, revolving around a staging of Wagner's
Tannhäuser:

> the idea…is that Venus, the most beautiful woman who ever existed, should tempt
> Tannhäuser from the narrow path of virtue. But unfortunately Venus was chosen because
> she had a marvellous larynx, and unfortunately sometimes she weighted too many
> pounds, and unfortunately—but I leave that to your imagination. And so the whole
> evening, the whole point of the drama is changed and spoilt. […] Can we change that
> lady? She might change herself if she would exercise, if she would eat less…, but it is
> really not going to be necessary, Electricity will change the lady.[46]

Several months earlier, he had espoused similar sentiments in another speech elsewhere.
As recounted in a *New York Times* article about his talk, the conductor insists that 'opera
today, while pleasing to the ear, is often a sore trial for the eye', anticipating Adorno's
later comments (also occasionally misogynistic) about subpar stagings wearing the
acoustic dimension of the genre threadbare.[47] Stokowski once again laments seeing
actresses play Venus who 'may sing like a nightingale' but 'look like an elephant' and
likewise promises, after rejecting the notion that he could 'ask the lady to eat less

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[46] Leopold Stokowski, 'New Horizons in Music', 12.
[47] In 'The Curves of the Needle', Adorno's earlier-cited argument regarding the problematics of 'sound
separated from bodies' is in fact grounded in a sexist comment that 'the female voice' specifically 'requires
the physical appearance of the body that carries it' and without it seems 'needy and incomplete' (p. 274). In
'Opera and the Long-Playing Record' he rails against 'the tireless efforts to modernise operas in opera
houses with new sets and stagings—at the expense of their substance' (p. 284).

spaghetti', that 'electricity will change her'. 'We can take her voice and record her on a disk. Then we can select a beautiful young lady who really may be accepted by the audience for a Venus. Then we can synchronise voice and action to create a perfect illusion'.[48]

On the one hand, comments such as these foreshadow the many body-shaming issues singers (women more so than men) would increasingly be forced to reckon with, especially as opera began to be recorded in video format. Deborah Voigt and the so-called 'Little Black Dress scandal' of 2004 comes to mind as one of the more prominent examples in recent memory, as does the outcry after numerous male critics denigrated Tara Erraught's Glyndebourne appearance ('stocky', 'dumpy', 'a chubby bundle of puppy-fat') in several 2014 reviews.[49] But Stokowski's proposal, which the anonymous newspaper author refers as 'synthetic opera', also anticipates techniques such as those employed by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, whose *Parsifal* film of 1982 would put such synchronisation techniques into practice much later. This film will be the subject of my next chapter, but the parallel is interesting, especially since Stokowski would also turn to the same opera in 1936 for a similar proposal, equally radical in its conception. Unlike Syberberg's later endeavour, which was a film and thus free to take advantage of the techniques conventionally afforded to that medium (critiques of his interpretation notwithstanding), Stokowski's would still have been a stage production.

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[48] 'Stokowski Testing Singerless Opera', *New York Times*, 3 May 1932, 23.
[49] For an overview of the 'little black dress' scandal, see Catherine Milner, 'Royal Opera sacks diva who was "too fat for dress"', *The Telegraph*, 7 March 2004, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1456228/Royal-Opera-sacks-diva-who-was-too-fat-for-dress.html. For a more recent example, see BBC News, 'Glyndebourne opera critics spark "sexism" row', 22 May 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-27500461.

For his proposed Easter 1936 *Parsifal*, Stokowski anticipated that 'the visual part on the stage' would be done by 'mimes', while the orchestra, as well as the soloists and the chorus, would be in the studio.[50] He had planned to tap AT&T's and Bell Laboratories' technologies so that they could also transmit at least one performance from Philadelphia to New York. Though further details are harder to come by—Stokowski lamentably gave up the proposal as he began to undertake his arduous transcontinental tour of the US with his orchestra earlier that year—likely strategies might be gleaned from earlier writings regarding his planned work with the Philadelphia Grand Opera company leading up to the abandoned *Parsifal* project. Another *New York Times* article detailed his proposal to synchronise disparate visual and aural components for some stagings in the 1932/33 season. The former would be the responsibility of 'actors and actresses, groups of dancers, and mimes…as ideal as possible in their physical makeup…and knowledge of the craft'. Meanwhile, he also planned to hire 'the best singers, the best chorus, and the best orchestra' to be transmitted by wire, with the added benefit of being able to use a larger orchestra than he would otherwise be able to, owing to the more restrictive size of the orchestra pit. Stokowski also clarified that

> although the actors on the stage will utter no sound the voices of the actual vocalists will be projected so as to come from the spot on the stage where the actors are seen. The voices will move from backstage to the front or side along with the mimes, who will concentrate upon the dramatic side of the production'.[51]

It is striking that Stokowski was offering a proposal which even today would still likely cause an uproar at many of the world's more forward-thinking opera houses. Acousmatic

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[50] Quoted in Robert E. McGinn, 'Stokowski and Bell Laboratories', 61.
[51] 'Stokowski Plans Opera Revolution', *New York Times*, 4 October 1932, 26.

sound on disc, he seems to suggest here, could still play a part in 'traditional' opera staging practices—and this in an era where, even by the conductor's own admission, the technology left much to be desired. By the time John Culshaw began work on his own Wagner-related studio recordings, technology had come a long way.

Though experimenting with the potential of stereophonic recording would become common in the realm of popular music record production, David Patmore suggests that only John Culshaw and Glenn Gould recognised and articulated the possibilities of stereo recording within the realm of Classical music.[52] As the above discussion of Stokowski and his abiding interest in studio technology should suggest, however, others might fruitfully be included in this (still admittedly limited) list. Nevertheless, Culshaw, whose reputation rests on the pioneering work he did with the British Decca label in the 1950s and '60s, provides an outstanding example of the ways in which opera's aural dramaturgy might be transformed from stage to record. As we saw with Adorno's comments, the birth of the long-playing record was what truly revolutionised the field of operatic disc production and laid the groundwork for the ideas Culshaw was to experiment with in the decades that followed.

Had one tried to record Wagner's massive *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in the era of the 78rpm record, Culshaw points out, the complete work would have occupied approximately 224 sides, or 112 records.[53] *Das Rheingold* would have to be interrupted thirty-five times alone for record changes, while *Götterdämmerung*, the longest in the tetralogy, would require double that. The fact that Culshaw's eventual production of the

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[52] David Patmore, 'Selling sounds: Recordings and the record business', in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, op. cit., 131.
[53] John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*, 8.

Cycle was released on fewer than two dozen LPs testifies to why someone like Adorno could praise the newer format for its 'uninterrupted' musical experiences, even if, as I have suggested above, the claim is still somewhat of an exaggeration. But stereophonic sound would revolutionise the field even further. In his own words, Culshaw suggests it was 'obvious from the beginning of stereo that opera would have to be conceived aurally for the new medium'.[54]

Before going into detail on the ways in which Culshaw's records demonstrate a unique approach to operatic dramaturgy on disc, it is worth highlighting that many of his reasons for working with the format seem to lie in the same sort of distaste for the artform's visual aspects that we could discern in comments made by Adorno and Stokowski above. In the book he published following the release of his monumental *Ring* Cycle recordings, he rails against the 'perversity of the stage' and the 'period of hopeless inadequacy in terms of staging' (especially at Wagner's Bayreuth theatre), and, writing earlier, he channels a 1914 comment from Ernest Newman in arguing for 'a sort of aural conception [that] may often be closer to the operatic ideal than many average offerings in the theatre'.[55] In the late 1950s, too, he argues provocatively that 'the dream of many opera enthusiasts' is 'a *wholly* accurate reproduction of the voice in balance plus the effect of that voice *in action*. All that one misses is the visual element and that is perhaps a mixed disadvantage'.[56] It is bold to suggest that the main dream of enthusiasts is one in which only the voice (and/or the voice 'in action') matters, but by the same token, record

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[54] Ibid., 10.
[55] Ibid., 27. For his comments on Newman, see David C. Patmore, John Culshaw and the Recording as a Work of Art', *ARSC Journal* 39, no 1 (Spring 2008): 21–22.
[56] Cited in ibid. Emphasis in original.

companies had been trying to sell that idea to consumers for the better part of a century at this point.

Culshaw's comments, especially while working on Wagner's operas, are also often shot through with notions of *Werktreue*—that sort of (supposed) fidelity to the composer's intentions we saw Guth's critics citing with regards to *Fidelio* in the previous chapter. In his monograph, Culshaw suggests trying to convey the Cycle 'on the lines [Wagner] envisioned', despite the fact that Wagner of course envisioned a more fully multisensory experience than audio alone could provide (Culshaw's innovative sound design notwithstanding).[57] Elsewhere, he also insists that his technological achievements are merely 'the servant of the music drama'. 'It has no function other than to convey through the medium of the gramophone, and in terms of sound alone, a magnificent interpretation of the musico-dramatic experience', he insists.[58] Yet despite this perceived anti-theatricalism or anti-visuality, Culshaw also bemoans that the sort of work he was doing in the studio was in fact not being adequately transferred over to the stage. He comments in his book, for instance, that 'it is a fact that many of the aural devices we used to make an effective *Ring* on records could also be made to work in the theatre', and he rails against 'any mentality which resists change in any form, save possibly that of the prevailing fashion'.[59] Elsewhere, he remarks about how 'howls of protest go up every time that technology comes to the assistance of music, despite the fact that without technology there would be no music at all, save for the human voice, for there would be

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[57] John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*, 256.
[58] Quoted in David C. Patmore, 'John Culshaw and the Recording as a Work of Art', 21,
[59] John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*, 259, 264.

no instruments to play on and no halls to play in'.[60] And again, towards the end of his

book, he insists that 'if the audience for opera in general and Wagner in particular is to

grow, and if that audience is to make contact with the drama in any serious sense, the

time is coming when technology must play a greater part even at the cost of a few artistic

sacred cows'.[61] The occasional paean to *Werktreue* notwithstanding, then, Culshaw truly

did seek to create experiences decidedly different from in-person theatrical attendance

while still striving to be equally immersive.

Regarding his utilising of the long-playing record (and specifically the newer-still

technology of stereophonic recording) to create what he has referred to as something akin

to a 'theatre of the mind', there can be no doubt that Culshaw's work on Wagner's *Ring*

Cycle stands as his magnum opus, much as it did for the composer himself.[62] Though I

will consider a number of his other operatic recordings as well, the *Ring* was in many

ways a testing ground—sometimes perhaps more like a playground—for figuring out

how best to convey Wagner's many sound effects and stage directions in an exclusively

aurally-based medium. I will not recount all of his efforts in detail; as mentioned above,

he has published an entire book on the topic, and has written about it elsewhere besides.

Nevertheless, several aspects merit attention.

For one, the importance of having supportive partners is worth bearing in mind.

Above, I have stressed Stokowski's work as a conductor, and his own interest in the

recording process. This has left us somewhat unaware of the work of the recording

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[60] John Culshaw, 'The Mellow Knob, or The Rise of Record and the Decline of the Concert Hall as Foreseen by Glenn Gould', *Record and Recording* (November 1966), 26–28.
[61] John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*, 258.
[62] Ibid., 2.

engineers themselves—hence my desire to shift focus to Culshaw's production process. Still, Georg Solti played a pivotal role as a conductor similarly open to Culshaw's experimental approach to the operatic soundscape. A number of the singers were, too. As the producer relates in his book, he was relieved to find in soprano Kirsten Flagstad, for example, an 'unsuspecting enthusiasm for what can be conveyed by movement on the stage as heard on a stereo recording', noting as well how she 'made a couple of suggestions for additional movements which we happily accepted'.[63] His comment about how to convey movement 'on stage' is worth pausing on for a moment. Frank Granville Barker suggested, when interviewing Culshaw in 1958, that 'a recording session has become rather like a stage production and calls for the expert placing of the performers'.[64] This was no exaggeration; for his records, Culshaw literally recreated a stage in the recording room, marked off with tape to be able to block his singers according to the dramatic action of the operas in question (Image 3.3).

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[63] Ibid., 11.

[64] Quoted in David C. Patmore, 'John Culshaw and the Recording as a Work of Art', 22.
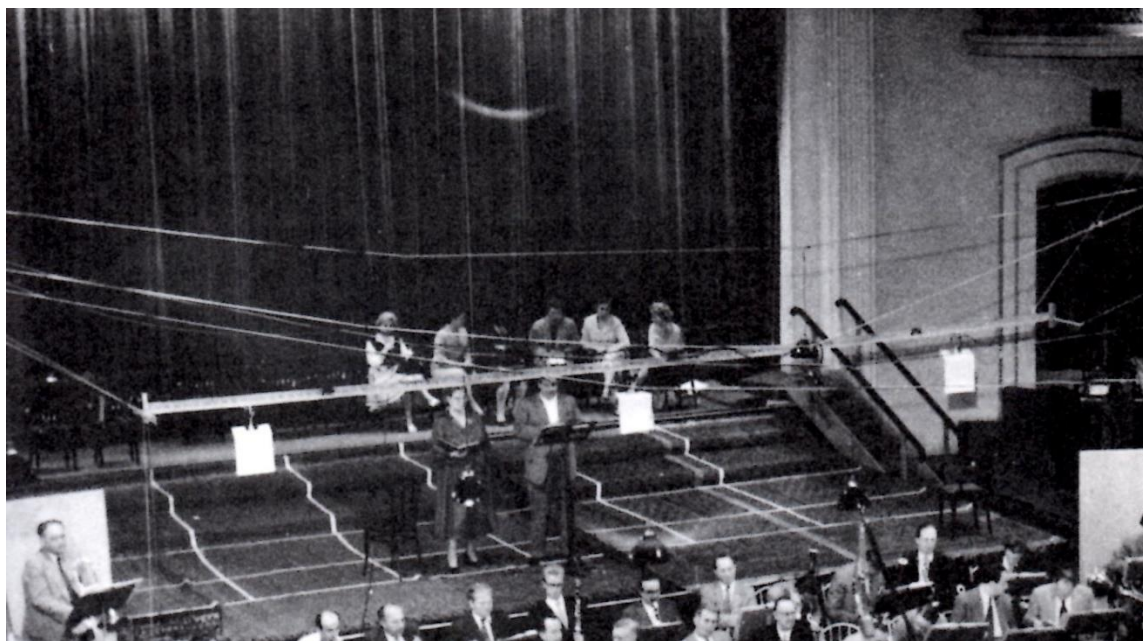
Image 3.3 Detail from a photo of a Culshaw recording session showing the marked-up sound stage[65]

But as he related shortly following the interview, 'the job of the stereo opera producer is to realise the essential movement of the drama in aural terms: in other words, far from attempting to duplicate the sound one hears in an opera house, he is trying to use his own medium to compensate for the fact that all his listeners are necessarily blind'.[66] In his book, too, he suggests plotting out the action for the singers on his sound stage resulted in their feeling 'free to move and to *act* in a way that was very rare' in the days of monophonic recording, but he also takes care to stress that 'the effect is nothing like that of an opera house'.[67] It was clear that Culshaw's approach to opera's aural dramaturgy was to be something that was neither the 'stand and deliver' style of recitation offered on previous discs but also distinct from the sort of soundscape one

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[65] The full photo appears in John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*, 59.
[66] Quoted in David C. Patmore, 'John Culshaw and the Recording as a Work of Art', 22.
[67] John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*, 10. Emphasis in original.

might capture in a recording of a live performance. His recordings offered something altogether different.

Among the more noteworthy aspects of Culshaw's sound design for the Cycle is the effort he went through to acquire a variety of differently sized anvils, to recreate the sounds of the Nibelungs toiling away in *Das Rheingold*. 'The noise was so enormous that the players could not hear themselves, and could therefore not tell when they got out of rhythm'. He suggests aiming for a sound that was 'meant to engulf the listener', building to a point where auditors 'could hardly bear the hammering a moment longer—at which point it would start to decrescendo'. This moment, along with the thunderclap at the end of the opera (about which more shortly) became 'a sort of international standard by which you judged the quality of your gramophone', Culshaw proudly asserts retrospectively. 'If you could play them, it was fine. If you could not, you were all set to buy yourself new equipment, for there was nothing wrong with the records'.[68] In fact, unorthodox orchestral sound effects being a proving ground for one's home audio setup can be traced back to the acoustic era, as when Simon Trezise points to the 'triumphant cymbal crashes' in the Boston Symphony Ocrhestra's 1917 recording of Tchaikovsky's fourth symphony, suggesting there, too, that they served as 'the last word in high-fidelity' and a 'marker for future generations of orchestral recording'.[69] But Culshaw's ingenuity can also be found elsewhere in the *Rheingold* recording that both formally and dramatically launched the first complete *Ring* Cycle on disc.

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[68] John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*, 89–90
[69] Simon Trezise, 'The recorded document', 197.

Regarding the aforementioned thunderclap near the end of the opera, Culshaw recalls that it 'was not a question of loudness, but of quality; we wanted a sound which would linger, and *from* which the music of the strings and six harps would emerge logically'. He recounts finding the low end of the frequency spectrum satisfactory with early efforts, but laments there being 'nothing at the top'.[70] His solution was to specially commission a steel sheet that would be used for the recording, seen in Image 3.4.
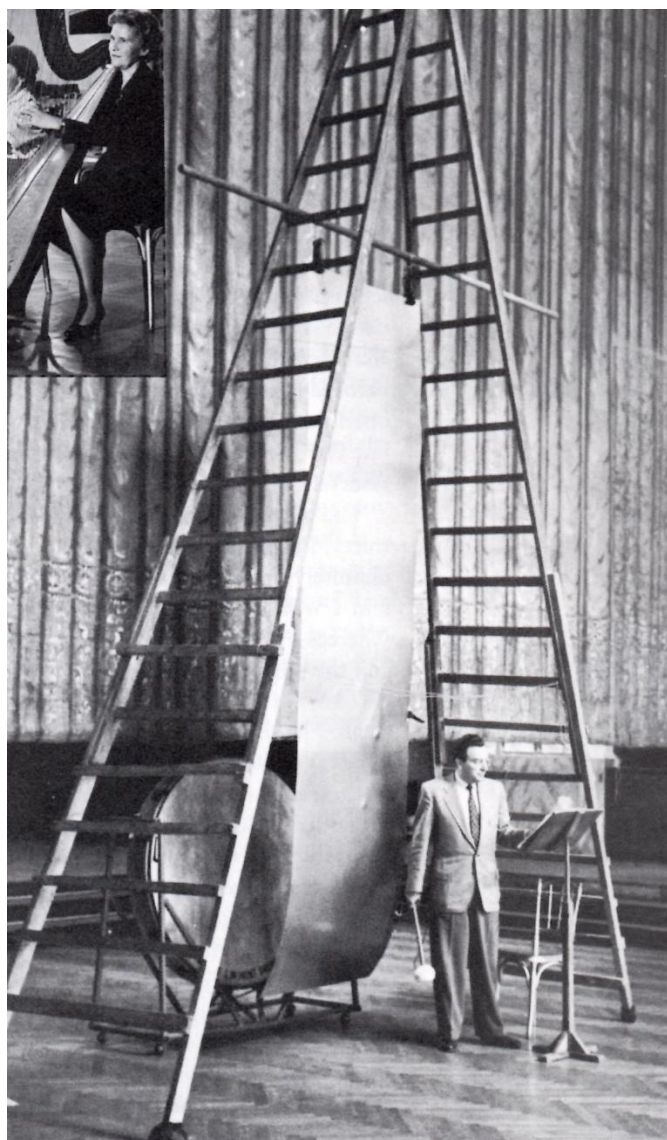

Image 3.4 The setup Culshaw used to create the thunderclap at the end of *Das Rheingold* [71]

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[70] John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*, 93. Emphasis in original.
[71] Reproduced from ibid., 95.

Measuring twenty feet by five feet, it 'took two men to shake it, and two more men to wallop the bass drums which lay at the foot of the sheet'. Of these two moments in particular—the two loudest on the disc—he suggests that they broke 'all the golden rules of what one should and should not do, technically speaking, on a gramophone record'.[72] Given how successful the record was both commercially and critically—one reviewer at the time said it was 'not exactly a theatre illusion that we have but perhaps something even closer to Wagner's creation'—the rules seemed no longer to apply.[73] As Gordon Parry, one of Decca's executives who greenlit Culshaw's early stereophonic projects, suggested shortly after the album's release, the 'vivid stage effects' have 'all the points and noises that people will want to show their hi-fi off with'.[74] Indeed, the recording was so successful that Parry and the other Decca executives subsequently decided to give the go-ahead for recording further operas in the Cycle.

Needless to say, with Wagner's tetralogy clocking in at some fifteen-to-sixteen hours to perform, there were many opportunities for Culshaw to pull off similar feats of acousmatic magic. Consider, for instance, how he describes a particular series of occurrences in *Die Walküre* that offers the listener 'all sorts of different acoustics and perspectives':

> There is Hunding's horn, loud and growing closer; there is Siegmund first in one offstage position and then, by Wagner's decree, in another; there is Hunding; first heard offstage but not yet in contact with Siegmund; and on the stage itself is Sieglinde, awakening to find that her nightmare has become a reality. There is a thunderclap, and then the sound

[72] Ibid., 93.
[73] Andrew Porter, '*Das Rheingold*', *The Gramophone*, March 1959, 472.
[74] Quoted in David C. Patmore, 'John Culshaw and the Recording as a Work of Art', 25–26.

of Brünnhilde's voice as she appears in the air above Siegmund, followed immediately by the sound of Wotan's voice as he stands above Hunding. From a purely technical point of view, it is the hardest two minutes in *Walküre*.[75]

He gets at something similar when he points out the breakdown of sound effects required for *Siegfried*, the third opera in the cycle: 'the technical requirements for act one may be gauged by the fact that on the schedule I had quoted five special effects for act three, thirteen for act two and twenty-eight for act one, although it happens to be the shortest of the three'.[76] But that persistent sense of *Werktreue* lingers throughout his account. 'All this was only a modern extension of what Wagner himself had in mind' he tells readers after recounting a similar audio experiment to 'change and magnify Alberich's voice and make it move at our will to any part of the stereo arc and back again' (as the Nibelung dons the magical Tarnhelm and threatens his brother Mime earlier on in *Das Rheingold*).[77] Rare moments of departure from the composer's stage directions are thus also worth considering, then.

As the cataclysmic events of *Götterdämmerung* begin to play out, Wagner simply notes the collapse of the Gibichung hall without indicating any sounds or further stage directions. 'It is the only case in the entire *Ring* recording where we incorporated something that is merely *implied* by Wagner', he tells us.[78] Intervention in this regard is easily justified for Culshaw, though; there was 'no reason why Wagner should have thought of mentioning it as a noise, for in demanding what amounted to the collapse of a substantial stage set he was assured of any amount of noise by the nature of the

[75] John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*, 237.
[76] Ibid., 153.
[77] Ibid., 99.
[78] Ibid., 197, 198.

requirement'. For this unaccounted-for moment, he expected objection from Solti, but recounts 'to [his] great joy' that the conductor 'liked it, and agreed that some non-musical sound can be justified, dramatically, at that moment'.[79] One other moment in the last opera deserves mention: Siegfried's earlier transformation into Gunther, again courtesy of the transformational magic of the Tarnhelm. While difficult to effect convincingly in most stage productions in any manner aside from a simple costume change, Culshaw reports altering the 'construction' of Wolfgang Windgassen's voice 'in such a way that it would sound vaguely like Fischer-Dieskau's [Gunther], but without altering the key or tonality in question'. Noting it was 'an exceedingly difficult business', he again reports his relief that 'the critics did not kill us for it, because it was what Wagner hoped for, according to his stage directions, and because it came off—which is to say that it fitted into the dramatic context without drawing attention to itself as a gimmick and without interfering with the music'.[80] Later in the book he returns to this potentially controversial decision: '*It does not happen in the theatre* would doubtless be the phrase thrown at us from certain quarters. There is an answer, however. It does not happen in the theatre because nobody has tried to make it happen; but *the idea is in the score*'. Again with the same sort of nods to 'what Wagner would have wanted' that we will again encounter in Chapter 5 (with a staged version of the Cycle), Culshaw, 'hazard[ing] a guess' based on knowledge of Wagner's 'enthusiasm for any new and effective way of bringing about the ends he desired', suspects that the composer would have 'jumped at the possibility' of deploying such technological manipulation.[81] But Culshaw's innovative sound designs

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[79] Ibid., 198.
[80] Ibid., 12.
[81] Ibid., 174, 175. Emphasis in original.

extended beyond the Cycle as well—and besides, I will return to the aural dramaturgy of Wagner's *Ring* in Chapter 5. Before concluding, then, it is also worth noting innovative techniques in some of his other recordings.

Before departing to work as the BBC's head of music programmes in 1967, Culshaw produced a number of other significant albums with Decca. Following the release of *Das Rheingold* in 1959, the company began putting out much of Culshaw's work under what they dubbed their 'Sonicstage' catalogue. First among its releases was *Tristan und Isolde* in 1961. For this recording, the producer took his 'stage' idea even further, reproducing literal sets as might have appeared in an actual production, but constructed in a way to take particular advantage of the full spectrum stereophonic sound offered on disc. For Act 1, which takes place on the ship carrying Isolde to King Marke, Culshaw requested the ship be placed at a forty-five-degree angle on his sound stage. Tristan and Kurwenal can be heard upstage on the deck of the ship, singing from what we might think of as stage-right, while Isolde and her attendant Brangäne can be heard downstage, stage-left, in the cabin area. The aural dramaturgy here again subverts the typical sort of 'stand and deliver' approach that would even characterise many of Decca's own subsequent releases after Culshaw left for the BBC. With *Tristan*, however, we can begin to get a sense of why Culshaw was able to conceive of opera as a sort of sound drama.

This is not to suggest that Culshaw's only significant works involved Wagner's music-dramas. With Decca's exclusivity deal with Benjamin Britten at the time, Culshaw also recorded the first complete *Peter Grimes*, for instance, and worked with the composer to record a number of his other operas, as well as his *War Requiem*, which

Culshaw thought to be the finest of his recordings.[82] Sympathetic (to a point) as Britten

may have been to Culshaw's ideologies, the acoustic experimentation in these albums is

somewhat less than the latter indulged in elsewhere, owing perhaps to some sense of

deference to a still-living composer's wishes. Rather, his 1962 *Salome* and 1967 *Elektra*

stand out as exemplars on par with his *Ring* Cycle and *Tristan und Isolde* endeavours.

Both of the Strauss operas were also released under the 'Sonicstage' brand and

were likewise collaborations with Solti and the Vienna Philharmonic. Though the

producer was to later admit the claims made for these recordings to be somewhat

hyperbolic (he suggests not doing much differently than he had already been doing with

his earlier Wagnerian experimentations), the soundscapes in both are equally intriguing.

For *Salome*, Culshaw suggests trying to 'offer a new kind of personal involvement to the

listener by placing him closer to the score, and thus to the drama, than has been possible

hitherto', and also states that with the album he was finally able to 'establish stereo

recording as a legitimate operatic medium'. In another advertisement around the time of

the disc's release, he similarly promised 'a new sense of listener participation which

brings you to the heart of the drama'.[83] The practices are similar with *Elektra*, wherein a

1967 *Gramophone* review suggests Culshaw managed to create 'acoustical atmospheres

which convey the changing ambiences of the music—not only the situations and the

words, but what the characters are feeling at a particular moment'. During the work's

climax, after the titular character hears of her brother Orestes' death, Culshaw pans

Elektra's manic laughter left, right, and everywhere in between, with echoes offering

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[82] With Britten, Culshaw also recorded *Albert Herring* (1964), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1967), and *Billy Budd* (1968).
[83] Both quotes cited in David C. Patmore, 'John Culshaw and the Recording as a Work of Art', 29.

further distortion still. *The Gramophone*'s description of the effect as 'bloodcurdling' is fairly accurate, if also something of a Culshaw-like hyperbole.[84]

In the wake of Culshaw's death in 1980, record critic Edward Greenfield spoke, in a memorial article, of how the pioneering producer's contribution to the industry was 'to appreciate for the first time the vital role which stereo had to play in the development of recording as an art and opera recording in particular'. He singles out the *Ring* project, not surprisingly, and asserts that the set brought about 'a new concept in recording as an art-form distinct from live performance', which, as I have argued above, was indeed the sort of experience Culshaw was himself championing: something different from both standard, live or studio-based recordings, but also something altogether different from what one might experience in-house. Greenfield channels Culshaw again when he suggests the producer's unique approach to aural dramaturgy—his 'idea of a total production in sound recording'—being able to transcend 'what was possible in the opera house', citing Culshaw's 'translating Wagner's stage directions into sonic terms' as something which particularly inspired his imagination 'to the full'.[85] The idea of rendering stage directions in sonic terms also brings us back to the acousmatic more generally speaking, for this is a consideration any stage director inevitably comes face to face with. Recall the many references to owls and bells in *Macbeth* (both Shakespearean and Verdian), for instance, or the acousmatic chorus in Guth's *Fidelio* staging. But where these sounds might fall into Kane's category of 'ancient telos' or 'originary experience', Culshaw shows us how these, too, become new riddles to solve when divorced from the

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[84] William Mann, 'Elektra', *The Gramophone*, November 1967, 277.
[85] Edward Greenfield, 'The Art of John Culshaw', *The Gramophone*, July 1980, 123.

bodies of the actors and stagehands who might otherwise bring them about for in-house audiences.

Since the advent of video recording, operas can now be enjoyed outside the theatre as audio-visual, rather than purely aural, phenomena. But, as I have suggested with works like Toop's *Star-shaped Biscuit*, audio-only operatic experiences still exist, and may at times be the only way one might be able to come into contact with certain pieces, especially if they are not standard repertory staples. Thus, Culshaw's abiding belief in the distinction between hearing opera on disc and seeing it on stage is one that opponents of other forms of remediated opera would do well to bear in mind. For Culshaw, to reiterate once more, 'stereo offers, or should offer, an entirely different experience from that of the concert performance, [so] there is no reason on earth why the two should not exist happily, side by side, for many years to come'.[86] The same might well be said of cinematic opera adaptations and operatic telecasts—the topics to which I will now turn in the chapters that remain, and both of which equally seek to offer unique ways of coming to know the artform through sound.

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[86] John Culshaw, *Ring Resounding*, 11.

CHAPTER 4

Time Becomes Space? The Remediated Sounds of Syberberg's *Parsifal*

The previous chapter helped us transition beyond sound's 'page-to-stage' journey by also investigating its newfound ability to exist independently of the live stage, through technologies of audio-visual reproduction. The chapters to follow will focus more exclusively on ways in which we can come to know operatic sound in the age of its mechanical reproducibility. Put differently, I will now consider how remediation, the process Bolter and Grusin define as 'the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms', has come to impact our understanding of the operatic soundscape.[1] The idea of remediated sound is of course quite broad. In regards to opera alone, it could readily be the subject of a book-length study—or indeed, multiple studies; several scholars have begun exploring the artform's various remediated incarnations, though from different perspectives than I offer here. While I will begin this chapter with a brief overview of operatic remediation writ large, the present chapter will focus largely on film, followed by a separate chapter on another format—that of the live cinema broadcast.

