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REVIEW ARTICLE

Present(ing) Opera

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Christopher Morris, *Screening the Operatic Stage: Television and Beyond*. University of Chicago Press, 2024. 256 pp.

Yayoi U. Everett, editor, *Contemporary Opera in Flux*. University of Michigan Press, 2024. 335 pp.

Caitlin Vincent, *Digital Scenography in Opera in the Twenty-First Century*. Routledge, 2022. 198 pp.

When titling my recent monograph, I grappled with the inclusion of the word 'digital', which provided important context for the themes and timespan of the book but, I suspected, also might prove to be nonspecific or confusing as technologies evolved.[1] In examining the subjects of this review – two monographs by Christopher Morris and Caitlin Vincent, and a collection of essays, many of which engage with the digital, edited by Yayoi Uno Everett – I am struck anew by the challenges of writing about the diverse amalgamation of performances that make up twenty-first century opera. As a scholar who, like many of these authors, thinks frequently through refraction, doubling, distancing and repeating – themes that loom large in works dealing with digitality – I find that our critical discourse of mediation and opera, regardless of prefix, adjectival modifier or type (re-, hyper-, cinematic, digital, televisual, through the *disposizioni sceniche*, Théâtrophone, simulcast) can easily find itself caught within the kind of *mise en abyme* (to use a recurring image from Morris's book) that all three texts interrogate. In their remediation of a range of live, screened and cinecast performances, scenographic designs and models of composition, Morris, Vincent and Everett *et al.* offer a host of disciplinary interventions that exemplify how scholars, audiences and practitioners might observe both obvious and overlooked practices of twenty-first century operatic performance beyond the common theme of their contemporaneity or medial engagement.

In this review, itself another remediation, I offer a trio of concepts that I have been playing with as I think through these works: the present, presence and presentation of opera within the media-saturated moment of the 2020s. The present is perhaps the simplest of these concepts: each author is contending with operatic performance concurrent with their own historical moment or very recent past. The present also includes the COVID-19 pandemic, which makes an appearance in each book. While COVID-19 does not drive the

[1] Megan Steigerwald Ille, *Opera for Everyone: The Industry's Experiments with American Opera in the Digital Age* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2024).

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primary argument in any of these works, its presence shapes the experience of operatic performance, intensifying the frequency with which audiences access the 'cinecasts' of Morris's study, informing the circumstances under which the collaborators of *Opera in Flux* came together in 2020 to identify common themes in twenty-first century opera, and conditioning the final writing stages of Vincent's work. I invoke the second term, presence, without delving too deeply into the rich body of work surrounding it in opera studies and beyond, as a way of thinking through how these works are perceived spatially and/or temporally (perhaps 'Gumbrecht and then some'[2]), as these authors consider the perception of operatic performers and/or voices through screened media or in live formats and the sensorial frameworks audiences and performers bring to a specific work. The third concept, presentation, brings to the fore the literal modes of performance and spectatorship with which all three books engage, referring also to these studies' discussions of how opera draws attention to itself as a genre (what Morris refers to as 'how opera sees itself in video', 20).

Presenting opera

Opera is already a multimedia form. Twenty-first century opera of the global north, to a greater extent than in prior centuries, is situated within an ecosystem of screen media and digitally enabled technologies as a means of production and reception. Caitlin Vincent's book, *Digital Scenography in Opera in the Twenty-First Century*, provides a broad survey of the contemporary 'use of digital scenography in Western opera production' (5). In the process of exploring several key case studies and familiar productions, she unpacks a range of industry practices and their dramaturgical implications.

