

4 'Too much music': the media of opera

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Richard Strauss's last opera, *Capriccio* (1942), reflects on an issue that has preoccupied opera since its birth in the Italian courts of the late Renaissance. Which is more important, it asks, the words or the music? Is it 'prima la musica, dopo le parole' (first the music, then the words) or 'prima le parole, dopo la musica' (first the words, then the music)? *Capriccio* suggests that the answer lies in a genuine symbiosis that privileges neither, implying, with a wink, that the opera itself is a demonstration of that symbiosis. Things haven't always been so harmonious. To its critics opera always seemed to lack the economy of means so treasured, at various historical moments, in verbal, musical and theatrical arts, while its apparently haphazard and bloated combinations suggested a forced marriage. Opera hasn't even fared well in relation to other suspect hybrids like theatre. The term 'theatrical' has often encompassed negative associations with falsehood, superficiality and emotive excess, not least for the modernists, who, as Martin Puchner has shown, derided theatricality as a trope for everything that modern art disavows.¹ Yet the victimized finds its own victim: in many theatrical circles musical forms of theatre, including opera, stand for something debased in relation to what is still referred to as 'legitimate theatre'.² Is it that too much is given away to music? Does music need to be kept in check to avoid swamping theatre's heterogeneous mix of literary, gestural and visual components in a flood of homogenizing sound? Isn't the opera house really a concert hall with scenery?

This is certainly one strand of the historical critique of opera, which is saturated with arguments for the reform of operatic practice in the name of drama and poetry, as though curbing the genre's instinctive tendency to indulge music. Measured against the possibility of rediscovering a lost unity between poetry and music in Hellenic theatre – a conviction shared by so many of the theorists and practitioners of opera, from the Florentine Camerata through the eighteenth-century philosophers to Wagner – opera was always haunted by an ancient ghost and found wanting by comparison. That ghost was Aristotle, whose prescriptions for tragedy offered an always-elusive benchmark against which opera was perceived to fail. In his *Poetics* Aristotle had affirmed the importance of music to drama, but with qualifications: like character and spectacle, music would be subordinated to

a dramatic ideal centred on the coherence and unity of plot and motivated by the pursuit of 'beautiful' proportion and scale.

If early modern understandings of Aristotelian theory informed the very emergence of opera, the *Poetics* would subsequently be mobilized against opera, repeatedly invoked to provide a critique of operatic practice. It was neo-Aristotelian ideals that underpinned the Arcadian reform movement so central to the establishment of *opera seria* in the early eighteenth century, and it was these same values that returned later in the century when *opera seria* was deemed to have lost sight of the classical values of what Gluck called a 'beautiful simplicity'.³ Writing in the preface to his libretto *Tarare* (1787), Beaumarchais summoned the authority of Gluck to castigate opera's overindulgence of music:

There is too much music in our music for the theatre; it is always overloaded with it. And to use the naïve remark of a justly famous man, the illustrious Chevalier Gluck, 'our opera stinks of music': *puzza di musica*.⁴

Beaumarchais's endorsement of Gluck's colourful critique is not the last indictment of an operatic culture deemed to have confused means (music) and ends (drama). Aristotelian ideals and criticism resurfaced in modernism, especially in its neoclassical strains, and resonated in twentieth-century musicology, most notably in Joseph Kerman's influential *Opera as Drama* of 1956 (the title says it all).

The prevalence of this Aristotelian strain of criticism, then, highlights opera's persistent 'failure' to conform to its strictures. Brecht's call for an 'epic theatre' in which music would figure prominently is, in part, a call for a reconceptualization of opera on non-Aristotelian grounds, yet, as Joy Calico observes, this is a moot point because opera 'was never Aristotelian in the first place'.⁵ Contemporary opera studies tends to reflect this view, probing opera's distinctly non-Aristotelian tendency to let gesture, spectacle and music (especially voice) off the leash, as it were. Armed with media theory and methodologies developed in the fields of theatre and performance studies, scholars of opera have increasingly tended to acknowledge and celebrate, rather than apologize for, opera's failure to conform to acceptable notions of drama. In his reading of the critical reception of Rameau's operas in France, Charles Dill shows how much was at stake in these debates.⁶ With their unprecedented quantities of instrumental music – divertissements, symphonies – Rameau's operas seemed, to many critics, to test the limits of meaning, a breach that flirted with mere noise. That audiences could take pleasure in this 'noise' – pleasure in something that could not be named – raised questions about the sorts of experiences licensed by opera. The spectre of musical meaninglessness, Dill concludes, could provoke questions not only of semantics or convention, but of ideology and even morality. What

scholars like Dill have shown, in fact, is that opera's excesses of means and materiality are its most revealing features – revealing, not just about opera, but about its social, cultural and historical environments. Part of this focus has been to situate the debates about the relationship between words and music within the enabling materials or conduits of operatic production and signification, seeking to understand, for example, the discursive role of text, performance space and the body of the performer in operatic practice.

Text as medium

Here I take a cue from the work of Friedrich Kittler, albeit with some reservations. Keen to foreground the material foundations of discourse and question the metaphysics of 'spirit' so central to traditional humanist analysis and criticism, Kittler focuses on the determining impact of media technology. His understanding of the term 'technology' owes much to Foucault, who associates it with the enabling *techniques* of discursive identity formation and socialization. But Kittler places considerably more emphasis on the material foundation of discursive technologies, on the material conditions that determine the possibilities not only for the circulation of discourse, but also for its storage (and thus availability to the historian).⁷ Identification of this mediality – which Kittler defines as the historical set of possibilities for the storage, processing and transmission of data – precedes, for Kittler, questions of meaning and of subjectivity itself.⁸ It is a stance that can take him into alarmingly reductive territory, stripping discourse down to the effects of data systems and raising the spectre of technological determinism. Yet if Kittler can be accused of articulating what Thomas Sebastian and Judith Geerke have called a 'technicist perspective', his materialist mode of analysis nevertheless offers scholarship on opera some useful tools.⁹ The richness and complexity of opera as discursive practice cannot be reduced to materiality alone, yet the historical importance of material determination in its emergence and development should not be overlooked.¹⁰ As Richard Dellamorra and Daniel Fischlin have argued, opera is materially overdetermined, its excessive resource requirements opening its production and distribution to the contingencies of time and place, from vocal production to stage design, and from theatre architecture to orchestral timbre.¹¹ As a highly public, official, urban cultural form, too, opera depends on and sets in motion a series of what Kittler would term 'discourse networks' (*Aufschreibesysteme*) involving material and cultural resources, skills, management, distribution, publicity and critical and popular reception.¹²