I have selected the opera-film and the livecast because they represent one of the most and least theorised areas of operatic remediation, respectively, and existing scholarship on both has been fruitfully interdisciplinary, involving not only music and opera scholars, but also those in film, theatre and performance studies, literary criticism, and beyond: in other words, many of the same fields whose research has already been

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[1] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 273.

brought to bear upon my exploration of opera's aural dramaturgies in previous chapters. The question of how the artform has thus far been able to interact with twentieth and twenty-first-century media technologies offers opportunities to continue exploring the operatic soundscape from angles other than text- and performance-based approaches. Notably, as with other aspects of the genre's aural dramaturgy, existing studies of operatic remediation still often fail to consider acoustemological questions. As I will argue in this chapter and the one to follow, these remediated formats allow for new ways of coming to know the artform through sound. Debates among aficionados on potential amplification in the theatre, or whether studio editing of the operatic voice is a boon or a bane, seem perennial, but academic discourse has yet to engage with the other ways in which the remediated sounds of stage and screen might possibly deepen our understanding of the characters and stories that have been presented on unamplified proscenium stages for centuries.[2]

I will begin with an historical overview of opera's history of cinematic remediation, with the caveat that further details about the livecast will be explored in Chapter 5. Following this I will shift specifically to the category of the modern opera-film, with Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's 1982 *Parsifal* as my particular case study, and with a primary focus on the characters of Parsifal and Kundry. By exploring questions of audio-visual synchronisation and the splitting of the titular character into male and female halves, I will demonstrate how Syberberg attempts to confront the work's gender and racial issues. The separation of voice from body, I will argue, also has a bearing on how

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[2] For a consideration of the issue of amplification, see Anthony Tommasini, 'Pipe Down! We Can Hardly Hear You: Opera has stepped up to the mike. Will it ever sound the same again?', *New York Times*, 1 January 2006, A1, A 25.

the director handles Kundry, and an analysis of her character will follow the sections dedicated to the opera's protagonist.

Lastly, it should be noted that the use of Wagnerian music-drama for my case studies here and in the chapter to follow should not be taken as part of the frequent and widespread tendency to equate Wagner with these media technologies specifically. Many interdisciplinary studies in recent years have placed the composer at some point in a teleological progression that sees him as either the endpoint or, more frequently, the founding father of multi-medial innovation. Hilda Meldrum Brown, for instance, claims that composers in the first half of the nineteenth century were merely 'stumbling, though in a piecemeal fashion and without the benefit of any clearly defined pathway' towards the sort of Wagnerian integration that would become the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of the *Ring* Cycle. She dismisses the work of composers before Wagner as irrelevant, suggesting that the groundwork for multimedial integration lay elsewhere, and similarly dismisses as 'virtually non-existent' any 'pantheon of twentieth-century *Gesamtkünstler*', leaving Wagner as the culmination and end-point in this regard.[3]

This contrasts starkly with studies by Matthew Wilson Smith, Randall Packer, and Ken Jordan, among others, whose works, with subtitles such as 'From Bayreuth to Cyberspace' and 'From Wagner to Virtual Reality', place the composer at the beginning rather than the end of a chronology of multimedial innovation. Media scholar Friedrich Kittler has referred to *Tristan und Isolde* as 'the beginning of modern mass media', and Jeongwon Joe and Sander Gilman's sizeable edited volume *Wagner and Cinema* likewise

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[3] Hilda Meldrum Brown, *The Quest for the Gesamtkunstwerk and Richard Wagner* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016), 268. Her reading of film also surprisingly goes against the grain of many other scholars by suggesting that the medium offers little to no evidence to consider when theorizing quests for multi-medial synthesis.

offers a variety of authors who investigate the composer's influence on and adaptation in

the medium. Others such as Scott Paulin have worked equally hard to dismiss what he

dubs 'the fantasy of cinematic unity' when considering 'the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*

in the history and theory of film music'.[4] Even Adorno and Horkheimer's earlier

scholarship suggests such a teleological reading, as when they claim in their *Dialectic of*

Enlightenment that television, which 'aims as a synthesis of radio and film' could be seen

as 'derisively fulfilling the Wagnerian dream of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*'.[5] Many of these

claims inevitably seek no less an authority on the matter than Wieland Wagner, who in a

1977 conversation with Tony Palmer suggests that his grandfather would surely have

been a Hollywood filmmaker had he lived longer. Indeed, Hilan Warshaw, in another

article with a revealing subtitle ('Wagner as a Proto-Filmmaker'), suggests the composer

was 'working, in essence, as a film composer' even as early as *Der Fliegende*

Holländer.[6] He also channels authorities farther back in time, as when a 1911 article in

the trade journal *Motion Picture World* asserted that 'every man or woman in charge of a

moving picture theatre is, consciously or unconsciously, a disciple of Richard Wagner'.

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[4] Friedrich Kittler, 'World-Breath: On Wagner's Media Technology', in *Opera through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 231. For these other studies, see Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Randall Packer and Ken Jordan, eds., *Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality*, especially their 'Overture' at the beginning of the volume; Jeongwon Joe and Sander Gilman, eds., *Wagner and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); and Scott D. Paulin, 'Richard Wagner and the Fantasy of Cinematic Unity: The Idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in the History and Theory of Film Music', in *Music and Cinema*, eds. James Buhler, Caryl Flynn, and David Neumeyer (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 58–84.
[5] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1999), 124. Adorno also writes of 'the birth of film out of the spirit of music' in *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (New York: Verso, 2009), 96.
[6] Hilan Warshaw, '"The Dream Organ": Wagner as a Proto Filmmaker', in *Wagner Outside the Ring: Essays on the Operas, Their Performance and Their Connections with Other Arts*, ed. John Louis DiGaetani (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 186.

Warshaw, himself a filmmaker as well as a scholar, does concede that what the composer would have thought about early film practice is 'debatable', however.[7]

Gundula Kreuzer's approach is more measured. At the beginning of her recent monograph, she admits to setting out with the hopes of 'dismantl[ing] Wagner's overbearing in the historiography of operatic production by exposing his borrowing of technologies from his contemporaries' but confesses 'with some chagrin' to realising how instrumental he had been after all, 'not for inventing but for pushing and twisting the uses of each technology' considered in her study.[8] I can thus only echo David Trippett, who, in his own Wagner-inspired look at the genre's interactions with various media formats, suggests that the composer's works are 'only a case study for modern opera media aesthetics and it is worth clarifying that the intuitive connexion here with discursive genealogies…are incidental rather than intrinsic to this inquiry'.[9] Though Wagner's thoughts on *Parsifal* (and, in the next chapter, on the *Ring*), as well as his other theoretical writings, may occasionally warrant consideration, their inclusion here should not be taken as an endorsement of the teleological focus some of the other studies alluded to above may have promoted. Rather, these works will serve merely as exemplary case studies—much as those of Shakespeare, Verdi, and Beethoven served previously—as I chart how opera's aural dramaturgy is affected by the remediated spaces and sounds of cinema (and, later, livecast).

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[7] Quoted in ibid., 191.
[8] Gundula Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian Technologies of Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), xi.
[9] David Trippett, 'Facing Digital Realities: Where Media Do Not Mix', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 26, no. 1 (March 2014): 44.

I. A Brief History of Operatic Remediation

Acts of operatic remediation have a history dating back well over a century, and in almost every sense opera has been integral in helping to solidify each new medium's reputability among the broader cultural and economic marketplace. Less than two decades after electricity's introduction to the stage (operatic or otherwise)—for the 1849 premiere of Meyerbeer's *Le prophète*—its capacity for operatic remediation was already being theorised and, in some quarters, feared. In terms prophetically similar to those that greeted the Metropolitan Opera's *Live in HD* telecasts hardly more than a decade ago, an 1876 *New York Times* article reporting on recently successful telephone demonstrations prophesied the apparatus's disastrous effects on ticket sales for the city's then-dominant opera house, the Academy of Music: 'No man who can sit in his own study with his telephone by his side, and thus listen to the performance of an opera at the Academy, will care to go to fourteenth street and to spend an evening in a hot and crowded building'.[10] As we shall see in the next chapter, the invention of the théâtrophone only five years later would indeed offer just the sort of service proposed by the anonymous journalist. But just as soon as these enterprises were getting off the ground, Edison had already announced his ambitious hopes for a more fully integrated audio-visual form of operatic remediation. In a weekly periodical printed by the Electrical Publishing Company in May 1891, he is quoted as saying:

> My intention is to have such a happy combination of photography and electricity that a
> man can sit in his own parlour, see depicted upon a curtain the forms of the players in an

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[10] 'The Telephone', *New York Times*, 22 March 1876, 4. Quoted in Mark Schubin, 'The Fandom of the Opera: How the Audience for a Centuries-Old Art Form Has Incubated Electrical and Electronics Technologies', *Proceedings of the IEEE* 104, no. 3 (March 2016): 676.

opera upon a distant stage and hear the voices of the singers. When the system is

perfected—which will be in time for the [1893 Chicago World] fair—the play of each

muscle of the singer's face will be seen, every colour of his or her attire will be

reproduced and the stride and positions will be as natural as those of the live characters.[11]

Though Edison's early dream of audio-visually live-streaming opera to the home

was still technologically infeasible, he was as quick to seize upon film's operatic

potential as he was the phonograph's a decade prior. As Mark Schubin relates, the first

patent for motion picture equipment was certified in 1888 as a 'method and apparatus for

the projection of Animated Pictures in view of the adaptations to Operatic Scenes', and

the inventor's earliest patent caveat for motion pictures, filed the same year, describes

opera as their only purpose—and with synchronised sound to boot, so that 'we may see &

hear a whole opera as if actually present although the actual performances may have

taken place years before'.[12] Fittingly for my concerns in this chapter, Edison was also

responsible for the first *Parsifal* film. He hired Edwin S. Porter to produce one in March

1904, only three months after the original had made its way to theatres outside of

Bayreuth for the first time. As Charles Musser notes, the work was treated as a 'sacred'

film and listed in catalogues with other religious films. Its 'extraordinary' length—nearly

2,000 feet of film—ran for approximately thirty-five minutes and complete prints sold for

$335 at the time.[13]

Several decades later, television would offer another possible avenue for those

wishing to experience opera outside of the theatre. Though an extended look at the

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[11] 'Alleged Edisoniana', *The Electrical Enterprise* 1, no. 22 (30 May 1891): 419.

[12] Thomas A. Edison, US Patent Caveat no. 110, written Orange, NJ, 8 October 1888; filed 17 October 1888, 2–3. Quoted in ibid., 680.

[13] Charles Musser, *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 288, 289.

subgenre of opera on television remains outside the scope of this study, it is worth

bearing in mind that, for a period of time in the 1950s and '60s, this trend also helped

bring these works outside the confines of the opera house. In Marcia Citron's words, it

helped create a 'great excitement for the production of opera and eventually shifted the

centre of gravity from the large screen to the small'.[14] Most significant for our present

purposes, however, was the ABC television network's 1948 opening-night broadcast of

Verdi's *Otello* at the Metropolitan Opera House. Arguably a significant precursor to both

the opera company's later 'Great Performances at the Met' television relays and their

most recent *Live in HD* endeavours (also often broadcast on public television after the

fact), the performance, seen in over half a million homes, was popular enough to warrant

opening-night broadcasts for the following two years before ultimately being cancelled

on account of the high technological demands and limitations of the time. I will return to

this experiment in the next chapter, too, where it will be considered in further detail.

As technology advanced, Edison's vision of presenting full-length operas with

synchronised audio and visuals became increasingly viable. By the mid twentieth

century, neither television nor film, record nor radio required opera's 'highbrow' cultural

capital to help legitimate their various mediums. Nevertheless, as Schubin (a free-lance

engineer who has worked with the Met's media department for the past fifty years)

relates, the first monochrome-compatible colour-television programme seen at home was

opera (in 1953). Both the first live radio network (1973) and stereophonic-sound

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[14] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 40. For an overview of opera on television, see Jennifer Barnes, *Television Opera: The Fall of Opera Commissioned for Television* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1982) and 'Television Opera: A Non History', in *A Night in at the Opera: Media Representations of Opera*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (London: John Libbey, 1994), 29–51. See also the second chapter of Citron's *Opera and Screen*, and Danielle Ward-Griffin, 'As Seen on TV: Putting the NBC Opera on Stage', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 71, no. 3 (Fall 2018): 595–654.

television network (1976) were built for the same purpose as well.[15] The 1970s and '80s also brought the artform back to the big screen, with a sizeable influx of what have become known as opera-films: cinematic interpretations of repertory classics, recorded either in a studio or on-location. As opposed to in-house tapings of the opera stage, these films were full-length cinematic treatments by major directors such as Ingmar Bergman, Joseph Losey, Franco Zeffirelli, and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg.

Around the same time as these directors were working on their opera-films, the rise of VHS and, later, DVD, helped bring about another surge in popularity and accessibility for the genre, bringing it beyond the opera house in various states of remediation. Curiously, despite the enduring longevity of such physical, audio-visual media (now including Blu-ray and 4K Ultra HD) over the past several decades, English-language scholarship in this area remains regrettably undertheorized within the field of opera studies, though work by Christopher Morris and Pierre Bellemare, among others, has recently begun to rectify this.[16]

The modern, high-definition, live-streaming simulcasts inaugurated by the Metropolitan Opera House in 2006 rank among the newest forms of operatic remediation.[17] Though this format will be the subject of further analysis in Chapter 5, it is worth bearing in mind that the rhetoric used to advertise these events echoes that of many

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[15] Mark Schubin, 'The Fandom of the Opera', 681.

[16] Christopher Morris, 'Digital Diva: Opera in Video', *Opera Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 96–119. Pierre Bellemare, 'Opera on Optical Video Disc, or the Latest (and Final?) Avatar of the Gesamtkunstwerk', in *Opera in the Media Age: Essays on Art, Technology and Popular Culture*, ed. Paul Fryer (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 173–98.

[17] The advent of subscription-based online streaming services from opera houses like 'Met on Demand' and the Vienna Staatsoper's similar online platform, along with equivalent services for spoken and musical theatre (GlobePlayer, BroadwayHD, etc.) represent more recent endeavours than the simulcasts, but space precludes a more detailed examination of this technology.

earlier attempts at operatic remediation. The cinema broadcasts are often promoted as the highest-quality, most 'faithful' of operatic remediations—the next best thing to 'being there', as we shall see. Yet as even this cursory trip through opera's history of remediation begins to show, covering all of these forms in detail is well beyond the scope of this chapter—or even the next one. For the sake of time and space, I will favour depth over breadth of focus and turn now to the opera-film more specifically.

II. Opera-Film's Conventions, Syberberg's Ambitions

As suggested above, opera has had close ties to film since the latter's earliest days, and the opera-films of the 1970s and '80s saw the genre return to the big screen with a vengeance. Many disparate technological trends had finally converged to make this both possible and profitable at that time: it was now feasible to record a full-length opera, in colour, with synchronised sound, to add subtitles for international audiences, and to monetise the productions further through subsequent home video release on VHS and laser disc (later, DVD and Blu-ray). Directors like Bergman and Syberberg chose to film in studios, recreating theatrical sets or inventing their own, and offering sights and sounds one may or may not be able to see and hear in a conventional production, whether recorded live or otherwise. Others, such as Joseph Losey and Francesco Rosi, aimed at a more cinematic sense of realism or naturalism by shooting the operas on-location, sometimes even going as far as to film at the places and times described in the libretti. As remarked upon earlier, singing in these films is often pre-recorded, with performers lip-syncing during the filming process (recitative was often recorded live on-set, however), though live recording has been successfully attempted in some instances.

Literary scholar Jeremy Tambling's Marxist-inflected readings of these works offers one of the earliest book-length treatments on the subject. His *Opera, Ideology and Film* (1987) was written at a time when directors like Zeffirelli and Jean-Pierre Ponnelle were still producing films in this vein. Subsequently, Marcia Citron, Jeongwon Joe, Michal Grover-Friedlander, and several others have all released monographs on this particular strain of 'opera-film'—a genre that has continued into the twenty-first century, if at a slower pace than previously, with works like Kenneth Branagh's *Magic Flute* (2006), Robert Dornhelm's *La Bohème* (2008) and Kasper Holten's *Juan*, a 2010 adaptation of *Don Giovanni*.[18] It is not my intention to rehash their scholarship, but I highlight the ubiquity of critical interest in the opera-film to mention its curious dearth of sonic nuance. Though film and sound scholars might seemingly be in a better place to notice and comment upon the unique sonic aspects of these cinematic adaptations, attention to the aural dramaturgies created by directors like Syberberg and others has been scant. It is my hope to elucidate how attention to things even as apparently mundane as lip-syncing—by far the most popular technique in opera-film production—can become a vehicle in this medium for altering our acoustemological understanding of these works.

Before delving into Syberberg's *Parsifal* film, however, it will also be useful to clarify several things about the director, including the numerous ways in which his approach to the opera differ from others who have sought to adapt this genre for the big screen. Though Solveig Olsen is perhaps extreme to suggest that his rendition 'defies

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[18] Representative scholarship can be found in Jeremy Tambling, *Opera, Ideology and Film* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Marcia Citron: *Opera on Screen*, op. cit.; idem., *When Opera Meets Film* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jeongwon Joe and Theresa Rose, ed., *Between Opera and Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

labelling', that 'opera film does not do it justice', and that it is 'the only one of its kind', it is certainly the case that the German director pushes the envelope further than most other filmic adaptations have attempted even to this day. Olsen asserts, however, that since the film 'unfolds within the given parameters of libretto and score', Syberberg's contribution resides 'to a considerable degree in the visual treatment'.[19] Yet as I suggest below, the cinematic soundscape of this *Parsifal* is at times as revelatory as its multi-layered visuals, and equally capable of unsettling us.

Syberberg is not the only opera-film director to have no practical experience with the older artform prior to adapting for the screen. While directors like Zeffirelli and Ponnelle had extensive backgrounds in opera and spoken theatre, Joseph Losey similarly had no prior exposure to opera before filming his *Don Giovanni* (1979), and Robert Dornhelm, working more recently, has been openly hostile to the idea of working with the genre—even saying so in the commentary tracks included with his film's commercial video release. Nor is Syberberg unique in offering a strong ideological underpinning to his cinematic adaption. While Zeffirelli confesses his main aim with his *Otello* to be no more than to 'provide the viewer with an experience of great beauty' (a paraphrase I borrow from Citron), Losey's film offers a pointed critique of industrial, class-based inequalities.[20] Relocated to Venice and filmed in ornate but dilapidated mansions—to symbolise the impending fall of the old order—the titular character in this otherwise eighteenth-century-dress production (played sinisterly and masterfully by Ruggiero

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[19] Solveig Olsen, *Hans Jürgen Syberberg and His Film of Wagner's* Parsifal (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 316.
[20] Citron's paraphrase of an interview with the director can be found in *Opera on Screen*, 72.

Raimondi) is the owner of a glass factory who meets his death after the Stone Guest

backs him into the fiery abyss of the libertine's own furnace.

Yet Syberberg's film is unique in that it functions as a piece of a much larger

puzzle within the director's oeuvre, one that connects it to his larger project of

Trauerarbeit, or the 'work of mourning'. The term, with its psychoanalytic associations,

is regularly employed by the director as a way of framing his broader project: tackling the

thorny and complex issue of Germany's perceived inability to reconcile its National

Socialist past with its present-day problems, including persistent issues of anti-Semitism

and racism, capitalist exploitation, environmental irresponsibility, and other topics

besides.[21] Many of his filming techniques have been characterised as Brechtian, and

examples in *Parsifal* will confirm this. As Thomas Elsaesser, writing prior to this film's

release, puts it, 'Brecht allegorised and Wagner surrealised are the polarities within which

Syberberg's work wants to redefine the cinema as a "Gesamtkunstwerk" of mediation,

that is to say, of interpretation'.[22] Thus, besides the theatrical implications of marrying

Brecht to Wagner for this film (much commented on by scholars), the sort of alienation

Syberberg strives for is also connected to his ideological beliefs. He says he works

consciously against the sophisticated and immersive filming techniques used by Leni

Riefenstahl, for example, which he believes to have played a large part in helping

aestheticize Hitler's *Weltanschauung*. Along these lines he also consistently fights back

against Hollywood, which he in one instance refers to as 'the great whore of

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[21] The term first appeared in Freud's 1915 'Trauer und Melancholie'. For a comprehensive analysis of the term as applied to Syberberg's films, see Eric L. Santner, 'Allegories of Grieving: The Films of Hans Jürgen Syberberg', in *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 103–49. Santner does not consider *Parsifal* in his study, however.

[22] Thomas Elsaesser, 'Myth as the Phantasmagoria of History: H. J. Syberberg, Cinema and Representation', *New German Critique* 24/25, Special Double Issue on New German Cinema (Autumn 1981–Winter 1982): 153.

showbusiness'.[23] Writing about *Parsifal* specifically, he insists that he deliberately sought to avoid such 'boulevard film' techniques as shot/reverse-shot and the arbitrary, 'stylelessness' of hectic quick-cuts.[24]

His approach to film is thus unconventional on a number of levels. This unorthodox and ideological style of filmmaking has garnered him more than his fair share of critical hostility in Germany, where his work's preoccupation with Hitler and the country's Nazi past has at times resulted in uncomprehending viewers (critics and audience members alike) assuming the director to be taking a sympathetic rather than a critical stance against the dictator. He is thus certainly one of the more controversial filmmakers to involve himself in the opera-film genre to date. Patrick Carnegy sees *Parsifal* as the culmination of Syberberg's attempts at *Trauerarbeit*, and indeed the director has admitted to moving on to other topics in subsequent works. *Die Nacht* (1985), Syberberg's next film following *Parsifal*, is one he describes as his 'swansong for Europe' and his 'final lament'; elsewhere, he claimed that to continue such work, beyond his decade-plus string of films broaching these topics from a number of different angles, would have amounted to 'megalomania' (*Größenwahnsinn*).[25]

Some cinema scholars refer to a so-called 'German Trilogy' of films by the director. By these they mean *Ludwig II: Requiem für einen jungfräulichen König* (1972); *Karl May: Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Paradeis* (1974); and the massive, 442-minute *Hitler: Ein Film aus Deutschland* (1977). This last, released in English under the title *Our Hitler*, features an iconic moment, frequently reproduced (see Image 4.1),

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[23] Quoted in John Sanford, *The New German Cinema* (London: Oswald Wolf, 1980), 117.

[24] Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *Parsifal: Ein Filmessay* (Munich: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, 1982), 78, 123.

[25] The director's ideas are paraphrased in Eric L. Santner, 'Allegories of Grieving', 192n101, 193n104.

wherein the toga-clad *Führer* arises from an open grave bearing the initials RW—an

allusion that hardly needs further clarification here.
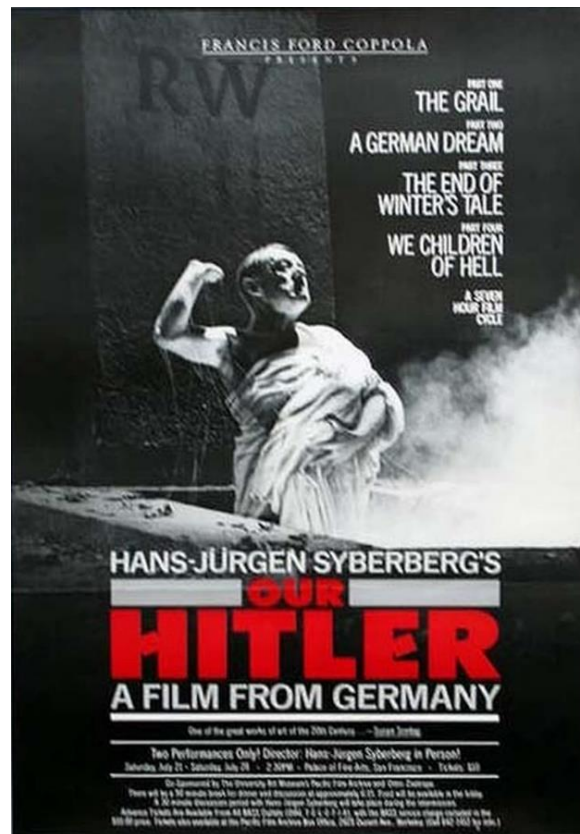
Image 4.1 Poster for the English-language release of *Hitler: Ein Film aus Deutschland* (1977)

    Yet the other films that occupied the director during this time period also tackle

topics related to his homeland, despite what the term 'trilogy' might imply. Syberberg's

shorter follow-up to the Ludwig II film, *Theodor Hierneis oder: Wie man ehemaliger*

Hofkoch wird (1972), was based on the memoirs of a court chef for the Bavarian king, for

instance. Eric Santner describes it as one of Syberberg's 'more Brechtian productions'

and suggests that it helps elaborate on the idea of Ludwig's transformation into a

commodity, broached also in the film about the king himself. His other project, produced

between *Karl May* and *Our Hitler*, is also relevant to *Parsifal*. In 1975, Syberberg sat

down with the aged matriarch of the Wagner clan at the time, Winifred, and filmed a

five-hour documentary, shot in black and white and with hardly more camerawork than

the occasional zooming in/out and periodic cuts to text or pictures. Among other topics,

she discourses at length about her friendly relationship with Hitler prior to and during his

dictatorship. Such a frank admission was problematic for her children Wolfgang and

Wieland, who at the time were trying desperately to distance their opera festival's

productions (and the family name more generally) from its ties to the fascist regime

(Image 4.2).

Image 4.2 Winifred Wagner reminisces about Hitler's presence at Bayreuth

Speaking of the denazification process, which forced her to retire from running the

festival but which allowed her children to supervise (providing she refrained from any

sort of commenting or input), Winifred asserts that the post-war criticisms of her were of

no concern since she 'didn't feel guilty of any crime at all'. Later in the documentary, the

composer's daughter-in-law also reveals how she and other former Nazi party members

who wished to discuss Hitler in public despite post-war prohibition from doing so used

the codename 'USA' to surreptitiously speak of *Unser Seliger Adolf* (Our Blessed Adolf).

She also elaborates on her continued devotion, even thirty years after the fact:

> I couldn't dismiss the Hitler I knew as a human being, I couldn't banish him from my
>
> mind. I admit that everything that happened during the second half of the war is to be

totally condemned, and I condemn it. But I won't 'throw the baby out with the bathwater'. What I thought was good and humane about the man, that I refuse to let them take away from me, my memories and my…He was an absolutely unique personality and knowing him is an experience I wouldn't have missed.[26]

Winifred also asserts that she would 'never deny [her] friendship with him' and that she was able to 'separate the Hitler [she] knew from what he is accused of today'. 'If Hitler came through that door today', she avers,

I would be just as happy to see him as always. All that dark side of things – I know it is there but not for me because I don't know that side of him. When I have a relationship with someone only personal experience counts. Maybe that will remain incomprehensible forever. You will have to leave it to a psychologist to settle the question of my relationship with Hitler.[27]

Winifred Wagner und die Geschichte des Hauses Wahnfried von 1914–1975 was trimmed down and released in several different versions, including the 104-minute *The Confessions of Winifred Wagner*, subtitled for English-speaking audiences. It earned Syberberg the perpetual scorn of the Wagner clan, as well that of key members of the Bayreuth socio-political circle. Indeed, not only did the Wagners refuse his request for a Festspielhaus recording of *Parsifal* (to be used in his filmic adaptation), but they seemingly had a hand in preventing him from acquiring *any* licensed recordings of the piece. As such, when it came time to make the film, the director had to contract a new performance. Armin Jordan conducted the work for him in the summer of 1981, with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Monte Carlo and the Prague Philharmonic Choir. The Wagner

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[26] Aside from the official, abridged English version mentioned below, the full film can be found subtitled online, in two parts. I refer here to the second part, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvQHOnC6C7Y. The quote in question occurs at 1:26:53.
[27] Ibid., 2:18:40.

family also successfully prevented Syberberg from screening his opera-film at the Bayreuth Festival during the centenary year of the composer's death in 1983, though he was able to manage screenings in the town's local cinema.

Other scholars have thus referred more broadly to a 'German Cycle' amongst Syberberg's output, which allows for the inclusion of all the director's film work from *Ludwig II* through to *Parsifal*. The designation also suggests a serendipitous allusion to Wagner's own Cycle of works. Though Syberberg does not engage with the *Nibelungen* operas explicitly, they are frequently alluded to in his films (aurally and/or visually), and the director has elsewhere claimed the composer, along with Brecht, as one of his 'two fathers'.[28] This being said, it should be clear that the director's approach to Wagner's final music-drama would differ considerably from previous opera-films that came before it.

In the sections to follow, my focus will be on two issues, in some senses interrelated. Both will touch on the intersections of sound, noise, and gender first explored in Chapter 1. The first will address the doubly remediated voices of the operatic characters on screen. Parsifal's role becomes particularly complicated in this regard, for, besides the amateur teenaged actor's miming the lines sung by a middle-aged baritone, the director memorably splits the protagonist into two roles during the pivotal seduction scene in Act II, with a young female actress taking over onscreen for much of the remainder of the film. This split into male and female halves, I argue, can impact the way

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[28] Betsy Erkkila, 'Hans Jürgen Syberberg: An Interview'[1979], in *Syberberg: A filmmaker from Germany*, ed. Heather Stewart (Watford, London: BFI, 1992), 28. He also discusses how he had 'no contact' with Wagner until his Ludwig film but how he became increasingly interested in how the composer 'operated' (i.e., produced his works, his ideas, his operatic reforms, and 'daily struggles').

in which we understand Parsifal's journey towards *Mitleid* (compassion), a key theme in the opera, and helps us reconsider issues of gender in the work more broadly speaking.

After analysing the sights and sounds of the multiply-fragmented Parsifal, the second half of the chapter will be devoted to Kundry. I will address both the character's acoustic profile as Wagner conceived of it as well as the specific aural dramaturgy of Syberberg's film. In this section, I argue that the sight of Edith Clever (actress) and the sounds of Yvonne Minton (singer) work together to present Kundry in a new light— especially as her character relates to the new female Parsifal. We will see, in the end, how Syberberg consciously takes advantage of his chosen medium to effect an aural dramaturgy unlike those of even the most radical stage productions of his time, and how his *Parsifal*'s unique soundscape was deliberately constructed to alter our perception of the work's complex relationship to Wagner's views on gender, nation, and anti-Semitism.

Though I will be considering specific aspects of the adaptation shortly, some other salient directorial choices are worth noting first, as my study will not work its way systematically though the entire film. Syberberg begins and ends the movie with shots of a long-haired woman clutching a large crystal ball, suggesting she is some sort of seer. In the opening shot, seen in Image 4.3, the object contains a tree prominently in the centre of a labyrinth; at the end of the work, it contains a miniature replica of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus.

Image 4.3 Syberberg begins his film with unexpected sights and sounds

We will come to recognise the actress shortly: the seer is portrayed by Edith Clever, who

not only plays Kundry, but also portrays Parsifal's mother Herzeleide—normally only

alluded to in the work—during a flashback scene of the director's own invention.

Factoring in the film's aural dramaturgy here, we can surmise that this represents another

one of her many personas, aside from those of the wild woman, temptress, and penitent

she serves as in Wagner's original.

Syberberg unsettles our aural expectations right away, playing fragments of

Kundry's Act II lament (shortly after being awakened by her 'master' Klingsor) to

accompany the silent image of the seer and her globe. The camera then scrolls for several

minutes over an assortment of photographs of ruined buildings and landscapes

(presumably German, though a fallen Statue of Liberty is depicted in one) floating in

murky water. As the camera moves about to show us these pictures, and while opening

credits gradually scroll by, Syberberg further manipulates our acoustic experience of

space and time by providing snippets of audio recordings from the studio rehearsal

process. We hear a voice echo the opera's prophetic lines about the Pure Fool made wise by compassion (*durch Mitleid wissend, der reine Tor*), conductor Armin Jordan speaking to the orchestra in French, and other thematic and leitmotivic fragments played in no particularly chronological order. This opening footage and its accompanying soundtrack last for nearly eight minutes before the first strains of the Prelude begin.

This latter music, which marks the beginning of the work as Wagner conceived it, resounds amidst a *mise-en-scène* of the director's invention, and which can be thought of as playing out in three parts. The beginning features more scrolling camera shots that focus on symbols central to the work's narrative: a ruined Grail temple, a spear and a chalice strewn about on the ground, a dead swan (covered in what looks like oil), and a nearby arrow. Syberberg then presents us with a scene inspired in part by the composer's primary source material, the mediaeval romance *Parzifal* by Wolfram von Eschenbach. We see the hero as a young child with Herzeleide at his side, and his first encounter with the outside world as a group of travelling knights passes by. The actors playing the knights will go on to portray Parsifal later in the opera, but this is something we can only know in retrospect, much like the identity of the seer. In the final portion of the Prelude, the director uses a mixture of puppets and actors, an alienating feature utilised in several of his other films as well (most notably in *Our Hitler*). At first, we see the child Parsifal watching a puppet play that depicts a scene Gurnemanz will narrate later in the opera. The puppets are all dressed according to photographs of Wagner's original stage production. The camera then pans past a number of Wagner puppets, including one animated reproduction of André Gill's famous caricature of the composer violently hammering a music note into an eardrum. As the camera zooms out, we see for the first

time an oversized replica of Wagner's death mask, which Syberberg re-created in various sizes for the film: the largest is broken into fourteen pieces and serves as the main set for nearly the entire movie (Image 4.4).