By historicising practices of digital scenography within a longer narrative of scenographic development in opera, Vincent's work gently critiques the fallacy of technodeterminism to which many contemporary opera companies fall prey. The book, comprising an introduction, six chapters and a conclusion, balances historical framing of scenographic developments with analysis of the applied work and experiences of projection design practitioners. The first two chapters offer a framework for analysing the degree to which the digital elements (digital 'to refer to any form of digital media that is used on stage in a way that is arguably integral to the scenographic design', 6–7) shape the production's engagement with the performer, stage setting and spectator. This schema is organised on a spectrum from those productions fully dependent upon visual correlation to those that Vincent describes as 'full synthesis' productions. In visual correlation, 'live performers and digital elements function as coordinated "layers" without either a sensory fusion or an interactive one' (26). Vincent gives the example of productions in which projections might serve as a referent to an object or person about which a character is singing. Full synthesis productions are those in which 'one entity's behaviour (either digital or live) appears to prompt a corresponding response in the other. This establishes a shared spatial realm where the live and digital not only meet but co-exist as performers' (27). Causal interplay refers to any situation in which 'live performers and digital elements explicitly interact' (28). The strongest case study exemplifying a full synthesis production is the 2012 Komische Oper Berlin/1927 production of *Die Zauberflöte* (Susan Andrade, Barrie Kosky, Paul Barritt[3]), with which many readers will likely be familiar.

In the subsequent two chapters, Vincent's focus shifts from analysis of the presentational modes of scenography and their effects to the presence and practical implications of those

[2] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, CA, 2004).

[3] Komische Oper Berlin, *Die Zauberflöte* Program, https://kob-6a25.kxcdn.com/download/3601/kob_programmheft_die_zauberflote.pdf.

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individuals shaping digital scenography. Chapters 3 and 4, 'The lineage of digital scenography in opera: Baroque origins to the twentieth century' and 'Twentieth century multimedia developments' trace a history of scenographic development to argue that digital scenography should be understood as a continuation rather than a disruption of current production endeavours. Due to their expository tone, these chapters in particular might be useful for advanced students seeking a brief history of scenography in opera, or those in opera studies interested in an infrequently discussed aspect of operatic performance.

Chapter 5, 'The projection designer and evolving creative hierarchies', compares a vertical and lateral hierarchy of operatic production with special attention to the role of the projection designer. Relying on seven practitioner interviews, Vincent explores the often-ambiguous role of the projection designer with respect to other members of the design team. As she makes clear, the role often falls under multiple categories and requires the cooperation of other designers, especially the lighting designer, with whom the projection designer must often work hand-in-glove. In her consideration of creative hierarchies, Vincent highlights several notable outliers in which the projection designer is situated above the stage director (two productions of *Die Zauberflöte*: William Kentridge with the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, 2005, and Jun Kaneko with the San Francisco Opera, 2012, 133). In the example of full or even partial synthesis productions (those that incorporate a greater deal of causal interplay), Vincent notes that the designer must often work directly with the stage director as early as possible in the design process. The specific case study in which hierarchy seems intertwined with working outcomes is the Komische Oper/1927 *Zauberflöte*, which, as Vincent highlights, incorporated a lateral hierarchy in which Andrade and Kosky worked together with Barritt as animator, functioning above the stage, costume and lighting designers (136). Vincent convincingly maps the small-scale practicalities of interpersonal relationships and modes of working onto the outcomes of operatic performance. In my reading, then, presence reveals how the literal appearance of an individual in certain spaces with certain opportunities can inform the presentation and perception of these works onstage.

Chapter 6, 'Evolving production design processes', will appeal to personnel-focused scholars for Vincent's close attention to various institutional frameworks. She relies on Robert Cohen's 2011 description of institutional models, single production models and regional theatre models of production to think through how the projection designer fits into each model.[4] The latter part of this chapter examines 'the impacts of both creative and administrative factors in driving design processes and the degree to which practitioners are forced to adapt to organizational constraints' (151). Vincent maps types of synthesis onto five case studies, integrating the production hierarchy type with the funding/production model: Washington National Opera's *Das Rheingold* (2016), non-synthesis; Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie's *Die Zauberflöte* (Mozart, 2005), partial synthesis; Dutch National Opera's *Die Zauberflöte* (2012), partial synthesis; Santa Fe Opera's *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* (Bates, 2017), non-synthesis; and the Komische Oper Berlin/1927's *Die Zauberflöte*, full synthesis.

In the book's conclusion, Vincent observes that 'the use of digital scenography has far greater implications for offstage processes than it has from an onstage perspective' (170). While I agree in principle, this framing feels directed more toward industry practitioners than scholars, who may be equally invested in understanding *onstage* processes within the context of those taking place offstage. In any case, Vincent has offered a solid foundation for further engagements.

