PART I

The making of opera

1 Opera as process

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Production and re-production

Eighteenth-century opera is experiencing an unprecedented revitalization. New productions are increasingly presented to us in a manner that resonates as much as possible with our modern sensibilities, such as McVicar's recent staging of Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, set in British colonial style with Bollywood-inspired choreography (see cover illustration). Although productions of the same opera in the eighteenth century and in our time result in theatrical events that on the surface seem radically dissimilar, they also share fundamental traits. No matter how distant the story of an opera is set in time or in space, opera was and still is meant to engage with the present audience. To do so, it places the audience at the forefront of the performing event by adopting a system of production that favors re-creation over re-production, or process over work. In this chapter I will examine who and what was involved in this process and how it functions in contemporary practices. The basis of this investigation is Vivaldi's *Motezuma* (Venice, 1733), which exists in two modern and completely different recorded versions. A close reading of this work can reveal the process through which opera was produced and disseminated in the eighteenth century as well as the techniques of creative philology that are practiced in our contemporary production of early opera. As demonstrated in later settings of the Montezuma story beginning with Graun's version (Berlin, 1755), the reform of opera, which was famously exacted by Gluck, attempted to address some of the problems related to a system of production that was perceived as too chaotic and diffuse. The reformers, however, preserved the function of opera in society as a highly engaging and communicative genre, a function that had to maintain the nature of opera as process rather than artifact.

Opera played a central role in eighteenth-century society. The number of active opera houses far exceeded those in today's far more densely populated world. Opera theaters were commonly located in the heart of urban centers and many theaters were active at the same time in capital cities. Small but elegant theaters were also located in provincial towns, in trendy holiday resort locations, as well as in wealthy aristocratic country

residences, like Eszterháza in Hungary, where Joseph Haydn resided and wrote more than twenty original operas, revising and reworking numerous others.[1]

In all of these venues and especially in public theaters a cross-section of contemporary society, including the most influential citizens, gathered for many hours to attend opera performances supplemented with *entr'acte* ballets and/or comic *intermezzi*. Because opera was regarded as the quintessential social event, contemporary critics and commentators, like President De Brosses or Charles Burney, often focus their attention on the live events rather than on operatic texts (libretti and scores) and never forget to record the reaction of the audience. Stefano Arteaga indeed begins his 1783 influential essay on opera with a classification of the opera audience into types of spectators. At the bottom of the hierarchy is the *gente di mondo*, the mundane audience, who attend because "everybody else does," and they are concerned to see and be seen ("adocchiare per essere adocchiati"). Arteaga describes these worldly opera-goers as constantly strolling from box to box, chatting, gossiping, gambling, flirting, and accuses them of confusing affects with lust, and ethics with their own advantage. This casual attitude was facilitated by the architectonic structure of the typical horse-shoe shaped venue tiered with rows of boxes and constant illumination, which certainly allowed one "to see and to be seen." This also permitted the less distracted audience to follow the libretto, which in many cases presented the text in the original language and parallel translation, working as the equivalent of our projected super-titles. The second type of audience, according to Arteaga, is made up of politicians. They exercise their power directly when involved in the production, and at the least they take advantage of opera events, where they go dressed to kill, to confer with other influential people. Next come the well-learned or erudite members of the audience, who are not able to get emotionally involved. Their only concern, according to Arteaga, is to check facts and dates, or the historical and literary accuracy of the plot. Because of their pedantic attitude, they miss what counts most in opera: affects, passions, and artistic imagination. The fourth category is the man of good taste, who appreciates opera for its intrinsic aesthetic value. The fifth is the philosopher, who understands and distinguishes when an opera is a diversion from reality, when it represents human feelings and when it offers a moral lesson. The philosopher is also able to discern how an opera represents national habits, how it reveals the degree of political freedom of a nation and how it exposes current ideas and preconceptions.[2] Arteaga's account shows very little concern for social divisions as we perceive them. As such it differs in critical substance from modern opera scholarship based on a tripartite division of society in

classes. Reinhard Strohm (to mention one eminent scholar) writes that the "unequal tripartite division of the auditorium approximately reflected the social structures of the audience. The stalls were populated by younger and often fanatical supporters, mostly men, from the privileged classes (and possibly by courtesans). The boxes were used by the court, aristocracy and patrician families, and the upper tier and gallery by the common people."[3] A more recent study by Beth and Jonathan Glixon based on documentary evidence from seventeenth-century opera production, in fact reveals that the social spectrum of the opera audience was much more nuanced; most notably, one cannot speak of nobility as one single block, nor can we assume that the status of *cittadini* or middle class was necessarily below the nobility.[4] After all, Arteaga's account seems to deserve as much attention as later Marxist dialectics of class struggle, at the very least because it qualifies as what in anthropology is called "native theory" i.e., a theory generated from within the system, in this case produced by a European eighteenth-century opera-goer, rather than from an external observer. This does not mean that opera had a less profound political influence on society. On the contrary, the scope of political discourse in eighteenth-century opera included issues of class, but also went far beyond them. For this reason opera needed to be carefully monitored. However, it was a difficult genre to control because of the complexity of its production system.

The libretto was in reality the only part of a production that could be carefully checked by authorities. In contrast to the score, which circulated almost exclusively in manuscript, the libretto was disseminated as a printed text. Official approbation was confirmed in the frontispiece, through formulas like, "con licenza de' Superiori," where the superiors were either or both secular authorities or religious inquisitors. This focus by the censors almost exclusively on the libretto allowed composers and singer-actors a greater freedom of expression. As a consequence, today's interpreters who base their understanding of opera exclusively on libretti are often misled by such partial and reassuring messages offered to censors (Mozart's and Da Ponte's *Le nozze di Figaro* is a case in point). The "licenza" is often counterbalanced and sometimes contradicted by the music and the scenic apparatus (stage setting, costumes, props), and even by the style of acting. In opera of any era the interplay and counterpoint of the various signifying elements call for an active responsibility by audiences to interpret these messages. This process is perhaps more acute in works created during times of restricted freedom of expression because the message is often left intentionally ambiguous. Eighteenth-century opera produced today complicates the picture by superimposing original contextual meanings on new referential associations operating in our society.[5]