Image 4.4 Puppets of Wagner caricatures amidst other symbols. In the background is a replica of the composer's death mask, which will serve as a set for much of the film

Also depicted in the image above are the two amateur actors who will play Parsifal: Michael Kutter and Karin Krick. As the final bars of the Prelude resound, Kutter stands up and leaves his female counterpart sleeping, her head on her knees. He walks towards the death mask and prepares us to enter Wagner's head, in a sense literally, but also of course symbolically, suggesting that all which follows is occurring within the composer's mind.

This dense web of visual referents that already appear in the first twenty minutes or so of the film—before the action proper has even begun—is characteristic of Syberberg's style. Coupled with his aversion to immersive cinematic techniques and a desire to tie the work to his broader socio-political criticisms of post-war German culture,

he creates a fascinating adaptation that manages to offer new insights into the opera while simultaneously probing its relationship to the composer's legacy and the first hundred years of its reception and performance history. That it does so through an aural dramaturgy no less interesting than other aspects of its *mise-en-scène* should not come as a surprise. The way in which he opens the film already suggests as much, yet it is a feature seldom discussed in such terms. It is the topic to which I will now turn.

III. The Multiply-Fragmented Parsifal

While seemingly dictated by decades of cinematic convention—not to mention the norms of spoken theatre—it is not always a given, within the genre of the opera-film, that the characters we see on screen will be singing (or even lip-syncing to) the lines as we hear them. As noted in Chapter 2, some directors occasionally employ what Marcia Citron has dubbed 'interior singing' in a number of their films. This voiceover technique provides for a different sort of aural dramaturgy not frequently found on the opera stage (though Claus Guth's *Fidelio* did use such a technique at one point, as discussed previously). In Citron's terms, such internalised monologing makes us 'privy to internal thoughts, and there is a suggestion that the character has chosen to keep things from other characters'.[29] We can see this, for example, in Ponnelle's *Le nozze di Figaro* (1975), during the Countess's 'Porgi amor'; and in Kenneth Branagh's more recent *Magic Flute* (2006), for Pamina's 'Ach, ich fühl's'. Though not employed by Syberberg, it provides an important precedent for the asynchronous sights and sounds we see in *Parsifal* and allows us to draw a distinction between the meaning and function of audio/visual dissonance in his work and that of other opera-film directors.

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[29] Marcia Citron, *When Opera Meets Film*, 121–22.

Syberberg is also not alone in opting to employ actors lip-syncing their roles rather than filming the opera singers themselves.[30] This twofold disconnect between sight and sound, wherein pre-recorded voices are stitched to a mute filmstrip and attached to an entirely separate set of performers, was anticipated within the realm of opera-film as far back as 1953. For Clemente Fracassi's adaptation of Verdi's *Aida*, the director chose to cast Sophia Loren in the lead role, and she mimed her performance to a recording by Renata Tebaldi. In terms that echo the scholarship of Abbate and Toop discussed in previous chapters, Citron refers to such silent actors as 'shadowy likenesses of real people [who] are only miming and resemble ghostly vessels that transmit sound, or rather appear to transmit sound'.[31] Armin Jordan, the conductor for Syberberg's *Parsifal* recording and also the onscreen actor playing Amfortas, defended the remediated opera's split between actors and singers on aesthetic grounds, saying 'a singer, obliged to sing with only half his voice (in order to hear the soundtrack) will never have the same gestures that he has singing normally. He can't wear headphones either (which permit him to sing in full voice), because the cameras are rolling'.[32] Others have approached the topic differently.

For Citron, the use of a separate pool of actors represents 'an honest way of signifying the manufactured relationship to sound and image'. She suggests that 'it openly acknowledges the disembodied status of the voice in cinematic treatments of opera'.[33] However, scholars have differed in their analysis of sight/sound correlations in

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[30] There are two exceptions in the film: Robert Lloyd (Gurnemanz) and Aage Haukland (Klingsor) both sing their roles and also appear as the characters onscreen.
[31] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 29.
[32] Quoted in Jeremy Tambling, *Opera, Ideology and Film*, 200.
[33] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 14.

Parsifal. Tambling insists that 'there is no synchrony between music and camera on actors/singers: we look at one while hearing another', and Jeongwon Joe also speaks of the 'wildly asynchronous lip movements of the actors'.[34] Ulrich Müller, on the other hand, has argued that there is an 'astonishing' synchrony between sight and sound in the film; 'there is never the impression that the actors and actresses are only lip-synching', he insists.[35] David Schwarz charts a middle path, claiming the synchronisation is 'skilfully achieved' but that 'the artifice is visible on the surface of the film at all times'. In terms pertinent to those phenomenological studies of the voice discussed in my Introduction, he points out that 'singing bodies visibly channel energy to the throat, chest, and head in a way that speaking actors do not', and that the director intentionally 'shows the space between the gestures of enunciation and the actual music.[36] Given Syberberg's Brechtian leanings (recall that he refers to the playwright and Wagner as 'his two fathers'), a different set of ideological concerns than those espoused by Jordan seems to be at play here as well. Indeed, Tambling's staunch insistence on the lack of synchronisation is part of his Brechtian reading of the film. This also suggests, then, that the filmic medium offers an excellent avenue for exploring and experimenting with opera's aural dramaturgy in a way seldom utilised on the spoken stage—one that exploits the nature of remediation to challenge the presumed unity of sight and sound in operatic performance.

Consider pioneering film critic Béla Baláz's prescient observation that 'the surest means by which a director can convey the pathos or symbolical significance of sound or

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[34] Jeremy Tambling, *Opera, Ideology and Film*, 199; Jeongwon Joe, 'Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Parsifal*: The Staging of Dissonance in the Fusion of Opera and Film', *Music Research Forum* 13 (1998): 13.
[35] Ulrich Müller, 'Blank, Syberberg, and the German Arthurian Tradition', trans. Julie Giffin, in *Cinema Arthuriana: Essays on Arthurian Film*, ed. Kevin J. Harty (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 161.
[36] David Schwarz, 'Closing the Wound: *Parsifal* by Richard Wagner and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg', in *Listening Awry: Music and Alterity in German Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 153.

voice is to use it asynchronously'.[37] This is precisely the case with the director's

treatment of Parsifal himself in one of the most crucial moments in the film. Following

Kundry's second-act seduction and kiss, the director notably shifts from using a young

male actor (Michael Kutter) to portray the hero to a female one (Karin Crick), as seen in

Image 4.5 below.

Image 4.5 Karin Krick takes over the role of Parsifal from Michael Kutter in Act II

Though both are amateurs, Krick performs much more synchronously with the music—

still sung by tenor Rainer Goldberg—than does Kutter. Citron, for instance, notes that

'Parsifal I', as the male character's incarnation has typically been called, 'brings the

separation of sound and image more acutely to the surface' owing to his poor lip syncing,

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[37] Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film (Character and Growth of a New Art)*, trans. Edith Bone (London: Dennis Dobson, 1952), 210.

whereas Parsifal II (Krick) 'has the music-mouth relationship much more under control'. She further speculates that the male actor may have been 'encouraged not to perfect synchronisation so that his character would seem even more an innocent, as one who has not yet entered the symbolic stage and its discursive mastery'.[38] It hardly seems coincidental that the sights and sounds of the multiply-fragmented Parsifal begin to converge, if only to a limited extent, after this pivotal juncture in Wagner's narrative. The director uses sound to reinforce the sense of the soon-to-be redeemer's narration.

When we take the aural into consideration, we notice that Krick steps in right as Parsifal's long speech shifts from the agonies of Amfortas's sexual transgression to the youth's own otherworldly vision of the Grail and other spiritual matters.[39] It has been well-rehearsed by others that Wagner's belief in the etymology of Parsifal's name is mistaken. He claims it was of Arabic origin and that *parsi fal* meant 'pure fool'.[40] Though he erred in this regard, at the very least it carries this meaning within the opera, as Kundry essentially explains the hero's name to him in this way. Along these lines, Solveig Olsen suggests that Michael Kutter plays the 'Fal' and Krick the 'Parsi'. Attending to the aural dramaturgy strengthens such an assertion. The sights and sounds of the *reiner Tor*, at first 'wildly asynchronous', in Joe's words, undergo a transformation

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[38] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 153.

[39] Her first lip-synced lines are to Parsifal's proclamation of being transfixed by a vision of the Grail: 'Es starrt der Blick auf das Heilgefäß'.

[40] In a letter to Judith Gautier dated 22 November 1877, the composer writes, 'This is an Arabian name. The old troubadours no longer understood what it meant. 'Parsi fal' means: 'parsi'—think of the fire-loving Parsees—'pure'; 'fal' means 'mad' in a higher sense, in other words a man without erudition, but one of genius', reproduced, in translation, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, trans. and ed. Stewart Spencer and Barry Millington (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1987), 877. Gautier, herself a scholar and translator, disagreed with his etymology, and Hans von Wolzogen, another close associate and advocate of the composer's, wrote his own philological study of Parsifal's name in which he could find no definitive proof of Wagner's claim. For his writing, see 'Der Name "Parsifal"', in *Wagneriana: Gesammelte Aufsätze über R. Wagner's Werke vom Ring bis zum Gral. Eine Gedenkgabe für alte und neue Festspielgäste zum Jahre 1888* (Leipzig: F. Freund, Buch- und Kunstverlag, 1888), 163–66.

analogous to the visual shift from male to female as the hero begins to understand his situation. After the kiss, he (now she) begins to chart a path to understanding and true compassion (*Mitleid*), thus being able to fulfil the prophecy and bring redemption to the Grail society and its king. For Syberberg, this change in gender helps mitigate two of the most pressing issues historically associated with the opera: misogyny and anti-Semitism.

Unlike the Grail societies of Chrétien's and Wolfram's romances, Wagner's Monsalvat is notably devoid of women, save for Kundry, who is doubly coded as 'Other'. Though her character will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter, it warrants mention presently in light of her interaction with the now-female Parsifal in this scene. As woman, Kundry would seem to be most immediately responsible for the fallen state of the Grail society. Her seduction of Amfortas allows for Klingsor to steal the holy spear and inflict the crippling wound on the Grail King, thus robbing the knights of a precious artefact and incapacitating its leader, who becomes corrupted both spiritually and physically as a result. On the religious front, her Act II narration, detailing how she has been forced to wander eternally after laughing at Christ on His way to the cross, connects her to the mythical figure of the Wandering Jew. Though repentant (and almost entirely silent) in Act III, she nevertheless falls to the floor lifeless—*entseelt*, as Wagner's stage directions read—after Parsifal has carried out his duties and assumed leadership of the order. Ostensibly freed from her curse and finally able to die, her fate rests uneasily in light of the composer's writings. Indeed, the Wandering Jew is evoked for just such a prognostication in Wagner's infamous 'Judaism in Music' essay, where he suggests that the only way for the Jew to find redemption is through his downfall (*Untergang*).[41]

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[41] The final line of the essay specifically asserts that 'only one thing can redeem you from the burden of your curse: the redemption of Ahasuerus—Going Under!', in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. III,

Though the term is somewhat ambiguous, and much ink has been spilled arguing over what sort of solution he was specifically advocating, the fact remains that Kundry's death at the end of the opera paves the way for a homosocial society whose pure bloodline (a pervasive topic in Wagner's late, so-called 'Regeneration' essays) was now untainted by spiritual heathens and feminine influence alike. Along these lines it is also likely not coincidental that Wagner chose to associate his opera with one of the most infamous tracts of 'racial science' of the time, Arthur de Gobineau's *An Essay on the Inequalities of the Human Races*. Speaking of the French author's argument that the Aryan race represented the peak of human development, Cosima records her husband as saying, 'Gobineau says the Germans were the last card Nature had to play—*Parsifal* is my last card'.[42] Again, the meaning of this statement has also been debated, and these topics will be broached in further detail below when considering Kundry's character more properly. For now, it remains to be seen how the introduction of a female Parsifal can alter our understanding of the work, in part through Syberberg's aural dramaturgy.

In his book *Parsifal: Ein Filmessay* (released shortly after the film), the director proposes that this fragmenting of Parsifal, and particularly the inclusion of a feminine identity for the hero, helps mitigate against the music-drama's gender and ideology problems—indeed, may even solve them. Now, the work no longer features 'the rejection of the feminine by the man'. Rather, 'it is as if the better part of Kundry is admonishing herself, as in an inner monologue'. In Syberberg's film, 'old biblical ideas about the evil

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trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896), 100. In the original German it reads, 'nur Eines eure Erlösung von dem auf euch lastenden Fluche sein kann: die Erlösung Ahasvers,—der Untergang!', 'Das Judenthum in der Musik', in *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, vol. 5 (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1888), 85.

[42] Cosima Wagner, *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, trans. Geoffrey Skelton, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), vol. II, 647; entry dated 28 March 1881.

in woman, and of the Eternal Jew,' are no longer a factor; 'the difficult mental task was

and is solved … in a very practical and vivid way', he insists.[43] Earlier in the book he

espouses similar sentiments:

> The fact that Parsifal becomes a woman in the second part solves a problem of long
>
> tradition–here evil woman, there male redeemer. But this is an idea of salvation which
>
> can and must happen especially through a woman for the sake of the better part of
>
> themselves. Transferred to the Jewish problem, it is not the Jew as an image of terror and
>
> the mythical bane of the Christian that is in need of a cleansing redeemer, but an
>
> evolution that is now happening on its own and until the end of world. And it is no longer
>
> racism but a spiritual development coming from within each of us if we are ready to
>
> accept it.[44]

It is of course debatable whether or not this change can accomplish so much and, in the

opera's terms, bring about a 'redemption for the redeemer'. Again, the question of how

this gender shift can alter our understanding of Kundry will be broached in further detail

below. For now, I want to return to how this transformation affects our understanding of

the opera's aural dramaturgy at the point of the shift.

     Syberberg's indebtedness to Brecht can be traced back to the director's early

career, when he was able to film the Berliner Ensemble in 1952–53. Within *Parsifal*, I

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[43]'Es nicht mehr die Zurückweisung des Weiblichen durch den Mann, es ist, als ob der bessere Teil Kundrys selbst nun sie ermahnt, wie in einem inneren Monolog. Alte biblische Vorstellungen vom Bösen in der Frau, und das gleich ewiger Jude, wie Richard Wagner es seiner Zeit entsprechend und aus besonderer persönlicher Kultur- und Kampfsituation heraus beschrieb, gehen nun nicht mehr auf. Die schwierige, gedankliche Aufgabe war und ist gelöst, so wie ich sie mir seit langem gestellt hatte für diesen Fall, auf ganz praktische und anschauliche Weise'. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *Parsifal: Ein Filmessay*, 161.
[44] 'Dadurch, daß Parsifal in seinem zweiten Teil eine Frau wird, ist das Problem aus der langen Tradition—hier böse Frau, dort erlösender Mann—gelöst. Es geht aber um eine Idee von Erlösung, die auch und gerade durch eine Frau geschehen kann und muß, um ihren besseren Teil. Übertragen auf das jüdische Problem, ist es nicht der Jude, als Schreckensmotiv und Mythos des christlichen Fluchs, der einen Erlöser braucht zur Reinigung, sondern diese Entwicklung geschieht nun aus sich selbst bis zum Ende der Welt. Und das ist nicht mehr Rassismus, sondern geistige Entwicklung aus jedem von uns, wenn wir bereit sind dazu'. Ibid., 56.

have already mentioned the use of puppets and the asynchronous match between sound and image broadly speaking, but surely the shift to hearing Rainer Goldberg's tenor voice ostensibly emanating from the teenaged female now representing the *reiner Tor* represents one of the clearest instances of *Verfremdung* that the film has to offer. While Citron characterises the singer's voice as one that 'suggests androgyny' and the capacity for a 'sexual mobility [that] can speak through different kinds of bodies', there is never any doubt that the character's voice does not belong to the person we see onscreen.[45] Citron also intriguingly posits that the viewer is seeing something akin to an 'inverted castrato, namely, a woman's body with a man's voice' and that the combination 'suggests an ideal of androgyny'.[46] The topic of androgyny was certainly one that preoccupied Wagner in his later years, though Jean-Jacques Nattiez has argued that it in fact featured much more pervasively within the composer's earlier stageworks and writings as well..

Syberberg posits that the composer would have been happy with his 'feminine portrayal of this androgynous Parsifal', citing Wagner's desire to see singing actress Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient playing a feminine Romeo onstage, as well as the composer's more general distaste for tenors.[47] But for Nattiez, the director's attempts miss the mark. Certainly, his point is well-taken that it is 'far from certain' that Syberberg's changes are as clear-cut as he claims. Yet the scholar's assertion that 'the meaning of the work becomes totally contradictory if a female Parsifal redeems Kundry and if she dies nonetheless', and that nothing Syberberg has said or done indicates that the director 'has attempted or even felt the wish to rediscover Wagner's concept of

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[45] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 149.
[46] Ibid., 150.
[47] Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *Parsifal: Ein Filmessay*, 35.

androgyny' is somewhat extreme. Despite acknowledging (and arguing elsewhere) that 'a director has the right to hijack the work he is producing', Nattiez still goes so far as to disavow Syberberg's *Parsifal* as a 'false' interpretation.[48] Whether or not the director's and composer's views on androgyny were in accord is beyond the point, however, especially given the Brechtian undercurrents so readily at play throughout the film. Part of Syberberg's strategy here, and in his German Cycle more broadly, is to disrupt and alienate, causing us to view art and history in a new light; the disjunction between the sights and sounds of the multiply-fragmented Parsifal works towards just such a goal. That the dissonance between what we hear and what we see on screen enables questions of the work's gendered and ideological problems to be brought back into consciousness (if not quite solving them altogether, as Syberberg states) seems a perfect execution of Brechtian technique in action, serving to disrupt a more passive mode of spectatorship by causing our attention and awareness to shift to some of the underlying socio-political issues associated with the work. Productions occasionally add silent women to the stage in an attempt to (visually) redress the feminine void in the opera: François Girard's thoughtful Met Opera staging, seen in Image 4.6, represents one of the more recent such endeavours. Seldom, however, do such changes become so disruptive and jarring as in Syberberg's film, wherein the Pure Fool himself is split before our very eyes.

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[48] Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Wagner Androgyne*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 290, 291.

Image 4.6 Women and men reside, segregated, in the barren Grail domain of François Girard's *Parsifal* staging (Metropolitan Opera, 2013). The society only integrates after Parsifal performs his office at the end of the work[49]

From the very beginning of his adaptation, Syberberg had been crafting an aural dramaturgy unlike those of traditional stage productions, as I have discussed above. The moment of Parsifal's initial split represents a high point of audio/visual dissonance in the film, even if images of the two together at the end of the Prelude offered us, unknowingly, a preview of the character's already-fragmented existence. From the moment Parsifal I recedes, following Kundry' kiss and through most of the third act, this female Parsifal remains the hero we see for a majority of the action. While this change might be jarring in and of itself, once we are past the moment of transition, scholars have been more willing to accept such an alteration (even if the reception amongst critics has occasionally been more hesitant). Solveig Olsen, for instance, rationalises by suggesting that 'Wagner's text makes such a remarkable turn in content at this point that a change in subject becomes less alienating. The experience has thoroughly rattled and transformed

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[49] The staging has subsequently been released on video by Sony Classical, catalogue number 88883725589.

the hero'.[50] Citron similarly argues that we 'sense that if a character can change sexually in terms of body then a vocal alteration is not too surprising'—though arguably the fact that there is *no* vocal alteration here to accompany the visual transformation is just as surprising![51] If viewers can accept the substitute of one lip-syncing Parsifal for another for much of the film's second half, one final instance deserves mention for its jarring reminder of the multiply-fragmented nature of this particular version of our hero: the moment Parsifal I returns with the lance to heal Amfortas and the subsequent on-screen reunion of the protagonist's male and female selves.

Following her return to the sickly Grail kingdom, Parsifal II absolves and heals Amfortas. Without actually touching the spear to the king's side, as Wagner calls for, she ministers to him from atop the composer's death mask, which still serves as a setpiece for part of the scene. The wounded and ailing monarch lies below with his knights and Gurnemanz attending to him. Kundry looks on from a distance, half hiding herself behind the throne. After announcing that she will now perform the office of the Grail King (*Denn ich verwalte nun dein Amt*), Parsifal asserts that it was Amfortas's suffering that has endowed the 'timid fool' with 'compassion's highest power and the might of the purest wisdom'. At the point where Wagner's stage directions instruct Parsifal to step forward holding the spear high above him, the camera cuts to a closer shot of the knights below, on Amfortas's level. They are arranged in a formation that leaves an opening for Michael Kutter to enter as Parsifal I once again. Musically, Syberberg has timed this entrance well: he enters just as Krick has finished enunciating 'Tor' (fool) and as the orchestra plays the Parsifal motif. He is dressed in the brown tunic he wore during the

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[50] Solveig Olsen, *Hans Jürgen Syberberg and His Film of Wagner's* Parsifal, 251.
[51] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 149.

opera's first act (as opposed to his white garb from Act II) and is carrying the spear at his

side. He enters the company of knights alone as he announces his return and, just as

important, the return of the lance: *The holy spear—I bring it back to you*. But following

this, we also see Karin Krick enter the frame, having descended from the death mask with

her own cross-tipped staff in-hand. To an even greater degree than the momentary

synchronisation in Act II, both Parsifals sing together here (Image 4.7). Reinforcing

sound and sense, the first lines the two sing jointly seem fitting: *O highest joy of such a*

miracle, they declaim together with one voice.

Image 4.7 *O! Welchen Wunder's höchstes Gluck!* One voice sounds out as both Parsifals sing together

On one hand, they are referring to the miracle of the wound being healed by the

lance—perhaps even more wondrous in this version, where it does not even touch the

wound (itself a nod, presumably, to Eschenbach's romance, wherein the wound is

ultimately healed through Parsifal's speech-act of asking what ails the king). But for

viewers, this single-voiced 'duet', as Syberberg even refers to it, represents another such

'miracle'—the two intone this together as one and, what's more, they continue to sing in this manner until their final lines in the opera.[52] When the pair gives the command to open the shrine and disclose the Grail, the camera cuts back to the death mask, which begins to split open, shimmering light and vapours emanating from its centre. As the light from within fades, Krick begins walking towards the camera from the centre of the mask, while Kutter begins his exit towards us from the left. Though the two have had no interactions since the Prelude (they seldom acknowledge one another's presence in the scenes where they are together), here they look compassionately upon one another and then embrace.

Image 4.8 The fragmented Parsifal is whole again at the end of the film

This scene offers neither the final sight nor the final sound in the film, but it is an unquestionably moving end for a hero who has been forced to live a fragmented existence as a result of the trauma of the Act II seduction and kiss. The *mise-en-scène* implies that

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[52] Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *Parsifal: Ein Filmessay*, 224.

Parsifal's maturation is finally complete, and whereas the initial growth pains that came

with experiencing sensual and sexual arousal caused the initial fracture, it now seems

possible to experience a sense of wholeness and completion. A number of scholars have

read Syberberg's adaptation in terms of Jungian psychoanalysis. Along these lines, this

final shot of the protagonist(s) suggests a reunion of animus and anima. Kundry's

seduction in Act II would be understood as a traumatic event, corrupting the balance of

the masculine and feminine aspects within. As Solveig Olsen explains, the retreat of

Parsifal I

> conforms to Jung's description of what can happen in an emotional upheaval. The loss of
> balance relegates the conscious part of the ego (Parsifal I) to continued exploration of the
> collective unconscious as a stage in adapting to external realities. Meanwhile,
> unconscious influences (Parsifal II) predominate. Their activity at restoring the
> equilibrium will, states Jung, 'achieve this aim provided the conscious mind is capable of
> assimilating the contents produced by the unconscious, i.e., of understanding and
> digesting them'. The film creates a visible equivalent of such assimilation in progress by
> entrusting the spear to Parsifal I at the end of act 2. The spear corresponds to the
> 'contents produced by the unconscious' that now will be returned or restored to the Grail
> community.[53]

The kiss, then, causes Parsifal I's retreat as animus both mentally and, within the realm of

the film, literally, allowing the anima—Parsifal II—to surface and continue the quest for

spiritual purity and healing. Rainer Goldberg's tenor voice uncannily emanating from

Michael Kutter's and Karin Krick's bodies simultaneously now becomes fitting rather

than alienating or jarring. *Nur eine Waffe taugt*, Parsifal says earlier: only one thing (i.e.,

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[53] Solveig Olsen, *Hans Jürgen Syberberg and His Film of Wagner's* Parsifal, 258.

the spear) could bring about the hoped-for cure. In the end, only one voice would seem to serve as an appropriate symbol for the reunification of Parsifal I and II.

Throughout Syberberg's *Parsifal*, the disjunct between sight and sound serves diverse ends. Film scholar Michel Chion has argued that it symbolises cinema's aspiration to achieve the 'impossible unity' of voice and body, and Citron similarly posits that it 'foregrounds cinema as apparatus'.[54] Tambling discerns a Brechtian purpose, and Olsen is one of several to view the split in psychoanalytic terms. All of these may well be valid interpretations; at the very least, they are by no means entirely contradictory readings. For my own purposes, however, I should like to stress that it is specifically through the film's aural dramaturgy that scholars, critics, and other viewers alike are all able to contemplate such issues in the first place. A number of the authors cited thus far have tried to stress that, since the director was adapting a previously-existing work, his innovations must invariably lie in the visual portion of the film, the music and dialogue being pre-existing as it was. To be sure, Syberberg weaves a dense web of visual allusions to his previous films and to those of others; to Wagner's life and works; to German art, culture, and history; and to other topics besides. Nevertheless, it is significant that one of the most notable and frequently commented upon features of the film—that is, the fragmentation of Parsifal's role into that of a singer and two actors (three, if including the young child from the Prelude)—is a move tied just as much to the film's aural dramaturgy as it is to the visual. But while this filmic soundscape, so different from typical stage versions, affects the protagonist most obviously, it has significant bearing on the way we come to understand Kundry as well.

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[54] Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 154; Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 154.

IV. Screams, Cries, and Laughter: The Acoustic Profile of Kundry

If Barry Millington can refer to *Parsifal* as 'the most enigmatic and elusive' of Wagner's music-dramas, the lion's share of that mystery falls to Kundry, the seemingly immortal woman who undergoes several metamorphoses over the course of the work.[55] A portion of her complexity can be tied to the fact that she represents an amalgamation of several distinct characters in Wolfram's romance (and Chrétien's before that).[56] In fact, the composer's initial conception of the work featured two separate female roles, with the seductress of Act II as a separate entity. The decision to further combine his source characters into one came as somewhat of an epiphany, as witnessed by his correspondence with Mathilde Wesendonck in August 1860: 'Have I already told you that the wondrously wild Grail messenger shall be one and the same being as the temptress of the second act? Since this occurred to me, almost everything about this material has become clear to me'.[57] Still, this only goes so far in explaining the complexity of the character, who arguably ranks as one of the most psychologically nuanced within the artform.

Michel Poizat, in a monograph dedicated to Lacanian readings of opera and opera fandom, has posited that 'no other work comes as close as *Parsifal* does to being an opera of the cry and of silence', and both of these are traits that define the opera's prima donna

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[55] Barry Millington, *The New Grove Guide to Wagner and His Operas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 141.

[56] Aspects of Kundry can be discerned in Eschenbach's Sigune, a female hermit and one-time Grail-bearer who reveals Parzifal's name to him during one of their meetings; Cundrie la Suziere, the wild, Loathly Damsel who also serves as the Grail's messenger abroad; a second Cundrie, sister of Gawan and imprisoned in Chlinsor's castle; and Orgelûse, the seductive, Haughty Lady beloved by Anfortas and whom Gawan eventually marries.

[57] Quoted in Benjamin Binder, 'Kundry and the Jewish Voice: Anti-Semitism and Musical Transcendence in Wagner's *Parsifal*', *Current Musicology* 87 (Spring 2009): 117–18n9.

more than any other.[58] Alternatively 'surly woman', surrogate mother, seductive temptress, and nearly-silent penitent, Kundry has been a major focus of attention for scholars within the music world and without. Much that has been said about her could fruitfully be compared to those readings of Lady Macbeth cited in Chapter 1, and the many vocal outbursts Wagner writes into her part would make her (and her acoustic profile) an excellent candidate for a text-based analysis along the lines explored in my first chapter. Consider, for instance, Wagner's stage direction that her first words in Act II should be sung 'hoarsely and brokenly, as if in an attempt to regain speech'.[59] Sound, noise, gender, and madness all intermesh here, too.

However, Kundry's status as the sole woman in *Parsifal* (aside from the nameless Flower Maidens), coupled with the aforementioned anti-Semitic and misogynist writings Wagner was penning while working on the opera, set her apart for particular scrutiny in a way different from that of Shakespeare's leading lady. Mary Ann Smart's analysis of Kundry provides a good basis of comparison. Echoing an earlier study by Elisabeth Bronfen, she suggests that the character 'exhibits many of the classic symptoms of [hysteria] as it was described by Freud':

> in textbook fashion she speaks little, often stammering, repeating words, or breaking into senseless laughter; and, especially in the first act, she is constant motion—quivering, trembling, throwing herself in a heap on the ground and then gradually raising herself up again. At various points in the first act, for example, the stage directions call for Kundry to act out her anguish through the visible, bodily manifestation of hysteria.[60]

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[58] Michel Poizat, *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 199.

[59] 'rauh und abgebrochen, wie im Versuche, wieder Sprache zu gewinnen'.

[60] Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 195–96. For Bronfen's study, see 'Kundry's Laughter', *New German Critique* 96 (Autumn 1996): 147–61.

It would not be implausible to imagine Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene staged

similarly. But while Kundry's behaviour has likewise been interpreted as hysterical by a

number of scholars, here the characterisation can be said to function as a part of

Wagner's twofold gesture of othering, as discussed earlier. Matthew Wilson Smith, for

instance, suggests that her 'glassy eyes, screams, weariness, and manic contortions' work

in such a way as to underscore the 'distinctly "feminine" and "Jewish" nature of her

illness'.[61] As Sander Gilman has also shown, Jewishness and hysteria were inherently

linked at the time. After pointing out the late nineteenth-century 'scientific' consensus

that Jews were more at risk than others, he offers the following anecdote:

> This view had been espoused by Charcot, who diagnosed on 19 February 1889 the case
> of a Hungarian Jew named Klein, 'a true child of Ahasverus', as a case of male hysteria.
> Klein had a hysterical contracture of the hand and an extended numbness of the right arm
> and leg. It was Klein's limping that Charcot stressed. Klein 'wandered sick and limping
> on foot to Paris' where he arrived on 11 December 1888. He appeared at the Salpêtrière
> the next day, 'his feet so bloody that he could not leave his bed for many days'. Klein
> 'limped at the very beginning of his illness'. Charcot reminded his listeners that the
> patient 'is a Jew and that he has already revealed his pathological drives by his
> wanderings'. His 'travel-mania' could be seen in the fact that 'as soon as he was on his
> feet again, he wanted to go to Brazil'.[62]

This network of associations—Ahasuerus (the Wandering Jew), hysteria, illness, and

pathological itinerancy—strikingly calls to mind the constellation of issues surrounding

[61] Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art from Bayreuth to Cyberspace*, 41.
[62] Sander L. Gilman, 'The Image of the Hysteric', in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, ed. Sander L Gilman, Helen King, Roy Porter, G. S. Rosseau, and Elaine Showalter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 406. See particularly the section on 'Hysteria, Race, and Gender', 403–37.