Presencing opera

From Vincent's exposition and analysis of twenty-first century digital scenographic practice, I move now to the theoretical tour de force on opera's engagement with the televisual

[4] Robert Cohen, *Working Together in Theatre: Collaboration and Leadership* (Basingstoke, 2011).

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that is Morris's *Screening the Operatic Stage: Television and Beyond.* While the object of Morris's enquiry seemed initially to slip away from me – a common pitfall in any discourse on mediation in which the object of study is the elision from one concrete medium to the next – his book unspools a critical discourse surrounding 'the apparatus of remediated opera' (14). In fact, the sense of slippage, the shift from one space to the next via a specific medium (in this case, Morris's monograph), is the point: Morris asks about opera's relationship to televisual and cinematic mediation, presence, representation and liveness to cultivate a deeper understanding of what he terms the phenomenon of the 'cinecast', or 'live opera transmissions to cinemas' (15). As he puts it, '[this book] is about how spaces other than the opera house *become* the opera house, how screens and speakers both contain and channel opera's sights and sounds, presenting them with an apparent immediacy that nourishes a pleasurable fantasy of virtual presence, sometimes "not quite" and sometimes "more than" the real thing it models' (4).

The book comprises an introduction, conclusion and seven chapters, which are grouped into three parts. In part one, Morris explores operatic performances whose staging contains some sort of screen which must then also be remediated (Chapter 1, 'Screening the stage/Staging the screen') and those stagings that, in their remediation, require the video director to deal with a 'multiplicity of spaces' that 'form a spatial montage that seems to demand simultaneous visibility of all its parts' (Chapter 2, 'Split loyalties'). He relies on three case studies for this first chapter, Frank Castorf's *Ring* telecast (Wagner, 2022), director Tobias Kratzer and video artist Manuel Braun's *Tannhäuser* (Wagner, 2019) and filmmaker Christophe Honoré's and telecast director Philippe Béziat's *Tosca* (Puccini, 2019). These examples reveal the conflicting narratives that can result from contrasting depictions of an onstage screen versus a direct video feed of a production versus a produced video later released with editing. In the *Tosca* case study, for example, the livestream of the production incorporates panning shots that reveal various projector screens that are situated ('copies of copies') above the live onstage performers. By contrast, Béziat's edited on-demand stream of the opera 'is presented not via shots of the screens but as a montage linked with slow dissolves' (39). Chapter 2 juxtaposes the televisual effect of the 'fragmentation of the screen' (multiple boxes with different kinds of action taking place on the same screen, as in news or live sports) with the long-held expectation that 'cultural coverage' will rely primarily on a single frame. Morris uses several case studies in this chapter, most prominently director Katie Mitchell's production of *Written on Skin* (Benjamin, Crimp, original production 2012; DVD performance, Royal Opera House, 2013) to argue that 'televisual convention allows video production to let itself be seen and heard … only in fragments and in the margins' (86).

With Chapters 3–6 Morris turns to the Metropolitan Opera's cinecast series, *The Met: Live in HD.* Chapter 3, 'What time is it in New York?', considers the ways the series constitutes itself as both an event of simultaneity and singularity. For myself, reading this chapter provided the pleasurable experience of an opera-centred version of the sensorial and sociocultural history that appears in the works of Jonathan Sterne and Jan Hadlaw.[5] Morris contextualises the *Live in HD* series within a longer history of radio and television broadcasts, and then presents a close reading of many of the distinctive elements of the cinecasts, including the intermissions, screen clocks and encore performances. 'By making the audience assemble', Morris concludes, the broadcasts 'recalibrate the simultaneous, they revive the live as local' (98). Chapter 4, 'You are here', brings forth the hidden televisual truth of the series. As Morris makes clear, 'the shared practices, conventions, personnel, technologies, and materials' of the series are drawn from televisual grammar that

[5] Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproductions* (Durham, NC, 2003) and Jan Hadlaw, 'Saving Time and Annihilating Space: Discourses of Speed in AT&T Advertising, 1909–1929', *Space and Culture* 14 (2011), 85–113.

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contributes to the idea that the spectator is truly 'there' (117). Morris presents a close reading of broadcast marketing and spectator reactions, focusing on the 'directness of the transmission' and its specific association with immediacy (116), the language of the hosts welcoming spectators, and the emphasis on the 'event as story' (118).