Kittler's storage function of media, for example, is evident in libretto, operatic score and stage manual. Each serves to store information about

the operatic work – information that can be retrieved by the practitioner in the context of performance or by the historian or analyst seeking to investigate and interpret traces of past literary, compositional and theatrical practice. The score, in particular, makes use of uniquely operatic notation (*Aufschreibesysteme* can be translated literally as ‘notation systems’) that is simultaneously imprecise and rigid: imprecise, in that the notation of Western music leaves so many musical parameters open to interpretation; rigid, in that the embedding of plot within a pre-defined musical framework ‘temporalizes’ the narrative unfolding in ways that have no equivalent in traditional literary notation. So, for example, the musical notation of the act finales in the Mozart/Da Ponte collaborations (*Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*) tells us only so much about timbre, tempo and accent. At the same time, by rhythmicizing verbal delivery, timing entry cues and coordinating ensemble, it maps out a kind of diegetic pacing and positioning that can be relativized only to a point. The result is an elasticity that tolerates considerable stretching or contraction (singers are not free, for example, to overlap or interrupt other dialogue in the way that actors might in spoken theatre). Cuts to the score are common, but reworking a trio as a duet or interpolating musical material from outside the score is still widely considered unthinkable. Radical or revisionist stagings of the classic opera repertoire, then, will often suggest a split character in which the originality or shock factor of the *mise en scène* counterpoints the familiar (sometimes all too familiar) terms of its musical realization.¹³

Performance space as medium

In her definition of theatrical performance, theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte emphasizes the spatial and temporal conditions involved. Theatrical medi-ality, she argues, ‘is determined by the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators, who gather at the same time and in the same space’.¹⁴ In the case of opera the qualities of this space tend follow a familiar pattern: tiered balconies in horseshoe shape, orchestra pit, proscenium arch. But these developed only gradually towards their current form. Gary Tomlinson has shown, for example, that the performance venues of early seventeenth-century opera shared with the Renaissance *intermedi* a comparatively free and fluid conception of the borders between performance and spectatorial space. As temporary and adapted venues like palace chambers and courtyards gave way to dedicated structures, so the theatrical ‘fourth wall’ established a more rigid division between audience and performers. And by the early eighteenth century, Tomlinson adds, contemporary illustrations of operatic productions suggest a further demarcation: in the celebrated sets

of the Bibiena family, the heavens, once represented in a continuity with the space of the action, are now displaced to another, inaccessible realm, as though configuring in scenic terms the dualism of the Cartesian subject with its defining split between physical and metaphysical realities.¹⁵

For Fischer-Lichte one of the characteristic features of operatic mediality in modernity is its tendency to play on the distinction between a visual (Theatron) and an acoustic (Auditorium) conception of the performing space. We need only think of opera's penchant for offstage voices (some obvious examples include Pamina's offstage call to Tamino before their final reconciliation in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, the Heavenly Voice in Verdi's *Don Carlos*, the voice of John the Baptist cursing from his underground dungeon in Strauss's *Salome*, the offstage chorus calling the name of Peter Grimes at the end of Britten's *Peter Grimes*, which cleverly blurs the line between the real lynch mob and what may be imaginary voices in Grimes's head), not to mention the orchestra pit, to understand this eye/ear schism. Fischer-Lichte stops short of suggesting that the performing space is itself a medium; rather, she sees it as a set of possibilities enabling and determining the media of sight and sound.¹⁶ But there is a real sense in which the auditorium and stage serve to channel and inflect the communicative process of performance – to function, in other words, as a medium of theatrical signification.

Richard Jones's 2004 production of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* at the Royal Opera, Covent Garden highlights one of the less obvious possibilities that the auditorium might offer as medium. In Act II, as the paranoid Boris patrols his property at night in search of intruders, creaking floorboards and footsteps are heard from behind the closed doors leading to the access corridor of one of the balconies of the auditorium. In a gesture that breaks the theatrical 'fourth wall' both visually and aurally, Boris looks up, startled, to the darkness of the balcony, attempting to make out the source of the noise. The resemblance to the surround-sound effects of cinema and home speaker systems is striking: in each case the traditional front-and-centre field of sound is disrupted by sound pointedly sourced outside that field, in this case to the side. In fact the sourcing of the sound to a very specific point in the acoustic field echoes the often artificial and exaggerated locating of surround-sound effects at points in an imaginary field outside the flat, front-and-centre visual source. Yet it is also a bridge to operatic tradition in the sense that opera has always been fascinated with its imaginary acoustic environment: echoes (vocal echo effects were a common feature of early opera, most obviously in the scene in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* in which Orfeo sings his lament for the lost Euridice and hears only the echo of his own voice repeating the last syllable of each line), sounds that approach from or withdraw into the distance (the retreat of the Furies in Act II of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, or the march of the pilgrims in Act III of *Tannhäuser*),

ghostly realms half-heard (the Wolf's Glen scene in *Der Freischütz*, Peter Quint's beckoning of Miles in Act II of *The Turn of the Screw*). That DVD recordings of opera should feature multichannel sound is not some radical departure but simply a technologically updated adaptation of one of opera's characteristic features.

Not that the traditional opera house is opera's only space. Site-specific performance of opera may be very much the exception, but some of the experiments are striking. In the UK, for example, the phenomenon of the flashmob (an event in which an audience is gathered quickly via word-of-mouth, texting and telephoning) has been applied to opera. BBC television has organized and broadcast flashmob operas at Paddington Station, London (2004) and Meadowhall Shopping Centre in Sheffield (2005), inviting the flashmob by text and incorporating it as a chorus into a contemporary plot consisting of well-known operatic extracts. Swiss television has broadcast a series of productions of popular operas staged in public locations: *La traviata* in Zurich's main train station (2008), *La bohème* in a high-rise complex in Bern (2009) and *Aida* on barges on the Rhine in Basle (2010). Cinematic adaptations have allowed opera to roam free of the opera house, although singers (or substitute actors) typically mime onto a studio recording of the music. Penny Woolcock's 2003 film adaptation of *The Death of Klinghoffer* breaks with this tradition by recording the singers live on location, with the result that the acoustics of the locations become part of the recording. Opera conceived specifically for electronic media is another rarity, but it too has resulted in some telling reconfigurations of operatic tradition. The American composer Robert Ashley, for example, has focused his operatic output towards television, in the sense not merely of adapting from the stage, but of conceiving his work from a televisual perspective from the very beginning:

Every opera I have written is written as though it were a television production schedule. So all the television producer has to decide is how to illustrate the story and when to look at the singer, when not to look at the singer, when to look at the landscape, when to look to something else; but the television producer makes that decision, and I wanted that to be a characteristic of my work.¹⁷