Kundry.[63] Gilman also references a frequently cited, 1927 study of the pathology of the Jews by Herman Strauss. In Gilman's words, the scientist concludes that male Jews 'suffer twice as often from hysteria as do male non-Jews'. For Strauss, women were still 'the predominant sufferers from the disease', but hysteria still suggested 'a clear "feminisation" of the male Jew', arguing further that it was to be understood even in men as a 'uniquely feminine nervous disease'.[64] The linking of effeminacy and Jewishness also has important implications for the other outsider in *Parsifal*, Klingsor—the spurned, would-be Grail initiate whose self-castration, heathen sorcery, and residence on the other (Moorish) side of Monsalvat marks him as similarly Other—but space here precludes a more detailed analysis of this character.

Some scholars claim that this is not made overt or explicit in the opera, but Wagner stresses the Jewish connexion in his some of private writings, too. In an August 1865 letter to Ludwig II, he seeks to explain his work-in-progress to the king by drawing a comparison between Old and New Testament figures—that is, between Hebrew scripture and more properly Christian ones. Attempting to answer the monarch's question on the significance of Kundry's kiss, he responds:

> That is a terrible secret, my beloved! You know, of course, the serpent of Paradise and its tempting promise: 'Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil'. Adam and Eve became 'knowing'. They became 'conscious of sin'. The human race had to atone for that consciousness by suffering shame and misery until redeemed by Christ, who took upon himself the sin of mankind. My dearest friend, how can I speak of such profound matters except in comparative terms, by means of a parable? Only someone who is clairvoyant

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[63] It should be noted that limping, too, though not present in this opera, is associated with Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and Mime in *Siegfried*, both Wagnerian characters whom scholars frequently acknowledge as coded Jewish.

[64] Quoted in Sander L. Gilman, 'The Image of the Hysteric', 406.

can perceive its inner meaning. Adam–Eve: Christ.—How would it be if we were to add

to them:– 'Amfortas–Kundry: Parsifal?' But with considerable caution![65]

The 'considerable caution' Wagner urges here might be to guard against too literal of a

reading—potentially blasphemous—between Parsifal and Christ. After all, Cosima's

diaries reveal another instance where her husband lambasts colleague Hans von

Wolzogen in making this explicit parallel: 'he remarks to me that W. goes too far in

calling Parsifal a reflection of the Redeemer: "I didn't give the Redeemer a thought when

I wrote it"', she records.[66] Still, the parallel between Kundry and Eve, the first temptress,

remains strong, especially given the lines that would eventually find their way into the

finished libretto wherein she attempts to seduce Parsifal through the prospect of acquiring

god-like knowledge ('The full embrace of my love would then raise you to Godhead').[67]

This again reinforces the interconnectedness between misogynistic and anti-Semitic

undercurrents scholars have detected in the opera: Kundry is not only a blasphemer and

an outsider, but through the Eve of Hebrew scripture and the mocking Jew (non-

canonically named Ahasuerus) who laughs at Christ on the *via dolorosa*, the Jewish

element remains pertinent, too.

As suggested above, Kundry's character has attracted the attention of multiple

disciplines, but psychoanalysts have often been especially frequent interpreters of the

character. The field is particularly relevant in the present case given the Freudian and

Jungian symbolism that pervades Syberberg's films, *Parsifal* included—in fact, one

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[65] Quoted in John Deathridge, *Wagner Beyond Good and Evil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 162.
[66] Cosima Wagner, *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, II: 177; entry dated 20 October 1878.
[67] The German reads 'Mein volles Liebes Umfangen / lässt dich dann Gottheit erlangen'.

reviewer even calls it 'the most Freudian film since *Un Chien Andalou*'.[68] Poizat, for

instance, argues that our primary enjoyment of the opera derives from an identification

with the human voice in a pure, elemental form that exists beyond speech. The genre, he

says, tends toward 'that supreme mark of the failure of speech and the signifying order,

the cry'.[69] His analysis of Kundry features towards the end of a teleological study of

opera's transcendence beyond words to pure vocal emoting. More specifically, Poizat

describes Kundry as representing 'in its purest form that image of The Woman ever

present in opera, the privileged medium of The Voice in its purest embodiment as object'.

He argues that it is thus not surprising to see her vocal profile call for 'cry, plaint, moan,

and then the silence to which the entire third act confines her despite her continued

presence on-stage', and that to this 'vocal palette' she adds laughter 'with all its demonic

shadings—an effect rarely used in opera with such violence as here'.[70] Speaking of

Wagner's aural dramaturgy (though not in those terms), he cites Marc Bégin, whose

description is fascinatingly prescient for our present purposes:

> Fifty years before Artaud's dream of a theatre of cruelty, there could be heard on the
>
> stage of Bayreuth a range of procedures that would come into systematic use only with
>
> the twentieth century (in Berio, Cathy Berberian): modifications of the timbre of the
>
> singing voice; … transition from the sung laugh to the genuine laugh, from the cried-out
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> text to the true cry … and from the cry to the plaint. … It is perhaps no surprise to find in
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> the musical composition of Kundry's role a direct precursor of *Sprechgesang*'.[71]

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[68] J. Hoberman, 'His *Parsifal*: Following the Syberbergenlied' [1982], rpt. in *Vulgar Modernism: Writing on Movies and Other Media* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 89.
[69] Michel Poizat, *The Angel's Cry*, 39.
[70] Ibid., 194.
[71] Quoted in ibid., 199. The ellipses are Poizat's.

Poizat reads the opera psychoanalytically and argues that it represents 'the quest for the lost object and the illusion of its recovery in absolute jouissance'. In terms that have a haunting resonance with the ending of Syberberg's film (to be discussed below), he describes the hero's final act: 'with a touch of the now-recovered spear he abolishes chasm, fissure, suffering, all, in the ecstasy of the absolute jouissance of the Grail, without realising that in doing so he abolishes life'.[72]

Žižek, writing more recently, offers his own Lacanian reading of the work and takes issue with some of the conclusions Poizat draws here and in other studies. The earlier author was wrong, Žižek suggests, in discerning the actual 'source of disturbance' within the Grail community. 'Contrary to the misleading appearances, it is not Amfortas's succumbing to Kundry's advances that sets in motion the catastrophe but Amfortas's horrifying superego father Titurel's excessive attachment to the Grail', he argues. The problem is then 'not the external intrusion of the desiring Other that introduces a gap into the circle but the internal excess of drive, of its excessive and suffocating fixation on the thing-*jouissance*'.[73] This has a bearing on the ending of the opera, for unlike Poizat, who sees a rejection of the feminine and a return to business as usual, Žižek is more sympathetic to readings of the finale that highlight 'a reassertion—or rather, an opening toward—the feminine'. He points out that the protagonist immediately changes the rules upon assuming leadership of the community, announcing for instance that the Grail would henceforth remain disclosed and visible permanently. In a later writing he makes a similar point, suggesting that, 'instead of dismissing the Grail

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[72] Ibid., 198; 199–200.
[73] Slavoj Žižek, 'The Everlasting Irony of Community', in Mladen Dolar and Slavoj Žižek, *Opera's Second Death*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 173. Emphasis in original.

brotherhood as a homoerotic, elitist, male community, is it not much more productive and urgent to discern in it the contours of a new post-patriarchal revolutionary collective?'[74]

In his earlier reading of the opera, Žižek further argues that our focus should be on 'the relationship between woman and the wound'.[75] This, too, can be one way of reading the ending of Syberberg's adaptation. As Amfortas is lamenting, just prior to Parsifal's return, we see a second bier adjacent to the Grail king. It is first occupied by his disembodied wound, but in a subsequent shot, the space becomes vacant and open for Kundry, who, anticipating her imminent demise, approaches and takes her place beside him. She is now crowned and shrouded even more resplendently than Amfortas (see Image 4.9 below). According to Syberberg, her look recreates that of Uta von Ballenstedt as she appears in the famous memorial sculpture of her in the mediaeval Naumburg cathedral.[76] Not mentioned in his book is the statue's appropriation and veneration by the Nazi regime. It is held up as an ideal of Aryan purity in Fritz Heppler's infamous propaganda film *Der ewige Jüde* (1940) and was also featured prominently in the Nazi *Entartete Kunst* exhibit as a counter-example of the degeneracy on display. Given Syberberg's larger project of *Trauerarbeit*, and its appearance in a film named after the Wandering Jew, one suspects her dress is another of the director's countermeasures in fighting back against his country's Nazi past. The coded-Jewish woman is now clothed as a figure who was idealised as properly Aryan. Regardless of these associations, seeing the two paired in this way recalls Wagner's earlier explication to Ludwig regarding the

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[74] Idem, 'Wagner, Anti-Semitism, and "German Ideology", in Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (New York: Verso, 2010), 165.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *Parsifal: Ein Filmessay*, 224.

parallel between Adam and Eve and Amfortas and Kundry.[77] The two clearly belong

together, and Syberberg does just that.

Image 4.9 Top: Amfortas (Armin Jordan) with his wound by his side
Bottom: A crowned and shrouded Kundry (Edith Clever) takes its place

Moments later, following the jointly-given command by both Parsifals to uncover

the grail, we see the Wagner death mask and the reunion of the protagonist's two halves,

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[77] Alain Badiou, in contrast, sees the reunited Parsifals at the end of the film as a 'a little like a new Adam and Eve' in *Five Lessons on Wagner*, op cit., 114.

discussed above. When Syberberg next returns our gaze to the Grail Hall, it has been

emptied of all bodies except for the dead Kundry and Amfortas, plus the Grail Carrier,

whose role the director bills in a tripartite manner as 'Faith' and 'Synagogue' as well. As

can be seen in Image 4.10, this shot, too, is heavily laden with many iconographic

symbols, some obvious (the spear and staff, a swan) and others less so (the polyhedron

from Dürer's *Melencolia I*, the crown of the Holy Roman Empire, a miniature Parsifal

statue sculpted for Ludwig II).

Image 4.10 Syberberg's final shot of the Grail Hall, now almost entirely devoid of life

If the ghostly Hall here recalls Poizat's interpretation of Parsifal's life-ending act, it also

accords with Žižek's gender-inclusive reading of the finale. By altering Wagner's

instruction that Kundry fall lifeless to the ground after Parsifal's healing actions, the

director offers her a crown (a recurrent symbol throughout the film) and shroud and

allows her a place of prominence beside Amfortas. Following her act of repentance and

baptism earlier in the act, the two are reconciled and entombed as equals, much as the two Parsifals are taken to be complements of one another at the end of the film. Recalling again Syberberg's comments about the ways in which he sought to redress the misogynistic and anti-Semitic undercurrents of the work, it would seem that he has proleptically heeded Žižek's remarks about rethinking the relationship between woman and wound. But if these readings only begin to touch upon the director's specific interpretation of the character, they at the very least provide the backdrop against which his aural dramaturgy stands in relief.

V. The Sights and Sounds of Syberberg's Seductress

Syberberg says much about the production process and occasionally divulges his sources of inspiration and audio-visual referents that appear in his works, but equally important are the thoughts and interpretations of his performers. The idea of appropriating another's voice for this film weighed heavily on Edith Clever's mind. As Marcia Citron relates, she even went into the recording studio to meet with Yvonne Minton, the soprano whose voice she was to mime, 'in order to acquire a physical sense of that voice and its real embodiment'. In Citron's words, Clever wrestled with the question of whether she had 'the right to take someone's voice and merge it into a single entity'.[78] According to Syberberg, the answer that she came to was 'no', and the result, as the director puts it, was her playing the role 'as if she *were hearing* this voice that she didn't want to make corporeal—as if they were remaining *two*'.[79] According to one critic's recollection, the director stated that Clever was still 'having nightmares of Minton

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[78] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 152.
[79] Quoted in ibid. Emphasis in original.

pursuing her, menacingly' even as late as the film's premiere.[80] Syberberg's aural

dramaturgy is clearly just as arresting to his performers as it is to his viewers.

While the split between singer and actress here may at first appear to offer up

another case study related to the issue of dubbing and synchronisation, considered with

Parsifal above, the question is now more complicated owing to the gendered and racial

aspects scholars have read into her character. Despite the fact that Clever, as actress, has

no way of reaching audiences by means of her own voice (even the non-musical shrieks

and groans come from Minton), her gestures and on-screen presence remain arresting

throughout. Mary Ann Smart has previously described Kundry as being 'physically

driven by her music' and exhorts directors to 'capitalise on the associations with her body

that emerge in later occurrences of her motive'. Connecting back to the gendered issue of

hysteria, she also highlights that, 'most illuminating' about such a diagnosis in this case is

the fact that 'hysterics force us to pay close attention to their bodies, which are constantly

animated and marked with symptoms that "speak" of submerged, unvoiced trauma'. She

points out that hysterics are 'often *verbally* incapacitated, but their bodies speak for them

through tremors and spasms—and impression Wagner's music encourages by its tight

shadowing of Kundry's movements in the first act'.[81] A split between sight and sound for

Kundry, then, begins to take on more complicated meanings than it does for the

protagonist, and has implications for how we understand her character pathologically.

The notion of merging multiple personalities into a single entity has particular

resonance for the persona of Kundry, moreover, since, as mentioned previously, she

represents an amalgamation of several characters in Wagner's most immediate source

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[80] Quoted in J. Hoberman, 'His *Parsifal*: Following the Syberbergenlied', 88.
[81] Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania*, 195, 196. Emphases in original.

material. Her operatic manifestation undergoes several notable personality changes onstage as well. Margaret Medlyn, another singer who has performed the role, offers a detailed account of how she has read and interpreted the character and suggests one possible reconsideration of the enigmatic woman's supposed hysteria. Specifically, she diagnoses Kundry as having dissociative identity disorder.[82] This seems to accord with the way Clever has approached the role, considering the mental split between the actress as 'Kundry' and as 'The Voice in Her Head'. Her decision to treat her body and 'her' (onscreen) voice as if they remained two also draws our attention back to the doubled manifestation of Parsifal, whose division helps visualise more directly the split between sight and sound in the film. I will explore the connexion between Kundry and Parsifal II shortly, but another aspect of Medlyn's analysis also warrants consideration.

Like Poizat and many others, the singer hones in on the unique acoustic profile Wagner crafts for Kundry, especially her many sighs and screams, moans and groans. The aural dramaturgy of the character represents for Medlyn 'not a loss of ability to communicate' but the 'tools of her transformational power', appearing regularly at 'points of transition in her metamorphosis'. Along these lines, she discerns three distinct singing styles for the character: one declamatory and interjectory, another more lyrical and intimate, and a third 'vituperative, demanding, and forceful'.[83]Though she too favours a more inclusive ending for Kundry, like Syberberg and Žižek, she actually takes issue with the director's decision to utilise separate actors and lip-syncing techniques rather than live voices. Conceding that the adaptation is 'interesting and thought-

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[82] Margaret Medlyn, *Embodying Voice: Singing Verdi, Singing Wagner* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 124. She refers to the disorder by its older designation 'multiple personality disorder', however.
[83] Ibid., 124, 125–26. Medlyn also offers a more detailed musical analysis of these distinct musical profiles than space allows for here.

provoking', she (perhaps unsurprisingly) laments that 'we lose touch twice over with the acute physicality of embodied performance vital to the essence' of the opera. She even admonishes the director for showing 'an unwillingness to acknowledge the essential contribution that embodiment gives to the operatic sound', but as discussed earlier, Syberberg's choice can be explained with recourse to the ideological and stylistic goals of his film.[84] It is also worth recalling that the character famously falls silent for nearly all of the final act, thus complicating the contribution 'vocal embodiment' could offer in understanding her character for that long stretch of the work. Medlyn's earlier remarks on Kundry's mental state, however, read in tandem with Citron's assertion that Clever 'promotes a sense of pure voice, of its jouissance' by physicalising its 'almost violent implications', highlights the actress's creative power in Syberberg's film (and the important part performers have bringing these characters to life more generally), and also helps underscore and deepen our understanding of her anxiety over appropriating another's essence—their voice.[85]

As I have argued earlier, the unique medium of film offers Syberberg the chance to craft an aural dramaturgy unlike those we would typically find on the live stage, and he certainly takes great advantage of this form of mediation. The format allows for a different kind of acoustemological understanding of Wagner's characters than might be feasible elsewhere, and it is possible to effect these changes in a number of ways. Aside from the performer-based observations just mentioned, we can also note how the changes Syberberg makes help bring about a different understanding of how the characters relate to one another within the work itself. One of the most important relationships altered in

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[84] Ibid., 147.
[85] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 153.

this manner is that of Kundry and the now-female Parsifal, from the time of the hero's transition until the end of the opera.

As already suggested above, the gender switch for Parsifal has implications for how we understand the role of women within the Grail community of Wagner's opera, at least as far as Syberberg is concerned. Visually, the director underscores this in numerous ways throughout his adaptation. The seduction scene, for instance, might now be read as an inner monologue, with Kundry's 'better half' admonishing her and trying to set her on the right path, as we saw earlier. Additionally, as Image 4.11 illustrates, Syberberg at one point shoots the two in a mid-range closeup, arranged in double profile, further hinting at Parsifal II as Kundry's own inner essence, longing for redemption.

Image 4.11. Kundry and Parsifal II as aspects of one individual

At least one reviewer has argued similarly. Marie-Bernadette Fantin-Epstein sees in Parsifal II 'an image of the young Kundry, the one before the fall, who appears there as a

reflexion before the other' and posits that we are really seeing a double of Kundry rather than Parsifal here. Solveig Olsen takes issue with this supposition but, still discerning a shared connexion between the two, suggests a mother–daughter relationship.[86] Regardless of the exact details, however, Syberberg is still advocating for a reconsideration of the character in light of the shifted gender dynamics this film offers.

Further reinforcing the idea of Kundry's kinship with Parsifal II is the fact that the latter is seen carrying the former off, both at the end of Act II (with Parsifal I following behind) and during the Prologue of Act III. It is harder to definitively identify her in the beginning of the final act, but the protagonist is carrying a bundle with what looks like a tuft of Kundry's hair sticking out of it. The bundle is made of a star-studded blue cloth (associated with a robe of Wagner's) which has appeared numerous times in the film, including alternatively as starry sky and as floor during the early parts of the seduction scene, and covering the throne on which Clever, as Herzeleide, sat during the Prelude. She also appears wrapped in a blue shroud in a subsequent scene with Gurnemanz (before Parsifal enters the meadow), further underscoring the likelihood that we are to understand her as being in the bundle at the beginning of this act. It suggests, then, not only the idea of Kundry as Parsifal's 'burden', but given their newfound sense of shared womanhood, perhaps deeper ties as well, as an aspect of herself with which she has to live.

Both, after all, are fractured and incomplete individuals, a fact underscored through Syberberg's aural dramaturgy and the disjunct between voice and body in the film. Kundry has led many lives over the years—evident in Klingsor's (presumably) partial enumeration of them in Act II—and Clever as a performer has voiced her own

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[86] Solveig Olsen, *Hans Jürgen Syberberg and His Film of Syberberg's* Parsifal, 305. The French reviewer is quoted, in Olsen's translation, on the same page.

thoughts on the fragmenting process of the director's filming technique in a more literal sense. Parsifal, too, is fragmented, with the seduction scene crystallising and shattering an already-frail ego into multiple parts. The final act offers healing for both, with the reunion of the two Parsifals and Kundry's entombment alongside Amfortas. The king's disembodied wound disappears following the healing words of Parsifal, and Kundry taking its place besides the king suggests her own healing has likewise occurred, thus allowing for a peaceful rest and eternal coexistence side-by-side with her *other* 'other half'.

Parsifal II has been associated more with contemplation and compassion (the latter, *Mitleid*, a key theme of the opera), whereas Parsifal I has been linked to action: consider, for example, his reappearance with the spear at the end of the work in order to perform the healing deed (or in this case the healing words). Though this may ironically reinforce gendered stereotypes (passive female, active male), Parsifal's newfound femininity alters the dynamics; in fact, the situation may now be almost completely reversed. With Kutter as the *-fal* to Krick's *Parsi-*, many of the hero's most important functions are carried out not by the male actor but by the female. Kundry's baptism in the third act, which Patrick Carnegy accurately describes as one of the most 'touching and beautifully handled' moments in the film, represents one such instance.[87] After Gurnemanz has himself performed the ritual for Parsifal II, the penitent Kundry in turn accepts the ablution from our heroine. If we continue to see the two as parts of the same being, as Syberberg suggests in speaking about the second act, we might then infer that Parsifal II, now christened by Gurnemanz as 'Pitying sufferer [and] Enlightened healer',

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[87] Patrick Carnegy, *Richard Wagner and the Art of the Theatre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 387.

has been the first to realise the importance of this ritual and in turn offers the same service to Kundry. The undying woman has already spoken her only lines in the act—*dienen, dienen* ('to serve')—but this would seem to further underscore her desire to begin the process of change. Seen in this light, Kundry's redemption comes about through her own inner struggles and convictions rather than through a male redeemer who can only offer annihilation for the sake of purifying the homosocial order of the Grail.

It may be worth recalling Nattiez's criticism, cited earlier, that the meaning of the work would become 'totally contradictory if a female Parsifal redeems Kundry and if she dies nonetheless'. To be sure, others have voiced their scepticism over whether or not the director's attempts to redress Wagner's anti-Semitism and misogyny are effective. John Christopher Kleis has been another such detractor, arguing that 'Syberberg is here attempting to cover his confusion and throw his problem back at the audience that agrees with his feminism and is willing to get it in any form'. Though he still lauds it as a 'brave film' that 'Wagner surely would have applauded' as a 'technological/philosophical *Gesamtkunstwerk*', he insists that the music-drama should be read along the lines of the Protestant debate on salvation and its attainment through faith alone or through faith-inspired good deeds.[88] Of course, it can at times seem that there are as many interpretations of *Parsifal* as there are critics and academics writing about it, or as there are directors staging it. Millington's comments about it being 'the most enigmatic and elusive' of the composer's works again comes to mind. In this sense, then, Syberberg's reading is one of many attempts to uncover meaning in Wagner's stagework. Just as

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[88] John Christopher Kleis, 'The Arthurian Dilemma: Faith and Works in Syberberg's *Parsifal*', in *King Arthur on Film: New Essays on Arthurian Cinema*, ed. Kevin J. Harty (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999), 117, 120.

some have argued that it 'uncannily anticipate[s] the mythos of the *Führerprinzip* in Nazi Germany' while others would like to think that such desires were 'excluded from the inner sanctum of [Wagner's] artistic personality', so too must directors—stage or film—come to similar conclusions in producing the work for audiences.[89] How these writers and directors go about making their case can oftentimes tell us as much about them as the works they are choosing to interpret.

Along these lines, there may still be one or two final scenes to decipher. Just as the director offers a significant amount of material—aural and visual—prior to the start of Wagner's score, so too does Syberberg offer a number of unexpected sights and sounds to contemplate at the conclusion of his film. Following the last shots of the Grail Hall depicted above, the camera gradually zooms out. As it continues pulling back, we see that we were just inside the eye socket of a skull adorned with an ossified (or perhaps just dusty) version of the *Reichskrone* (Image 4.12).

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[89] On Parsifal and the *Führerprinzip*, see Glenn Stanley, '*Parsifal*: redemption and *Kunstreligion*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 174. For the idea that Wagner's artistic output was untainted by his personal anti-Semitic leanings, see Dieter Borchmeyer, *Richard Wagner: Theory and Theatre*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 408. The long history of debates on whether Wagner's anti-Semitism is made manifest in either his works more generally or in *Parsifal* specifically is too large to broach here, but Borchmeyer has been a leading proponent in trying to decouple the composer's works from his ideological writings. On the other hand, Robert Gutman's *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), and Hartmut Zelinsky, 'Die "feuerkur' des Richard Wagner oder die "neue religion" der "Erölosung" durch "Vernichtung", *Musik-Konzepte* 5 (1978): 79–112, are among the most damning scholarly interpretations of Wagner's artistic output (and of *Parsifal* especially).

Image 4.12 A crowned skull near the end of Syberberg's film

Perhaps this is an allusion to Titurel, the Grail society's patriarch whose funerary rites we observed earlier in the act, or maybe it represents one of the more recently deceased—Amfortas, or even Kundry (though her crown was different). But it also suggests other referents. Given the director's larger task of reconciling the German people with its history, it may also allude to Charlemagne. Though he reigned prior to the creation of this specific crown, Dürer famously painted an anachronistic portrait of the monarch wearing it. The artist has already been evoked numerous times throughout the film (his *Melencolia I* was mentioned above), and Wagner too includes reference to him in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. A replica of Charlemagne's Aachen throne also appears several times in Syberberg's *Parsifal*. Clever, as Herzeleide, is seen seated on it during the Prelude, and she will do so again in her role as the temptress of Act II. Amfortas also utilises it in the first act, and it returns partially obstructed in the last act, as Kundry observes Parsifal's healing of Amfortas while leaning on its steps. Given the nexus of

Holy Roman Empire, Dürer, and Wagner subsumed within the skull, smoke swirling in the background, it may also recall the final lines given to Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger*: 'Honour your German masters and you shall conjure good spirits. And if you honour their endeavours, even if the Holy Roman Empire should dissolve into mist, for us there would still remain Holy German Art'.[90] All these remain possible given Syberberg's penchant for multi-layered iconography and symbolism.

The director then uses a dissolve—a technique rare in his films for reasons discussed above—to transition to the next, and final, scene. Our gaze returns to an image familiar from the beginning of the adaptation. We see Clever in her role as the seer, now dressed in white, and still clenching her crystal ball (Image 4.13). Now, rather than containing the Tree of Life, or the labyrinth it contained during its appearance in the beginning of Act II, it holds a miniature replica of Wagner's Bayreuth Festspielhaus. Clever looks directly at the camera, which begins zooming in on her face. As the final bars of the piece conclude, she closes her eyes and, in the brief silence that follows, she slowly lowers her head down to lie on the globe. But the silence only lasts for ten seconds. Though hardly audible, the last thing we actually hear is again the voice of Kundry, whose acoustic presence was also unexpectedly inserted at the beginning of the film, as we saw earlier. Factoring in sound and image together, the act of resting her head against the globe now makes more sense, as she once again echoes her desire for sleep, expressed in Act I: *Die Zeit ist da. Schlafen – schlafen – ich muß.*

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[90] 'Ehrt eure deutschen Meister, / Dann bannt ihr gute Geister; / und gebt ihr ihrem Wirken Gunst, / zerging' in Dunst / das heilg'e röm'sche Reich, / uns bliebe gleich / die heil'ge deutsche Kunst!'
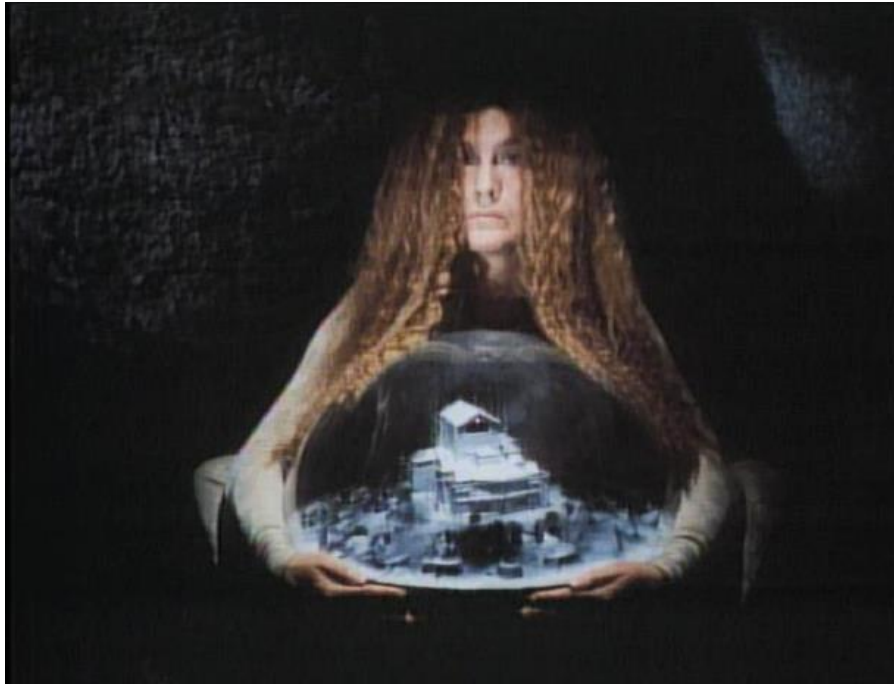
Image 4.13 We end like we began, with Clever

On one hand, the sort of visual referent here is similar to that found in *Hitler: Ein Film aus Deutschland*, where a crystal ball (of varying sizes) is seen near the beginning and end of the movie. There, it featured the Black Maria, Edison's first film studio. The studio appearing here would have also been apropos, given Edison's own 1904 *Parsifal* film, mentioned earlier. Though it would have been a nice homage to this film's cinematic forebear, Wagner's Festival Theatre appears inside instead. Clever's presence here is significant, then, suggesting that she is now turning up in her guise as Kundry, rather than the seer—reinforced too through the reprise of her Act I lines, barely audible as they are. Choosing to end the film with this nexus of Clever/Kundry/Bayreuth may then be alluding to the fact that the issues and debates attached to the character, the work, the composer, and the venue are still alive, and that the best way of continuing to grapple with them—to do the hard work and ask the tough questions, as Syberberg has been doing—is through performance.

Taking Syberberg's blanket statements about definitively solving the issues that inhere to Wagner's *Bühnenweihfestspiel* with a grain of salt, we arrive at one director's rather revolutionary approach to bringing these issues to light in a way that few others have managed to do, either in writing or on the stage. By situating the adaptation within his larger project of *Trauerarbeit*, coupled with his propensity towards psychoanalytic imagery and symbolism, and his other overriding cinematic tendencies besides (Brechtian *Verfremdung* chief among them), we come to understand how the filmic medium offers Syberberg a unique opportunity to confront the piece and the composer's legacy in a way even the most radical of operatic stage directors would likely have been unable to equal. The aural dramaturgy here, especially the divorce between voice and image—a frequent topic within my study—is now affected in a way unique to the filmic medium. Specifically, as I have argued, Syberberg utilises lip-syncing in order to call our attention to the transformation Parsifal undergoes within the work, now underscored by the alienating use of different actors and a voice/image pairing that seems dissonant for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the hero's female-presenting gender identity for the second half of the film. This transformation, coupled with the new gender dynamic that exists between the now-female protagonist and Kundry, otherwise the only female lead within the work, leads if not to a total resolution of the misogynistic and anti-Semitic undertones—then at least to an alienating 'shock' of sorts that lets these issues come to the fore in a way unique among the opera's reception history. In an interview given after the film's release, Syberberg was clear about his goals in utilising his preferred medium: 'What I intended was that such things as you see in my film are not

feasible on the stage'.[91] Elsewhere, he points to the seduction scene and says to another interviewer, 'that can *never* work on stage—it was made for film!'[92] While a degree of difference may lie in the visual realm, as other writers have suggested, the practices of lip syncing, dubbing, and other attributes associated with the filmic medium have clearly allowed the director to craft an aural dramaturgy equally as unique.

VI. Other Inquiries

As always, I make no pretensions to this chapter exhausting the possibilities of how one might approach film's impact on the operatic soundscape, either as applied specifically to this work or in general. This chapter has largely worked as a character study, focussing on Parsifal and Kundry, but this emphasis has required me to pass over how Syberberg's aural dramaturgy impacts our understanding of other important roles within *Parsifal*. Alluded to above was the opera's *other* 'Other': Klingsor, for instance. As with Kundry, there is copious literature exploring Wagner's anti-Semitism with regard to this character, and so many of the questions of how this remediated form of the work impacts our understanding of that topic would be another productive area of inquiry.

Syberberg's Klingsor would also present an interesting case study for other reasons. Unlike most other characters in the film, the voice we hear on the soundtrack *is* actually that of the actor we see onscreen. The same is true for Gurnemanz. It is unclear why the director chose only these two singers to perform before the camera, but in an interpretation that explores several of the opera's central issues and themes by undermining, splitting, and fragmenting our sense of vocal and bodily unity, it remains to

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[91] Die Zeit, '"They Want to Kill Me": An Interview with the Filmmaker and Theatre Director Hans-Jürgen Syberberg' [1988], rpt. in R. J. Cardullo, trans. and ed., *Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, the Film Director as Critical Thinker* (Boston: Sense Publishers, 2017), 148.