Chapter 5 examines what Morris terms the 'multicamera production grammar' of the cinecasts: rather than imitating the experience of a spectator physically present at the Metropolitan opera, he argues, this grammar shapes the experience of the spectator through 'eight to ten auditorium cameras', 'energetic cuts between these feeds', 'an emphasis on movement *within* each shot via slow zooms', 'camera movement using cranes/jibs and robotically controlled track mounts' and 'backstage access during intermissions' (126). The result is 'superspectatorship', or, in the words of the chapter's title, 'You are more than here'. Chapter 6, 'You are not here', concludes the second part of the book with an exploration of the duality faced by the broadcasts ('the cinecast invites scrutiny of what seems to exceed – and thus also fall short of – the experience of in-person attendance', 138). Comparing the live artist interviews to scholarship on sports interviews, Morris considers the ways that, while purporting to invoke a sense of immediacy and authenticity, the live artist interviews also reinforce 'the self-regarding myths of performance' (140). I appreciated the close readings of various styles of zoom and movement that, as Morris notes in an earlier chapter, have become the hallmark of the Metropolitan opera. Indeed, those familiar with the *Live in HD* series will find that Morris's reading, bolstered by the critical vocabulary surrounding the close-up, the use of the robotic dolly-mounted camera at the lip of the stage, and the catchy 'boom and zoom' combination shot (147), resounds with their spectatorial experiences. Exciting, too, is Morris's analysis of the composite sound mix used in the cinecasts, along with his dismantling of the notion of sonic immersion, especially in the context of cinematic audio affordances (and limitations). In an echo of Chapter 3's consideration of emplacement through televisual strategies, Morris concludes the chapter with a welcome discussion of locality and fandom among *Live in HD* attendees, which provides useful vocabulary for future studies of operatic communities.

The brief third section, comprising Chapter 7, 'Hosts and ghosts', and the book's conclusion, represents a final pivot in *Screening the Operatic Stage.* This chapter, whose title references Mike Pearson's work on site-specific performance, turns to a range of 'site-specific opera telecasts'. Morris's chosen case studies are the Schweizer Fernsehen and Thomas Beck/Christian Eggenberger *La bohème im Hochhaus* (A High-Rise *La bohème*, 2009, Puccini) and Andrea Andermann's 2010 *Rigoletto in Mantua* (Verdi). He considers the 'locative dimension of these productions: how they negotiate the space in which they unfold and how this space registers on screen' (165). With the vocabulary from previous chapters in mind, the close reading of *Rigoletto in Mantua* is especially satisfying; Morris reveals how the production draws on the grammar of the cinecast, including a multicamera setup and restrained 'perspective audio' (discussed in Chapter 2), in favour of the 'generic virtual soundstage' of the opera house. As a scholar who also thinks about site-specific opera (Morris's 2011 article on the Schweizer Fernsehen *La Traviata im Hauptbahnhof* was instrumental for my early research agenda), Morris's playful analysis reminds me of the significance of the televisual cinecast even in the most experimental productions that I assume to be at a remove from this medium. Even more broadly, in the moments in which Morris reminds us of the 'weak and fragile sonic field' of opera beyond the opera house, I am reminded of earlier pieces such as Hildegard Westerkamp's *Kits Beach Soundwalk* (1996), in which technological mediation is the mechanism for manipulation and perception. In the moving conclusion, Morris asks about the status of remediated operatic performance in the context of the pandemic and beyond, presence and the present intertwined: 'Pivotal, I think, is the question of how video is to be deployed, of the nature of the apparatus at work: its means of production, its visual and sonic forms, its sites of spectatorship' (189).

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Morris's chapters sometimes take on the role of multicamera production themselves, with sections sometimes only two paragraphs long. This mode of organisation made some of the challenging ideas easier to follow; at the same time, there were brief moments in which I, like Castorf's *Ring* spectators, felt adrift in a sea of changing perspectives and yearned for the central claim to be reinforced more strongly across these sections. Still, Morris's writing is pithy and playful; while the complexity of his ideas makes the book most suitable for experienced readers, short excerpts could be appropriate for less advanced and/or non-specialist students.