The eighteenth century is characterized by continuous debates on the nature of opera, made more acute by the complexity of opera as a knot of diverse signifying elements and the authorial responsibility over the system of production. Fifty years of virtual silence in literature on opera separates the publications of *Il Corago* (a handbook on production in mid-seventeenth-century Venice) and the explosion of critical writings in the eighteenth century, inaugurated by Saint-Évremond denouncing opera for its endemic absurdity engendered by the musical rendition of a dramatic text. At the turn of the century, Raguenet, in his *Parallèle des italiens et des français en ce qui regarde la musique et les opéras* (Paris, 1698, 1702), defended Italian opera for its musicality, while Lecerf de la Vieville denounced Italian opera for its "bad taste" in his *Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique française*. The two engaged in a diatribe over the superiority of either Italian or French opera that lasted until the end of the century, articulated through *querelles* and reforms.[6] This debate seems to focus on the superiority of either Italian or French language and music on the basis of two basic aesthetical ideals: naturalness and good taste. Inspired by these ideals typical of the new age of Reason, the followers of the Roman Arcadian Academy were eager to rescue opera from the excess and complexity of Baroque theater by conferring upon works an Aristotelian sense of clarity and coherence based on unity of time, action, and place and on a distinction of comic and serious modes, each to be relegated to a different operatic genre (see chapter 4). Although all the debates focus on issues of aesthetics, what remains at stake are the modes of production and dissemination. The dispute over the superiority of French or Italian opera is implicitly about the clash of two different systems of production. The French model, like the French monarchy, was based on a centralized system, in which the monarchy exerted a strict control on the dramatic subjects and financed lavish productions to display images of power and wealth. This system allowed librettists and composers to exert less ideological control but more artistic responsibility over the final product, with the result that French opera functioned as a model of an integrated art form. For this reason many reformist trends in opera outside France up to Wagner were implicitly inspired by French opera. This system also allowed the establishment and continuation of a repertory of works, preserved in printed editions of both the libretto and the music (see chapter 9). Outside France, and with the exception of a few court theaters, opera existed as a set of production practices, not as a repertory of established and fixed works (even canonic libretti by Metastasio were continuously revised and set to new music). The heterogeneous Italianate system (like its political geography) affected a constellation of European and American centers of production and as such it was

inherently less centralized, more often than not based on capitalistic, economically liberalist modes of production. This model favored the creation of works that needed to appeal to audiences with different political and ideological views and to both men and women. Gender in this era represented and was perceived as a huge cultural and social divide; women became, nevertheless, an extremely influential part of the audience, as testified by the many dedications of libretti to the local *dame* or ladies.

Production practices and consumption outside France appear reckless given their basis on the principle of a constant demand for new works and the unscrupulous usage of compositional procedures that often reveal little concern for single-authorial responsibility or for the integrity of the work. Opera was the collective result of the work of artists, artisans, and administrators. The complexity of the production process is best described in Benedetto Marcello's *Il teatro alla moda* (1720), subtitled as "an effective and fast method to compose and produce operas," which targeted the production system of Vivaldi's Venice.[7] Marcello's book lists over twenty professional figures involved in the making of opera, including poets (librettists), composers, singers in various roles, orchestral musicians, dancers, but also impresarios, managers and clerks renting theater boxes, selling tickets, sending invitations, lottery organizers, lawyers writing contracts, architects, engineers and painters in charge of the stage sets, tailors, supernumeraries, prompters, copyists, ushers, bodyguards of the star singers, vocal coaches and even singers' mothers who acted in the double role of managers and bodyguards.

This system fostered compositional procedures that in many cases can be described as modular, allowing works to regenerate themselves in different forms, by dissembling and reassembling their parts. Substituting arias for later productions of the same opera was the norm. An extreme but far from uncommon case was the *pasticcio*, an opera made up of pieces from previous dramatic works by the same composer or even from operas or newly composed pieces by different composers. In the first half of the century, this practice was facilitated by the dramaturgical syntax of opera, structured as a chain of recitatives alternating with self-contained or "closed" pieces, mostly arias; duets were rare and short, and so were the ensembles, mostly choruses, relegated to a function of generic commentary. This kind of syntax is normally described as "number opera" since every closed piece that excluded the presence of recitative (such as an aria, duet, a trio, or a whole finale) was numbered, as can be seen in any musical score, in order to facilitate rehearsing, copying, but also replacing pieces.

Printed operatic music was disseminated mostly as anthologies of favorite pieces often marketed as souvenirs from famous performances

(not so much for domestic reproduction by amateurs, considering the technical difficulty of these arias). The function of the score in these cases is descriptive rather than prescriptive. This important distinction between the two functions of music notation was first made by ethnomusicologist Charles Seeger, but his idea that Western culture has always used music notation prescriptively for its own tradition and descriptively for non-Western repertories ought to be reconsidered.[8] *The Favourite Songs in the Opera call'd Artaxerses by Sign^r. Hasse*, as many other favorite-songs collections, seem to use notation descriptively, as can be inferred by the use of the past tense ("sung by Farinelli in *Artaxerses*"), showing that the printed score functioned as a recording of a specific performance. This is a continuation of a seventeenth-century practice exemplified by the 1609 Venetian printed edition of Monteverdi's *Orfeo*. This score has performance indications (including the instrumentation used in one piece or another) narrated in the past tense, and the ornamented version of Orfeo's "possente spirto" is superimposed on Monteverdi's original unornamented melody, as a recording of the performance by the first interpreter.[9] A slightly different case is presented by *Artaserse*, originally created by Hasse with a libretto by Metastasio for the Grimani theater in Venice in 1730. The London *pasticcio* of 1734 presents a new aria, "Son qual nave agitata," for Arbace, composed by Riccardo Broschi and of course interpreted by his brother Farinelli. It is one of the most astounding bravura arias. In his account of Hasse's *Artaserse*, Daniel Heartz observed that this opera "contains the most successful arias [Hasse] ever composed." For this reason in his discussion of the aforementioned London anthology he disregards Broschi's substitute piece, which would have spotlighted Farinelli to the detriment of Hasse's art.[10] In a recent work on opera seria, instead, Martha Feldman spends several pages analyzing "Son qual nave agitata" looking at a London manuscript that (like Monteverdi's "possente spirto") superimposes two vocal lines, one for the melody composed by Riccardo Broschi, the other recording the seemingly improvised ornamentations. Her analysis stresses how certain conventional aspects of arias in this period (the alternation of instrumental ritornelli and solo vocal episodes) and their typical form (the ABA′ or da capo form) enhanced the ritualized exchange between singer and audience (by the same token jazz and blues music is based on typical and redundant forms filled with ever-changing musical content). Feldman emphasizes the nature of opera as event, as a form of "ritualized action" (borrowing the term and theory behind it from anthropological studies), during which the active participation of the audience, whether euphoric or distracted, should not be seen as an intrusion, but as part of a collective ritual.[11]