Body and voice as media

Fischer-Lichte's reference to the 'bodily co-presence of actors and spectators' chimes with another key feature of Kittler's mediality: the corporeal nature and impact of discourse. For Kittler the body is a historical site inscribed by discourse, written upon by the various intersecting media formations and technologies that channel through it and act upon it. One of

the consequences for the historian, Kittler argues, is that the effects on the body – its pathologies and pain – become privileged sites for the analysis of discourse. It is, in other words, where the body suffers, where it is subjected by culture, that the most telling insights are to be had. This has not been lost on theorists of opera. Linda and Michael Hutcheon, for example, have highlighted the tropes of disease, suffering and death in operatic texts from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Opera's frequent representations of disease – in works such as *La traviata*, *Parsifal* and *Lulu* – shed light, they argue, on cultural attitudes to contagion and its social causes and effects, so that in a society infected by disease, 'the physical breakdown of the body becomes the model for the pathological breakdown of the culture'.¹⁸ But what is so characteristically operatic, they add, is the intersection of these representations with questions of sexual desire and anxiety, so that Violetta's consumptive body in the final act of *La traviata* (her illness serving, perhaps, as a metaphor for the sexual diseases from which a woman of her profession would inevitably have suffered in the nineteenth century) becomes a complex site of intersecting tropes, suggesting not only a transformation from hedonism to pain and from sensuality to a spiritualized awareness of approaching death, but, crucially, the interdependence of these states.¹⁹

In a quite different take on the operatic body, Mary Ann Smart traces historical shifts in the relationship between physical gesture and music in nineteenth-century opera. Yet here too it is the moments of greatest intensity and suffering – nervous agitation, fainting, suffocation – that prove decisive. In the musical gestures of Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (1828), the work considered the first grand opera, in which the mute heroine is played by a dancer, Smart detects the disruptive presence of a gestural excess, derived from the synchronism of music and gesture in melodrama, that challenges conventions of operatic meaning with an 'overflow of signification'.²⁰ Characteristic of the later nineteenth century, she argues, is the coexistence of this aesthetic of 'gestural overstatement' with an increasingly transcendental representation of the body.²¹ In the ethereal conclusions to some of the arias in Verdi's late operas (such as Leonora's prayer for release at the end of *La forza del destino*), Smart identifies a tension between the legacy of melodrama and the increasingly metaphysical orientation of opera – metaphysical, that is, in its turn away from grounded engagement with the body and social experience to mystical invocations of spirit and will or to a quasi-psychological intimation of inner, inscrutable forces.²²

Although Smart concentrates on musical gesture notated in the score, she also conveys a sense of what this might mean in performance – how this modern idiom, in which music and stage seem to appeal to a level of signification above and beyond the body, might recast the body of the operatic performer. It is an idiom, she observes, 'in which singer's bodies are overwhelmed by sheer orchestral sound and scenic grandeur'.²³ The

media of sight and sound act upon the performing body, shaping it into what Smart characterizes as an ‘increasingly vulnerable figure’.²⁴ In short, opera’s musical gestures increasingly give the impression of acting upon, rather than in accord with, the performer’s body, a shift Smart sees exemplified in Wagner, above all in the contrast between the strongly gestural musical language of Act I of *Die Walküre* and the mystical disembodiment of *Parsifal*.

The kinds of gestures analysed by Smart form only part of a corporeal economy in opera that also includes more formal choreography of principal characters (Carmen’s exoticism is defined as much by her dancing and body language as her voice); dance scenes closely integrated into the plot, usually featuring the chorus (the socially stratified dances in the party scene of *Don Giovanni* or the drunken dancing in the tavern scene of *Wozzeck*); and the incorporation of formalized dance numbers featuring professional dancers, whether as an element of operatic spectacle (the countless exotic dances in opera), convention (the role of ballet in French opera) or genre (the *opéras-ballets* of eighteenth-century France). Yet, as the guest editors of an issue of *The Opera Quarterly* devoted to dance point out, scholarship on opera has, until recently, paid only cursory attention to the role of dance, hampered, they argue, by a lack of resources and the skills needed to engage with both music and dance (including familiarity with two forms of notation).²⁵ In his contribution to the special issue, Daniel Albright points to a missed opportunity. If dance can be integrated into opera in a seamless way, Albright argues, it is often the case that the two make strange bedfellows, as though the incorporation of a medium of mute gesture within a genre so defined by vocality represented a forced fusion of inherently incompatible modes of expression. Rather than attempt to smooth over this tension, Albright emphasizes its value as a means of renewing our perspective on both opera and dance. Ballet’s ‘aesthetic contortions of the body’, he contends, never seem more strange than when it interrupts the noisy vocality of opera, while the ‘opera-ness of opera’ comes sharply into view when it follows a dance number and suddenly demands that we readjust to its strange conventions:

In *Salome*, Herod always seems slimy, but nowhere quite so goggling, panting, outlandish, and inhumanly lewd – a drooling mouth and rolling tongue standing in for a man – as when he sings his applause just after the Dance of the Seven Veils.²⁶

And what of the power of the voice? This has been one of the central themes in the work of Carolyn Abbate, who addresses the question in relation to, among others, *Salome*. The trouble with the standard feminist critique of Salome’s awful fate at the hands of Strauss’s score, she argues, is its failure to register the power of her voice, a power that is cued and unleashed by the score but which ultimately exceeds any textual strategies of containment,

even the brutal silencing that concludes the opera. Nothing, Abbate tells us, can quite overcome the authority summoned by the sensuous vitality and force of Salome's soaring voice.²⁷ More recently, though, Abbate's writing has registered an anxiety about the authority of the performer. Does performance, she asks, only imply an active agency that takes control of text, making it his or her own? Or is there also a more troubling side to this engagement, a sense of the performer's submission to a mechanical and inevitable unfolding of script, of predetermined process? For Abbate interpretative freedom and creative energy are shadowed by the performer's submission to the machine-like demands of the musical work, to a textual command that leads to 'the persistent vision of performers as dead matter, subject to mortification and reanimation'.²⁸ In this sense the performer becomes a medium in the split sense of that word: simultaneously an agent or go-between who actively manipulates or interprets information (music, stage direction) but also a vessel or carrier, alive only in the sense that it is charged with the semiotic energy of the data that it transmits.