Present-ing opera

The contributors to *Opera in Flux* offer, through a range of methodologies, approaches and critical questions, an effluvious response to the challenge of understanding late twentieth and early twenty-first century opera, even as such proceedings are still developing. The volume's twelve chapters, prefaced by a brief foreword by Susan McClary and thoughtful introduction by Yayoi Uno Everett and Nicholas Stevens, are loosely organised into three themes: posthuman conditions (Chapters 1–4), vocality and dramaturgical innovations (Chapters 5–8) and subjecthood (Chapters 9–12). Given the frequent intertwining of primary themes beyond this organisational scheme and the fact that Everett does not formally differentiate between themes in the table of contents, I sometimes depart in my summaries from the book's own chronology in the interest of illuminating productive correspondences that cut across designated groupings. I do so not as criticism of the thematic structure, but to highlight the rich sense of coherence established by the many points of contact between individual contributions.

Part one (on posthuman conditions) begins with a contribution by Nicholas David Stevens ('Fear of an envoiced planet: Speculative arias of the operatic hyperobject'), who analyses the ways 'operatic creators decenter or unsettle depictions of humanity' by examining the 'hyperobject voice' (23). Drawing on two case studies, Ash and Adam Fure's *The Force of Things* (2016–18) and composer Dai Fujikura and librettist Saburo Teshigawara's *Solaris* (2013–14), Stevens explores how opera has 'already opened itself to the possibility of more-than-human, mass-assemblage, and hyperobject vocalities' (24). While Stevens is curious about how hyperobject vocalities can signify, and in turn, how they might help the spectator hear the climate crisis differently, Jelena Novak (in Chapter 2, 'Posthuman voice beyond opera: Songful practice of holograms, robots, machines, and vocaloids') is focused on the process of discerned listening, that is, 'how we distinguish the process of becoming posthuman' (47). Relying on autoethnographic experiences and close readings, she considers Michel van der Aa's virtual reality installation *Eight* (2018–19), Keiichiro Shibuya's *The End* (2013), composed for vocaloid Hatsune Miku, and Martin Riches's artwork *Singing Machine* (2010–13). Those familiar with Novak's *Postopera: Reimagining the Voice-Body* (2015) will find many resonances with this chapter; for example, Novak connects the experience of *Eight* with experiences of desynchronisation between voice and body inherent to her definition of postopera: 'What I heard instead of the "human voice" was a series of liminal states of becoming: becoming cyborg, becoming android, becoming virtual, where relationships of human with "nonhuman people" become reinvented' (51).

While it is clear why the Stevens/Novak pairing appears in the 'posthuman' section of the work, it is also apparent that concerns about vocality, space and dramaturgical possibilities are woven throughout the volume. Like Novak's contribution, Alexander K. Rothe's 'Technics and dramaturgy of the avatar in George Lewis's *Afterword*' (Chapter 5) engages with cybernetics, but with the goal of using the concept of the avatar as a way of considering how historical individuals are represented onstage. For Rothe, the avatar becomes a way of

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inflecting/performing/cultivating a kind of 'heteroglossic … community voice' representative of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (111).

I move backwards now to Chapter 4 ('*¡Únicamente la verdad!* (Only the truth!): Camelia la Tejana's many truths'), in which Amy Bauer addresses the fragmentary medial landscape with which I began this review. She roots composer Gabriela Ortiz and librettist Rubén Ortiz Torres's documentary opera *¡Únicamente la verdad!* (Only the truth! 2007–10) in the twentieth century tradition of *Zeitoper*, reading the work's reliance on fragmentary media-driven narratives as a 'meta commentary on the very existence of postdramatic theater' (90). Like many of the contributions in *Opera in Flux*, Bauer's chapter interweaves references (and definitions) of more recent turns within opera and theatre history (*Zeitoper*, Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic theatre[6]) which would be especially suitable for upper-level undergraduates or a graduate seminar.