Many arias of this time can be classified according to a typological nomenclature, first invoked in John Brown's 1789 opera guidebook for informed English audiences, *Letters Upon the Poetry and Music of the Italian Opera* (see chapter 2). Brown does not make entirely clear, however, that this nomenclature is composed of terms that refer to different and often independent aspects of an aria: the text, its music, dramatic purpose, and economic or practical function. An aria like "Son qual nave agitata" can be classified in different ways: as an "aria di paragone" ("comparison aria") because its *text* compares the character's emotions to a ship in the tempest; as an "aria di bravura" (agility aria) because its *performance* required extremely difficult coloratura passages. It can also be explained as a da capo aria, describing its musical *form*, and finally as an "aria di baule" (literally a "suitcase aria"), describing its *function* within the singer's profession – a piece that suited a particular singer's abilities and became a showpiece to be inserted in any opera whenever the psychological state of the interpreted character is "like a ship in the tempest," which happens at least once in every opera.

The mere existence of this complex system of nomenclature reflects a fluid process of production well suited to fulfill a continuous demand for new operas. Venice's feverish operatic life was described in 1741 by the traveler Luigi Riccoboni in these words: "they [the Venetian opera producers] sometimes act the same opera two nights successively: a practice which disgusts the spectators, and not a little blemishes the glory of the Italian theater, so fertile is novelty."[12] It is precisely to satisfy the demand for new operas that composers and impresarios were forced to resort to a practice of recycling, reassembling, and adapting previously composed pieces. Even Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (premiered in Vienna in May 1786) was immediately subjected to the usual process of modification and substitution between the Prague production in August 1786 and the Viennese revival of 1789.[13] Roger Parker has recently readdressed this issue, reminding us 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 in this process, adding freely to his own words and those of others." Without denying that these revisions create a "surplus of signature," Parker still holds that "the operatic 'work' can survive startling transformations and still remain coherent." Consequently, he takes into consideration two contentious replacement arias for *Le nozze di Figaro* that Mozart wrote to fit the acting and vocal ability of the new Susanna, Adriana Ferrarese.[14] On February 28, 1778, Mozart wrote to his father Leopold from Mannheim, "I love it when an aria is so accurately measured for a singer's voice that it fits like a well-tailored dress."[15] This well-known

passage should not fuel the notion that composers were subservient to singers, but should rather be taken as evidence that great dramatists, like Shakespeare and Goldoni, worked *with*, not only *for* performers, in order to create a kind of drama that was conceived not as a monument for posterity but as a living experience for the present, indeed for any present as history has proven.

The constant demand for novelty required rapid production. Vivaldi once proudly told Charles De Brosses that he could compose a concerto faster than a copyist could copy it.[16] In 1734 Goldoni surprised even the "red priest" by writing on the spot the text of a replacement aria in Vivaldi's adaptation of Zeno's *Griselda*. Goldoni's job was to make the libretto shorter and current; as he recounts, "to change the order and character of the arias as the composer and the singers wished." The title-role was destined for the composer's protégée, the singer Anna Girò, who requested an aria with more action and expression than languid singing ("canto languido"), with "broken words, vibrant sighing, and some agitation and movement." While Vivaldi kept himself busy reciting a few psalms and hymns, Goldoni (so he recounts) wrote the new aria text "in less than fifteen minutes." Happily surprised by this quickness the red priest embraced the librettist, whom he previously mistrusted, asking him forgiveness, and hugging him. Vivaldi promised that he would not have another librettist. Then summoning Anna Girò and her sister (who were living with him) joyously exclaimed, "he wrote it right here! right here! right here!"[17]

Vivaldi's operas have too often been dismissed as exemplary of a corrupted system that mid-century reforms would attempt to cure. The practice of borrowing or recycling preexistent material, parodying and assembling works out of different parts, nevertheless, affected eighteenth-century music of virtually every genre. The works of Johann Sebastian Bach (who never wrote an opera) offer as many examples as Vivaldi's. One should not assume that this process led necessarily to loss of coherence. Bach scholar John Butt has posited that it is by understanding the logic of assemblage and recomposition that "we may gain some insights into the extraordinary processes by which this composer structured music of diverse origins into a coherent whole." Moreover, "what is remarkable is Bach's manipulation, rather than creation, of musical language."[18] Understanding music of Bach's and Vivaldi's time (and opera in particular), requires us to make a special effort to go beyond the admiration of what Lydia Goehr has called "the imaginary museum of musical works," and start imagining the process of production and reproduction of opera as a continuous and still ongoing phenomenon.[19]

***Motezuma* (1733–2006)**

Let us take a closer look at the process of making and remaking opera from its original context to modern productions and re-creations, by taking into account Vivaldi's operatic output. Vivaldi, like Mozart, is one of the few eighteenth-century composers who not only outlived their time, but even gained popularity long after their death, becoming exquisitely modern cultural icons. Despite their present high renown, both Mozart and Vivaldi ended, 50 years apart, in a similarly inglorious way, in a mass grave in Vienna. If the fame of Mozart was resumed and started growing shortly after his death, Vivaldi, on the other hand, was left in a state of oblivion until the late 1930s when his concertos became a staple in twentieth-century musical culture. Subsequently he became known mostly as a composer of instrumental music, even though his activity as an opera composer was frenetic. In 1739 he claimed in a letter to Marquise Bentivoglio that he had composed 94 operas (probably without distinguishing between his responsibilities as a composer, impresario and editor, since music for "only" half of this number survives).[20] Vivaldi's operas are less studied due also to the condition and history of the sources themselves. Immediately after Vivaldi's death (1741), Count Giacomo Durazzo, a promoter of opera reforms at the time of Gluck, purchased a large collection of Vivaldi's operatic manuscripts that remained in the count's library until his death in 1794. The location of the collection changed several times and in 1922 the manuscripts even spent one night in the open air, mixed up and half immersed in the mud, after the small two-wheel cart used to transport them flipped over. A decade later the library of Turin acquired the dismembered collection from two private owners (Giordano and Foà), but the manuscripts are still waiting to be made accessible through printed editions because scholars have been missing editorial criteria compatible with the nature of Vivaldi's operas, which fiercely resists modernistic critical editing based on the establishment of the most authorial text. Nevertheless (or maybe because of that), a plethora of recent recordings have become available during the last decade, produced in a way that may scandalize scholars trained in modern critical editing.[21] These recordings pose an interesting question: if a modern audio or video recording of an eighteenth-century opera presents remarkably different music from the opera as it was first experienced, shall we dismiss it as a forgery, or consider it as a natural (and authentic) continuation of the original production practices?

