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In response, a call

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I am happy to strive to add an appoggiatura – if my comments might be considered a minor bridge towards a deferred conclusion – to the very stimulating set of articles by Michelle Duncan, David Levin and Fred Moten that appear in this issue. It struck me that these three articles can be read as imbroglio in that they offer contest, or dissonant engagement, more than seamless convergence. Indeed, by underscoring the complexities that haunt our habits of reception in 'artistic' practice, these essays further the passion and urgency in listening closely to less audible aspects in any cultural production including opera.

In different ways, each of these articles brings concerns of that wiggly rubric 'performance studies' to bear on opera. As is by now widely known, performance studies scholars take up cultural products (from texts, to theatre productions, to objects, to opera, to acts of all kinds including the most banal gesture or slip of the tongue) and read them or engage them in the context of their 'eventness'. By 'eventness' I mean to suggest the embodied annunciation and reception, the iteration and audition, of acts in social circulation. Even a text becomes an act in this way of thinking in that it is the active circulation and reception of any text – *the architecture, practice and regulation* (*the habitus*) *of access and inaccess* – that gains in significance by means of this approach. In terms of performance, a focus on event may seem to offer a straightforward reading for the 'present moment' of production, and might be expected to result in annals of liveness: What happened where and when and to whom in any given 'show'. But the scene becomes complicated once we acknowledge, as Duncan and Moten and Levin acknowledge here, that the present moment of embodiment and annunciation is actually an enormously complex enterprise, not necessarily limited to a binarising metaphysic that would divide presence from absence, or body from voice, or (for that matter) past from present.

Indeed, once ghost notes, absent spectators, absent singers, silent voices, silenced voices, disembodied presences or the haunting aspects of history are taken into account as constitutive of the 'present momentness' of any event, our assumptions about what constitutes materiality, what constitutes 'liveness', and what marks the boundaries of those constitutions becomes undone. Levin, here, reads the material effects of a production that never took place. For him, the non-production remained present as a kind of resonant absence, available for reading in the space of its occlusion. While my comments will focus on the essays by Duncan and Moten, Levin's article provides an important complement to the more theoretical engagements of the other articles. It is interesting that just as opera studies has not turned to performance studies as readily as have dance studies, theatre studies, ritual studies, and even visual art, so too has performance studies been late in coming to consider opera. This is due in part to a strain of antitheatricality in performance

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studies itself, as well as a nervousness about the conjunction of voice and presence in the wake of poststructuralism (something Duncan addresses here quite astutely). Levin's reading of a production that did not see the stage due to the conservative curve of opera production in the United States bumps into the long history of antitheatricality that hounds that country (and even hounds its avant-garde).[1] As Moten makes clear, such antitheatricality is often a by-product of race- and gender-boundary policing, and so the politic of bodies and their markings for or as excessive is a deeply vexed issue – and an issue importantly pertinent in thinking through voice.

Reading for the material properties of the resonant voice, Duncan approaches voice as a kind of mobile embodiment – embodiment carried or passed in the resonant voice – an embodied resonance that moves in and through other bodies. Bodies here are a porous material where skin is less a limit than a portal. Voice is suggestive of a bodily fluid capable of entry and circulation. Voice and porous, open bodies ring of excess in a fastidious world of carefully kept binaries (and here a historical reading of the designation of Opera as excessive relative to the antitheatrical bias of protestantism, and the policing of binarised relations of the body in accordance with the work ethic, again finds refrain). The excess of voice as *body out of bounds* is part and parcel of the 'scandal' of the speaking body Shoshana Felman wrote about so importantly in the early 1980s. Duncan's essay does important work in mapping the implications of Felman's scandal onto the context of the singing body, but also onto the context of 'voice' as it has circulated as an emblem of excess, inarticulation and 'impasse' in philosophical and psychoanalytic engagements with meaning and meaning-making across the century.