I read Chapter 3 (Ryan Ebright's 'Steve Reich and Beryl Korot's *The Cave*, Theater of Testimony, and the documentary turn in American opera') in tandem with Chapter 6, Joy Calico's 'Dramaturgies of trauma: Chaya Czernowin's *Infinite Now*'. With forthright writing styles that distil complex ideas with ease and confidence, the two authors treat their chapters as direct invitations to future scholars thinking about contemporary opera. Ebright understands Reich and Korot's *The Cave* (1993) as a turning point within the history of documentary theatre, reading the role of singers within the work as a 'multivalent conduit between authors and audiences; the recorded and the live; text, speech, and song' (69). In so doing, he provides an overview of the early history of the documentary turn in opera (explored in greater detail recently by scholars like Allison Chu[7]) and asks fruitful questions about representation and the materials of documentation. Calico, skilfully examining the way two primary techniques ('the composite libretto and the use of sound design') create a 'traumatic immersive sound experience' in Czernowin's 2017 opera (131), identifies a number of promising directions for future opera scholarship. She contextualises her analysis in a range of late twentieth and twenty-first century examples (both in and out of the opera house), providing multiple jumping-off points with regard to sound design, timbre, Luigi Nono's spatial dramaturgy, multi-sourced libretti and media opera that will excite those new to opera studies and those already familiar with its discursive concerns. I was particularly entranced by her exploration of amplified breath and its implications for studies of voice (143–8).

While Chapter 7, Nancy Yunhwa Rao's 'Inter-Asia sensibility: Vocality and materiality in Tan Dun's *Tea: A Mirror of Soul*', speaks to themes already present in the volume (spatial dramaturgy, representation), I underscore her exploration of vocality and Tan's 'human-body as instrument approach' as 'transform[ing] the opera orchestra's traditional mode of signification' (164). As in Calico's chapter, engagement with non-traditional modes of vocal signification bring to the fore ideas of voice and materiality (especially important to Tan's aesthetic, as Rao points out). Rao's analysis of the role of notated page flipping by the string section in Act II of the opera, which also brings in Jane Bennett's work,[8] draws further connections to the concerns of materiality established in the early chapters of the volume.

Chapter 8 sits in an evocative liminal space between the previous section's focus on vocality and dramaturgical innovation and the next section's engagement with subjecthood and representation. In 'Of sense and sirens: Ana Sokolović's *Svadba* and *Six Voix Pour Sirènes*', Colleen Renihan asks how Sokolović's writing for the female voice cultivates the 'relational energy and acoustic power' so acclaimed by audiences (181). She ultimately concludes that

[6] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London, 2006).

[7] Allison Chu, 'Documentary Opera: Twenty-First Century American Performances of Race and the Archive' (PhD diss., Yale University, 2025).

[8] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC, 2010).

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Sokolović's work moves 'beyond essentialist constructions of gender' to focus on feminine presence and relationality by 'extra-vocal, contralogos sounds' such as breath, whispering and percussive consonants (194). Renihan's contribution, like those by Novak, Calico and Rao, exemplifies ways that scholars of voice can both incorporate earlier writers on vocal materiality (Adriana Cavarero, Michelle Duncan, Nina Eidsheim) and find new ways to perform close readings that consider aspects of spatiality in reception.[9]

Chapters 9, 10 and 11 (by Jane Forner, Edward Venn and Yayoi Uno Everett, respectively), in applying traditional approaches (close readings of scores and/or productions, intersectional considerations of subjecthood), greatly enrich the volume and provide important methodological breadth. Forner ('Sex, myth and power: Reclaiming the "dark feminine" in Anthony Davis's *Lilith*') analyses composer Anthony Davis's and librettist Allan Harvis's 2009 *Lilith*, arguing that the opera represents a 'feminist reclamation' through three themes, 'sex and power, motherhood, and confronting a Lilith–Eve duality' (200). In a move that I could imagine enjoying critical attention in Vincent's and Morris's monographs, she considers the impact of projections and mirrored fragmentations in the 2015 semi-staged workshop production of the work to synthesise how it plays with the so-called Eve–Lilith duality.