In a substantial body of work on opera, Lawrence Kramer has reflected on the perceived capacity of voice to articulate subjectivity while also gesturing towards extreme states (of pleasure and of pain) that seem to undo the borders of the self. But Kramer also sounds a note of caution, wondering if the by-now quite 'sophisticated' scholarship on voice has come at a price. To conceive of the operatic voice as a vehicle for transcendence strikes Kramer as entirely reasonable, but only if this claim is balanced by acknowledgement of the means by which voice achieves this. Such an acknowledgement, he adds, would mean confronting 'the rhetoric of a genre whose historical mandate is precisely to uphold the links between voice, sexuality, and transcendence while at the same time forgetting the cultural and historical work performed by doing so'.²⁹ That is, in its celebration of the transformative potential of voice, opera studies has risked merely endorsing or repeating its effects while paying insufficient attention to the relationship between the idea of voice and its grounding in convention, actual (gendered, socialized) vocal utterance and specific cultural contexts. In his account of Strauss's *Elektra*, for example, Kramer relates the tessitura and contour of the protagonist's voice to a radical *fin-de-siècle* split between horror of and fascination with a supposedly 'anarchic' feminine corporeality that always threatens to break through the ordered surface of culture.³⁰

Intermediality

Any discussion of operatic mediality needs to account for the interaction of, or movement between, its media – what we might term, following recent theory, 'intermediality'.³¹ As we have seen, the notion that opera

indulges music – that it subordinates its literary and visual dimensions to music – had wide currency historically. If this critique underpinned practical attempts at reform, it also fuelled more idealistic visions of cohesion. Writing around the time of Gluck's operatic reforms, the Enlightenment philosopher and dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had begun a project to outline the potential and limitations of a union of the arts. Although only the first part of his *Laokoön* (1766), focusing on the distinct properties of poetry and the visual arts, was published, notes for a planned continuation show that Lessing viewed music and poetry as aligned by their temporal natures.³² Yet their union in opera was marred, he argued, by the practice of alternately making poetry subservient to music (aria) or music to poetry (recitative).³³ Sympathetic in principle to the idea of a synthesis, Lessing nevertheless cast doubt on the prospects for realization given the means available. One of Lessing's contemporaries and admirers, the philosopher and critic Johann Gottfried Herder, echoed Lessing's pessimism when he contrasted the 'whole shebang of fragmented and tattered operatic sing-song [*Opern-Klingklang*]' with the as-yet unrealized potential of a 'cohesive lyric structure in which poetry, music, action, and decoration are one'.³⁴ The perceived gap separating operatic reality from the ideal would become a recurrent theme among the generation of Romantic critics. In observations published in the literary journal he edited with his brother, August Wilhelm Schlegel outlined a dream of synthesis:

We should try to bring the arts closer together and seek transitions from one to the other. Statues perhaps may quicken into pictures, pictures become poems, poems music, and (who knows?) in the same way stately church music may once more ascend towards heaven like a cathedral.³⁵

And only a few years later, in lectures published posthumously as his *Philosophy of Art*, F. W. J. Schelling would issue a plea for a renewal of the vision of Greek drama that had fuelled the emergence of opera:

The most perfect union of all the arts, the union of poetry and music through song, of poetry and painting through dance, all synthesized with one another – this would be the most fully constructed realization of theatre, namely the theatre of antiquity, of which we have only a caricature: opera.³⁶

If calls like these were too rarefied and idealistic to offer anything like a prescription for specific cultural practice, the notion of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a 'total work of art', haunted nineteenth-century German aesthetics, promising not only to rejuvenate opera, but to bridge the divisions of a culture perceived to have lost its organic wholeness in the face of divisive political forces and mechanization.³⁷

When Wagner boldly claimed to have embodied the *Gesamtkunstwerk* principle in his own work, the critical response was famously polarized, some hailing a new breakthrough in operatic practice, others responding with the charge that he had merely succeeded in intensifying the tyranny of music, still others charging him with the destruction of music.³⁸ Wagner became a touchstone for the *Gesamtkunstwerk* idea in both a positive and negative sense, inspiring creative experimentation with synthesis, while arguably provoking a backlash in the form of investment in the idea of an independence of the arts. As Daniel Albright shows, Lessing's views on the distinctive properties of the arts found champions among the modernists, albeit in a new guise.³⁹ The modernist approach to mixture marked a shift in focus from genre to the vessel of signification as perceived, from message or meaning to underlying materiality, from art form to medium. If the debate over hybrid forms like opera had always implicitly included consideration of media – sound, image, language – it now did so much more explicitly. Hybridity now implied a mixture not only of accepted genres and forms but of underlying media, as though to turn attention to the container or conduit rather than its variable content. Conversely, the language of autonomy now emphasized 'purity', as though invoking the craft of the metalworker or alchemist. And this was no mere shift in descriptive paradigms. Tracing the emergence of the new purity discourse on visual art, W. J. T. Mitchell stresses the moral imperative at work. Pure painting, Mitchell argues, implied a 'purgation of the visual image from contamination by language and cognate or conventionally associated media.' Mixture, he adds, was to be 'resisted in the name of higher aesthetic values.'⁴⁰

Music, too, would be subject to the modernist drive toward purity, but this was only one stage in a long history. For Tomlinson the post-Renaissance definition of music is synonymous with a drive towards abstraction from language, and he highlights opera's role in problematizing the relationship between words and music. In Lully's recitative, he argues, 'the style ceased to be one that revealed a . . . sameness and came instead to entail the mitigation of the innate difference between the signifying operations of words and tones.'⁴¹ The nineteenth century brought this separation to its apogee in the concept of 'absolute music', a purely abstract music that means nothing but itself and refers to nothing but its own formal processes. But music's self-containment, supposedly unsullied by language, was born out of discourse, not least the Romantic characterization of music as a form of metaphysics. As Daniel Chua puts it: 'Far from standing speechless before its ineffable utterances, the Romantics spoke absolute music into existence. It is a music emancipated from language *by language*.'⁴² And, as Tomlinson shows, nineteenth-century opera has a part to play in articulating this strange double quality of expressing the inexpressible, of 'representing

aspects of a protagonist's soul previously (and normally) invisible'.⁴³ Repeatedly traversing these borders, operatic characters would oscillate between what Abbate identifies as a foundational split between phenomenal and noumenal, heard and unheard. That is, if opera can suggest a (phenomenal) world in which characters hear music *as* music, it increasingly elides these moments with a (noumenal) sphere of music which surrounds and inhabits the characters but to which they seem deaf.⁴⁴

Seeking to purge the musically absolute from these nineteenth-century noumenal shadows, modernist purism would gesture towards newly distilled modes of expression.⁴⁵ Like visual art, music was to purge itself of alien elements. Kurt Weill summed up the attitude when he insisted that 'opera today no longer represents a discrete musical genre (as in the nineteenth century) but has again taken its rightful place . . . in the whole area of absolute music'.⁴⁶ Opera, then, should acknowledge its identity *as* music. Yet Weill acknowledges that the sort of music theatre he produced in collaboration with Brecht might be seen to contradict this view, and he carefully qualifies the nature of his work:

True, this form of music theatre presupposes a basically theatrical type of music. Yet it also makes it possible to give opera a structure that is absolutely musical, even instrumental.⁴⁷

The trick, it seems, is to combine music and theatre without allowing one to dominate or transform the other. Brecht affirms this view from the theatrical side. The potential he detected in music lay not in a Wagnerian synthesis, but in its participation in critical, oppositional relationships between the media of theatre:

So long as the expression '*Gesamtkunstwerk*' . . . means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be 'fused' together, the various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere 'feed' to the rest . . . Words, music, and setting must become more independent of one another.⁴⁸

Yet the gulf dividing Brecht and Wagner may not be as wide as is often presented. Matthew W. Smith argues that, for all Brecht's insistence on a theatre of mutually estranged media, his model replicates Wagnerian totality as 'a kind of unity through juxtaposition'.⁴⁹ That is, the intermedial relationships in Brechtian theatre may be based on opposition rather than reinforcement, but the result is still a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁵⁰

Nicholas Cook takes up some of these thorny issues in *Analysing Musical Multimedia*. Like many accounts of its kind, Cook's struggles to define the term medium, but the book nevertheless points towards a productive rethink of music in mixed-media settings, opera included. Reflecting on the

kinds of relationships traditionally theorized between music, language and image, Cook confronts the often cosy critical assumptions of conformity and reinforcement that are so embedded in traditional opera studies. What he proposes instead goes beyond understanding media relationships in more confrontational terms towards an argument that deconstructs the very notion of media purity, suggesting, in a stance that parallels Mitchell's for visual art, that the meaning of even 'pure' music is so inextricably bound with representational figures and practices that it is already a form of 'multimedia'.⁵¹

A similar acknowledgement of the centrality of difference also underlies Fischer-Lichte's characterization of opera as 'a prototype of the theatrical'. Far from exceptional, Fischer-Lichte claims, opera defines theatricality, taking theatre's characteristic 'disjointedness' (*Zusammenhangslosigkeit*) and 'openly putting it on display' much more than other theatrical genres.⁵² A vivid example of operatic 'disjointedness' might be the by-now familiar dissonances between text and performance in productions that resituate plots geographically or historically, or which dissolve scenic detail into more abstract settings and concepts. Few spectators will be unfamiliar with the strange operatic dissonance when characters refer to objects that are not there or rhapsodize about vistas that cannot be seen. This will often take ironic form: in Christoph Marthaler's 1998 production of *Kat'a Kabanová* for the Salzburg Festival the first act opens with the clerk Vanya rhapsodizing about not the sight of the mighty Volga beneath him in the valley, but a photograph of the river on a calendar hung on a wall in a domestic interior. At other times the confrontation will be more stark: in Peter Sellars's famous Mozart/Da Ponte stagings of the late 1980s, Don Giovanni's 'Champagne Aria' becomes a heroin aria, while directors Hans Neuenfels and Calixto Bieito have become notorious for introducing layers of action not alluded to in the libretto. In the opening scene of Bieito's 2001 production of *Un ballo in maschera* for Barcelona, for example, a split-level stage presents the regicidal conspirators sitting on a row of toilets, their trousers around their ankles, while Neuenfels's production of *Die Fledermaus* for the Salzburg Festival in 2001 has the chorus masturbating in time to Strauss's music.

Audiences and critics are inevitably polarized in their reactions to these kinds of gestures – one outraged member of the *Fledermaus* audience initiated legal proceedings to recover his ticket costs⁵³ – but there is no question that a fundamental and deliberate misalignment of text and production is now a standard feature of operatic performance. Director Peter Konwitschny took this relationship to a new level when his 2001 Stuttgart production of *Götterdämmerung* substituted any staging of the destruction of Valhalla with a scrolling projection of Wagner's stage directions. Instead of misaligning text and production, then, Konwitschny allowed text to *become*

production, as though reflecting on the impossibility of staging the scene, not from a technical but from a representational and historical point of view: how are we to engage with this climactic moment and its apocalyptic symbolism, now saturated and over-represented by a century and a quarter of interpretation and staging? What is suggested here is more than text as a pretext to performance, but an intermedial engagement between text and performance space that brings *textuality* into performance.

The same might be said of the now common use of surtitles in operatic performance. Superficially merely aids to comprehension, they in fact transform the spectatorial engagement with the stage by drawing the act of reading into the theatrical experience. And this reading only synchronizes with the unfolding of plot and sung/spoken dialogue up to a point: delays or anticipations in the projected words are common and inevitable, particularly given fluctuations in tempo of delivery and the nuances of translation and word order. In comic opera it can manifest itself in the phenomenon of ‘miscued’ laughter (miscued, that is, in relation to vocal delivery), but more generally it can also create unexpected alignments, when translated text coincides with musical gestures, creating temporal conjunctions that might not feature in the score. But surtitle effects need not be accidental or secondary, as Jones’s production of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* demonstrates. When Katarina and her lover Sergei murder her husband, Zinovy, the surtitles above the stage turn to red, as though the blood from the gory scene were spilling out from the stage and staining the very textuality of the opera. Or is it the other way round?⁵⁴

One result is that the intermedial relationship in opera between performing body and text becomes complex and unstable. On the one hand the strong tradition of text as vehicle has empowered the performer and privileged the immediacy and authority of voice. It has also licensed a unique gestural vocabulary. The singer’s engagement with an operatic text is in part a dramatic interpretation, but it is also a technical response that seeks an appropriate production of voice. The demands of musical execution appear on the stage together with the imperative to ‘characterize’: the singer must contort his or her body simply in order to maintain the musical process (melodic, timbral, rhythmic, verbal) now unfolding and (as Abbate points out) unstoppable. The operatic body is a technified body in Kittler’s sense, negotiating the demands of both vocal production and the range of theatrical gestures conditioned by particular cultural and historical environments. But this need not be understood as a struggle in which ‘inappropriate’ gestures motivated by musical-technical demands must be somehow controlled in the interests of dramatic truth. Rather, evidence of the bodily demands of opera becomes in itself a form of dramatic truth, so that the singer’s visible negotiation between technique and theatre,

potentially a sign of inexperience or weakness, can become a sign of commitment: technique *as* theatre. And to what extent have these two gestural vocabularies fused to make a kind of heightened operatic language of gesture, the sort of 'overstatement' that features in Smart's reading of nineteenth-century opera?