If voice is fluid body in material motion, passing across space (and troubling the boundaries of time), then the implications are profound. Duncan writes near the end of her essay that voice 'seeps through porous bodies, remaining as haunting memories, haunting melodies'. Here the voice is not disembodied (itself already a haunting trace of something prior, some separated body). Rather it is the voice that leaves a trace – a trace *of voice*. What remains is the trace of the voice *as body*, in the sense that voice *is material, has/is body*. A kind of scandal becomes apparent in that bodies and their differences bleed (via voice) into the spaces we generally understand as between bodies. Vocal bodies bleed or flow across both time and space, refusing to be contained by the boundaries we (according to social habit) struggle to enforce. Because the voice has material weight *and* is invisible, because it does not align with a metaphysics of presence that delimits bodies and the subjects who inhabit them to binaries of presence and absence, voice calls us into response. Voice is thus a mobile material history – for isn't history that which is (re)composed in the tense and undecideable (even if inevitable) *passage* between a call and a response? Isn't it voice that traverses that passage?

[1] See Stephen J. Bottoms, 'The Efficacy/Effeminacy Braid: Unpicking the Performance Studies/Theatre Studies Dichotomy', *Theatre Topics*, 13/2 (2003), 173–87; and Rebecca Schneider, 'Hello Dolly Well Hello Dolly: The Double and Its Theatre', in *Psychoanalysis and Performance*, ed. Patrick Campbell and Adrian Kear (New York, 2001). On antitheatricality in general, see Jonas Barrish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, l985).

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When the live residue of recorded voice is considered, a fulsome creepiness can set in, where the cite of the live (and the site of the dead) becomes profoundly interi(in)animated (to borrow a word from Fred Moten). Working with and against Adorno (in a syncopated call and response to his writings on jazz, opera and the phonograph), Moten finds generative trouble in the binary of public and private, as well as in the binary of live and dead, or present and absent bodies. The trouble in these binaries is accentuated by recorded voice. Taking up Adorno's valorisation of the private and 'lonely' act of listening to the long-playing record, Moten asks whether Adorno's drive towards the formal and literary purity he finds in the seeming erasure of live performance and visual spectacle knows itself as 'pure' precisely by the resilient and resonant haptic materiality continuing as resident in *the voice* – a voice that, despite death, or in some syncopated relation to absence accentuated by technology, *remains live*. Taking up the 'troubled voice' – the 'tainted voice' – of Jessye Norman (troubled as a result of her race and gender, along lines articulated by Adorno), Moten asks whether the voice's trouble (the living excess of the body it carries) doesn't

> . . . resocialise the iconic loneliness of the phonographic mise-en-scène . . . its auditory extension of composition and its suppression of spectacle even as the trace of operatic staging irrupts forcefully into phonographic audition by way of the racial-visual language closely tied to the psychological extremity of loneliness?

For Moten, Norman's recording of Schoenberg's *Erwartung* is a 're*mater*ialisation' of Schoenberg's written score, but Moten's point is to take us further. He suggests that all writing (of scores, of texts) takes place where performance and recording converge – that is, in the tangle of the live – at the crossing over that is 'at once of and before' the time(s) we inhabit. Writing and recording is, writes Moten, 'the site of a *bodily* inscription'. But 'bodily' here is both present and absent – or, better, simply not delimitable to the enforced logic of such a binary. All writing is a medium for continuance, and all continuance takes place via 'rematerialisation' in encounter with body or with voice and its body in (time) passing.

As these three articles illustrate, fabulous imbroglial complexities, word-play, folds and tangles almost immediately attend to the 'performance' project when the boundaries of the live are recognised as habitual, and given to bleed. When materialities, and slippery, faulty (even scandalous) exigencies of bodies in social practice are taken into account simultaneously with the acknowledgement that embodiment does not stop at the skin but pierces the air between us, and punctures the time separating us, we are invited to listen to resonance as full of intersubjective potential as well as full of intertemporal moments. As surely as your eyes, now, rest on this *word* and hear that word in *your voice*, I (now) hear the same word in mine. Something, between here and there, is shared. Something (social) is called into response. Whether in agreement or disagreement, whether consonant or dissonant, hardly matters, as both are constitutional. What matters is engagement – with the material.

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