[92] J. Hoberman, 'His *Parsifal*: Following the Syberbergenlied', 88. Emphasis in original.

be explored how we might come to understand these characters differently in a world where they alone can claim a true affinity with the voices to which they are tied. Granted, they are still mouthing their lines in the film to their pre-recorded performance, and so there is still some disconnect at play, but not to the same degree as the others, who are miming to voices not their own—especially so in Parsifal's case, as we have seen.

Amfortas too, represents a special case in this film. For Wagner, the character was once so central to his interpretation that he was initially having trouble finding a way to divide our attention between the suffering king and his redeemer. As he confides in a letter to Mathilde Wesendonck,

> if Anfortas is to be placed in his true and appropriate light, he will become of such immense tragic interest that it will be almost impossible to introduce a second focus of attention, and yet this focus of attention must centre upon Parsifal if the latter is not simply to enter at the end as a deux ex machina who leaves us completely cold.[93]

Much as the Grail king was of central importance to Wagner, so too was Armin Jordan to the conception of Syberberg's film. Here, the person onscreen is actually the conductor as well, appearing now like a manifestation of that music the composer had sought to conceal and make invisible. Realising that the actor we are seeing perform as Amfortas is also the one conducting the orchestra can be thought of as yet another attempt at Brechtian alienation: clearly, this would be impossible in the theatre, as a person cannot be in two places at once. It thus forces a disconnect in a way that takes unique advantage of the medium.

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[93] Richard Wagner, *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner*, 459–60; letter dated 30 May 1859. Wagner retains the original spelling of 'Anfortas' here; it would not change until a later draft of the work.

But there is also an even more alienating moment—when video of Jordan conducting is projected into the sky during the third act, shortly following Kundry's baptism. As Jeongwon Joe notes, this moment is 'particularly subversive of the Wagnerian theatre' and in fact reverses the situation typical at Bayreuth and elsewhere: 'the labour from the pit is brought into sight, while the actual singers' vocal labour is virtually hidden, replaced by the actors' lip-synching'.[94] Citron too speaks of Jordan as actor/conductor. Pointing out that 'the persona exists both inside and outside the diegesis', she argues that Amfortas thus 'represents much more than himself', with an obvious link being his embodiment of 'control over the unfolding of a primal signifying system of the film, namely, the orchestral music'.[95] Solveig Olsen, by contrast, looks for both religious connexions and to Wagner's other operas for this post-baptism scene in *Parsifal*, noting the references to Christ's baptism in the Jordan River and the related references to this deed in *Die Meistersinger*.[96] Regardless of the interpretation, this intricate accrual of meaning and signification that attaches to Jordan as conductor, as lip-synching actor, and as on-screen counterpart to the unseen Wolfgang Schöne (who sings the role) would be yet another aspect of Syberberg's complex aural dramaturgy worthy of further investigation.

But to speak of the characters left unanalysed only begins to address untouched aspects of the opera itself; it does not account for other issues more specific to the adaptation, or to Syberberg's chosen medium. Also left unexplored here are some of the other ways in which the director uses—or perhaps at times fails to utilise—film to his

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[94] Jeongwon Joe, 'Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Parsifal*', 12.
[95] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 154.
[96] Solveig Olsen, *Hans Jürgen Syberberg and His Film of Wagner's* Parsifal, 272–73.

advantage. One aspect of the new medium regularly exploited by directors like Francesco

Rosi and, occasionally, Franco Zeffirelli, is the ability to manipulate the relationship

between diegetic and non-diegetic sound. I have already referenced another example of

this in the case of 'internal singing' in Ponnelle's opera-films, where certain arias take on

the form of personal introspection, not sung live or lip-synced on screen, but provided as

voiceover (i.e., without any lip movement), much like the narrator in a film might be

heard. Rosi also inserts many diegetic sound effects into his opera-film of *Carmen*

(1984), as does Zeffirelli with his *Otello* (1986). Diegetic sound is largely absent in

Syberberg's adaptation except for a few instances. In some senses, it may make more

sense for this sort of soundscape to be absent in an adaptation of Wagner. The effects are

useful in filling in gaps between musical numbers, but the composer's *unendliche*

Melodie technique does not offer such gaps. Still, diegetic sounds appear superimposed

on top of the score in some of these adaptations, so that option remained a possibility,

too.

There *are*, however, some acoustic additions the director inserts into his *Parsifal*.

The beginning of the film, discussed earlier, offers one such instance. As we saw,

fragmented parts of Kundry's Act II lamentations, snippets of orchestral rehearsals, and

Jordan's feedback to the performers can all be heard during the first several minutes of

Syberberg's film. The director also chooses to close the second act with the sound of

tolling bells, which, he comments in his book, were borrowed from the Grail ceremony's

soundscape in Act I.[97] The sound of running water is one of the few other diegetic effects

Syberberg inserts into his film soundtrack. The element is prominent throughout the

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[97] Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *Parsifal: Ein Filmessay*, 167.

opera, and in the film as well—Kundry lands in a pond in the first act, is baptised in third, and so on—but none of these scenes in this adaptation feature the sound of running or splashing as characters wade through the water. Despite the silence of those waters, elsewhere in the film it remains audible at several important moments. When we first see Titurel in his subterranean dwelling, asking his son to perform his appointed duties, echoes of water dripping from the ceiling are as audible as the drops are visible, for example. During the third act, too, we can hear running water. Its source? A fountain prominently visible throughout much of the Good Friday scene, modelled after the one appearing in the van Eyk brothers' *Ghent Altarpiece* of 1434. Atop the fountain is a statue of the archangel Michael, which Olsen suggests is the director's attempt to evoke thoughts of the male Parsifal (recall that the actor playing Parsifal I is Michael Kutter).[98]

For Syberberg, these moments represent points where he consciously chooses to use sound to break the self-imposed framework of the composer's score; they thus represent an interesting audio-visual counterpoint to the otherwise more 'properly' Wagnerian scoundscape.[99] Again, though time precludes a more detailed investigation of these sounds, in a film where allusions pile up and everything has a reason for its being, these few instances wherein the director consciously chooses to add to the soundtrack seem significant and warrant further study. Water is an important signifier in the film, after all: Syberberg emphasises the element even more than score and libretto call for. We see the murky water during the Prelude, icicles hanging from Gurnemanz's dwelling in Act III, water vapour and other mists, and added fountains, to say nothing of Kundry's

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[98] Solveig Olsen, *Hans Jürgen Syberberg and His Film of Wagner's* Parsifal, 276.
[99] 'der Ton den selbstauferlegten Rahmen der vorgegebenen Musik des Wagnerschen "Parsifal".', Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *Parsifal: Ein Filmessay*, 244.

tears, and even Wagner's own in a sense—the eye sockets of the composer's death mask are the source of the waterfall feeding into the spring in which the Good Friday baptisms take place.

In fact, there may have been more sounds added to the film, too, but we may never be able to hear them. Syberberg has commented about inserting Kundry's laughter into the end of the second act, for instance, but this does not appear on video versions of the film.[100] Writing in another book about *Parsifal*'s initial reception history, he also complains about how Gaumont, his French production company, removed a number of inserted sound effects. He does not offer further details, but given the previous comments about Kundry's laughter, it seems plausible that this represents at least one such instance. While it is obviously not possible to analyse the significance of the sounds if we do not know what they were or where they were inserted in the first place, it at least suggests that the soundworld created for his adaptation was not entirely faithfully reproduced in the finished product as it was sent to theatres and was subsequently released on video.

This also brings up one final topic I wish to broach here: the importance of the film's afterlife as physical media. Given how frequently critics and other writers comment on the dense, multi-layered symbolism and iconography present in Syberberg's films, there can be no doubt that one's understanding of and appreciation for the many referents contained within would be deeply enriched by multiple viewings. Not only in this instance but more generally speaking as well, operatic remediation of this variety gives us the ability to do just that. Now, we have the ability to pause and rewind—to re-visit and contemplate any details we may wish to examine as much as we desire, giving

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[100] Ibid., 244, 245.

new meaning to Gurnemanz's famous comment in the opera about time becoming space. As Citron has argued, there is also a clear pedagogical benefit to this. Describing her classroom experience, she mentions that with film, she and her students now 'had a shared visual experience of the opera. We also had a sense of the work as a drama enacted in a specific place, performed by seen bodies who move, emote, and interact with each other. As a class, we could consider critical elements of staging, direction, and interpretation and their impact on the work'.[101] In some senses, this may be a double-edged sword, for the audio-visual setups we employ for our own personal screenings may either greatly enhance or greatly diminish the audio-visual clarity offered in a cinematic environment, though it is still arguably better than the alternative of not having the option to both see and hear at all.

Syberberg, too, has exploited his adaptation's existence as physical media. At a two-floor exhibition of his work in Vienna, for example, he dedicated an entire floor to screening his film, dispersed over three rooms and with eight television sets playing *Parsifal* with staggered timings. The director described it as being 'like a fugue with scattered sound- and image-lines'. His aural dramaturgy thus becomes even more complex. He also compares the experience to sound filling different niches of a cathedral and speaks of one's ability to discover different aspects of the same subject, both visually and acoustically: 'the gently moving pictures and you yourself at the front of the room, the image of the camera going up and down, forward and back: just so, the sounds do not

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[101] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen*, 2.

break off but are always there, with a gentle, hovering motion, back and forth, wherever you go'.[102]

This non-conventional approach to exhibiting his opera-film also speaks to the director's other dissemination strategies. As Olsen notes, he 'avoided cinemas in favour of opera houses and theatres' for many of the screenings he personally oversaw. Though his French distributor saw to it that *Parsifal* screened in more traditional venues as well, Syberberg, in Olsen's words, 'upheld his non-conformist screening regiment' rather consistently, and gives as examples his showings at the Alte Oper in Frankfurt am Main and at the Hamburg Staatsoper.[103] Thomas Elsaesser, in a contemporary review of the film, elaborates further on this, suggesting an 'assault on the finances of high culture' through a 'two-pronged offensive' to 'make the film enter the concert hall, and opera take over the cinema'.[104] Though space here has precluded my ability to consider how our understanding of this *Parsifal* film's aural dramaturgy may shift when experienced in another medium (after all, my own viewing is courtesy of its subsequent DVD release, and not cinema screenings), this desire to blur the boundaries between theatre and film, and to have opera 'take over the cinema', will be precisely the subject of my next and final chapter.

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[102] 'Wie eine Fuge mit versetzten Ton- und Bildlinien, und in verschiedenen Nischen einer Kathedrale verschiedene Vorgänge zum selben Thema zu finden--etwas zum Entdecken: die leicht bewegten Bilder und man selbst davor im Raum, die Bilder mit der Kamera auf und ab und vor- und zurückgehend, so wie die Töne, die nicht abreißen, immer in leichter schwebender Bewegung, wohin man auch geht, vor und zurück'. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, *Der Wald steht schwarz und schweiget: Neue Notizen aus Deutschland* (Vienna: Diogenes, 1984), 234.

[103] Solveig Olsen, *Hans Jürgen Syberberg and His Film of Wagner's* Parsifal, 331. Syberberg documents much of his own travels with the film in his book *Der Wald steht schwarz und schweigt*, op. cit.

[104] Thomas Elsaesser, 'Parsifal', review, *Monthly Film Bulletin* 50 (January 1983): 138.

CHAPTER 5

Space and Time, Revisited: Remediated Sound at the Opera Livecast

Following on from Chapter 4, this chapter will explore the soundscape of

remediated opera from a different angle. Where I considered the aural dramaturgy of

Syberberg's *Parsifal* with recourse to decisions employed by the director, as well as by

his actors and singers, here my approach to questions of operatic remediation will be

more oblique. By looking at the physical and theoretical implications surrounding our

displacement from the 'live' performing venue itself, as well as the paratextual material

the Metropolitan Opera uses to frame and advertise their *Live in HD* cinema events, this

chapter will explore the acoustemological question of how we come to understand these

operas through a different sort of remediated sound. In this case, our understanding can

be further affected both by our unique location in the space and place of the screening

venue, and by the way performing arts companies use the format of the livecast to alter

our relationship with the artwork and the site of its initial performance.

As one of the newest types of operatic remediation, the theatrical livecast has

been less theorised than older forms and formats. I will situate the livecast within both its

immediate rise and global expansion over the past fourteen years and also connect it to

other, related efforts at live operatic remediation that date back over a century. I will also

consider scholarship that has already begun to emerge from the various disciplines in

which livecasts have had the biggest impact, such as theatre and performance studies,

media studies, and Shakespeare studies. Scholars across these fields share a confusion

over naming this new type of live, simultaneously theatre- and cinema-based

entertainment, and an emphasis on its hybridity as an artform. I will consider how these

ontological issues can be traced back to our aural engagements with opera as both a

mediated and *re*-mediated genre.

After this historical and critical grounding, I will consider other salient theoretical

and contextual issues relating to the format of so-called 'Event Cinema'.[1] A key focus

will be the issue of space and place, and how these relate to our understanding of the

operatic medium on the one hand, and to our understanding of the broadcast as its own,

emergent format as well—one that allows for new and different perspectives on the ways

in which operatic sound can convey meaning when remediated. Along these lines, I will

discuss some of my personal experiences across a number of different types of screening

venues, supplemented with observations by other theatre and performance scholars

commenting on venue-specific topics at telecasts in their own cities. Critics as far back as

Marx have remarked upon the socio-economic and cultural implications that have

accreted to 'the opera house' and the attendant ritualised viewing that occurs therein, yet

few have sought to understand how this experience might change when the site of

consumption shifts outside the opera house itself. This portion of my study will thus seek

to explore how the sights and sounds of the hosting institutions can influence our

understanding of remediated opera.

Following this, the second portion of the chapter will ground the somewhat

abstract analysis offered in the first half in a more focussed case study: The Metropolitan

Opera's revival of the Robert Lepage-staged *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. I will begin by

discussing Lepage's production in general, concentrating on its reception at the time of its

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[1] As I discuss below, this industry term was the result of a rebranding effort circa 2012. 'Alternative
Content Cinema' was the term previously employed for this sort of live and/or time-delayed cinema
broadcasting.

initial premiere (rolled out between 2010 and 2012), and how a variety of unintended acoustic phenomena helped to mark the production as a critical failure—one panned by reviewers and even several scholars—in contrast to the triumphant, celebratory rhetoric offered by the Met. I will then consider the 2019 revival's *Die Walküre* broadcast particularly, focussing on how the paratextual, 'framing' featurettes built into this format can alter the way we come to know this familiar repertory work. I will offer a detailed breakdown of the remediated sights and sounds on display during the screening to show how these elements, too, affect an aural dramaturgy that is medium-specific. In this final look at aural dramaturgy, I will show how format hybridity, site-specific viewing practices, and paratextual framing devices offer yet another way of understanding opera through format-specific strategies of remediation

I. The Livecast: A Not-So-Recent Phenomenon

Remarkably, the ability for mass audiences to enjoy a live opera performance from a distance postdates Wagner's *Ring* by only five years and thus even predates *Parsifal*, my previous case study. At the first International Exposition of Electricity in Paris (1881), the French inventor Clément Adler set up a listening room where those interested could hear live performances happening at the nearby theatres, a scene reproduced in Image 5.1 below.
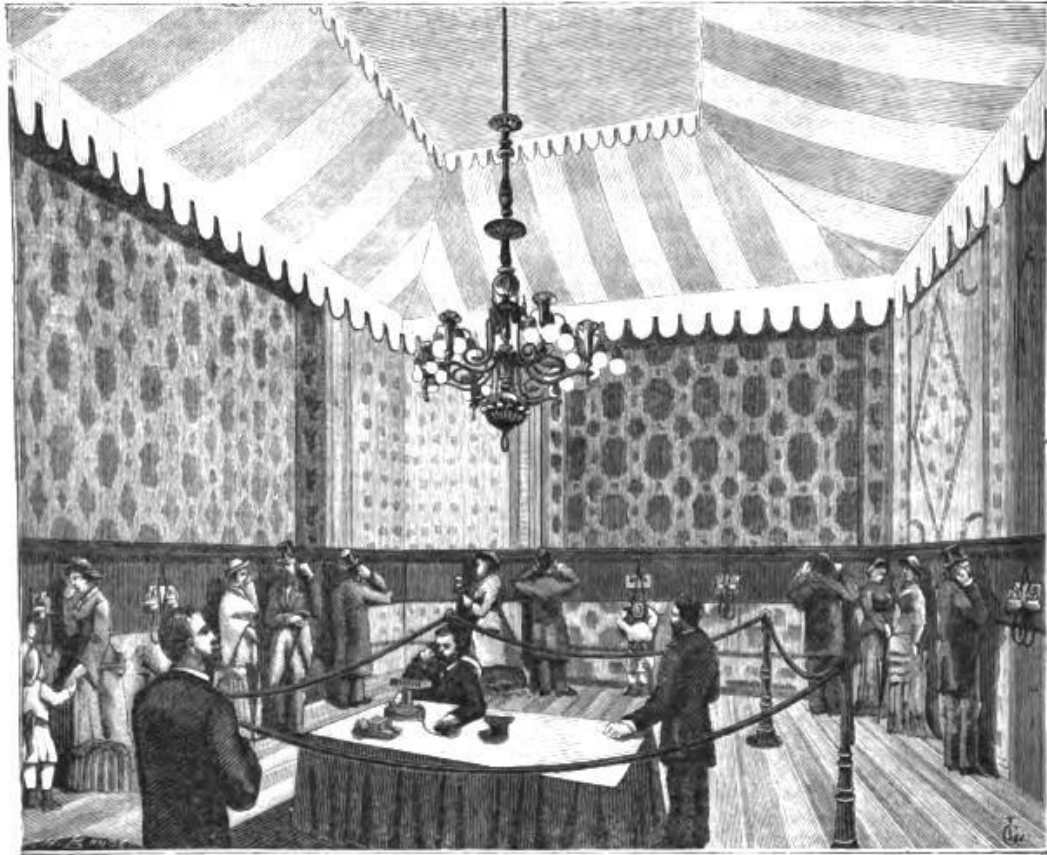
Image 5.1. The Listening Room at the 1881 Paris Electrical Exhibition[2]

To capture and relay these performances as they were happening, Adler used a series of

carbon microphones placed on both sides of the stage and either behind the footlights (at

the Théâtre Français) or on either side of the prompter's box (at the Opéra) and connected

them to telephone cables running through the Parisian sewers and into the exhibition

room at the Palais de l'Industrie. Perhaps even more fascinating is the fact that the

inventor offered this early form of live streaming not in monaural sound, but, because of

the setup—including two earphones, each connected to microphones on either side of the

stage—created instead a type of binaural, stereophonic sound *avant la lettre*. Adrian

Curtain's description of a 'novel auditory and theatrical experience' wherein audiences

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[2] The illustration originally appeared in *Nature*, 20 October 1881, 587.

participating 'from afar, both "inside" and outside an event, creating the stage in auditory terms, involved yet simultaneously removed' seems to resonate exactly with the sort of medium hybridity and institutional rhetoric surrounding the cinema livecasts of our own century—our ability to *see* 'live' as well as hear notwithstanding.[3] And as with *The Met: Live in HD* broadcasts, Adler's invention was quick to catch on as a profitable business venture, both at home and abroad.[4]

Initially, this service allowed performances to be heard in special screening rooms three nights per week between the hours of 8 and 11 pm. By the end of the decade, the Théâtrophone Company of Paris was formed and the device was marketed for home use. As Curtin notes, the company amassed over 1,500 subscribers by 1893, and additional listening stations could be found in clubs, hotel lobbies, cafes, restaurants, and other hotspots throughout the city.[5] As the 1912 advertisement pictured in Image 5.2 suggests, the device's popularity quickly spread internationally, with other models and subscription-based services for so-called 'pleasure telephones' springing up across the US, the UK, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Hungary, and beyond.

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[3] Adrian Curtin, *Avant-Garde Theatre Sound: Staging Sonic Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 88.

[4] While Joseph Attard's assertion that brand promotion and audience outreach, rather than profitability, appear to be the principal 'institutional objectives' behind simulcasting, James Steichen also demonstrates how the company's 'enhanced media presence' began to constitute an increasingly large share' of the Met's income. Annual reports through 2018 show that the simulcasts continue to turn a profit for the company. For Attard, see 'Massenet for the Masses? The Opera Virgins Project', *Opera Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (Autumn 2018): 286. For Steichen, see 'HD Opera: A Love/Hate Story, *Opera Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (Autumn 2011): 450.

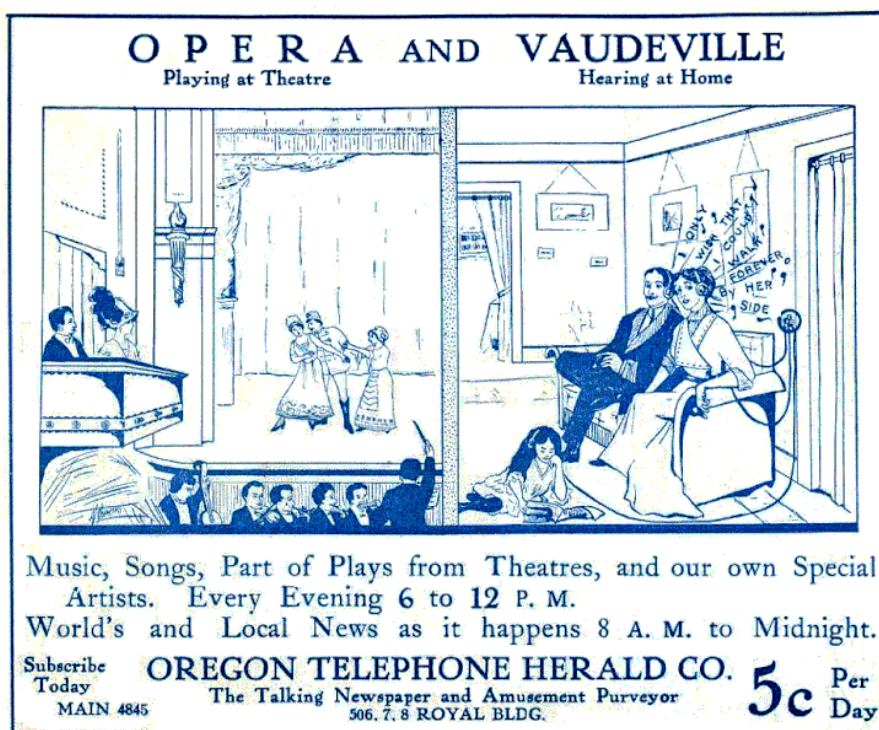[5] Adrian Curtain, *Avant-Garde Theatre Sound*, 89.

Image 5.2 An advertisement from the Oregon Telephone Herald, 1912

Verdi, in fact, fought against the business model and sued a Belgian service provider

successfully in 1899, establishing 'the legal principle of broadcast rights', as Mark

Schubin terms it.[6] And yet the technology spread, such that these live-yet-remediated

theatre broadcasts could even be enjoyed across national borders. Aside from local

theatrical, operatic, and even religious/ecclesiastical offerings provided by London's

Electrophone Company (est. 1894), subscribers could listen in on the Paris Opéra's

performances as well. The English company operated until 1925 and the original

Théâtrophone Company continued servicing Paris until 1932, both enjoying several

decades of success until eventually succumbing to the rising radio broadcast industry.

Such was the longevity of the Théâtrophone Company, and such was the

innovation at the Metropolitan Opera, that only fifteen years separate the former's final

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[6] Mark Schubin, 'The Fandom of the Opera: How the Audience for a Centuries-Old Art Form Has Incubated Electrical and Electronics Technologies', *Proceedings of the IEEE* 104, no. 3 (March 2016): 677.

live audio broadcast and the latter's first live video broadcast. As discussed in the previous chapter, their opening-night performance of Verdi's *Otello* in 1948, broadcast on the ABC television network, represented the first large-scale relay of operatic video into the home, much like Edison envisioned, though without his desired ability to see 'each muscle of the singer's face'.[7] The network used infrared television lighting (operating via alternating current) so as to not interfere with the lighting setup for the stage (wired for direct current), but the result was a rather dim picture presented to the 500,000 homes tuning in that night.[8] The video director's penchant for long shots meant that the performers on screen were even harder to see when coupled with the low lighting, and, as Marcia Citron relates, critics were also quick to lament the poor synchronisation between music and action.[9]

Nevertheless, as with the théâtrophone, the endeavour proved fruitful. Despite the difficulties and criticisms, the Met partnered with ABC to televise its opening night performances for the next two years. The opera house would later experiment with closed-circuit broadcasting, which proved easier to manage but meant circulation would be more limited than their previous efforts. The popularity of these showings also inspired other networks to bring operatic programming to the small screen, though these were often not live events. Some were 'relays', programmes recorded at the opera house, sometimes over two or more days, and often edited together for broadcast at a slightly

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[7] Alleged Edisoniana', *The Electrical Enterprise* 1, no. 22 (30 May 1891): 419. The Met's endeavour was not technically the first live opera to appear on television screens; the BBC aired a heavily abridged thirty-minute version of *Carmen*, starring Sara Fischer, in July 1934.

[8] Further details about the technical setup can be gleaned from John Crosby's review 'Opera by Video', originally written for *New York Herald Tribune* and currently accessible through the Met's online archives, http://archives.metoperafamily.org/archives/frame.htm.

[9] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 43.

later date. Alternatively, some television stations chose to pre-tape stagings in their

production studios for later broadcast. The NBC Opera Theatre, which ran from 1949 to

1964, operated in this manner (and even exported some of these shows for live, touring

performances throughout the country), though a further history of televised opera lies

beyond the scope of this study.

Another important precursor to the Met's regular *Live in HD* screenings, if

decidedly shorter-lived, was the company's live transmission of a *Carmen* production to

thirty-one cinemas across twenty-seven different cities in 1952 (Image 5.3). As

documented by a review from the *New York Times*, just under 3,000 people attended at

the opera house itself, but the company attracted a paying audience of nearly 70,000

altogether.[10]

Image 5.3 Audience members at the first live cinema broadcast, 1952[11]

The choice of *Carmen* for this live, one-off cinema event is also interesting since the

opera was used to similar effect decades earlier, when Cecil B. DeMille released his

silent film version to much acclaim (and uproar) in 1915. As Melina Esse relates, the

publicity and advertising leading to the film's debut, which took place in Boston's

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[10] Howard Taubman, 'Theatres in 27 Cities Show "Met" Telecast', *New York Times*, 12 December 1952, 1.
[11] Images appear on Mark Schubin, 'The First Opera Cinemacast', Sports Video Group, 21 March 2013,
https://www.sportsvideo.org/2013/03/19/media-technology-and-opera-history/.

Symphony Hall, was framed as a 'not-to-be-missed live event' that 'revealed yet another debt to opera' and one which the *Boston Daily Globe* promised as 'something entirely new'. The venue for the film's premiere had also, Esse argues, 'signalled cinema's ascendency'—it was now a medium fit to grace the 'stage' of that venue.[12] Further echoing a practice that has tended to typify cinematic audiences' response at the Met's *Live in HD* telecasts, reviews of DeMille's film also point out attendees heaping 'frequent applause' upon Geraldine Farrar whenever she appeared on screen, as if responding to an in-person singer who could hear their supportive feedback. Esse also suggests that 'what was at stake here was not just film's desire to emulate high-art forms such as opera and symphony' but was more generally 'an attempt to make the film what we would describe today as a "live" event, a once-in-a-lifetime experience'. The exhibition practices in Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco, furthermore, also seemed 'designed to encourage some of the exclusivity of opera to rub off on the film', and, as I will discuss below, much of this rhetoric could just as easily be applied to the Met Opera's later incursion into cinemas worldwide.[13]

The genre returned to the small screen once more in 1977, again courtesy of the Metropolitan. Its *Live from the Met* series, airing on the PBS network, featured interviews with star singers and conductors during intermissions, much like their later telecasts would. Indeed, the programming was often simulcast, with their televised productions featured live in stereo on the company's long-running radio broadcasts as well (just as the company continues to do with its *Live in HD* performances). The Met changed the name

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[12] Melina Esse, 'The Silent Diva: Farrar's Carmen', in *Technology and the Diva: Sopranos, Opera, and Media from Romanticism to the Digital Age*, ed. Karen Henson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016) 94, 95.
[13] Ibid., 98.

of its public television broadcasts to *The Metropolitan Opera Presents* in the late 1980s

to reflect the fact that its programming had been gradually shifting to the pre-taped

'relay' format discussed above. In 2007 the name would chance once again. *Great*

Performances at the Met broadcasts are in effect encore screenings of *Live in HD*

offerings, often several weeks (or months) after they have aired in cinemas, though

occasionally productions from earlier seasons may air, too.

When the company premiered its first *Metropolitan Opera Live in HD* transmissions

in late 2006, it thus had more of a pedigree to tap into than its already venerated tradition

of radio broadcasts, first explored in 1910, begun in earnest in 1931, and now also

regularly presented in HD through satellite radio. The first cinema season, inaugurated by

Julie Taymor's English-language production of *The Magic Flute* on 30 December, was

broadcast to approximately 100 venues, largely in the United States and Canada, but with

ten theatres abroad as well.[14] In the dozen or so years that have passed since that

premiere, the simulcasts now screen in approximately 2,200 locations across more than

seventy countries. Even if their boast of being 'the only arts institution with an ongoing

global series of this scale' is not accurate strictly speaking (London's National Theatre

has been broadcasting its *NTLive* series for a decade and screens in a comparable number

of venues worldwide, for instance), the Met was clearly the pioneering force behind the

event cinema phenomenon.[15] Not only did their success prompt other opera houses like

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[14] As outlined by Campbell Robertson, 'Mozart, Now Singing at a Theater Near You', *New York Times*, 1 January 2007, E1, the breakdown was as follows: sixty cinemas in the United States, twenty-eight in Canada, seven in Britain, two in Japan, and one in Norway.

[15] The assertion has most recently occurred in their press release detailing the 2019/20 season: https://www.metopera.org/globalassets/network-news/2019-20-season-announcements/2019-20-live-in-hd-season.pdf. The most current statistics I have come across for the NTLive, from their 2017/18 season, boasted of reaching 2,000 cinemas in over sixty-five countries. The Met's statistics for that season suggested the same number of cinemas and seventy-one countries.

La Scala, Glyndebourne, the Liceu, and San Francisco Opera to enter the fray, but also, after its initial success became evident, prompted other performing arts institutions to try their hand in the business. Indeed, the spoken theatre market has seen remarkable expansion and success in recent years, especially within the United Kingdom, where at least half a dozen high-profile companies launched similar projects in almost as many years.[16] Though statistical research is harder to come by in the US, surveys conducted across the UK in the past several years have shown spoken theatre vying for the top spot in event cinema distribution and revenues. While opera events received more screenings throughout the region in 2018 (opera with 28, theatre with 22), further statistical analysis reveals that the theatre events in fact brought in far more revenue, accounting for 35.4% of box office shares (versus opera at 19.6%) and overall revenue nearly double that of opera (£10.66 million compared to £5.9 million).[17]

Of course, there are many other parts to the equation. Some companies require screening venues to set ticket prices, with some having minimums and other having maximums, some providing for 'encore' productions (no longer live, but replays later in the week or further on down the line), and so on. Though contract details are often not revealed to the general public, it is well known that the Metropolitan Opera, at least,

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[16] In addition to the National Theatre Live broadcasts, which launched in 2009, Shakespeare's Globe (2011), the Royal Shakespeare Company (2013), the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company (2015), and the Almeida Theatre (2016) have all begun global broadcasting to cinemas, and this also fails to consider those endeavours of the Royal Opera House, the Royal Ballet, Glyndebourne, and others within their respective genres.