An excellent example to reflect on this question is *Motezuma* (*sic*), an opera about the crucial episodes of the defeat of the Aztec emperor Montezuma II at the hands of Hernán Cortés resulting in the Spanish conquest of Mexico in 1531. Vivaldi composed it in 1733, two years before

Rameau's opéra-ballet *Les Indes galantes*, also featuring America, anticipating a trend in transatlantic operatic subjects that grew precipitously during the second half of the century. The opera was first performed at the Sant'Angelo theater, one of the half-a-dozen opera theaters in Venice at the time. The building on the Grand Canal belonged to the Marcello family but was operated by impresarios who, by offering cheaper entrance tickets than the other opera houses in Venice, likely granted access to lower-income audiences. As a result the productions avoided the prohibitive costs for star singers (famous castrati and *prime donne*) and also tended to be more progressive politically (later in the century the Sant'Angelo theater specialized in opera buffa).[22]

In the *Argomento* to the opera, the librettist Alvise Giusti explains that the plot is inspired by the *History of the Conquest of Mexico* by Antonio Solís, an apology by General Hernán Cortés in response to the criticism of the Spanish conquista by Father las Casas and other Jesuits. Giusti's introduction ends by reassuring the reader (in fact the censors) that his text does not offend the Catholic faith.[23] In this drama, however, the Spanish conquest of America is not presented from the single-minded and biased perspective of the conquistadors and the opera leaves plenty of room for contrasting interpretations. This is immediately clear as the curtain rises and the Mexican lagoon is represented on stage. The libretto provides the usual description of the setting: "Part of the Mexican lagoon, which divides the Imperial Palace from the Spanish Quarter, with a magnificent bridge in between." By representing Mexico City in a way that recalls Venice (a city on a lagoon, with magnificent bridges and palaces), the Venetian audience was immediately led to sympathize with the Mexicans. Amongst war ruins the architecture of the imperial palace towers over the Spanish military camp, presenting a stark metaphor that civilization builds what modernity destroys.

We are first introduced to the Mexican royal family: Motezuma and his wife, Mitrena, then their daughter, Teutile. Mitrena, first interpreted by Anna Girò, tries to comfort her husband, who is absorbed in painful contemplation of the ruins, of the fire and the blood coloring the waves in the lagoon. Motezuma gives Mitrena a knife instructing her to kill herself and their daughter in order to escape the humiliation of slavery and abuse. As Motezuma unsheathes the dagger the recitative reaches the right emotional temperature that allows the first da capo aria to take off. In opera of this time, the first aria sung by a character is of momentous importance because it defines the personality of that character, which is usually restricted to very limited psychological development during the rest of the drama. Motezuma's "Gl'oltraggi della sorte" is a typical seria aria in many respects. It presents two stanzas of rhymed seven-syllable

lines (*settenari*), each stanza conveying a contrasting affect or feeling. First, he expresses pride and courage (reasserting his role as a political leader); second, faith in his wife (reverting to the role of a good husband). The two strictly interwoven dimensions of eighteenth-century opera – the public or political sphere and the private or domestic sphere – are deployed in the space of eight lines:

Gl'oltraggi della sorte	A magnanimous soul
Non teme un'alma grande;	does not fear destiny's offences;
Si vince con la morte	through death one overcomes
Anche la crudeltà.	even cruelty.
Tutto ne' casi miei	In my plight
Forse temer dovrei,	I should be afraid of everything,
Ma il tuo costante core	but your faithful heart
Nulla temer mi fa.	makes me afraid of nothing.

What did this aria sound like when it was first performed in Venice during the fall season of 1733? This is hard to tell because its music is lost. Yet, today we can listen to two versions of this aria in two very different recordings of the opera. The first was produced in 1992. Inspired by eighteenth-century impresario practices, Jean-Claude Malgoire created a *pasticcio* opera by assembling Vivaldi's music from different operas and cantatas, slightly adapting the vocal melody to fit the words of Giusti's libretto. Malgoire dedicated his recording to Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, author of the 1974 novel *Concierto barroco*. Both Malgoire's *pasticcio* and Carpentier's novel are quintessentially postmodern in their assemblage of heterogeneous material. Carpentier tells the story of a wealthy Mexican (who happens to be Montezuma himself) and his African-American valet Filomeno. They both travel to Venice, where they encounter Vivaldi, Handel, and Domenico Scarlatti and with them they engage in a nocturnal jam session at the Ospedale della Pietà, the school of music for orphan girls where Vivaldi taught for most of his life. Here they improvise a baroque concerto, baroque in the literal sense of the word: a fanciful fusion of blues, African drumming, and European virtuosic concerto music. The Mexican traveler then recounts to Vivaldi the story of Montezuma, which the red priest promptly turns into an opera, disappointing the Mexican king with its historical inaccuracy. Towards the end of the novel Filomeno waits in the motorboat traffic of the Venetian lagoon to attend a jazz concert by Louis Armstrong. Modern scholars who approached Vivaldi's *Motezuma* evoked indeed the inherent nature of Carpentier's novel, even though they disregarded the absurdity of time and place displacements in the novel, probably finding this aspect irrelevant or irritating. Nevertheless this surreal aspect of Carpentier's

magic realism reflects the absurdity of our present musical culture, in which eighteenth-century opera coexists with music of any style and genre from any other time and place of the world.[24] We should be thankful to this eclectic soundscape if eighteenth-century opera is still accessible to us. Let us remind ourselves that seventeenth-century opera was no longer accessible to Mozart, nor was Vivaldi to Beethoven. The reason why our society recycles eighteenth-century opera is not only because we are fond of historical relics (which we are), but also because we accept opera of the past as part of our present culture. Malgoire is trying not only to retrieve the past but also to communicate to his present audience, and as such his production reflects political views, opinions, and preconceptions of the late twentieth century.