A potentially more sensitive negotiation between singers' bodies and texts emerges when there is, as Fischer-Lichte puts it, 'an obvious discrepancy between the corporeality of the singer and that imagined for the character in question'.⁵⁵ This turns in part on the relationship between musical technique and dramatic verisimilitude: Strauss's famous quip that Salome should be a 'sixteen-year-old princess with the voice of Isolde' sums up the problem.⁵⁶ Roles less demanding than Salome will still tend to demand a level of experience and a vocal maturity that may be at odds with notions of ideal casting. Body shape, too, can become part of the equation: Fischer-Lichte quotes Fuchs complaining, in the year before the *Salome* premiere, of the 'Siegfrieds with laced-up beer bellies', and the image of the overweight singer has been a persistent jibe against opera.⁵⁷ Shifts in cultural perceptions of body shape have a bearing on this issue. Recent trends towards particularly thin ideal body images have left their mark on opera, evident in the sometimes drastic attempts by singers to lose weight. Soprano Deborah Voigt, for example, underwent stomach surgery to reduce her weight, a step inevitably linked in the press to her dismissal from a 2004 production of *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Royal Opera House, when she was deemed too large to fit a dress earmarked for the title role.⁵⁸

Part of the intermedial engagement of the performing body in opera is an interaction with other performing bodies. And if this interaction can be interpreted as a collaborative effort, a synergy, say, between vocalists or within the orchestra, it also points to a musical hierarchy in which both singers and orchestra are united not in some form of collective but in common acknowledgement of the authority of the conductor. Obedience to a single will is the paradigm here, and if the rise of the director in recent decades has challenged the position of the conductor, he or she retains enough of that despotic authority entrenched by nineteenth-century practice to hold sway over all but the most rebellious or independently famous operatic performers. The new star-director only adds to the layers of hierarchy, reinforcing the singer's position as medium of an authoritative will. This will is also perceived to be *authorial*: conductor and director are positioned as mediators between text and performance, as representatives of authorial intention. For the director this role tends to come with considerable interpretative licence, although a production will often be critically evaluated in relation to established perceptions of the meaning of libretto/plot/scenario. For conductors, who embody an art-music tradition

predicated on the authentic transmission of authorial intention (the will of the composer-genius), the tolerance is more narrow: with their authority comes responsibility to the greater authority of the composer. In this sense the dual nature of their role as medium (both interpretative agent and compliant vessel) is no less complicated than that of the singer.

Remediation⁵⁹

If we can speak of a discourse network for opera in the context of modernity, it would undoubtedly centre on the gramophone, on the technological reproduction of opera as sound. In part this ‘invisible opera’ had already emerged as a trope in the live performance of opera, evident in the nineteenth-century cultivation, particularly in Germany, of the metaphysically tinged theatre described by Smart.⁶⁰ One outcome was what might be called the ‘symphonization’ of opera: in theory and in compositional practice the role of the orchestra was newly privileged, in part as a foil to the perceived mundane, even embarrassing, realities of the stage. Allied with a paradoxical cultural inheritance that surrounded instrumental music with a metaphysical aura while equally investing it with a seemingly limitless capacity for representation – the same doubleness that Tomlinson detects in the nineteenth-century operatic voice – orchestral preludes and interludes in operas summon a theatre that is even further removed from the mundane reality of the stage: natural panoramas (Wagner’s *Ring*), sexual encounters (Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier*) and dream-like explorations of the unconscious (Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*). That is, the orchestra becomes a vehicle capable of representing multiple worlds – both external and internal, sensual and metaphysical – while appearing to transcend theatrical representation as defined by the stage.

But if the role of the partially or (in Bayreuth) fully concealed orchestra pointed to new ways of dislocating sight and sound, music and performer, the gramophone seems to have summoned spectres that the nineteenth century had not foreseen.⁶¹ As a burgeoning body of theory has highlighted, this new technologically rendered disembodiment remediated opera into new modes of engagement while it further heightened those cultural anxieties that had long attended the voice as both inside and outside, produced and heard, empowering and betraying.⁶²

Cinema, too, discovered a fascination with opera, a subject explored recently in the work of Marcia Citron, Jeongwon Joe and Michal Grover-Friedlander.⁶³ What fascinates Grover-Friedlander about this remediation is the process of mutual illumination that it opens up: ‘Paradoxically, cinema can at times be more “operatic” than opera itself, thus capturing something

essential that escapes opera's self-understanding.⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, it is the operatic voice that she locates at the centre of this attraction: what, she asks, might cinematic remediations of opera tell us about the relationship between the vocal and the visual? This tension, for Grover-Friedlander, is already inherent in opera, not merely foregrounded by the relation of opera to cinema.

And what is the impact of other forms of operatic remediation: webcasts, live broadcasts of stagings on television, on DVD and now in the cinema? Although they record or document an event in the theatre, they are very much their own medium. As Kramer points out, the visual vocabulary of video is loaded with conventions of its own: different, and often contrasting, shots give way to one another with considerable frequency and not necessarily motivated by what is happening on stage. Close-ups and headshots also figure prominently, a perspective, Kramer observes, that is unavailable in the theatre.⁶⁵ In the theatre, live performers are often perceived merely as distant bodies, their more subtle gestures often lost, their faces meaningfully visible only thanks to theatrical make-up. But video reveals (betrays?) another level of detail. To see the beaded perspiration seep through the make-up on the face of Christopher Ventris in a videotaped production of *Parsifal* from Baden-Baden is to witness the labour and corporeality of opera in a way that may remain invisible in the theatre. Video represents the singer's body in ways unimaginable in live theatre: the muscular control around neck and mouth, perspiration beading on stage make-up, the chest filling with air, the palate vibrating the tone, theatrical movements both directed and undirected. A similar effect is created by the singer's need to observe the conductor's gestures. While some singers have an extraordinary knack for concealing their glances toward the conductor (and well-placed monitors are of some help here), others make the process all too visible. In close-up, even a brief upward glance of the eyes is caught, exposing the musical regimen that always accompanies the theatrical one.