[17] These figures are all searchable through the statistics portal database Statista. The results in question can be found under the titles of 'Box office revenues from event cinema screenings in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2018, by type (in million GBP)', https://www.statista.com/statistics/589216/cinema-events-box-office-revenues-by-type-uk/; 'Number of events screened in cinemas in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2018, by type', https://www.statista.com/statistics/264526/numbers-of-events-screened-in-uk-cinemas-by-type/; and 'Share of box office revenues from event cinema screenings in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2018, by type', https://www.statista.com/statistics/589241/cinema-events-box-office-revenue-share-by-type-uk/.

requires its broadcast partners to enter into exclusivity agreements that prohibit them from screening events by competitors (i.e., other opera companies) during its own broadcast season plus thirty days thereafter. As Martin Barker notes, the company tried to extend this window to a much larger 120 days but eventually reconsidered after sizeable backlash.[18] These figures illustrate the surge in popularity that event cinema, as it has become known in the industry, has enjoyed in recent years in its two most dominant forms: opera and spoken theatre. Regardless of which genre comes out on top, this format represents a significant new way of engaging with remediated stageworks, and demands that we approach their aural dramaturgies differently than we would other remediated formats, or even live in-theatre.

II. Critical Approaches to Event Cinema

Scholars who have addressed the livecast have done so from a variety of disciplines. As the Met's programming was responsible for the initial boom of 'Alternate Content Cinema' (as the industry was originally known), it should come as no surprise that a number of scholars, including James Steichen, Paul Heyer, Jaume Radigales, and David Trippett, have chosen to write on the phenomenon with a particular focus on the company's broadcasts specifically, though each has broached the topic from their own perspective. Steichen's work, which remains some of the most frequently cited among the literature, tackles what he dubs the 'institutional dramaturgy' behind the opera company's broadcasts. As I will discuss in more specific detail later, this entails the way the Met formats and organises its telecasts; what information is presented to cinema audiences; and how it is framed and advertised simultaneously as 'the next best thing to being there

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[18] Martin Barker, *Live to Your Local cinema: The Remarkable Rise of Livecasting* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013), 84.

live' while also offering advantages not obtainable at the live performance itself (the interviews, close-up views, and so on).[19] Heyer draws on medium theory to analyse how both the live performance and the act of filming work together to 'combine the shared experience of traditional movie-going with at least part of the "aura" of attending a live theatre performance'.[20] Martin Barker's monograph, cited above, is the first book-length study to consider the Met's *Live in HD* series in detail, offering, significantly, some of the only available statistical details about questions of viewership, attendance, and other related matters. His work is not exclusively focussed on opera, however; he also discusses the National Theatre and other types of broadcasts like sporting events.

In the realm of theatre studies, Bernadette Cochrane and Francis Bonner take a similarly multi-genre approach in a shorter survey, focussing in part on how the Met's telecasts differ in scope and presentation from that of the National Theatre while also chronicling the shared experiences that transcend genre, performance, or institutional framing. Film scholars, too, have tackled the topic from their own vantage point, with Kay Armitage channelling cinematic auteurism to write on a particularly progressive female broadcast director for some of the Met's simulcasts, and Ben Parker offering another broader look across the operatic, theatrical, and even pop/rock concert genres in his own brief essay. Since Shakespeare has been the rock around which much of the aforementioned spoken theatre broadcasts have been built, it should come as no surprise that the format has already garnered a somewhat significant body of literature within this

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[19] Steichen's writing on the subject appears in 'The Metropolitan Opera Goes Public: Peter Gelb and the Institutional Dramaturgy of *The Met: Live in HD*', *Music and the Moving Image* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 24–30; and 'HD Opera: A Love/Hate Story', op. cit.

[20] Paul Heyer, 'Live from the Met: Digital Broadcast Cinema, Medium Theory, and Opera for the Masses', *Canadian Journal of Communication* 33 (2008): 602.

corresponding disciplinary sub-field. The recent publication of *Shakespeare and the*

'Live' Theatre Broadcast Experience (2018) remains one of the only book-length studies

of the livecast to date besides Barker's, at least in English-language scholarship. The

seventeen essays contained in the volume provide useful insights into the broadcast

experience that can at times be applied to the Met Opera's series. Even more valuable,

they can also be used comparatively to understand how the hybrid cinematic-yet-live,

theatre-yet-remediated experience can both change and remain the same when handled

both by different companies operating within the same genre and across spoken and sung

stageworks.

　　Among the many different disciplinary approaches to the livecast, almost all share

two traits: they invariably discuss the unstable name of this new entertainment format,

and they often stress its medium hybridity or refer to it as a new genre altogether. These

points are well taken. As is perhaps evident, I have adopted a variety of terms for the

phenomenon (and will continue to do so), even if 'livecast' is the one I tend to fall back

on most frequently. Prior to *Event Cinema*'s re-branding during an industry convention in

2012, executives had been referring to their offerings as *Alternative Content Cinema*,

which Cochrane and Bonner describe as 'the most accurate, though the least informative'

of the terminological possibilities. They take issue with the designation 'broadcasting',

too, citing that it indicates 'wide availability and conventionally free reception but the

encryption ensures that this is not what is happening'.[21] I would argue, however, that with

a global reach across six continents, subsequent airings on (free) public broadcast

television, and further access granted by many of these institutions to primary, secondary,

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[21] Bernadette Cochrane and Frances Bonner, 'Screening from the Met, the NT, or the House: what changes with the live relay', *Adaptation* 7, no. 2 (July 2014): 122.

and sometimes even university students free of charge, the term need not be thrown away—hence my occasional use of it in this chapter.[22] Paul Heyer coins the term 'Digital Broadcast Cinema' in his writing, though this to me seems a bit cumbersome; even Heyer abbreviates to 'DBC' in his article. The edited volume on Shakespeare prefers 'live theatre broadcast' as its phrase of choice, and scholars within the book refer to other authors with yet further choices, *cinecast* and *multim* among them.[23]Christopher Morris and Joseph Attard, in their joint introduction to a recent *Opera Quarterly* issue dedicated to 'Opera at the Multiplex', likewise employ the term 'cinecast', though in Attard's own contribution to the issue (and elsewhere), he opts instead for 'opera cinema'. Sarah Atkinson, another contributor, suggests 'opera cinema broadcasts' might be the most accurate name before shifting to 'opera cinema' herself.[24]

Barker favours 'livecasting', evidenced from the subtitle of his book, whereas Trippett settles on 'simulcast', a term originally used to describe radio broadcasts (in stereo) that aired at the same time as television broadcasts. While both seemingly get at the same thing, and while I occasionally use the latter term, too, it should perhaps be noted that these events are frequently not simultaneous with the 'actual' theatrical

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[22] The Met's *Live in Schools* programme provides free tickets to educators wishing to take their students to a broadcast and also partners with local schools to screen in-school exhibitions. The National Theatre*'s On demand.In Schools* [sic] offers productions for free on a streaming platform to all primary and secondary schools in the UK, and the RSC even has a *Live School Broadcast* programme specifically for students at given times (with sign language interpretation to ensure further accessibility), complete with live introduction and Q&A time for students to ask company actors questions afterwards. These are just three examples but others offer similar programmes.

[23] Both terms are listed and summarily dismissed in Pascale Aebischer and Susanne Greenhalgh, 'Introduction: Shakespeare and the "Live" Theatre Broadcast Experience', in *Shakespeare and the 'Live' Theatre Broadcast Experience*, ed. Pascale Aebischer, Susanne Greenhalgh, and Laurie E. Osborne (New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2018), 14n6. They note that Greenhalgh herself had previously used the term 'live relay' on p. 6.

[24] Christopher Morris and Joseph Attard, 'A Note from the Guest Editors', *Opera Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (Autumn 2018): 261–65; for Joseph Attard, see 'Massenet for the Masses?'; for Atkinson, see 'The Labor of Liveness: Behind the Curtain of Opera Cinema', 307–23.

performance, whether due to delays across time zones (national or international), 'encore performances' in cinemas (actually re-screenings of the same performance), subsequent public television broadcasts, and more. At first blush, 'livecast' seems equivalent, but I believe the word 'live' specifically highlights the rhetoric surrounding the format in a more direct and meaningful way. Within the history of recorded music performances, whether of the pop/rock, classical/operatic, jazz, or other varieties, we have often come to distinguish between 'live' and 'studio' recordings, and the rhetoric of liveness as such bleeds through to the rhetoric surrounding event cinema programming similarly. Even the titles many of the series take on—*Live at the Met*, *NTLive, KBTC Live*, *RSC Live*—keep the buzzword in play.

This focus on 'liveness' is important for the way we come to think about the aural dramaturgies of the stageworks being presented, both as theatrical and performance events, and as remediated sounds as well. In many ways this relates to the frequently-referenced debate on liveness between scholars Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander beginning in the 1990s. For the former:

> Performance's only life is in the present. Performance 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. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.[25]

Auslander, by contrast, notes in his aptly titled book *Liveness* (1999, rev. 2008) that 'the live' is historically dependent on 'the recorded' as its opposite and, since the notion of liveness did not exist prior to recording, must be understood in this historical context. He also sees the two existing in a more co-equal relationship than Phelan, suggesting forms

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[25] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

like film and video 'can be shown to have the same ontological characteristics as live

performance, and live performance can be used in ways indistinguishable from the uses

generally associated with mediatised forms'.[26] He even argues that

> initially the mediatised form is modelled on the live form, but it eventually usurps the live
>
> form's position in the cultural economy. The live form then starts to replicate the
>
> mediatised form. This pattern is apparent in the historical relationship of theatre and
>
> television […]. To the extent that live performances now emulate mediatised
>
> representations, they have become second-hand recreations of themselves as refracted
>
> through mediatisation.[27]

Both claims come into play with programming like the Met's *Live in HD* series.

On one hand, Phelan's are demonstrably alive and well within the performance venues

themselves, rehashed on-screen too when singers hosting the telecasts invariably stress,

during the introductory and/or intermission material offered to cinema-goers, that

'nothing beats the real thing'. They make repeated pitches for going to the 'actual'

performance venues to see the actors in the flesh and to hear the acoustics resounding in

the halls themselves. This is precisely what Steichen discusses when he speaks of

'institutional dramaturgy', and I will discuss the idea in more explicit detail below with

regards to my simulcast experience of *Die Walküre*. Contributors to the Shakespeare

volume on live broadcasts have also documented similar strategies at play for several of

the spoken theatre companies mentioned above.[28] On the other hand, the hosts and the

institutions themselves cannot be too quick to dismiss their livecasts either, lest they risk

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[26] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 184.
[27] Ibid., 183.
[28] Essays by Susan Bennet and Pascale Aebischer discuss these matters most directly, though others allude to it, too.

the potential draw and profit of cinema attendance in the first place. Without the requisite allure of 'liveness'—or at least the rhetorical framing of these events as such—those wishing to see remediated opera could just as easily view DVDs of performances recorded live on stage or as opera-films, find streaming clips and entire operas starring preferred singers and companies on the internet, and other options besides. The companies themselves thus walk a fine line, trying to imbue their simulcasts with the ontological and discursive properties of live theatrical performance to the greatest extent possible (so that potential global viewers see the event as something worth spending time and money on) while at the same time driving home the point that their 'virtual', global audiences should also make a pilgrimage to the 'real' venues to enjoy an operatic experience devoid of the audio-visual remediation offered on screen.

Because of the conflicting paratextual framing of the livecast, it should come as no surprise to see that scholars frequently choose to classify it as a new, hybrid genre (or at the very least a new type of cultural experience), built around principles variously culled from television, documentary and cinematic filmmaking, sportscasting, and live opera or theatre, among others. Indeed, almost every scholar cited thus far has underscored at least some of the cross-genre borrowing that has gone into the way the broadcasts are filmed, advertised, and distributed, and, just as all jockey about with various name proposals, almost all equally stress the liminal or transitional state of event cinema as a new medium. By extension, I suggest that the aural dramaturgies of these simulcasts also function in a unique combination of ways by drawing on types of hearing associated with recorded sound, staged sound, soundscapes and sound theory connected with cinema, and others besides. One of the unique aspects of these livecasts, I would

argue, is tied to issues of space and place, and how these properties can come to impact our engagement with the soundworlds around us, whether on screen, in our virtual, remediated theatres, or in the 'actual' venues themselves.

III. Space, Place, and Their Impacts on the Remediated Soundscape

The idea that how, where, and when we experience a performance—operatic or otherwise—can impact our understanding of the performance itself, as well as our perception of that experience, is not new. As a particularly apt corollary to my present concerns, we might note ethnomusicologist Steven Feld's observation that 'the experience of a place potentially can always be grounded in an acoustic dimension'.[29] The intersection of space, place, and performance has been treated with especial thoroughness in theatre studies literature, where Marvin Carlson, for instance, has succinctly explained that 'places of performance generate social and cultural meanings of their own which in turn help to structure the meaning of the entire theatre experience.[30] Suzanne Aspden has most recently explored this idea with respect to the opera house specifically in an edited volume aptly titled *Operatic Geographies: The Place of Opera and the Opera House* (2019). This line of scholarly inquiry has less frequently been broached with regard to the livecast, however—a lamentable oversight given that an understanding of space and place for this format is arguably even more complex, with even more variables, than live, in-person attendance at the un-remediated performances themselves.

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[29] Steven Feld, 'Places Sensed, Senses Placed: Towards a Sensuous Epistemology of Environments', in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, ed. David Howes (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 185.
[30] Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), 2.

For one, there is the process of sound recording and reproduction. In a November 2011 press release, Wohler Technologies announced that it would be providing All Mobile Video (AMV), the company responsible for broadcasting the Met's *Live in HD* programmes, with upmix processors, used in converting two-channel stereo input into the surround-sound, 5.1 speaker output setup typical in most cinemas. As the press release explains,

> For live-to-theatre events, AMV transmissions typically play in theatres equipped with surround sound systems. Because many edit houses and production companies can't handle 5.1, and because recorded audio content coming off tape is stereo, upmixing to 5.1 is a common requirement in delivering such transmissions.[31]

This description suggests a level of editing and sonic manipulation that would not quite square with the general perception of hearing unamplified, 'natural' voices as they would resound in the theatres themselves, where acoustics can help clarify space through changes in volume. Yet the Met's *Live in HD* FAQ page suggests that it is 'the next best audio experience to being in the opera house itself'.[32] As Trippett observes, however, 'any upmixing of a stereo input from the theatre into immersive surround-sound washes away the spectator's sense of occupying a fixed position in three-dimensional space'. It produces an 'immersive experience that denies listeners any auditory points of orientation'.[33] This surround sound experience is just one of several reasons that prompts Trippett to argue that 'the media of live opera and simulcast do not mix':

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[31] 'Wohler Supplies SoundField stereo-to5.1 Upmixers to All Mobile Video', Pro Video Coalition, 1 November 2011, https://www.providecoalition.com/wohler_supplies_soundfield_upm-1_stereo-to-51_up mixers_to_all_mobile_video/.

[32] For more, see Metropolitan Opera, '*Live in HD* FAQ', 2019, https://www.metopera.org/about/faq/live-in-hd-faq/.

[33] David Trippett, 'Facing Digital Realities: Where Media Do Not Mix', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 26, no. 1 (March 2014): 54.

> The operation of simulcasting live acoustic stage events mobilises a tension between, on the one hand, obligations to the sensory reality of the performance space (where the priorities are those of replication and mimesis) and, on the other, the need to ensure a stimulating cinematic experience, repurposing the acoustic product for the hyperrealism of digital cinema.[34]

It may be extreme to argue that the simulcast experience is as fully immersive and aurally unfixed as Trippett claims. Certain mixing effects still offer a sense of spatial regularity, akin to the binaural, stereophonic hearing possible in the original opera broadcasts by telephone. Still, even on the distribution end, Trippett's observations demonstrate that the way in which sound comes to be remediated produces an aural dramaturgy unlike that of a traditional theatre-going experience, even when (re)mediated sounds are at play on the stage, as was the case in Chapter 2.

Like much else about the livecast, however, this sort of unrealistic-yet-somehow-faithful quality of high-definition hearing has origins well before the advent of the Met's current programming. As Paul Sanden points out with regards to 1950s-era advertisements for high-fidelity sound systems, 'a perceived liveness of fidelity…derives from the high degree of perceived technological transparency in the sound of the hi-fi record'. Echoing Jonathan Sterne, he suggests that technologies of this sort—and we could easily apply this to the remediated sounds of the livecast as well—can be considered 'vanishing mediators', which, in Sanden's words, 'are not considered to influence the performer's communication or its reception in any way but rather to reveal this musical communication in its truest state'.[35] Indeed, we might trace the phenomenon

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[34] Ibid., 56–57.
[35] Paul Sanden, *Liveness in Modern Music: Musicians, Technology, and the Perception of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 37. Sterne's quote appears here, too.

back even further still, as the Victor Talking Machine company's 'Victor Tone Tests' and Edison's competing 'Realism Tests' sought to make similar claims about the fidelity of their own products. Edison sponsored more than four thousand tests between 1915 and 1920 alone. Audiences, sometimes numbering in the thousands, would gather to experience the supposedly indistinguishable performances of a live singer and the corresponding recordings on an Edison phonograph.

If we consider Sanden's argument in tandem with Steichen's observation that the broadcasts 'invite and enable the audience to inhabit imaginatively the status-imbued space of the Metropolitan Opera house, the corporate headquarters of the initiative', we can complicate Trippett's claims about the immersiveness of the simulcasts. Events such as the *Live in HD* broadcasts may in fact allow for a different sort 'sensory reality of the performance space', one that is dependent on the audience's ability to imagine the remediated sound and space as coming from the originating venue and singers, in a hall where the acoustic projection and reverberation also surround the listener, albeit differently.[36] I will consider the importance of the space and place of these opera halls and theatre venues themselves briefly as well, but first it is worth pausing to consider our experiences on the receiving end of these telecasts—in the many varying types of theatrical and cinematic environments these performing arts organisations partner with.

One significant variation between the live event and its remediated form is the sheer amount of variability in how these performances are framed and presented by the hosting institutions. This topic has not yet received much attention as regards the Met broadcasts, or within opera scholarship in general, but Joseph Attard's audience-based

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[36] James Steichen, 'The Metropolitan Opera Goes Public', 28.

research begins to touch on such issues. For one phase of his research, he chose to

question viewers attending a diverse sampling of the repertoire (Royal Opera House

screenings of *Boris Godunov*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and *Werther*) across four different

cinema locations. He notes, 'surprisingly', that, while 'data were quite consistent across

different locations and all three operas … the only contextual factor that exerted an effect

over subjects' engagement was the type of cinema', with attendees at the Hatfield and

Hereford Odeons reporting more negative views about their experiences.[37] Elsewhere,

Keir Elam has broached the subject with reference to a 2016 National Theatre broadcast

of *Hamlet* across multiple venues in Bologna. He focusses mainly on the different types

of promotion and reception at a screening in an historic cinema venue that attracts 'a self-

selected audience composed primarily of cineastes' (and thus framed largely as a film in

its own right), and another that heavily advertises the mixed-genre livecast as its own,

unique, hybrid form of entertainment, further contextualised for audience members

within a broader series of event cinema productions the theatre would go on to offer. He

also points to two other, more conventional multiplexes screening the same event that

night as well, though space precluded his consideration of those venues in detail. Elam

suggests, persuasively, that 'the perceptual framing of the event may be conditioned by

its venue, since different cinemas have distinct cultural histories, and attract, at least in

part, different kinds of audience'. 'The reception of the same, simultaneous event may

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[37] Joseph Attard, 'Massenet for the Masses?', 299. Attard remarks on the following page that attendees at those theatres were especially 'critical of the cinema environment for breaking the spell of absorption'. Though he does not elaborate further on what may distinguish those theatres from others, one gets the feeling that, as one of England's largest and most widely-recognised cinema chains, there may be an element of 'brand recognition' at play here—i.e., owing to the well-known setting, it became harder to distance oneself from the realities of the space.

have been different in the venues in question', he continues, 'due to conditioning by their respective micro-cultural contexts.[38]

This is very much evidenced in my own experiences across a variety of different types of screening environments. The Paramount theatre in Charlottesville, Virginia, originally built as a so-called 'movie palace' in 1931, has only one screen to make use of, and so a simulcast presentation is the only event that can happen there at a given time. Purchasing tickets requires selecting specific seats, and they are subsequently picked up at the will-call window, much as one could do at the Met. Also like the New York opera house, the Paramount has an HD television screen outside the main hall for latecomers to be able to watch the performance until an appropriate intermission occurs. It is also significant that the site has been primarily focussed on live performances in recent years, such that telecast attendees may well be predisposed to associate the space with live performance. Despite having an open concession stand, food and drink have recently become prohibited in the hall itself, also much like a 'traditional' theatre.

Contrasting strongly with this is the Showcase Cinema, a multiplex in Revere, Massachusetts, where during intermissions multiplex employees rolled in mobile dining carts to sell audience members specially-prepared lunch options that in many ways mirrored the fare offered at the Met. The catered menus, printed off and differentiated at each opera screening, offered a marked difference from the more general popcorn-and-pretzel offerings on sale in the lobby of the building. Furthermore, given the local popularity of the screenings at this venue, the Revere location even began utilising two of its auditoriums to screen the *Live in HD* performances, at least while I was living in the

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[38] Keir Elam, 'Very Like a Film: *Hamlet* Live in Bologna', in *Shakespeare and the 'Live' Theatre Broadcast Experience*, op. cit., 194.

area from 2011 to 2014. Of the other 'traditional' multiplex locations in which I have

attended these broadcasts (in Boston and Framingham, and also in Deer Park, New

York), Revere was the only one to resolve the issue of sell-out performances (a most

frequent occurrence in Boston's Fenway AMC theatre) by adding a second, simultaneous

screening. It also suggests the possibility for even smaller 'micro' communities than

Elam gets at above. But, while each auditorium sees the same livecast, one might

theoretically experience technical glitches while the other presses on. The Met's website

claims that all technical malfunctions happen locally, at the theatres themselves. One

showing might thus 'experience a small problem', they warn, 'while another nearby has a

perfect transmission'.[39] Even at such a local level, then, variety might still exist, for better

or for worse.

I have also seen these HD broadcasts elsewhere, with still further differences in

how the hosting institutions present their screenings to audiences. The Staller Center for

the Arts at Stony Brook University was the first venue on Long Island to offer the Met's

programming, and even by their third season (2008/09), when I attended my first

performances there, this was still the case. Though located on the University's campus,

the theatre operates largely as a for-profit performance facility, which, besides hosting

student-led recitals and concert/performance events on its five stages each year, also

brings in professional touring groups of musicians (both popular and 'classical'), ballet

troupes, and hosts other such events. It also serves as the site for a notable, recurring film

festival. Despite having an auditorium with labelled seats, like the Paramount, the tickets

for the Met screenings were general admission, and audience members could sit wherever

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[39] Metropolitan Opera, 'FAQs *Live in HD*'.

they liked. Though they also had a concession stand, it was not in operation on telecast days. Thus, even another 'live' theatrical/performing arts space like the Paramount offered a rather different environment in which to experience the *Live in HD* event.

From a slightly different angle, Ann Martinez speaks about attending an *NTLive* broadcast of *Hamlet* with her students at a local Ohio movie theatre in 2015 (the same production that Elam attended in Bologna the following year). While the multiplex may not function as a performing arts venue like the Paramount or the Staller Center, the students received a heightened theatrical experience more typical of live theatre than that of the cinema. As Martinez describes it, the multiplex 'deliberately fostered' this feeling 'by broadcasting *Hamlet* in the screen room with the most elegant double-door entrance, employing an usher with a flashlight to guide people to their seats, and opening the private concession stand adjacent to the screen room for intermission'. This helped to shape what she terms a 'community of *reception* … where visual, auditory, and spatially-related aspects coalesced'.[40] In terms that are just as relevant for the Met's *Live in HD* series, she argues that we should view these simulcasts as 'a new view into a performance, and as an experience that can be immersive and communal even for a distant audience'.[41] Relating this to my own experiences, it is perhaps also worth noting the Paramount's attempts to foster this same sort of immersive, communal feeling in a way commensurate with their framing of the venue and its programming. The screenings are sometimes preceded by pre-performance lectures by local scholars or performers, for example, and, to celebrate the conclusion of the season's *Live HD* series in May 2019,

[40] Ann M. Martinez, 'Shakespeare at a Theatre Near You: Student Engagement in Northeast Ohio', in *Shakespeare and the 'Live' Theatre Broadcast Experience*', op. cit., 201, 200. Emphasis in original.
[41] Ibid., 204.

they offered a free, post-screening champagne reception following the final Met

broadcast. Activities such as these suggest an attempt to align the series more with rituals

of highbrow cultural entertainment rather than those associated with more typical

cinematic outings.

Given the radically different types of hosting institutions in which these

simulcasts can be screened, then, it follows that one's acoustic perception of the work can

be altered quite significantly when attending at one location or another. While it might be

possible to research and draw conclusions about the ways we hear in, say, the Met itself,

at Wagner's Bayreuth Festspielhaus, or in the reconstructed Globe Theatre in London,

such theorising would be much more complicated in trying to write about the *Live in HD*

telecasts given the immense variety in acoustic design principles across the thousands of

different receiving venues. Nevertheless, Laurie Osbourne also discusses the complex

relationship between the space and place of the original theatres and those of its

broadcasting locations. She suggests each originating institution's 'venue-specific *mise*

en théâtre' can 'resonate or conflict with the screening theatres in dynamic ways that

potentially shift the balance toward cinematic or theatrical experience'. [42] While

Shakespeare is her point of reference in this regard, such sentiments can also readily be

applied to operatic broadcasts, too, even if opera houses, with their frequent reliance upon

proscenium-style presentation, offer fewer types of viable stage configurations than

spoken theatre.

This may suggest a more passive type of aural dramaturgy than those I have

considered in other chapters, where playwrights, librettists, composers, and sound

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[42] Laurie E. Osbourne, 'Epilogue: Revisiting Liveness', in *Shakespeare and the 'Live' Theatre Broadcast Experience*, op. cit., 221.

designers were actively shaping the soundscape evoked on the page and realised on the stage. But in addition to my earlier discussion of the recording and mixing techniques utilised by the Met for their broadcasts, the idea that issues of space and place can further impact our understanding of an opera's remediated soundscape is another important aspect of operatic acoustics worthy of further study. Indeed, even Wagner himself theorised on the importance of architecture for a more complete comprehension of the operatic spectacle. After lamenting that present-day theatres were constructed primarily with an eye for financial profit and 'luxurious ostentation', he suggests an end to the 'parcelling of our public into the most diverse categories of class and civil institution' and dreams of a 'Theatre of the Future' constructed with an egalitarian seating arrangement such that all things visible to the viewer must lend itself to a deeper understanding of the work being performed.[43] For this same reason he would also create the 'mystical gulf' (*mystischen Abgrund*) between stage and audience in his Festspielhaus—the sunken pit from which his orchestra would play, and which, like the reformatted sightlines and the darkening of the auditorium, removed yet another visual 'distraction' so that audiences could better focus on the stage matter.

Sarah Dustagheer has recently offered a study of Shakespeare's Globe and Blackfriars theatres with attention to the specific acoustics and unique spatial properties accorded to each, and Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth Salter have written about 'aural architecture', as they term it. More specifically, they discuss approaches to the experience of space through practices of attentive listening, a topic also taken up from a less scientific and more philosophical approach by Gernot Böhme. Emily Thompson's *The*

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[43] Richard Wagner, 'The Art-Work of the Future', in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. I, trans. William Ashton Ellis (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1896), 185n34.

Soundscape of Modernity (2002) likewise devotes a considerable amount of space to the acoustics of various building spaces. Symphony halls garner more attention than their operatic equivalents, but one could easily begin formulating a number of related questions as a result of these studies, both in terms of our operatic spectatorship in general (much as Aspden's study, mentioned earlier, has already begun to do), and then as applied to our consumption of the livecasts more specifically. The stadium-like seating presently favoured by multiplexes is quite unlike the design of early movie theatres, for example, and this does not even begin to touch on the various structural variations of both older and newer opera houses.

The topic is important for our understanding of the aural dramaturgy of remediated theatre because, as Heyer puts it, these screenings create a viewing subject that is 'at a distance from the event being experienced yet at the same time an integral part of it, a phenomenon media historians sometimes refer to as co-presence'. The format's hybridity would also complicate arguments such as Walter Benjamin's, who famously insisted that 'even the most perfect reproduction of an artwork is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be'.[44] Though telecasts do often feature encore performances in their receiving venues and/or on public television, the fact remains that the initial screenings *do* actually bring together spectators across various sites to collectively watch the same production play out in real time. This 'live' aspect of telecast attendance in turn resonates with the general trend among the scholars cited above who have all sought to stress the medium hybridity or the altogether new media format represented by these livecasts.

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[44] Paul Heyer, 'Live from the Met', 601. Benjamin's quote appears here, too.

In another oft-cited work of theatre studies literature, Erika Fischer-Lichte defines 'bodily co-presence' as the *sine qua non* of performance. 'For a performance to occur', she asserts, 'actors and spectators must assemble to interact in a specific place for a certain period of time'. This constitutes an underlying factor that 'must be given when applying the term performance'.[45] Programming such as the *Live in HD* series complicates these matters, then. Bodily co-presence now exists at multiple sites simultaneously and fosters a sense of virtual co-presence as well, attested to by the way in which cinema-goers frequently applaud singers after arias or during curtain calls despite not actually 'being there' for the performers to receive this feedback. To return once more to Shakespeare scholarship, Stephen Purcell perhaps sums it up best: 'If "being there" remains, for now, the dominant criterion of liveness, then digital technologies are making it increasingly difficult to determine what, precisely, "being there" constitutes".[46]

IV. Lepage's *Ring* and the Sounds of 'The Machine'

To put all of this theory into more concrete terms, I will now shift focus to a specific Met opera staging and its corresponding livecast: the revival production of Robert Lepage's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and the cinema broadcast of *Die Walküre* on 30 March 2019. The premiere of Lepage's *Ring* Cycle, staggered over the 2010/11 and 2011/12 seasons, was one of the most frequently (and almost uniformly) lambasted endeavours in the company's recent history. So embattled was the production that, after

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[45] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (New York: Routledge, 2008), 32.
[46] Stephen Purcell, 'The impact of new forms of public performance', in *Shakespeare and the Digital World: Redefining Scholarship and Practice*, ed. Christie Carson and Peter Kirwan (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 222.

its final performances in 2013, the company scrapped its initially-planned revival for the 2016/17 season, delaying it by two more years. Peter Gelb, the Met's general manager, ostensibly cites 'a certain amount of "Ring" fatigue' after featuring the production in three successive seasons, suggesting 'it made sense to wait' before reviving it again.[47] Equally likely, however, was the company's desire to further distance audience memory from the costly production's initial reception, which was lukewarm at best and hostile at worst. Though opera scholarship has only in recent decades begun to focus its attention on questions of particular directorial staging practice and reception (as discussed in Chapter 2), Lepage's *Ring* has become so (in)famous that it has even appeared in case studies of three separate monographs recently, to say nothing of its appearance in shorter articles, too. In all three instances, the authors have largely agreed with reviewers in their dismissive lamentations over the production's failure to engender any real critical insight into Wagner's magnum opus.

As Gundula Kreuzer points out, the composer was frustrated after the premiere of his tetralogy that 'critics had focussed on the functioning (or failure) of his stage technologies'.[48] In this respect, at least, we can certainly discern an affinity between the original Bayreuth performances and Lepage's at the Met, where some of the biggest headlines were about its oftentimes spectacular technological mishaps. This was the case from the very first. At the end of the world premiere for *Das Rheingold* (also the Met's opening-night performance for that season), some of the set's rotating planks froze up, leaving the gods without a rainbow bridge to traverse and forcing them to walk offstage

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[47] Gelb is quoted in James Barron, 'Leaving the Met, but Not for Valhalla', *New York Times*, 17 May 2013, C1.
[48] Gundula Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian Technologies of Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 16.

anticlimactically.[49] *Die Walküre*, the most popular opera in the Cycle and the one I will

be discussing in the most detail below, has seen some of the most notable blunders.