Malgoire's intent can be illustrated through several points of comparison with the original version. In Malgoire's recording, Motezuma is interpreted by a countertenor. This tends to have an alienating effect on modern listeners who are aware of, but not perfectly accustomed to, the early opera practice of assigning male roles to either castrato singers or women. On the surface, then, Malgoire's choice seems to be justified by a concern for authenticity, but in fact Motezuma was originally interpreted by a bass singer (Massimiliano Miler, mentioned even by Carpentier in his novel). Vivaldi's decision to assign this role to a bass singer might have been prompted by Marcello's *Il teatro alla moda*, which denounced, among many other things, the absurdity of assigning the role of a father and tyrant to a castrato.[25] It appears that even for an assiduous patron like Marcello, while assigning an alto voice to a young hero or a male deity was perfectly acceptable, it was not so for a mature man, especially a father. Therefore Malgoire's choice unnecessarily alienates or exoticizes the Native American character and in doing so it reflects Western ideological biases that originated about two decades after Vivaldi's death, namely Buffon's idea of Native Americans as feminine and emasculated.[26] Interestingly, in Wolfgang Rihm's *Die Eroberung von Mexico*, a new opera about Montezuma composed at the time of Malgoire's recording, the Mexican emperor is interpreted by a female soprano supplemented by additional soprano and a contralto voices in the orchestra pit, while Cortés is interpreted by a baritone and male speakers. Malgoire's feminization of Motezuma is evident also from his choices for the music sources. Most notably, the hero's first aria is an adaptation of the second aria from Vivaldi's cantata for soprano and basso continuo, *Amor hai vinto*. This is a typical *galant*-style piece, characterized by simple and short melodic phrases, containing syncopations conferring a sense of lightness by avoiding a sense of strong pulse, elegant and minimal counterpoint between first and second violins, easy flowing coloratura, and fleeting minor

inflections in the B section of the da capo form, which are too short and localized to disrupt the overall serenity of the piece. The adapted aria from *Amor hai vinto* ("Se a me rivolve il ciglio") presents the same number and type of lines: two stanzas of four *settenari* of which the first three are *piani* (ending with a non-accented syllable after the accented one) and the last one is a *tronco* (ending with an accented syllable, as in "ma torno a respirar"):

Se a me rivolve il ciglio	If my beloved treasure [Clori]
L'amato mio tesoro	turns her eyes on me,
Non sento più martoro	I no longer feel a pain
Ma torno a respiràr.	and I breathe again.
Non teme più periglio	No longer fearing perils,
Non sente affanno e pena	anxiety or suffering
L'alma si rasserena	my soul relaxes
Come la calma in mar.[27]	like a calm sea.

Early eighteenth-century arias follow recurrent patterns of versification that facilitated the usage of the same music for different aria texts. In fact the first aria from the same cantata *Amor hai vinto* has the exact same line structure. Here, however, the lover compares his troubled soul to a ship in a tempest far from ports and shelters. Vivaldi set the text with stormy E-minor music that would have better represented the affects in Motezuma's first stanza, although not the sense of peace that the king finds when he reverts to thinking of his wife. It is clear, then, that even in a highly formulaic genre like early eighteenth-century aria verse, the number of variants is high enough to make self-borrowing not an easy, mechanical task. This is because many arias might be rhythmically but not dramatically compatible or vice versa.

A decade after Malgoire's recording the lost score of *Motezuma* was unearthed. In 2002, Russia returned the manuscript score to the Berlin Sing-Akademie. The Red Army had taken it with many other musical and artistic treasures at the end of World War II, when the capital of Germany was in a similar situation to the capital of the Mexican empire after the sacking and pillage at the hands of Hernán Cortés. Twentieth-century communist Russians, like sixteenth-century Catholic Spaniards, acted as the saviors of civilization against barbarity. Ironically, Vivaldi's score remained in oblivion on the shelves of the Central Archiv of Ukraine in Kiev. Once returned to Berlin in the new millennium, however, early music scholar and conductor Alan Curtis revitalized *Motezuma* in live performances and a CD released by Archiv Produktion of Deutsche Grammophon in 2006. Only Act 2 is, however, complete in the manuscript copy of Vivaldi's *Motezuma*. The first, third and last acts have

substantial parts missing and short sections of the extant pieces and recitatives are lost or illegible. To restore the score, the (re)composer Alessandro Ciccolini reconstructed the fragments on the basis of stylistic and dramatic consistency. For the missing arias, Ciccolini and Curtis, like Malgoire, used the music of arias from Vivaldi's previous operas.[28] If previous Malgoire's recording is a *pasticcio*, Curtis's is more like an invasive restoration which nonetheless allows us to appreciate this opera in the theater, unlike a recording of authentic fragments that can only be appreciated as a collection of relics in an archeological museum, framed outside their original context and function. An invasive restoration, whether recomposing a score, repainting entire figures of a heavily damaged fresco, or rebuilding substantial parts of a historical building, raises inevitable questions of philological accuracy. The new score or building will be an event or a space that has never been experienced in that particular form by the people of the past. Of course eighteenth-century audiences never experienced a performance of fragments either. There is also the question of whether a heavily reconstructed recording retrieves a more authentic process of producing opera than a recording of a fragmentary *Urtext*.