There is, then, a very perceptible remediation of live theatre into video. But is there evidence of the sort of radical engagement and problematization that Grover-Friedlander detects in the most successful cinematic engagements with opera? My contention is that, on the contrary, videos retreat into a conservative and self-effacing mode of engagement, as though their awkward dual role (both document of a creative act and creative artefact in themselves) has left them in cultural limbo.⁶⁶ Typically, video recordings of live performances begin with images of the exterior of the theatre, followed by shots of the foyer and the gathering audience in the auditorium, then, when the performance begins, a series of classic proscenium perspectives on the stage. In a sense we are invited to take our seat, to experience 'being there'. The live transmission of the Metropolitan Opera's

HD (high-definition) broadcasts accentuates this further with a countdown clock showing the minutes remaining as cinema audiences gather in sync with the audience in New York. Multichannel sound then simulates the acoustic environment of the theatre. As Ellis Jacob, president and CEO of Canada's Cineplex Entertainment, put it: 'The combination of the Met's superb musical productions combined with our giant screens and Dolby Digital Surround Sound will make these events the next best thing to actually being there.'⁶⁷

A notable exception is the video recording of Olivier Py's 2005 production of *Tristan und Isolde* from Geneva. Video director Andy Somers departs from the standard vocabulary with unusual angles, a mixture of floor and hand-held cameras and the use of different image qualities (including night-vision cameras). The result, superficially distracting, can also be read as a bold gesture towards a more assertive and idiomatic practice based, it would seem, on collaboration between stage and video director. Rather than simulate 'being there', rather than merely supplementing or simulating a now-lost original, it offers an experience that acknowledges its difference. It also problematizes its engagement with *Tristan*. Grover-Friedlander's observation that opera turns on the relationship between voice and image rings particularly true in relation to Wagner's drama of unattainable desire. And if Kramer is right that 'with videos, the problem of how to look, how to show, is itself always literally on view', the potential for a critically charged remediation is clear.⁶⁸ Somers's video seems to address this challenge, repeatedly problematizing the media of visual perception, and, in doing so, destabilizing the imagined source of voice in the image of the performing body.

In common with other forms of theatre, opera now embraces and mobilizes both new and traditional media: live voices and recorded sounds, stage actors and screen counterparts, sung lyrics and projected text, auditorium and home theatre. The implications for opera studies are far-reaching. Our understanding of opera history is profoundly coloured by our experience of the intensely mediatized culture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. But even those operas that remain for us scores or libretti or written accounts are mediatized by discourse and notation. It is through these media that we have come to know opera. To attempt to filter out mediality in the name of some imaginary work or pure historical origin is at best idealistic and at worst misleading. Kramer is quite right to question the notion of an imaginary opera unfiltered by its realizations. 'There is no possibility', he writes, 'of making a clean separation of an ideal opera to which its various renditions are external or supplementary.'⁶⁹ All opera, in other words, is mediatized, and this has consequences for opera studies, whether engaging with contemporary operatic experience or with the operatic past. It means acknowledging the material means by which we experience opera

and engage with the discourse surrounding it; it means acknowledging the *mediation* involved in media. This may not license a wholesale or thoughtless imposition of contemporary perspectives on the study of history, but it does gesture towards a reflexive and transparent engagement both with the operatic past and with its continual revitalization in the present.

Notes

1 Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

2 The term was originally applied in eighteenth-century London to theatres that did not use music and dance to circumvent censor legislation, but it is no longer used in this informed historical sense. Rather, its derogatory implications seem inescapable and intentional.

3 C. W. Gluck, Dedication for *Alceste*, trans. Eric Blom in W. Oliver Strunk and Leo Treitler (eds.), *Source Readings in Music History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), p. 934.

4 P. de Beaumarchais, preface to *Tarare*, trans. in Jacques Barzun (ed.), *The Pleasures of Music: An Anthology of Writing about Music and Musicians* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 231. John Rice speculates that Beaumarchais learned of Gluck's remark from Salieri, whose drafts for the score of *Les Danaïdes* had been Gluck's target. Rice, *Antonio Salieri and Viennese Opera* (Chicago University Press, 1999), p. 387.

5 Joy H. Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. 40.

6 Charles Dill, 'Ideological Noises: Opera Criticism in Early Eighteenth-Century France', in Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Downing A. Thomas (eds.), *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 76–7.

7 Paul Rabinow, interview with Michel Foucault, trans. Christian Hubert, in Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 255.

8 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 243. In popular usage the term 'medium' has become synonymous with mass communication and technology. In cultural theory it can stand for everything from genre and art form to communicative apparatus to journalism; it signifies something about the

way discourse circulates, about how informational and creative forms of communication are packaged and transmitted.

9 Thomas Sebastian and Judith Geerke, 'Technology Romanticized: Friedrich Kittler's *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*', *MLN*, 105/3 (April 1990), pp. 583–95; 584.

10 In an observation that parallels Sebastian and Geerke's assessment of Kittler's work, Abbate critiques what she calls the 'technomysticism' prevalent in musicological enquiry. Carolyn Abbate, 'Music: Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry*, 30/3 (Spring 2004), pp. 505–36; 527. To the extent that 'technology' serves as a catch-all to cover difficult questions of materiality, labour and discursive process, Abbate's complaint is justified. I view consideration of opera's media technologies, rather, as a means of initiating enquiry and opening up new perspectives, not as an end in itself.

11 Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin, 'Introduction', in Dellamora and Fischlin (eds.), *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 6. Martha Feldman writes tellingly of the 'hyperproduction' of light in eighteenth-century Italian opera, concluding that its lack of naturalness offered reinforcement of the absolutist allegory of the monarch, not the sun, as the source of light. Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago University Press, 2007), p. 151.

12 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer (Stanford University Press, 1992).

13 For more on this split attitude to fidelity, see Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song: Operatic Visions and Revisions from Handel to Berio* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 1–12.

14 Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Die Oper als "Prototyp des Theatralischen": Zur Reflexion des Aufführungsbegriffs in John Cages *Europas 1 & 2*', in Hermann Danuser and