Both Venn and Everett's analyses (the former, of composer Thomas Hyde's and librettist David Norris's *That Man Stephen Ward*, 2006–7; the latter, of composer Charles Wuorinen's and librettist Annie Proulx's *Brokeback Mountain*, 2014) correspond with Bauer's chapter in historical time span and the practical implications of connecting twenty-first century opera studies to critical conversations taking place in the twentieth century. Venn ('Narratives of the self in Thomas Hyde's *That Man Stephen Ward*') connects the opera to examples of late twentieth century operatic masculinity, contextualising it against works with which readers will likely be familiar, such as Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* (1945). He then provides a close reading of the work and its two staged performances, arguing that it should be read in the context of Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), which '[informs] the instrumentation, tone, form, and narrative techniques' of Hyde's opera (224). Everett ('Narrative agencies in Annie Proulx and Charles Wuorinen's *Brokeback Mountain*') builds upon analysis of Sarah Lucas's engagement with Seyla Benhabib[10] to consider narrative agency in Wuorinen's opera, breaking the concept into three categories: primary (the actions of protagonists Jack and Ennis), relational (the 'collective society's agencies', and the mountain) and generative (the mountain) (247). She provides a host of tools for analysing opera in performance, most notably focalisation, or 'the "point of view" the scenography establishes for the audiences as opposed to what the characters see' (247), and relates *Brokeback Mountain* to other 'expressionistic and modernist operas that pit an individual against an oppressive collective environment' (249).

The final essay in the volume, Mauro Fosco Bertola's 'From subjectivity to biopolitics: The dream in Salvatore Sciarrino's music theater' neatly connects the two halves of *Opera in Flux* by revisiting recurring themes and critical voices who have already appeared multiple times in the volume. Bertola reads Sciarrino's compositions as representative of Lehmann's postdramatic theatre and puts the extended vocal techniques employed by Sciarrino in dialogue with Cavarero's work[11]. Bertola examines how Sciarrino '[rearticulates]'

[9] Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford, CA, 2005); Michelle Duncan, 'The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body: Voice, Presence, Performativity', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16/3 (2004), 283–306; Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (Durham, NC, 2015) and *The Race of Sound: Listening, Timbre, and Vocality in African American Music* (Durham, NC, 2019).

[10] Sarah Drews Lucas, 'The Primacy of Narrative Agency: Re-reading Seyla Benhabib on Narrativity', *Feminist Theory* 19/2 (2018), 123–43.

[11] Cavarero, *For More than One Voice.*

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expressionism through the changing framing of the dream as a 'sociopolitical' space, relating that reading to the biopolitical writing of philosopher Giorgio Agamben (268).[12]

What material does *Opera in Flux* then offer as means to conceptualise opera in the present? A few key authors and concepts cited multiple times in the volume emerge as significant: Lehmann's postdramatic theatre, Bennett's materiality, and Cavarero, Duncan and Eidsheim's work on voice. Equally important are the concepts of representation, spatiality, amplification and their implications for understandings of this operatic voice among other concepts (Calico and Renihan's interventions come to mind here). Musically, Expressionism's influence in twenty-first century opera is an unexpected but important theme; so too is Novak's reading of the 'melodic turn' in twenty-first century opera as one interdependent with the thematic and compositional turn to the posthuman (62) and the range of stylistic and media influences from which operatic creators draw.

Presentiments on omnipresence

Presence, Morris notes in his introduction, is 'a term that gets around' (6). While a cheeky observation, these books demonstrate that the ubiquity of presence (or perhaps 'present-ing') is more than a critical concern, it is a key element of twenty-first century opera studies. If the performative turn of the past decade or so (still underway, I would argue) has pushed opera scholars towards expanded vocabularies and approaches to think about individual performances, and especially, performers, the focus on present-ing opera that emerges in these three volumes is perhaps a kind of antiphonal response to past decades' focus on opera in performance. Beyond their individual interventions, of which there are many, the combined effect of these authors' efforts is to demonstrate the unequivocal significance of conceptualising the wealth of spectatorial, audile and performative experiences that are part of twenty-first century opera. Whether these perceptive experiences originate in and from the singing objects in Fure's work, amplified voices in a traditional or non-traditional space (the amplification of the former now not so shocking), spectators in the theatre (or cinema), the *Live in HD* host offstage but still 'performing' at the Met, the video producers behind the bank of monitors, COVID-19 influenced 'car operas', or the operatic administrator making sense of the 'post' pandemic 2020s in their programming, the sensorial (and remediated) components of these experiences will continue to help scholars conceptualise what is presence, and what is present in our rich operatic, and for the moment at least, 'digital', world.

[12] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA, 1998).

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