A comparison of the scores of the Curtis and Malgoire versions reveals only three pieces in common: the original overture or *sinfonia*, the final chorus (from *Griselda*), and one aria that they both adapted from *Tito Manlio*, "Orribile lo scempio." Alan Curtis uses the vigorous music from this aria to set the words of Motezuma's first soliloquy (also lost) "Gl'oltraggi della sorte," while Malgoire utilized "Se a me rivolge il ciglio." Vivaldi wrote *Tito* one year after a long war against the Turks, and this aria is a dignified rage aria with oboe obbligato parts that Tito sings to threaten Rome's enemies. The original text is simply "Orribile lo scempio / nel sangue si vedrà, / e all'altrui cor d'esempio / la strage servirà" ("Horrible bloodshed / will be seen, / and the slaughter will be / an example to others"). Tito Manlio was a consul who subdued Latin rebels after the Roman invasion (thus a similar clash of occupying and occupied nations). In the opera Tito's daughter Vitellia is in love with the enemy, a Latin general. The contextual points of intersection with *Motezuma* are inescapable, but while Curtis let the leader of the occupied nation sing the victorious and dignified music that Vivaldi conceived for the Roman consul, Malgoire assigned this same aria to the Spanish general Cortés, the leader of the occupying army who was in fact responsible for the massacre of thousands of Native Americans. The ideological implications of these choices are inescapable, whether they are desired or not.

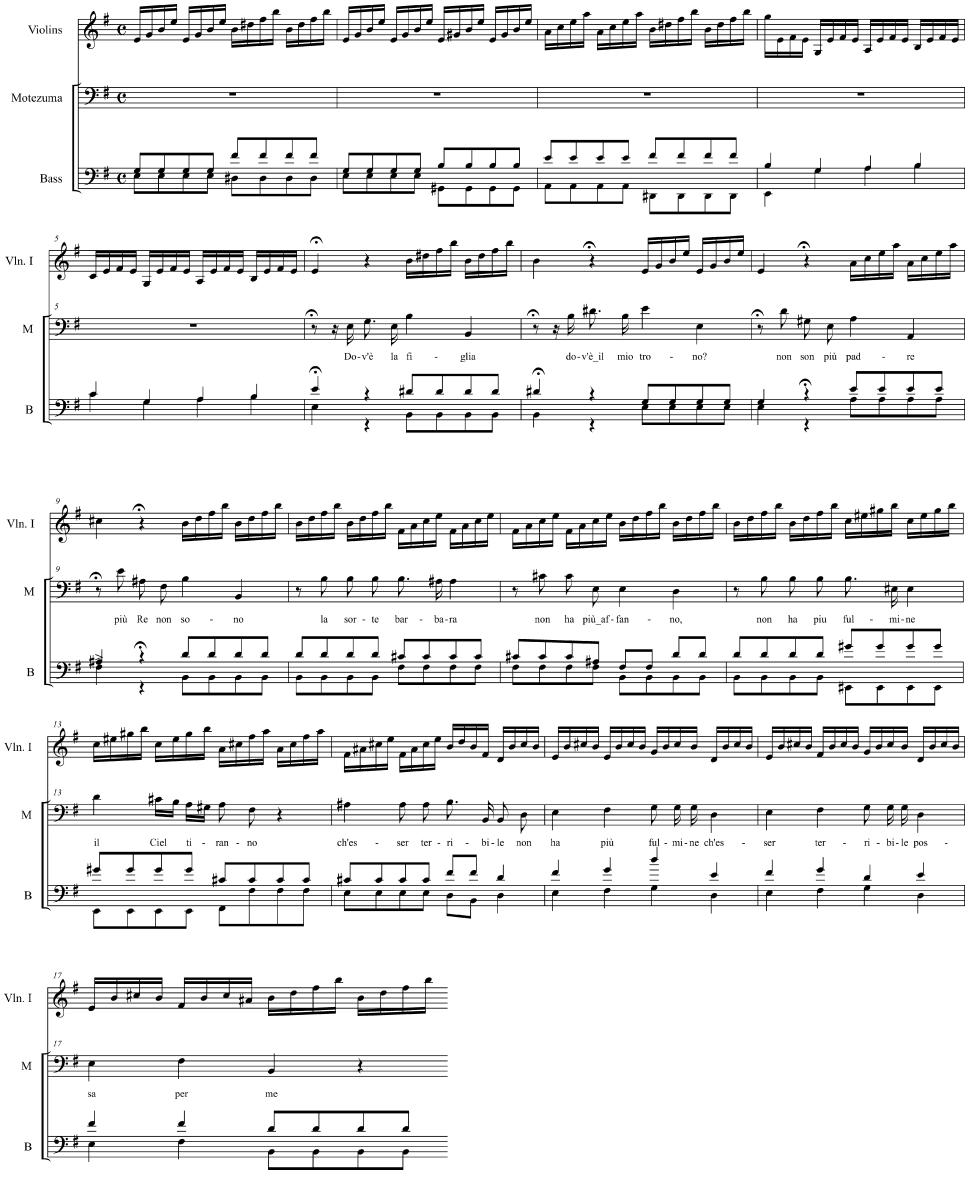
Vivaldi's conception of Native American characters is also of import, as it allows a glimpse into his logic of recycling at its best. The use of the

sinfonia in both recordings by Malgoire and Curtis may reflect the fact that it was reused by Vivaldi himself for a later *pasticcio* opera based on an older libretto by Agostino Piovene, *Bajazet*, which – like *Motezuma* and *Tito Manlio* – represents a clash of civilizations: the Tartars led by the victorious General Tamerlano and the Turks led by the defeated Sultan Bajazet (this is the same subject of Handel's *Tamerlano*). Both Motezuma and Bajazet have daughters who are in love with the enemy. On the surface, this *sinfonia*, with its sharp contrast between the outer, forceful, at times militaristic allegros and the introverted andante as the inner movement, seems to prepare the listener for a drama about the clash between nations, as well as between the public and the domestic sphere. The migration of music from one opera to another, however, is justified in this case by the presence of intersecting points between two different dramatic texts. This is fairly common in a system characterized by pervading intertextuality.[29]

By superimposing two related dramatic contexts sharing the same music it is possible to map precise points of intersection that generate what I propose to call a hyperplot. In the case of *Motezuma* and *Bajazet*, their dramatic point(s) of intersection are the tyrant under siege whose daughter is in love with the conquering enemy. This is not a typical plot, nor simply the plot of an opera shared by another opera. If we read various synopses of the two operas we will see that they summarize different, more complex events. The hyperplot emerges only when we superimpose two texts in order to map those coincidental dramatic elements that allow a migration of music from one opera to the other. By sharing the same music and dramatic situation with Motezuma, Bajazet stops being the Turkish Sultan, as Motezuma is no longer a Mexican emperor (as they would be labeled in a synopsis) and both of them can be described the "disempowered-exotic-Father-King." We may call this abstracted character a hypercharacter. As a recurrent but not necessarily typical character in a recurrent but not necessarily typical dramatic situation, we cannot consider this a "type" or a myth, because it is not like the typical and mythical figure of the all-powerful father and king vastly dominating the genre of heroic opera.