- Matthias Kassel (eds.), *Musiktheater Heute: Internationales Symposium der Paul Sacher Stiftung Basel 2001* (Mainz, London, Madrid, New York, Paris, Tokyo and Toronto, ON: Schott, 2003), p. 301.
- 15 Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 68–72.
- 16 Fischer-Lichte, 'Die Oper als "Prototyp des Theatralischen"', p. 303.
- 17 Bianca Michaels, 'Interview with Robert Ashley', *The Opera Quarterly*, 23/3–4 (Summer–Autumn 2006), pp. 537–45; 539.
- 18 Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: Disease, Desire, Death* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 15.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 38–43.
- 20 Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p. 11.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 22 For a discussion of this transcendental turn from a different perspective, see Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song*, pp. 127–42.
- 23 Smart, *Mimomania*, p. 161.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- 25 Simon Morrison and Stephanie Jordan, 'A Note from the Guest Editors', *The Opera Quarterly*, 22/1 (Winter 2006): pp. 2–3; 2.
- 26 Daniel Albright, 'Golden Calves: The Role of Dance in Opera', *The Opera Quarterly*, 22/1 (Winter 2006): pp. 22–37; 28.
- 27 Carolyn Abbate, 'Opera, or, The Envoicing of Women', in Ruth A. Solie (ed.), *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Musical Scholarship* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993), pp. 225–58.
- 28 Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 9. For a critique of Abbate's position, see Michelle Duncan, 'The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body: Voice, Presence, Performativity', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 16/3 (2004), pp. 283–306.
- 29 Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 8–9.
- 30 *Ibid.*, pp. 193–4.
- 31 For an investigation of intermediality in the context of theatre, see Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt (eds.), *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007).
- 32 Lessing's title refers to a Roman statue of the Trojan priest, Laocöon. For Lessing the discrepancy between the statue's representation of Laocöon and the literary accounts of his fate is emblematic of the distinction between the visual arts and poetry.
- 33 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Werke und Briefe 5/2 (Werke, 1766–1769)*, ed. W. Barner (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1990), p. 314.
- 34 Johann Gottfried Herder, *Adrastea* (Vol. II, 4th part) (1802), in Bernhard Suphan (ed.), *Sämtliche Werke*, 33 vols. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1877–1913), Vol. XXIII, p. 336.
- 35 August W. Schlegel, 'Die Gemälde', in *Athenaeum* 2 (1799), ed. August Schlegel and Friedrich Schlegel (1798–1800), Vol. II (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1960), p. 50.
- 36 Friedrich W. J. von Schelling, *Philosophie der Kunst, Schellings Werke* 3, ed. M. Schröter (Munich: Beck, 1984), p. 387.
- 37 For the relationship between the *Gesamtkunstwerk* ideal and modernity see Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007).
- 38 For a useful sample of nineteenth-century Wagner criticism, see Thomas Grey (ed.), *Richard Wagner and His World* (Princeton University Press, 2009).
- 39 Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- 40 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays On Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 96, 97.
- 41 Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song*, p. 42.
- 42 Daniel Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 6.
- 43 Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song*, p. 93. For an account of an interesting exception to this pattern, see Martin Deasy, 'Bare Interiors', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 18/2 (2006), pp. 125–50.
- 44 Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 122–3. While he endorses Abbate's distinction, Tomlinson argues that the term 'noumenal' should be applied more sparingly: 'It is not merely the ever-present sonorous environment, heard or unheard. Instead it is the form this environment takes at those moments when a character attains a special self-consciousness of the musical nature of his or her experience. It is the musical expression of a character's approach to the limit of

- phenomenal knowledge.' Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song*, p. 89.
- 45 Albright investigates modernist concepts of musical purity and hybridity in *Untwisting the Serpent*.
- 46 Kurt Weill, 'Verschiebungen in der musikalischen Produktion', *Berliner Tageblatt* (October 1927), trans. Stephen Hinton in Robert P. Morgan (ed.), *Source Readings in Music History*, Vol. VII (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), p. 125.
- 47 *Ibid.*
- 48 Bertolt Brecht, 'The Modern Theater is the Epic Theatre' (1930), in John Willett (ed. and trans.), *Brecht on Theatre* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 37–8.
- 49 Smith, *The Total Work of Art*, p. 49.
- 50 Calico endorses Smith's nuanced view of the opposition between Brecht and Wagner, adding 'as in any polarity, the poles are also bound by the current flowing between them'. Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, p. 2.
- 51 Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 264–72.
- 52 Fischer-Lichte, 'Die Oper als "Prototyp des Theatralischen"', pp. 306–7.
- 53 Tasos Zembylas, 'Art and Public Conflict: Notes on the Social Negotiation of the Concept of Art', *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 34/2 (2004), pp. 120–1.
- 54 Peter Sellars has experimented with similarly theatrical uses of surtitles. His 1988 production of *Tannhäuser* for Chicago's Lyric Opera, for example, included coloured surtitles projected for varying, dramatically motivated, durations.
- 55 Fischer-Lichte, 'Die Oper als "Prototyp des Theatralischen"', p. 295.
- 56 Richard Strauss, 'Reminiscences of the First Performance of My Operas', in *Recollections and Reflections*, ed. Willi Schuh, trans. L. Lawrence (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1952), pp. 150–1.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 296.
- 58 This incident, and the wider issue of singers' girth, is the subject of the documentary *Bella figura* (dir. Marieke Schroeder, 2007).
- 59 The term was coined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin to denote the incorporation of one medium into another. Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999).
- 60 In her diary Cosima Wagner records her husband's frustration with the realities of the theatre: 'Having created the invisible orchestra, I now feel like inventing the invisible theatre!' Diary entry for 23 September 1878, in Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack (eds.), *Cosima Wagner's Diaries: An Abridgement*, trans. Geoffrey Skelton (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 324.
- 61 Critics at the early Bayreuth festivals expressed astonishment at its novel media environment, with its fully darkened auditorium and concealed pit. Reporting on *Parsifal* in 1891, Mark Twain wrote: 'All the lights were turned low, so low that the congregation sat in a deep and solemn gloom. The entire overture, long as it was, was played to a dark house with the curtain down. It was exquisite; it was delicious.' Twain, 'At the Shrine of Wagner', in R. Hartford (ed. and trans.), *Bayreuth: The Early Years* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1980), p. 150. For more on these reactions, see my *Reading Opera Between the Lines: Orchestral Interludes and Cultural Meaning from Wagner to Berg* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 159–63.
- 62 See Avital Ronnel, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Felicia Miller Frank, *The Mechanical Song: Women, Voice, and the Artificial in Nineteenth-Century French Narrative* (Stanford University Press, 1995); Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception and Aesthetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Friedrich Kittler, 'Opera in the Light of Technology', trans. Anja Belz, in Beate Allert (ed.), *Languages of Visuality: Crossings Between Science, Art, Politics, and Literature* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1996), pp. 73–88; Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton University Press, 2005), especially chapter 5. An early response to these issues is to be found in Theodor Adorno, 'The Curves of the Needle' (1927), trans. Thomas Levin, in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 271–6.
- 63 See, for example, Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions*; Rose Theresa and Jeongwon Joe (eds.), *Between Opera and Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2005); and Mervyn Cooke, 'Opera and Film', in Cooke (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- 64 Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions*, p. 1.
- 65 Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture*, p. 174.

66 Jeremy Tambling referred to the 'parasitic' quality of video productions of live stagings. See Tambling, 'Introduction: Opera in the Distraction Culture', in Tambling (ed.), *A Night in at the Opera: Media Representations of Opera* (London: John Libbey, 1994), p. 11. David P. Schroeder echoes this view when he writes of the desire to make opera on screen 'a surrogate for live performance'. Schroeder,

Cinema's Illusions, Opera's Allure: The Operatic Impulse in Film (New York and London: Continuum, 2002), p. 321.

67 "'Metropolitan Opera: Live in HD' Now Playing at a Theater Near You' (15 November 2006), www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/news/press/detail.aspx?id=2719.

68 Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture*, p. 174.

69 *Ibid.*