During its own world premiere later that season (for which I was in attendance), star

Deborah Voigt could not easily mount the massive 'Machine' of a set (more on this

soon), causing her to fall after an initial attempt to climb up; she sang the subsequent part

of her scene standing on the stage floor rather than on top of the interactive set, where

Bryn Terfel remained. More embarrassingly still, the Microsoft Windows logo flashed

onstage during another performance when Lepage's projection technology failed, and yet

another mechanical mishap for a separate *Walküre* performance caused not only in-house

audiences but the additional 175,000 global theatre-goers to wait patiently (or not) for the

broadcast to begin while the issue was resolved.[50]

Yet unlike the creative team in New York, where management continued to

defend the staging during its revival throughout the 2018/19 season, Wagner was

cognizant of the need for constant renewal and improvement. Though he would not live

to oversee another staging of the Cycle, his ballet master Richard Fricke recorded a

conversation with the composer shortly after its Bayreuth premiere wherein he avowed,

'next year we'll do it all differently', and Cosima notes in her diary that 'Costumes,

scenery, everything must be done anew for the repeat performances. R. is very sad,

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[49] Anthony Tommasini, 'James Levine Is Back for Met's Opening Night', *New York Times*, 29 September 2010, C1.

[50] On the appearance of the Windows logo, see Anthony Tommasini, 'Met's "Ring" Machine Finishes the Spin Cycle, *New York Times*, 26 April 2012, C1. For the delayed simulcast see Daniel J. Wakin, 'Broadcast of "Die Walküre" Performance at the Met Is Delayed', *Arts Beat: New York Times Blog*, 14 May 2011, https://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/14/broadcast-of-die-walkure-performance-at-the-met-is-delayed/.

wishes he could die!'[51] Gundula Kreuzer, in her monograph on 'Wagnerian technologies', is only among the most recent authors who have stressed the profoundly contradictory nature of Wagner's endeavour along these lines, and also considers the Lepage *Ring* in her account. As she and many others have observed, Wagner castigated the evils of modern technology and endorsed an escape from artifice and towards a renewed oneness with nature. At the same time, however, the stage technologies he consistently sought out and relied upon throughout his career to convey this message were frequently on par with, if not surpassing, many of the most well-funded, technologically-advanced, and forward-thinking stages of his day. Along these lines, Kreuzer's quotation of Hanslick is apt: the Viennese critic, she points out, 'suspected modern technology to have inspired a central aspect of the *Ring*'s music-dramatic conception' and notes his observation that the Cycle 'could as little have been composed before the invention of electric light as without the harp or bass tuba'.[52] She also sees Lepage's *Ring* as a production that 'offers a rich case study of Wagner's dual technological legacy'—and this is particularly true for our present purposes.

If critics have focussed especially on the technological successes and (more often) failures of Lepage's production, this is not the only area that looms large in conversations about his interpretation. Most obvious, and literal, is the set itself: a forty-five-tonne device that has conventionally become known as 'the Machine', and which served as the sole set piece for the entire tetralogy. It consists of twenty-four aluminium planks, each thirty feet tall, suspended between two steel beams, themselves each twenty-six feet tall.

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[51] Richard Fricke, 'Bayreuth in 1876', trans. and ed. Stewart Spencer, *Wagner* 12, no. 1 (January 1991): 44; Cosima Wagner, *Cosima Wagner's Diaries*, vol. I, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, trans. Geoffrey Skelton (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 921–22; entry dated 9 September 1876.
[52] Gundula Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam*, 167.

Such was the weight of the machine—originally projected to weigh only half as much—that the opera house had to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to reinforce the stage. Given also that the typical new Met production at the time ran between two to two to four million dollars and that the Lepage staging would cost around sixteen million, it is clear to see why Gelb and others have seen the need to stand by their investment as staunchly as they have.

This foregrounding of technology also found its way into Susan Froemke's making-of documentary, *Wagner's Dream* (2012). Even the title tells us something of the marketing task it sets out to do. Produced by the Met, screened in movie theatres following a premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival, and then released on video, it reveals to us nearly as much about the Met's 'institutional dramaturgy', in Steichen's terms, as the simulcast material to be considered below.[53] Less than a minute into the documentary we are already made privy to the Lepage production's *raison d'être:* 'limited by nineteenth-century technology, Wagner was frustrated in his attempt to realise his cosmic vision'. Fromke also gets at something similar in a written interview included in the film's accompanying booklet. She praises everyone for trying to 'follow their vision to realise Wagner's dream—which he himself was never able to realise. He knew that, in his time, the technology would probably not exist to realise what he was after'. A self-identified Wagner historian, Georges Nicholson, takes this idea further in the documentary:

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[53] Significantly, Froemke has produced a more recent documentary for the company, too, entitled *The Opera House: Making the New Met* (2017). It screened in theatres for two days only and has also since aired on television and been released on video. It likewise toes a similar company line, framing the opera house's grand opening with the world premiere of Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1966) as a success when it was in fact castigated for its many failures to a degree similar to Lepage's *Ring*. The film's strengths and shortcomings have been noted by Christopher Lynch in a review of the DVD in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 295–302.

> When you look at this, you feel like this is finally the *Ring* Wagner would have wanted
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> all along. You know, he rejected the 1875[*sic*]—the opening at Bayreuth—he rejected the
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> scenery and everything. He was never satisfied. […] finally, with this kind of set, the
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> kinds of visual, we are actually having the vision that Wagner has when he was
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> composing. This is how it feels, in a way, to see everything moving here.[54]

Much like the scholars discussed in Chapter 4 who often sought to stress the

connexion between Wagner and cinema, Lepage too joins this chorus, telling us in the

film that his production 'is the movie Wagner wanted to do before movies existed'.

Froemke also cites this line in the booklet commentary: clearly it was a sticking point for

their marketing of the staging. Gelb's remarks in a 2012 interview with Anthony

Tommasini were similar. There, he stressed that Lepage 'may be the first director to

execute what Wagner actually wanted to see onstage' while also claiming the technology

itself was essentially akin to a 'new character'.[55] Statements like this, however, obscure

Wagner's perpetual desire to disguise rather than foreground his reliance upon

technology. The composer's suggestion that a hidden orchestra was as necessary for his

work's success as the concomitant concealment of 'the cords, ropes, laths and

scaffoldings of the stage decorations' needed to produce his illusionistic scenes is just

one example of his phantasmagorical tendencies.[56] But if this technologically-advanced,

multi-million-dollar endeavour was publicised along the *Werktreue* lines of 'fidelity to

the original', so too was the company's previous *Ring* Cycle, directed by Otto Schenk,

which ran at the Met from 1987 through 2009. The production, steeped in the most

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[54] Susan Froemke, *Wagner's Dream: The Making of the Metropolitan Opera's New* Der Ring des Nibelungen, Blu-ray, Deutsche Grammophon: 0044 073 4851, 2012.
[55] Quoted in Anthony Tommasini, 'The Met, the "Ring" and the Rage Against the Machine', *New York Times*, 4 April 2012, C1.
[56] Richard Wagner, 'Preface to the "Ring" Poem', in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, III, 276–77.

romantic of traditions, featured stage designs frequently based on the original 1876 set designs and sketches, now made more lifelike through the use of practicable scenery rather than painted backdrops, seen in Image 5.4.
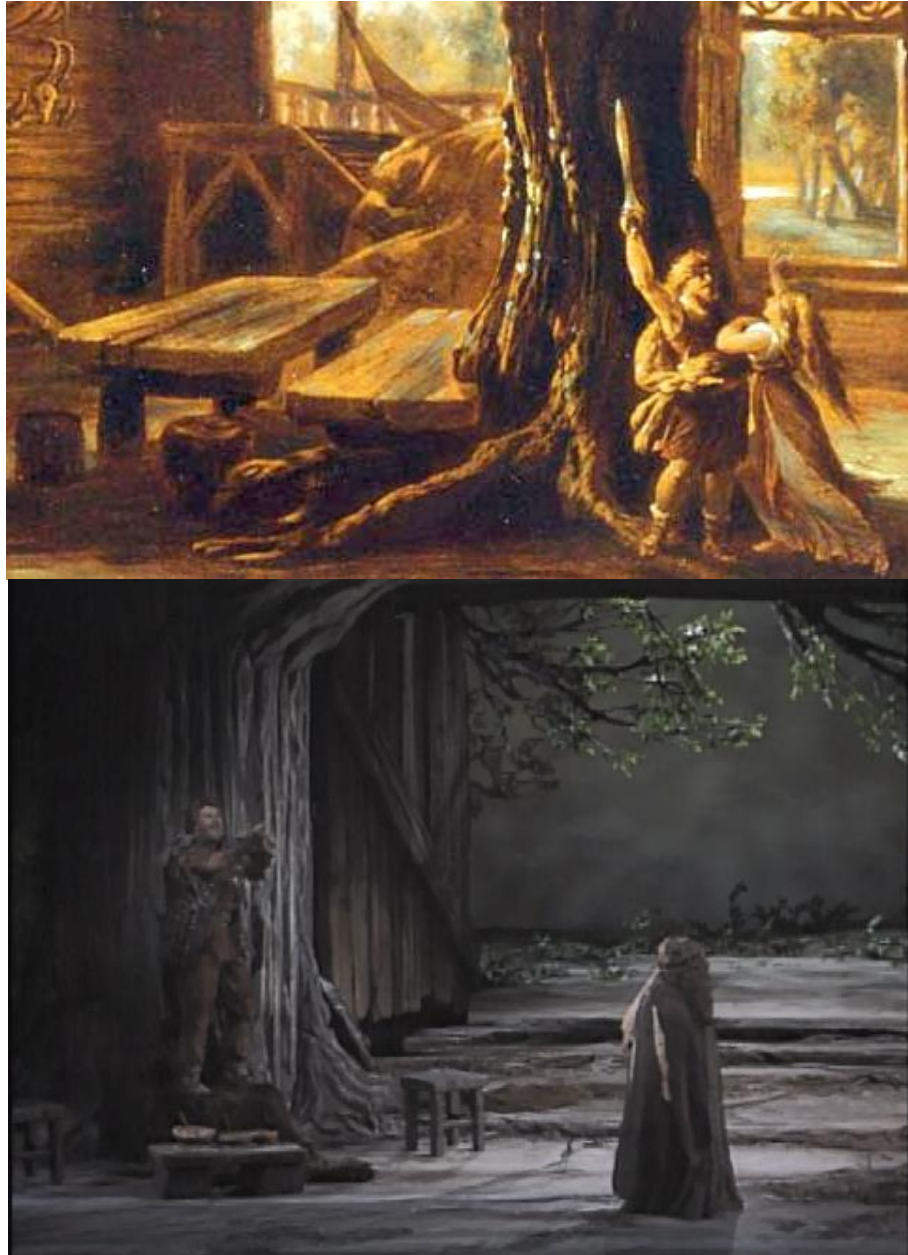

Image 5.4 Top: Detail from Josef Hoffmann's 1876 oil sketch for *Die Walküre*, Act I.
Bottom: Otto Schenk's Met Opera Staging (DVD, Deutsche Grammophon: 073 049-9, 2002)

If the company's framing of both the high-tech and high-Romantic approaches as 'faithful to the original' seems paradoxical, the reception histories of both productions do

at least reveal a near equivalency regarding a critical failure to live up to their lofty aspirations. In a review of the Schenk *Ring* premiere, for instance, Peter Davis lays out faults that could have easily been directed at Lepage's staging nearly a quarter century later. He excoriates the Met for repeatedly endorsing 'an approach that blatantly presents the sets as the star of the show no matter who happens to be singing in front of them', for example. He also notes the opera house's advertising of the production as being 'faithful to Wagner' but opines that 'what the audience actually sees is a stage virtually devoid of dramatic ideas'. Along these lines he cites another critic who describes the production as 'stillborn' and another 'polite' review that called it 'neutral'.[57] But one problem that criticisms of the Lepage were unlikely to share with the older Schenk production was its *noise*.

In a study that would have been much at home in my first chapter, Karl Gross concludes that the stage directions for Wagner's *Ring* operas collectively offer 220 acoustic references, along with a further 190 visual descriptors.[58] Yet much as critics took 'the Machine' to overshadow the performers on stage, so too did the noises of Lepage's realisation dominate the operatic soundscape—if not always to the detriment to the singers specifically, certainly to the overall acoustic experience of the productions as a whole. Consider Michael Cooper's September 2018 retrospective for the *New York Times* in advance of the staging's revival for that coming Met season. His account provides a copious amount of aural detail relating to the Lepage *Ring*, though the descriptions are

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[57] Peter G. Davis, 'Jimmy's Met: How Good Is the Tune Levine's Calling?', *New York*, 20 April 1987, 54, 56.
[58] For more, see Karl Gross, 'Die Sinnesdaten im *Ring des Nibelungen*: Opisches und Akustisches Material', *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie* 22 (1912): 401–22.

entirely of the Machine itself rather than any other aspect of the production's aural

dramaturgy.

He begins by speaking of the 'clinks, clunks, and groans' heard during its original

run and provides an overview of many of the 'Wagnerian-scale mishaps' discussed

above. He assures readers, however, that for the revival Gelb was seeking to 'make sure it

could run smoothly and quietly, so its creaks would no longer risk drowning out the

Wagner tubas'.[59] Cooper speaks of the company's acquisition of a new custom-built

hydraulic wrench as its 'secret weapon against the annoying clicking sounds that could

often be heard in past "Ring" performances'. 'As planks spun around on the axis', he

explains, 'they gradually loosened the custom-made 4.5-inch nuts and bolts that held it

together. The result? "Click, Click"'. He also goes on to describe 'a wooshing sound' that

could be heard as the planks spun into new positions which employees at the opera house

came to refer to as 'the rainstick effect'. The Met's Director of Production Operations

Jeff Mace relates that the sounds were coming from scraps of metal debris that came off

when screwing 'thousands of holes' into the planks themselves. It made 'the most

beautiful, ethereal noise', he observed, but demurred: 'it's not in the score so it's got to

go'. Cooper also quotes Gelb himself discussing a 'big clunking noise' as the Machine

executed some of its most complex rotations in the past and assures that this, too, was

being fixed for the revival. Near the end of the article, however, the journalist describes a

'low, worrisome rumbling' sound that emerged from the stage while he and Gelb looked

on at a technical run-through of *Die Walküre*, so things remained in the air at that point.

Clearly, the varied mechanical noises of the Machine had been a defining aspect of the

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[59] Michael Cooper, 'Retooling the Met Opera's Problematic "Ring" Machine', *New York Times*, 21 September 2018, AR8. All references in this paragraph are to Cooper's review.

Lepage *Ring*'s aural dramaturgy. It was an aspect of the soundscape that came to be closely associated with the production for audiences and critics alike.

When the revival finally began in Spring 2019, reviewers remained alert to the Machine's historical penchant for noisiness, the supposed remedies undertaken, and contradictions to those institutional assurances. Tommasini's review of *Das Rheingold* suggests fewer acoustic disturbances, but Anne Midgette's *Walküre* review for the *Washington Post* asserts that 'the set creaked and groaned and visibly constrained the singers' as much as ever. Several of her other observations also echo sentiments akin to those espoused regarding the Met's previous Schenk staging, mentioned earlier. In the same review she suggests that the revival 'remains a production without a point of view' and that the Machine doing 'all the work' 'renders the characters' actions 'a cartoonish afterthought'.[60] She tackles these and similar issues in her retrospective of the revival in subsequent column, too, after all four operas had been re-presented at the Met. Looking back, she questions whether Lepage

> had any vision at all. The whole focus of this production is the Machine, which has become something that moves in the background, its clankings quieter than in 2010 but still evident, and strikes tableaux while the singers act in front of it. [...] It doesn't, however, bring any special insight to the work — indeed, after "Das Rheingold" each subsequent opera seemed to have less inspiration and more apathy, as if, in the wake of a critical drubbing, Lepage had simply ceased to care.[61]

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[60] Anne Midgette, 'The Met Opera's high-tech "Ring" was a flop. Can a soprano change that at its revival?', *The Washington Post*, 26 March 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/the-met-operas-high-tech-ring-was-a-flop-can-a-soprano-change-that-at-its-revival/2019/03/26/dcfa0704-4fce-11e9-a3f7-78b7525a8d5f_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.42a86cb448d0 .

[61] Anne Midgette, 'The Met's "Ring" succeeds in spite of—and in no way supported by—a $50 million set', *The Washington Post*, 27 April 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/the-mets-ring-succeeds-in-spite-of--and-in-no-way-supported-by--a-50-million-set/2019/04/28/1ee794a6-69d8-11e9-a66d-a82d3f3d96d5_story.html?utm_term=.3327bae17e54.

Though this reaction seems more or less on par with general criticisms levied against the artistic decisions of both past and present Met administrations, it is perhaps more surprising, and in fact even disappointing, given Lepage's otherwise highly respected role in avant-garde theatre and the recognition he has earned among scholars as a leading practitioner who aims to 'evolve a radically non-traditional form of theatre'.[62] Consider, for instance, *Elsinore* (1996), the one-man reinterpretation of *Hamlet* which he both starred in and directed, and which also featured a large, metal, rotating setpiece (seen in Image 5.5 below).

Image 5.5 Lepage and his mechanical set in *Elsinore* (1996). Photo by Richard Max Tremblay

Here, as Christopher Innes argues, the 'continually turning steel construct and its kinetically moving planes … emphasised the mechanical nature of the stage and its status as a symbol of high technology'. More broadly, Innes suggests that the dominance of

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[62] Christopher Innes, 'Puppets and Machines of the Mind: Robert Lepage and the Modernist Heritage', *Theatre Research International* 30, no. 2 (July 2005): 125.

machines and 'the interface between machine and mind, technology and thought'

represents a tension that has run throughout Lepage's career—and this written well

before Lepage's work with the Met Opera no less.[63] But if such could be said of the

director's innovations elsewhere, critical and popular consensus has found his *Ring*

lacking, a shame given how readily such questions on the interplay of power and

technology (and indeed, the power *of* technology) could be readily applied to the

tetralogy.

V. *Die Walküre* and its Paratextual Framing

If these critical and scholarly reactions to both the premiere and its recent revival

demonstrate a keen awareness of the acoustic properties of the Lepage *Ring*, however, I

wish to also highlight another, less often discussed aspect of these livecasts that also

wields considerable impact: the accompanying commentary and other paratextual

features. Though the material seldom offers deep insights into the production or acting

process (questions to the performers and other personnel are often of a more casual

nature: *How does it feel singing on the Met stage? What's it like working with this

conductor/director*, and so forth), it plays an important part in the remediation process.

Sarah Atkinson has lamented the 'comparatively little attention' that has been afforded

this aspect of the screenings, and has sought to change that by examining the live portions

of the Met's and Royal Opera House's broadcasts.[64] I likewise seek to change that,

though with a wider focus on both the live *and* pre-recorded features of the *Live in HD*

events. Taken as a whole, the interviews, pitches for donations, trailers for upcoming

productions, and other 'bonus material' engender a different sort of acoustemological

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[63] Ibid., 132, 134.
[64] Sarah Atkinson, 'The Labor of Liveness: Behind the Curtain of Opera Cinema', 307.

engagement with, say, *Die Walküre*, than in-house attendance and most other forms of remediation would. They are thus worth further consideration.

When I attended the *Walküre* telecast on 30 March 2019, the first framing event played out before the Met's video feed even began. Two administrative personnel took to the Paramount stage in Charlottesville, microphones in hand, to address audience members directly. They spoke of their venue's own fundraising efforts, thanked donors, took a pot-shot or two at the length of Wagner's opera, noted upcoming live and broadcast events on their schedule, and, perhaps most interestingly, highlighted a local connexion between the production and this specific locality. One of the Valkyries, it seems, is a Charlottesville native and also performed in a live version of *South Pacific* at the Paramount the previous year. This enabled the venue to promote both its own (live) artistic endeavours, as well as the city's, by stressing the connexion between their work and one of the country's premiere performing arts institutions.

As the broadcast proper begins, the first thing we see is audience members in New York taking their seats and the orchestra tuning their instruments. Aside from act-end curtain calls and the final bows at the end of the performance, this is one of the few glimpses of either that we will get over the next several hours. Unlike some other broadcasts (such as those coming from Shakespeare's Globe), the Met opts for a sense of cinematic immersion during the acts. Paul Heyer suggests that 'with comic operas we can observe the Met audience laughing and laugh with them as well as collectively with those around us', but while audience laughter (and applause, for that matter) is certainly audible from time to time, such reaction shots seem exceedingly rare—I cannot recall any in the Met telecasts I have seen. Though there have been some shots of the singers from

cameras in the wings that provide glimpses of audience members, they have not been

foregrounded as reaction shots per se: and besides, in a darkened auditorium, it would be

difficult to capture such audience response in the first place.[65] Rather, much in line with

practices of live opera filming dating as far back as the 1950s, camerawork within acts

tends to present what Kay Armitage describes as 'a closed diegetic world' with 'no cuts

to conductor, musicians, audience reaction, or behind the scenes'.[66]

For now, our audience-gazing is occasionally interrupted by insert slides that

display publicity photos of the day's performers and their recent signing credits with the

company. After ten minutes of alternating between this and the audience filtering in, the

next two items to appear onscreen were two pre-made video trailers. The first advertises

the *Live in HD* telecasts in general. It is a curious video since it highlights neither the

current nor the future Met telecast seasons—*those* trailers will come later. It seems the

equivalent of going to the movies only to be met with an ad suggesting how great the

artform has been in the past by showing clips of older films. Presumably, the audience

has already been convinced to take a chance on the format, and the more specific trailers

will theoretically do a better job of enticing people with concrete examples of what's to

come. This may simply serve as a less conventional framing device, however. In some

senses, it sets the stage by announcing the Met's presence through clips of in-house

performances. Their previous television relay series through PBS, *Great Performances at

the Met*, often started by showing cast and crew credits against a recorded backdrop of

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[65] Paul Heyer, 'Live from the Met', 594.

[66] Kay Armitage, 'Cinematic Operatics: Barbara Willis Sweete Directs Metropolitan Opera HD Transmissions', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 922. If the director has chosen not to include any stage business during the overture and/or for any preludes (if the work contains them), broadcasts may choose to highlight the orchestra at these times, though these are arguably outside the scope of the operatic diegesis to begin with and thus still largely in line with Armitage's assertion.

the plaza outside Lincoln Center, its well-known (and since re-designed) water fountain framed in the centre, with the opera house prominently right behind it. Film recordings from Wagner's Bayreuth festival sometimes begin with a camera taking us up the Green Hill until we have arrived at the Festspielhaus, and performances from Shakespeare's Globe also frequently feature camera shots of the venue's exterior prior to taking us inside to view stage and audience alike. Perhaps this new trailer is a different way of framing what it does, then—not with recourse to the building's façade, but with reference to what happens *inside*.

The second ad is for Rolex and discusses their support of the telecasts and the arts in general. Pascale Aebischer highlights similar corporate sponsorship advertisements within the context of Shakespeare livecasts, too. At the National Theatre broadcast she attended, the British insurance company Aviva screened an ad highlighting their 'Street-to-School' project in Calcutta and which also noted their support of 400,000 children in seventeen countries. On my own end, I have also recently seen a performance of the Ontario-based Stratford Festival's *Timon of Athens*, part of their *Stratford Festival HD* series, in which their own major broadcast partner, Sun Life Financial, screened an ad highlighting their 'Making the Arts More Accessible' programme. This commercial was even included in the production's subsequent DVD and Blu-ray release.[67] Aebischer suggests of the ad she saw that the 'theatre's success and its global broadcasting needed to be offset by the global charity work of NTLive's sponsor'.[68] The same might be said of the Met and other companies, too.

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[67] William Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, directed by Steven Ouimette, Stratford Festival, DVD, 2018.
[68] Pascale Aebischer, 'South Bank Shakespeare Goes Global: Broadcasting from Shakespeare's Globe and the National Theatre', in *Shakespeare and the 'Live' Theatre Broadcast Experience*, op. cit., 121.

After these, we receive a third short video. As opposed to the earlier slideshow, this new one features today's cast in clips from the production itself, showing us who will be playing whom. Once it has finished, the 'live' content begins. Deborah Voigt, who had previously starred as Brünnhilde in the original run of the Lepage *Ring*, serves as host. She briefly interviews Peter Gelb, and he suggests that Lepage is offering us something that has 'never been thought of before'. Clearly, the revival is still being framed in the same manner as its premiere had been eight years prior. Gelb then leaves to supervise the camerawork for the telecast, which is done from a truck just outside the opera house. Fifteen minutes have passed since the camera feed went live with its audience shots. The Met's house lights dim as they rise to the ceiling. The work is about to begin.

As my focus for now is the paratextual material, I will withhold thoughts about the staging and opera performance itself for the time being. Exactly one hour later, the lights at the Paramount go back on. My fellow audience members seem to offer a more subdued applause than I have heard at other telecast screenings, but I am also admittedly sitting rather far to the front of the house this time around. Maybe their lack of enthusiasm is a genuine reaction to an uninspired staging, but maybe my own field of hearing is different now, too. Immediately following the end of the act, Voigt and the backstage cameraman track down the three singers who dominated the stage for the past hour. Voigt tries to question Eva-Maria Westbroek, who starred as Sieglinde, but much like halftime or postgame sportscasting interviews, the host has jumped on the star too quickly: she needs to catch her breath and is not quite ready to speak. Voigt, in an attempt to help bolster the company image of ingenuity and renewal, tries to ask the singer what has changed since she last sang the role at the Met. Highlighting the pre-scripted nature

of the questions but an inability to account for how the performers will react, the answer is unenthusiastic and does not quite toe the party line: she suggests not much has changed.

After another brief interview, Voigt plugs the *Wagner's Dream* documentary I discussed earlier. They screen a few minutes of the film and we then return to 'live' content. Now onscreen is the Met's Head of Production, John Sellars, who discusses some of the technical workings of the Machine. He also explains the manual labour needed to adjust the weight of individual planks in order to make them rotate the correct way, putting a humanising face on what might otherwise be conceived as a production run entirely by pre-programmed algorithms telling the apparatus how and when to move. Afterwards, a fifteen-minute countdown clock appears on the screen while the camera ambles through the backstage area. As Susan Bennett observes of the Almeida Theatre's Shakespeare livecasts, this helps reinforce a sense of liveness, keeping the audience to theatre time, 'ironically so when it is an encore screening'.[69] Though this is not an encore screening, the points remain valid. She also addresses how the backstage tour, a 'common strategy in Event Cinema', helps to both 'promote the high production values behind the broadcast' and also 'underscores the importance of the arts for job creation—a reminder to governments (and to voters) of the value of the creative industries to local and national economies'.[70] In this light, Sellars's description of the work done by his stagehands can be seen as working towards a similar goal, even if governmental funding does not play the same role in the Met's broadcasts as it does for many UK companies.

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[69] Susan Bennett, 'Shakespeare's New Marketplace: The Places of Event Cinema', 51.
[70] Ibid.

When the countdown timer concludes, Voigt returns to do another interview, this time with Günther Groissböck, who plays Sieglinde's husband Hunding. Afterwards, we switch back to another pre-recorded segment, this time an instructional demonstration of Wagner's use of leitmotifs throughout the *Ring*, as explained by various members of the house orchestra's brass section. While one might be able to account for the Rolex advertisement or the Met's trailer(s) for their present or upcoming seasons on institutional grounds, their decision to include clearly pre-recorded segments such as the documentary excerpt or the leitmotif video is more curious, as it clearly works to undercut the live experience otherwise so central to their framing. Indeed, the segment was not even pre-filmed for *this* livecast: it was featured in the previous HD *Walküre* performance in 2011![71] Laurie Osbourne laments the 'clunky and apparently dated technology of an all-text slideshow' in trailers for other theatre broadcasts and suggests they 'underscored the greater sophistication of cinematic juxtapositions within the theatre broadcast overall'.[72] Though the technology of the documentary was decidedly much more cinematic and technologically savvy than those of the slideshows Osbourne dreads, we might still see them serving as a contrast to the live content in a different way. Sarah Atkinson comments on this curious mix during the Met's and Royal Opera House's telecasts but suggests that the distinction is 'so smoothly glossed over' that it 'suggests precisely the combination of live and recorded characteristics of live television broadcasts'.[73] Looked at this way, we see yet another way in which televisual, theatrical, and cinematic

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[71] The segment is available as a bonus feature on the commercial video recording that was subsequently released. See Richard Wagner, *Die Walküre*, Metropolitan Opera, Blu-ray, Deutsche Grammophon: 073 4855, 2012.

[72] Laurie Osbourne, 'Epilogue: Revisiting Liveness', 224.

[73] Sarah Atkinson, 'The Labor of Liveness', 313.

tendencies blend together in this hybrid format. If we accept Auslander's claims about 'the live' as dialectical partner of 'the recorded', and the inseparability of one from the other on ontological grounds, then their inclusion here might begin to make more sense. Framed in this way, the sights and sounds of this type of paratextual material heightens our sense of those events which *are* live.

Following the second act, and the start of a new intermission (no video features or interviews happen immediately prior to the end of the act this time), I decide to walk around and observe audience reactions. One couple is discussing the notorious glitches that plagued the productions during their first run. Another pair discusses how 'Wagner needed a good editor'. An older woman, wearing a T-shirt that reads *Opera Rocks*, begins speaking to an elderly man in my row, who admits to this being his first Wagner performance despite otherwise being an avid opera-lover. After averring that Wagner 'was a nasty man but his music is wonderful', the woman recounts how she and her husband, both 'traditionalists', saw this production in person when it premiered several years ago. If and when a staging's visual aesthetics are not to her husband's liking, she insists, 'he'll just close his eyes'. Like the critics mentioned earlier, she too laments that the machine *was so noisy back then*, but suggests that it has gotten better. She admits, however, that a friend of hers who saw the telecast (while she herself was at the Met) claimed that there was no such noise audible in the hosting institution. This observation raises questions as to whether or not the remediated format offers an adequate way to assess the noise-reduction improvements Gelb and others have stressed leading up to the revival. It also suggests in turn that our understanding of the work's aural dramaturgy will shift when remediated in such a way.

The final twelve minutes of this intermission are more of the standard fare at this point. Voigt begins by promoting the season's final *Live in HD* telecast, a production of Poulenc's *Dialogue of the Carmelites*. In a rare move, she notes that the staging dates from the 1970s: the company does not generally advertise how long productions tend to stick around, but perhaps this too can be seen as a way to tacitly promote the high-tech stage business of the present simulcast. To further highlight the upcoming work, they screen a brief clip from a 1987 television broadcast before they return to the live interview format. This time, we hear from Karen Cargill, a mezzo soprano who will be performing in Poulenc's opera.

After the exchange between Voigt and Cargill, the former makes clear the paradoxical endeavours of these telecasts: 'as exciting as seeing Wagner on the big screen is, HD just isn't the same', she suggests. *Nothing is better than the unamplified voice*. She endorses the cinematic experience as 'exciting' at the same time as she suggests it will be found wanting when compared with the 'real thing'. She also makes a plea for more donations before showing a preview video for the ten telecasts that will make up the just-announced 2019/20 *Live in HD* season. Disappointingly, this video features only still images, a curious decision when all five of the returning productions (the other five will be premieres) have been screened as livecasts during previous seasons.[74]

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[74] Zeffirelli's 1987 *Turandot* and Anthony Mingella's 2006 *Madama Butterfly* productions were both screened during the 2015/16 season. David McVicar's stagings of *Maria Stuarda* (2012) and *Tosca* (2017) screened during the 2012/13 and 2017/18 seasons, respectively. Laurent Pelly's *Manon* (2012) was part of the 2011/12 broadcast season. The Met also offers a *Summer Encores* series where older broadcasts re-appear in cinemas; several of these have been featured there as well.

Lastly, Voigt conducts one more interview, this time with a group: two Valkyries and the two crew members responsible for their corresponding plank movements during the upcoming 'Ride of the Valkyries' scene. Wendy Bryn Harmer, today's Ortlinde, talks about safety and the potential fears and anxieties of technological mishaps inherent in 'riding' the planks, which act as their horses in this production. As with the earlier interview question that didn't quite provide the enthusiastic, company-friendly answer hoped for, here, too, the unplanned response seems contradictory to the Met's messaging. Voigt thus springs into action to assure viewers that safety issues are part and parcel of *all* stage productions. Given that the *Wagner's Dream* documentary showed numerous singers all handling themselves with the utmost trepidation when trying to manoeuvre around the Machine (Hans-Peter König even stopping the rehearsal at one point in fear of 'losing [his] feet' when the device unexpectedly wobbled underneath him), and the included footage of Voigt herself insisting that she would ask Lepage and Gelb to change her blocking pattern after falling off the apparatus, these fears do not seem to have lessened with time. Whatever safety precautions were taken, then or now, the massive set-piece was still an anxiety-inducing safety concern for the stars.