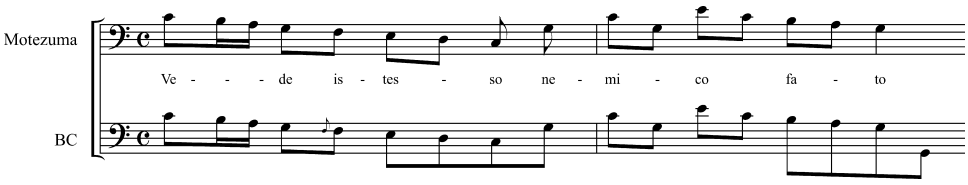
Vivaldi reassigned to Bajazet one aria originally conceived for Motezuma. The aria is "Dov'è la figlia, dov'è il mio trono?" ("Where is my daughter, where is my throne?"), which the title-role sings in both operas to express the collision of domestic and political tragedy of a father-king whose daughter is in love with the victorious enemy. In *Motezuma* the aria appears at the end of the opera, when the King has lost all his hope and no longer has faith in his gods, accusing them of inconstancy in the preceding recitative. In the opening ritornello of the aria (Example 1.1) the sixteenth-note ascending arpeggios in the first violins set the agitated mood in the minor key, while from measures 3 to 5 the violins double

Example 1.1 Vivaldi, *Motezuma*, RV 723, MS D-Bsa, SA1214, Act 3, scene 10, Motezuma's aria "Dov'è la figlia," mm. 1–17.



on the downbeat a brave major and ascending melodic tetrachord exposed in quarter notes in the bass line (G–A–B–C). The violins nail this luminous aspiration to the minor mode by viciously hammering a tight E–F♯–E arch after each note of the major four-note scale, gunning its G-major implication down with a volley of sixteen Es in only three measures that

Example 1.2 Vivaldi, *Motezuma*, RV 723, MS D-Bsa, SA1214, Act 3, scene 10, Motezuma's aria "Dov'è la figlia," mm. 44–5



lock the bass line in the minor mode by recasting the G sonority as the minor third of E. Motezuma starts singing a fragmented line, interrupted by repeated fermatas, ending each broken melodic breath with a disheartening descending octave. The remaining part of the first stanza uses the effective ritornello segments, both the ascending arpeggios and major tetrachord (now transposed one tone down) during a section in which the bass voice doubles the basses in the orchestra. The King sings: "Non son più padre, più Re non sono. / La sorte barbara non ha più affanno, / non ha più fulmine il Ciel tiranno / ch'esser terribile possa per me" ("No longer I am father, no longer a King. Tyrannical fate gives me no more anxiety and the tyrannous Heaven has lost the thunderbolts that I shall fear"). It is tempting to identify the bass line with Motezuma himself, but Motezuma surprisingly tags this bass line to the poetical lines from "La sorte barbara," identifying the trapped tetrachord not with himself but with Fate and Heaven, and in so doing he disempowers the supreme and higher divine authority now that he has lost his own. Consistently, in the second stanza of the aria the King bitterly but victoriously declares that Fate itself has no longer any power over him, even if he kills him it won't hurt him any longer ("Vede l'istesso nemico fato / che non più farmi può sventurato, / che, se m'uccide, crudel non è") (Example 1.2). The King derides these supreme powers in a descending melodic segment that imitates laughter by a sudden, spasmodic insertion of two faster sixteenth notes on the same vowel –e– of "vede," while the twisted shifts from sharp to flats in the harmony emphasize the perversity of fate. Motezuma, like Bajazet, appears like a tragic figure exerting a heroic control over their destiny to the extreme consequences.

Reformed opera: *Montezuma* goes to Berlin

The turbulent migration of arias from one opera to another was mitigated by the operatic reforms that started in the 1750s and culminated in

Calzabigi's and Gluck's famous reformed operas, *Orfeo* (1762) and *Alceste* (1767), both first produced in Vienna under the artistic direction of Count Durazzo. The libretto of *Alceste* has a preface by Gluck and the librettist Calzabigi that can be considered as the manifesto of reform opera. This document, however, was not as groundbreaking as music historiography has always presented it. In fact it is a summary of principles first exposed ten years earlier by Francesco Algarotti, an international and cosmopolitan intellectual who had the merit to bridge the most innovative ideas in aesthetics, drama, science, and good taste produced in various European countries. It is no surprise that his *Essay on Opera* (*Saggio sopra l'opera in musica*), first published in 1755, appeared in seven editions in Italian, but also in translation, in English (1767), German (1769), French (1773), and Spanish (1787). Most of the theories presented in the *Essay* were intended to influence opera of any national tradition. We would be mistaken, however, to consider the preface of Gluck's *Alceste* as a realization of abstract theories first developed in an academic setting. Eighteenth-century opera follows a consistent pattern of theory following practice or developing with practice. In fact, in the preface and dedication to Baron Svertz, artistic director of the opera theater at the Court of Berlin, Algarotti acknowledges that his own theories are nothing more than a report on what was already being practiced in Berlin at the court of Frederick the Great, where Algarotti had been a guest on different occasions for a total of eight years between 1740 and 1753. The court of this enlightened monarch, flutist, and composer was at the time a laboratory of new political and artistic trends. Therefore, even though it is undeniable that the best exemplars of reformed opera are the Viennese productions of the late 1760s, the Berlin productions of the late 1740s and early 1750s need to be considered the true origin of the reform.[30] In the very first edition of the *Essay on Opera*, entitled originally *Discorso* (*Discourse*) Algarotti mentions *Montezuma*, a scenario written in French by Frederick II, and praises it as a "subject [that] may open a new field to the valuable composer able to transport the music in a new world."[31] While the *Discorso* was in press, Frederick's subject was turned into Italian verse by Giampietro Tagliazucchi, with music by Carl Heinrich Graun, and first represented in Berlin on January 6, 1755. Graun's *Montezuma* can be considered an imperfect prototype of reform opera reflecting only some of the principles envisioned by Algarotti and later realized by Gluck. *Montezuma*, indeed, presents an integration of dance and drama (e.g. at the end of Act 2 there is a dance of Spanish soldiers). It also increases the presence of obbligato recitative. Of particular note is the long and dramatic recitative, filled with dense thematic and evocative melodic interjections by the orchestra, in Act 3, which presents an enchained Montezuma in a proto-Romantic prison scene. Graun also

experiments with more fluid forms for closed pieces: many of the arias in fact avoid either in part or altogether the traditional da capo form, and the librettist writes arias in an irregular number of lines, so as to prevent recycling. The opera ends with the suicide of Montezuma's promised spouse and a terrifying chorus of Mexicans accusing the Spaniards of barbarity and invoking their gods for mercy, breaking the convention of the happy ending. While Giusti's and Vivaldi's *Motezuma* maintains a certain degree of ideological ambivalence, Frederick's and Graun's *Montezuma* is ideologically consistent and unambiguous: Cortés is a villain comparable to Scarpia in Puccini's *Tosca*, while Montezuma is presented as the good, honest, caring and enlightened monarch (a self-portrait of Frederick), and the Mexican people in general as victims of barbarous Catholic forces. The opera shows Algarotti's influence in matters of politics too, since Frederick's portrait of the Americans replicates Algarotti's account in his 1753 book *Saggio sopra l'Imperio degl'Incas* in which Native Americans, from the Iroquois of North America to the Incas of Peru, are presented as "lovers of freedom" and their rulers as "examples of religious piety, magnificence, and virtue."[32] The opera projects the enlightened ideas of Frederick and Algarotti, under the influence of their friend and correspondent Voltaire. Later settings of *Montezuma* by De Majo (Turin, 1765), Mysliveček (Florence, 1771), Galuppi (Venice, 1772), Paisiello (Rome, 1772), Anfossi (Modena, 1776), Insanguine (Turin, 1780), Zingarelli (Naples, 1781), all first produced in Catholic Italy, were based on a libretto by Cigna-Santi that corrected the progressive standpoint of Frederick's subject and rehabilitated the moral stature of Hernán Cortés. The original Turin production, however, came to terms with the formal innovations introduced in Berlin, in particular Algarotti's new operatic aesthetic, making of Turin a secondary but propelling center of reformed opera.[33]

The main concept in Alagarotti's treatise is the idea of a cohesive unity of all the media involved: poetry, music, action (*mimica*), dance, and visual arts in opera, i.e., stage settings, costumes, and lighting, so that each part of opera, as "in the most complex machines" must work in a "harmonious concord for the achievement of one same end." This includes the idea of a new architecture for the opera theater in order to increase the effect of illusion and visibility (this observation was added in the 1763 edition). The idea of a more cohesive integration of the various media was quite new and it was a major concern for Algarotti, who starts his *Essay* by lamenting the lack of a thematic link between the *balli* (generally presented as detached *entr'actes*) and the drama of the opera. The same view applies to all the other parts, including the *sinfonia* or overture, which Algarotti thinks should be "integrated to the drama, as the exordium in a good oration" and "should prepare the listener to the affects

later presented in the drama." In the opening *sinfonia*, as well as in the recitatives (which ought to be accompanied by the full orchestra) and in closed pieces, the function of the orchestra should be to convey and reinforce drama, not to distract from it, so the instruments should be chosen according to the meaning of the words and the affects expressed in the drama. Like Marcello earlier and later Wagner, Algarotti perceives the rise of public and commercially run opera business as generating production practices that corrupt artistic integrity and for this reason he looked to French and Prussian court opera as models. The star system, in his view as in many others, pushed singers and composers to demonstrate a purely musical performing technique to the detriment of dramatic realism and natural simplicity in acting and singing. Algarotti denounces that the true meaning of the word recitative has been forgotten – recitative implies the act of "recitare," i.e., to act, and therefore it should be dramatically engaging. He immediately clarifies that acting and dramatic force should inform arias too. For similar reasons he criticizes the long ritornelli during which the actor-singer seems to wait to get back to the dramatic situation. Most importantly, he disapproves of da capo form and repetitions in general as contrary to the natural linear, rather than circular, way of human expression. Algarotti observes that the only good examples of the "true dramatic music" ("vera musica da Teatro") are offered by a few *arie parlanti* by "mediocre" singers ("mediocre" because in this kind of aria there is no virtuosic display) and "surprisingly by opere buffe." With this last remark Algarotti implicitly refers to the recent "Querelle des Bouffons" in Paris (1752–4), in which Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* was taken by Rousseau and his followers as an example of natural simplicity. The concept of natural simplicity is one of the most important themes in the suggested reforms, as in mid-eighteenth-century aesthetic in general: "only beautiful simplicity" – Algarotti writes echoing his friend Giuseppe Tartini – "can imitate nature, and is always preferred to the artifices of art by people of good taste."[34]

The idea of recuperating a more natural and realistic way of expressing drama through music, of smoothing the points of articulation of dramatic syntax, the praise of arioso over aria, of accompanied recitative, and moreover the attention to every single signifying aspect of opera (poetry, drama, both vocal and purely instrumental music, acting, dancing, costumes, lighting, architecture), seem to presage Wagner's concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or integrated artwork, over which the poet-composer exerts complete control. The main difference is that in eighteenth-century opera, including reform opera, there is no such thing as the concept of "work." Algarotti himself, we have seen, describes opera not as a *work* (notwithstanding that is the original meaning of the word *opera*), but as a

machine *at work* and – like Marcello – still sees making opera as a collective effort of both creative and performing artists. Even the Viennese *Orfeo* of 1762, which is generally regarded as the best representative example of reformed opera, was itself the product of a creative collaboration and cross-fertilization among a librettist (Ranieri de' Calzabigi), an impresario (Count Durazzo), a singer (Gaetano Guadagni), a choreographer (Gasparo Angiolini), a stage designer (Giovanni Maria Quaglio), and a music composer (Christoph Willibald Gluck). That the latter never intended to freeze the opera into a work became immediately clear as the opera underwent substantial revisions for its Paris production and what we hear in modern productions is often a combination of the two.[35] Even though eighteenth-century reformers tried to change the process of making opera, what they never dreamed of changing is the nature of opera as a process.