The inclusion of the crew members here, along with the previous interview with the Met's Head of Production, also warrants mention. Atkinson has lamented the 'foregrounding of only the lead creative personnel' in telecast interviews. The focus, she notes, is almost exclusively the stars of the show and the conductor, with the possibly of a pre-recorded word from the director, too. As she puts it, this 'reveals a very particular politics of labour'. Atkinson rightly points out that this sort of framing 'confines operatic labour to certain personnel and glosses over and conceals other operatic labour, just as

opera has long done'.[75] While the crew members here did not say as much as the Valkyries they were paired with, their presence does perhaps signal a shift on the company's part to acknowledge the many other contributors to these *Live in HD* events. As there is no paratextual material following the final act, there is nothing to frame the end of the telecast aside from the curtain calls and some final closing credits that scroll up afterwards, much like in a traditional film. As the performers take their bows, cinema-goers give standing ovations and applaud as vigorously as if they were at the Met itself. Today, however, we have gotten to hear from a few of those voices whom we might not otherwise have noted amidst the sea of quickly scrolling credits—if we even elect to stay in the cinema that long in the first place.

In terms of the actual opera staging (i.e., not just the surrounding paratextual material), the HD presentation offered a somewhat mixed bag—as these events so often do. On the one hand, its equalised sound mix proved advantageous for singers who had comparatively smaller voices. Performers used to older, smaller European theatres may find their voices less suited to the large Met auditorium, but when these productions are screened in cinemas, all voices obtain a sort of equality through the mixing process, for better or for worse. Further related to the issues of space and place discussed above, the acoustics of the screening venues in question (not to mention the surround-sound immersion presented therein) may in fact provide a more favourable experience to some auditors than they would otherwise experience at the Met. Depending on where one sits in the opera house, its acoustic properties have been criticised as widely divergent. One *New York Times* reviewer present at the theatre's grand opening in 1966 remarked that

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[75] Sarah Atkinson, 'The Labor of Liveness', 318, 320.

'reports from the upper part of the house were favourable, but the $250 ticket holders found the sound vaulting over their head as often as not'.[76] Thus the complex issue of fixed-position, binaural hearing in-house versus the infinitely variable acoustics offered across receiving institutions can provide markedly different auditory experiences for those in attendance—wherever they may be experiencing them.

Visually, those who revel in the physicality of performance might also appreciate the camerawork on display in HD screenings, despite the lack of bodily co-presence typical of live theatre. Personally, being able to see Christine Goerke's tongue rapidly fluttering as she belts out her cries of *Hojotoho!* was rather thrilling for me. Filming of this sort would rarely be able to accomplish something similar during the older, 'standard-definition' relays of decades past, and watching at home, with a screen presumably much smaller than that offered by a cinema or other arthouse venue, would only reduce the possibility even more. Scenes like this come as nice bonuses, in a sense; the camera has not intentionally provided a close-up of Goerke's mouth, and it is not framed as such, yet it is there all the same. Excessively intimate shots may begin to jar with audience members and affect their feeling that they are at a more 'properly' theatrical event, however. Seeing people larger than life through extreme closeup, Armitage observes, has sometimes been a negative 'sticking point' in reviews of these screenings. Yet here too she reveals that such anxieties have long roots in cinema's history and connects them to apprehensions of early film-goers perceiving anything 'larger than lifesize' as 'grotesque'.[77] As the artform continued to experiment and evolve,

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[76] Harold C. Schonberg, 'Onstage, It Was *Antony and Cleopatra*', *New York Times*, 17 September 1966, 16.
[77] Kay Armitage, 'Barbara Willis Sweete: Queen of HD Transmission', in *Doing Women's Film History: Reframing Cinemas, Past and Future*, ed. Christine Glendhill and Julia Knight (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 252, 253.

audience members were gradually willing to see the advantages of such closeups, though, as when one commented in what Armitage refers to as a 'startling analogy with opera': 'When we would see more clearly what emotions the features of the heroine expresses of what is in the locket she takes from her bosom we have no need to pick up our opera glasses. The film-maker has foreseen our desire and suddenly the detail is enlarged for us until it fills the canvas'.[78]

Questions over the effectiveness of the closeup can be carried over to the *Walküre* screening, too. For one, they allow us to catch the intimate glances of Siegmund and Sieglinde in the first half of the opera rather effectively. The livecast was able to capture something of their emotions through subtle gesture and body language that would have been harder to pick up on in-house[79]. At the same time, however, there are instances where even a long shot cannot help to prevent us from noticing things such as the very obvious body doubles Lepage employs for a number of the more dangerous scenes that take place on his machine. During the climactic final scene in the opera, Brünnhilde is put to sleep on her fiery mountaintop. In the Lepage production, Wotan and his daughter momentarily disappear from stage and reappear on top of the Machine as the god prepares to induce his daughter's indefinite slumber. But there now is a body double standing in for the Valkyrie, who is harnessed to the centre of the machine so that she can remain in place as its planks gradually rotate, leaving her suspended essentially upside down by the end of the scene (seen in Image 5.6, from the earlier production run in 2011).

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[78] Quoted in ibid.

[79] This, too, might vary based on one's location in the theatre, however. Some of the best acoustics, but worst sightlines, at the Met are high up and farthest from the stage, whereas a number of expensive seating locations provide closer views but worse acoustics, as detailed earlier.

Image 5.6 Bryn Terfel (Wotan) with Deborah Voigt's body double in the original 2011 livecast of *Die Walküre*[80]

In both the original production and its revival, the body doubles did not look like their counterparts, especially Christine Goerke's in 2019. The camera tries to mitigate our knowledge of this through more distanced shots, and in the revival production the stunt double holds her head up slightly while being lowered so that we are looking at the back of her head for a longer period of time. But the double is quite slender compared to Goerke (as was Voigt's double), and with a hair colour that is not even the same shade of blonde. The video quality is such that one could even discern differences in facial features between Goerke and her would-be doppelgänger. For such a climactic moment in Wagner's music-drama, the scene here comes off as underwhelming, owing to a sense of disjunction between singer and body double—a fact that would have presumably been lessened had I been sitting in the much larger Met auditorium, where even the closest seats would not have allowed for such minute comparisons. Had this been a staging along

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[80] The image comes from the subsequent video release, op. cit.

Brechtian lines, like Peter Konwitchny's Stuttgart *Götterdämmerung* of 2003, one might

begin to suspect some sort of directorial conceit at play. Recall also the many uses Claus

Guth has made of body doubles in his own productions, discussed in Chapter 2. Given

that Lepage does not seem to be aiming for a sense of *Verfremdung* at any other point in

the opera (or the Cycle as a whole for that matter), this seems an easily discountable

reading, however.[81]

Such unintended consequences of filming in high definition speaks once more to

the format hybridity of these event cinema broadcasts, perceived and marketed as live,

non-repeatable theatrical events even as they are screened in venues perhaps thousands of

miles away from the performance, and sometimes not even live at all. Early in *Live in*

HD's history Barbara Willis Sweete, one of the two principal videographers for the

series, experimented with unorthodox filming and framing techniques that more fully

took advantage of the hybrid medium. As seen in Image 5.7, her filming for the 22 March

2008 *Tristan und Isolde* livecast at times featured multiple camera shots of the stage

simultaneously.

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[81] Konwitchny's staging has also been released on disc. See Richard Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*, Staatsoper Stuttgart, DVD, EuroArts: 20 5209 9 DVUS-OPRDNG, 2006.
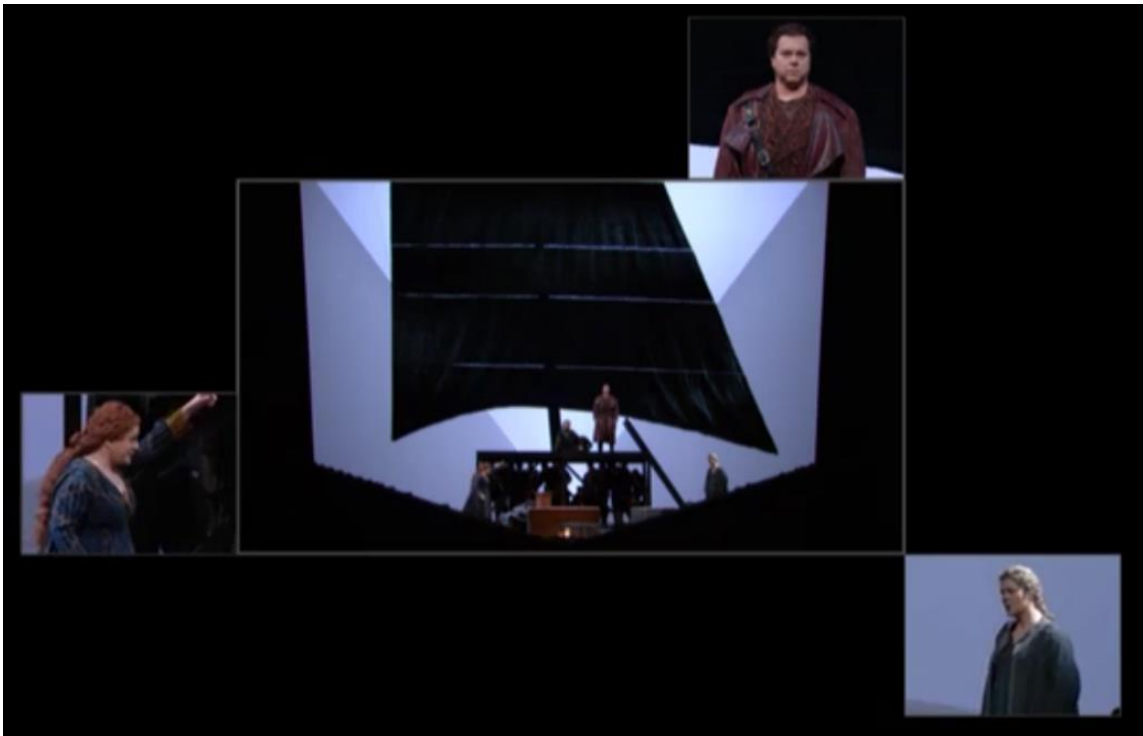
Image 5.7 Barbara Willis Sweete's unconventional camerawork for her 2008 *Tristan und Isolde* livecast[82]

As the particular instance captured here plays out, Michelle DeYoung's Brangäne, seen

in the bottom-right screen, starts walking towards Deborah Voigt (Isolde), and the small

square camera shot framing her begins to track along the bottom of the screen from right

to left, along with the singer. As she reaches Voigt, the small shot dissolves to black as

DeYoung then comes to take over the image space formerly occupied by Isolde in the

bottom left, leaving us with three camera angles onscreen rather than four. The central

image, meanwhile, offers a static long shot, seeking to satisfy those wishing to survey the

larger picture and focus their glances where they wish without the broadcast director's

eye doing the choosing for them. After negative feedback, however, Sweete realised that

more conventional shots and camera angles, as had become standardised through

previous opera recording for television relay and video broadcast, were the best way of

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[82] I have captured this image from the streaming version offered on the 'Met on Demand' player, though it has also been released on video.

not offending the more conservative base of livecast viewers; her experimentation in subsequent livecasts has been more subtle.[83]

Still, the HD format encourages a more nuanced approach to gesture and body language, vindicates elaborate expenditures on intricate costuming and set designs that would be difficult to notice in-house, and enables a more intimate understanding of the physicality of the singing and acting experience. This format hybridity can also be heard in the auditory realm, as when the Met suggests its surround-sound broadcasts are 'the next best thing' to hearing at the Met itself, despite the fact that such immersive, blended, and remixed audio feeds are not at all similar to the binaural, fixed-place hearing we experience in our seat at the opera house. Lastly, the paratextual content, itself a blend of live and pre-recorded material, offers features, and thus framing, akin to the live sportscast, reality television, commercial advertisement, and film trailers, suggesting in this instance, too, a cumulative audio-visual experience much different from how we come to know the work through the sights and sounds of in-person attendance at the opera house.

In a sense, then, Lepage's *Ring* does seem to be an ideal case study for thinking through questions of technological remediation and its impact on our opera-going experience. If the teleological readings of 'Wagner and multimedia' mentioned in the previous chapter often tend to exaggerate the connexions between the two, there can be no doubt that such an ideological pairing lies at the heart of both the Met's advertising and framing campaigns for this staging, and with Lepage as well: even the name of his production company, Ex Machina, suggests the inherent bond between technology and

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[83] Sweete's experimental film techniques are explored further detail in two different works by Kay Armitage, both cited earlier in this chapter.

stagecraft. Peter Gelb has suggested that Lepage might have been 'the first director to execute what Wagner actually wanted to see onstage'. This is of course easily discountable as a hyperbolic marketing gimmick—a *Ring* in which the means of production are laid bare for all to see hardly seems to square with Wagner's penchant for concealment and mystification. Nevertheless, the composer's desire to decouple sight from sound with his Bayreuth orchestra pit *does* find new meaning when experienced via a livecast that likewise challenges the idea of unified sight and sound. Regarding Lepage's Cycle more specifically, we must also concede that his production is symptomatic of a twenty-first century desire to continue exploring the ways in which technology can enhance our operatic experiences, now not only within the opera house but without.

As I have pointed out above, the stereophonic, upmixed audioscape of these livecasts differs considerably from our fixed-position, binaural hearing when seated in a theatre. Nevertheless, with this telecast Wagner's music reaches us in ways one might almost be tempted to connect to the Bayreuth Festspielhaus's own, built-in sound-mixing apparatus. After all, the so-called *Schalldeckel* (sound cover) above its sunken orchestra pit features a shell-shaped screen designed to redirect instrumental sounds to the stage area first, rather than out into the audience, so that it can mix with the voices of the singers. This blend then collectively hits the on-stage sounding boards, redirecting the newly-fashioned 'mix' out into the audience. Since the music coming out of the pit first enters the stage area before the auditorium, singers have even testified to needing to sing slightly out of sync with the orchestra so that their vocalising can reach the ears of audience members at the correct moment. They have also suggested that performing

these tasking roles is easier in the Festspielhaus auditorium since there is less of a tendency for the oftentimes massive Wagnerian orchestration to overwhelm the singer's voice.[84] This mixing apparatus—if we can call it that—thus creates a more nuanced balance between singer and orchestra than might be possible in other venues. Singer feedback like this again testifies to the importance of taking space and place into consideration when dealing with opera's aural dramaturgies, as well as the technologies of sound-mixing, but it also underlines the need to complicate the Met's rhetoric. The *Live in HD* telecasts are being billed as the next best thing to 'being there'; we need to recognise, however, that the event cinema experience is quite different from hearing the performance at the opera house, and also that even in-person attendance can vary widely depending on the building's acoustics, not to mention the further variation accorded by seating within a given venue. If we concede that one's sonic impression of the *Ring* will of course differ widely between the Met's cavernous auditorium and the more intimate Festspielhaus, so too must we acknowledge the differentiation possible when experiencing the livecasts across a variety of screening sites.

VI. Final Thoughts

Once again, this chapter makes no pretensions to completeness in exploring all avenues of remediated sound, even as it specifically relates to the livecast. As my recourse to Shakespearean scholars above has suggested, and as my own focus on the Met's 'institutional dramaturgy' should demonstrate, the ways in which a company is able to situate, frame, and promote its livecasts can be rather idiosyncratic and dependent on that company's aims—philosophically, financially, or otherwise. Though I have

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[84] For a succinct description of the Bayreuth acoustics, see Frederic Spotts, *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 8ff.

briefly discussed strategies employed by the National Theatre, Shakespeare's Globe, and the Stratford Festival, these could still be used to further distinguish similarities and differences in framing audience experiences across livecasts of differing genres. The possibility for intra-genre comparisons remains rich, too. The Glyndebourne Festival screened its first opera in cinemas in 2007, only one year after the Met began its *Live in HD* series, and was the first UK opera house to do so. Even Covent Garden made a cautious foray into movies a year before the National Theatre would do so, and their *ROH Cinema Live* programme (which includes performances by the Royal Ballet in addition to opera) continues to the present.[85] As of the 2018/19 season, they had reached over 1,500 cinemas (one-third of which are in the UK) across forty countries. Though the company has not yet reached the Met or the National Theatre in terms of global exposure, these numbers are not insignificant. In Italy, the *All'Opera* series represents a partnership between La Scala, the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, and Bologna's Teatro Communale and screens HD performances throughout the country. Paris, too, has been broadcasting opera and ballet to cinemas for a decade at this point. There is thus ample opportunity to examine the issues this chapter has addressed, relating to space and place as well as paratextual framing, from a comparative perspective across various opera companies, either within or across national borders.

Another issue I have not touched upon here is how these livecasts may change (or not) when they are no longer screened in 'real time'. The *Live in HD* performances all fall on Saturday afternoons, though 'encore performances' (i.e., re-screenings) are

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[85] For a succinct look at relatively early forays into the event cinema format by various UK arts organisations, see Mark Brown, 'Opera meets cinema with Glyndebourne: the movie', *The Guardian*, 22 September 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/sep/22/glyndebourne-cinema-opera-film.

broadcast to theatres the following Wednesday evening. The Met also offers a *Summer Encores* series during its off-season where they bring back a small number of telecasts from previous years. Some of the Covent Garden and Glyndebourne productions have likewise not been screened live, even for their first broadcast, and this has been the case for some spoken-theatre companies, too. Though Barker's monograph presented 'liveness' as a crucial factor for cinema-goers across genres, with interest levels falling by almost 50% for delayed transmissions according to a 2009 survey, his updated findings presented at a conference in 2016 suggests a shift has since taken place.[86] As paraphrased by John Wyver, Barker comments in his talk that it 'no longer seems important for audiences', which he found especially to be the case with the National Theatre's encore performances of *Frankenstein*.[87] Also in 2016, Arts Council England released a report entitled 'From Live-to-Digital' wherein they stressed similar findings: liveness did not 'drive demand', they conclude, nor did it 'affect the quality of audience experience'. In the report's terms:

> The survey of audience members suggests that in fact 'liveness' does not drive demand for Live-to-Digital, nor affect the quality of the audience experience. Just 17% of surveyed Event Cinema attendees say 'liveness' is 'very important'; 33% say it is 'somewhat important'. Those who stream are even less likely to say 'liveness' matters; only 9% called it 'very important' and 20% 'somewhat important'.[88]

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[86] Martin Barker, *Live to Your Local Cinema*, 40
[87] John Wyver, 'Live Cinema – live!', Illuminations, 27 May 2016, https://www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk/live-cinema-live/.
[88] Brent Karpf Reidy, Becky Schutt, Deborah Abramson, and Antoni Durski, 'From Live-to-Digital: Understanding the Impact of Digital Developments in Theatre on Audiences, Production and Distribution', Arts Council England, 11 October 2016, 13–14. Available online at http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication/live-digital.

These statistics offer a considerably different view from the opinions held by many of the performing arts institutions themselves, who according to the survey felt audiences to be much more invested in the liveness of event cinema screenings than they actually were. Again, per the investigation, 47% of organisations perceived the real-time liveness of their telecasts as 'very important', with a further 35% ranking it 'somewhat important'. Exhibitors of the livecasts ranked somewhere in between, with 20% viewing liveness as 'very important' and 67% seeing it as 'somewhat important'.[89]

We must of course keep in mind that these findings may vary by region—this survey was conducted only in the UK—and that such answers may also differ based on the artform in question as well (though the report does assert that results were comparable to other recent surveys across other artforms, including opera). At the very least, however, these recent studies suggest that Barker's older research within the United States needs to be updated and expanded upon by others so that we can understand how audience engagement with remediated stage performances continues to evolve. These changing views towards liveness amongst theatre-goers also supports the assertions made by scholars like Armitage who believe the format to be in a 'transitional period', much like cinema was when it first began making changes to its conventions (such as the closeup, discussed earlier) and that expectations and modes of engagement are changing as a result.[90]

One further aspect to the remediated sights and sounds of the livecast worth further mention is their alternate existence in other formats. Many simulcasts receive subsequent release as physical media: for the Met, this is all but guaranteed, though some

[89] Ibid., 13.
[90] Kay Armitage, 'Barbara Willis Sweete: Queen of the HD Transmissions', 254.

companies like the National Theatre still attempt to maintain a stricter sense of liveness by not making performances available in other forms of media—especially physical media.[91] The *Live in HD* screenings also appear later on the company's internet-based streaming platform, 'Met on Demand'. As mentioned in the previous chapter, scholarly inquiry into the field of the opera DVD remains lamentably scant, despite recent writings on the subject by Christopher Morris and a small handful of others. This dearth is even more evident when it comes to the recent rise of subscription-based internet streaming. There are some companies that will stream their performances live on their websites on special occasions, but will not make them subsequently available; others like the Met and the Vienna State Opera offer large databases of past stagings for a fee. On the one hand, this begins to shift away from questions pertaining to the livecast specifically as it has been defined here. The Bayreuth Festspielhaus streaming a production online is not being screened in cinemas, for example, and often many more DVDs and Blu-rays are released by companies that never appeared in movie theatres to begin with. Yet when the specific category of 'livecasts that later migrate to other formats' is considered specifically, things can change, and this transition from one type of remediation to another becomes specifically interesting when the issue of the paratextual material comes in to play.

As I remarked upon earlier, some of the paratextual footage finds its way into the alternate formats. The Met's leitmotif guide appeared on its subsequent DVD and Blu-ray release for the initial Lepage *Ring* production, for instance, as did the live interviews. Though a second release on physical media remains unlikely for the revival, the company does tend to place different productions of the same staging on its streaming service if

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[91] The National Theatre *has* licensed some of its telecast productions for screening on Bloomsbury Academic's subscription-based *Drama Online* streaming service, for instance.

they take place in different seasons and were featured as an HD broadcast. This has

indeed proved to be the case for *Die Walküre*; in the intervening months, their 2019

revival production has been added to the 'Met on Demand' website, and it offers a

different experience than in-person attendance at the broadcast did. To say nothing of the

ability to watch at one's own pace and in a location of one's choosing, even the video

material itself has been altered and rearranged. Most, but not all, interviews are retained,

but, with the exception of the opening dialogue between Voigt and Gelb, all others are

pushed to the end of the streaming video, after the final act's curtain calls. The leitmotif

guide, screened for audiences at both the 2011 and 2019 simulcasts, does not appear at all

in this iteration; those wishing to re-visit that feature will have to go to the earlier video,

located elsewhere in the streaming archive. Anyone using the service to view the opera or

the production for the first time may not even be aware of the feature's exclusive

existence on the earlier version's page. They would have no way of knowing that

attendees of the broadcast were provided with more contextualisation than the streaming

version is providing them with.

Furthermore, some of the material presented to cinema audiences did not make

the cut at all, like the ad for Rolex, for instance (even though, as I also commented on

above, the Stratford Festival's DVD release of *Timon of Athens* did feature its corporate

sponsor's advertisement on the disc). The interview and promotional pitch for their

upcoming (now-past) *Dialogue of the Carmelites* telecast is gone, too, unsurprisingly.

More surprising, and significant, is the omission of Voigt's interviews with the two

Valkyries and the stagehands. As commented on above, this interview provided a rare

chance at hearing from crewmembers, rather than just the leading performers, about their

own contributions to the world of opera production. But while this segment's absence is lamentable for that reason alone, it was also the one where the Valkyries expressed their anxiety over the safety of the Machine and the stunt work they had to perform, with Voigt chiming in to do damage control and to assure audiences that safety issues are part and parcel of all performance. Given the company's careful attempts at trying to mitigate all of the negative press that has accrued to the staging, one suspects that there were deliberate reasons to exclude this footage from its permanent home in their digital streaming archives. Relatedly, Sarah Atkinson has also noted the difference between the Met's and the Royal Opera House's approaches to the post-screening dissemination of livecast 'bonus' footage. Whereas the Met places these features only on their subsequent DVD and 'Met on Demand' releases—that is to say, behind pay services—Covent Garden chooses to upload the pre-recorded featurettes to its YouTube page for free. Interestingly, however, they omit the live interview portions of the screenings from both physical and streaming media releases alike, keeping them as bonuses only for those attending in cinemas.[92] If we accept that the paratextual material can alter how we come to understand the works they are meant to supplement, then our questions can become more complicated if we attempt to trace the way this material is treated when adapted to one format or another.

Lastly, to speak of the afterlives these *Live in HD* events lead on physical and streaming media will lead us back to the *sound* of the events. How they are captured and presented to audiences is one such issue I have only commented on passingly above, as

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[92] Sarah Atkinson, 'The Labor of Liveness: Behind the Curtain of Opera Cinema', 315–18.

when speaking about the process of upmixing for instance. Schubin, in an interview, describes the typical sound setup on recording day:

> There are typically 10 or 11 microphones in the orchestra pit, generally one for each orchestra section; the harp usually gets its own mic. For the singers, the basic pickup is four pairs of microphones across the lip of the stage: left, left centre, right centre, and right. Each pair has a short shotgun for distant pickup and a cardioid for closer pickup. There are three distant microphones in the house for ambiance pickup. Depending on the staging (e.g., use of the rear stage or a piece of scenery blocking the pickup), there can be some augmentation. That is all up to the Met's audio producer, Jay David Saks, who is in charge of the type of mics, their positioning, and their mix for radio, TV, and cinema transmissions. Of course, the announcer, interviewers, and guests all need mics.[93]

Needless to say, the work that goes into capturing and mixing the sounds for high-definition broadcast is one that one can hardly be re-experienced when one plays the DVDs, Blu-rays, or streaming video at home, at one's university, or for some other such private-screening event unless one's 'home theatre' setup is truly top of the line. Cinemas and other arthouse venues wishing to carry event cinema content frequently have to first upgrade their audio/visual equipment to make sure that they can appropriately screen the live feeds coming from the source locations; their existing setups were simply not designed to handle such digital feeds when the format was new. The cost of these upgrades was once considered a hurdle in getting cinemas to sign on to be event cinema carriers in the first place, though in the intervening years, and as more theatres have since made these upgrades, the cost of doing so is now seen as less financially risky given the proven success of the format. Still, this suggests that, for all of the self-serving posturing

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[93] Luiz Gazzola, 'The Exclusive Opera Lively Interview with Mark Schubin, media engineer at the met', Opera Lively, 29 June 2013, https://operalively.com/forums/content.php/848-The-Exclusive-Opera-Lively-Interview-with-Mark-Schubin-media-engineer-at-the-Met.

that the Met and other companies do to promote their simulcasts, there really *is*

something truly operatic about the scope and scale of experience—of seeing and hearing

these larger-than-life stories playing out in a venue where the audio-visual quality is

equally larger-than-life.

Barker, in his surveying of event cinema audiences, highlights the impressive

soundscape (and camerawork) as one of the potential draws for telecast audiences. As

one of his respondents puts it, 'the Met is such a huge and cavernous space that I felt very

little connection with what was happening on stage. On the cinema screen, being able to

see the faces of the singers and registering the emotions they convey offers a far better

experience. The sound in the multiplexes is also surprisingly more vibrant and involving

than a live set-up'.[94] One of Joseph Attard's respondents likewise comments positively

about how 'the music, voices and interplay between the two were clearer in the cinema

than when I was seated in the [Covent Garden] auditorium'.[95] *New York* magazine arts

critic Justin Davidson similarly stresses its immersive qualities as a potential draw. In

assessing the still-new simulcast experience in 2007, he insists that, 'if I had to choose

between paying $80 for a spot in the upper balcony and $22 to sit in the middle of the

action, I just might make for the nearest multiplex'.[96]

The question of remediated sound could equally be applied to non-simulcast

recording, too. As Christopher Morris notes, even productions filmed for commercial

video release (i.e., as opposed to livecast streaming) are often engineered in such a way

as to offer 'an exaggerated, special-effects account of operatic sound, with voices and

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[94] Martin Barker, *Live to Your Local Cinema*, 63.
[95] Joseph Attard, 'Massenet for the Masses?', 297.
[96] Justin Davidson, 'The Sopranos on the Big Screen', *New York*, 28 December 2008,
http://nymag.com/arts/classicaldance/classical/features/42388/.

orchestra and relative [microphone] placements sonically isolated in ways rarely heard in the opera house'.[97] Thus, just as I have argued that the acoustic properties of host and receiving institutions can impact our experience of opera (live or simulcast), so too could this argument be extended the soundscapes of cinematic screenings versus home/private screening experiences. To be sure, the remediated soundscape has been equally off-putting to some cinema-goers, too, accustomed as they may be to hearing unamplified voices in the opera hall. Barker's audience-driven research, and Attard's more recently, testify to this fact. Nevertheless, regardless of one's position for or against operatic remediation of this sort, there is no doubt that the way in which we come to know these works through sound can be profoundly impacted by the spaces in which we experience them.

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[97] Christopher Morris, 'Digital Diva: Opera on Video', *Opera Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 113.

EPILOGUE

It may seem curious or out of place to conclude a study ostensibly centred on *opera*'s aural dramaturgy with a discussion of genre hybridity, issues of space and place, and the paratextual material featured in operatic livecasts. Nevertheless, I choose to close with these topics to underscore the increasingly complex, ever-more-multimedial phenomenon opera has evolved into in the twenty-first century. As remarked upon in my introductory chapter, I have chosen to structure my study in such a way that charts the path operatic sound travels from its inception to (our) reception. For some theorists, the scores and—perhaps begrudgingly—the libretto may be the prime locus of signification, and thus the only operatic journey worth charting may have been concluded by the end of Chapter 1. Yet as theatre and performance scholars and, increasingly, opera scholars, have embraced the 'performative turn' evident within the wider humanities, it has become clearer and more acceptable to state that operatic signification can come about just as much on the stage as on the page, thus adding another dimension to the picture.

My third chapter shifted the question of opera's aural dramaturgies to the philosophical plane while also suggesting an additional layer of meaning that came about with the advent of recording technology. The sounds of the phonograph and radio began a process whereby operatic sound could signify even when permanently divorced from its physical manifestations in live performance. Thus, the genre's ways of creating signification though sound expanded yet again. Opera-film, the subject of Chapter 4, offered yet another distinct rendering of the artform, capable of creating soundscapes unlike those which we could typically hear in a live performance, with camera

techniques, questions of audio-visual synchronisation, and other medium-specific tactics employed to create an additional way of coming to know these works through sound.

My last chapter, then, continues to push the boundaries of what constitutes the operatic work, as well as how it is framed, and how we engage with it, inside the opera house and without. In each case, these various case studies suggest that there is more to consider about the topic of 'operatic sound' than just the way in which the music is composed, or how it interacts with the text. Each chapter has sought to uncover meaning in sounds that fall in between—neither text nor music, but consciously constructed aspects of 'the text' and its 'performative event' and the environments in which we receive them. These are not the only ways in which we can approach the topic of aural dramaturgy, yet as my text-, performance, and media-based approaches suggest, a shift in focus to these undertheorised aspects of artform reveals different ways to 'unsettle' our understanding of the repertory, offering up entirely new operatic experiences in the process.

Vɪᴅᴇᴏɢʀᴀᴘʜʏ[1]

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——. *Parsifal* [2013]. DVD. Metropolitan Opera, directed by François Girard. Sony Classical: 88883725589, 2014.

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[1] Feature film adaptations are given under the name of the director, as is customary for any other film. Filmed stage productions are given under the name of the original playwright or composer. Brackets after a title indicate the year of filming, as opposed to the year of its release on physical media, which is listed at the end of each entry.

CLAUS GUTH VIDEOGRAPHY[2]

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[2] Entries with asterisks indicate private recordings or otherwise unofficial releases. Though the list of commercial releases above is comprehensive and complete as of this writing, owing to the nature of private/unofficial recordings, that portion of the list makes no claims to completion.

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