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# **The Integrative Performance Theory:**

**An Anti-Hermeneutic Approach for Opera**

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of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

Opera is currently without an integrated theory of practice, pedagogy and analysis that realises meaning within the act of performance. As a result, the various performance aspects of acting, movement and music have been separate and the operatic performer has been marginalised and actively suppressed. This thesis explores the historical reasons for this disintegration and suppression, examines modern philosophies to open the way for a new approach, critically examines Konstantin Stanislavsky's methodology in this context, and proposes a new theory and practice.

This thesis proposes that since it is the event that happens on the stage through the act of performance, to choose or be aware of the fields of operations that contribute to a happening is essential if the desired effect is to have all these operations working together in a network to allow for that event. Historically, the idea of a communal art form and a "unity" of the arts has been a re-occurring theme within the development of opera. Due to a lack of recognition of the operations of performance and an assumption that the meaning is in the texts, such interrelationships have been denied.

Part One of this thesis critically examines traditional operatic history. This history is usually narrated as a search for a unified element that will provide some proper and original meaning. A constant struggle for supremacy between words and music is described as a struggle revolving around the merits of meaning within various organisations of these texts. The very fact that the texts of music and/or poetic text were seen to have inherent meaning is a widely held assumption supported by history and practised in analysis, performance, and pedagogy. This assumption relegates the role of the performer to that of indicator or imitator of this supposed meaning, rather than an active creator of the drama.

In part Two, through the post-structural theories of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, I open the way for an anti-hermeneutic approach to operatic performance analysis and practice. Barthes essay, "From Work To Text," introduces the idea that there can be an interwoven series of mutually interdependent elements that create meaning in the moment, rather than a set object that imbues meaning by its own authority. Derrida's, "Signature, Event Context," explores the modulation of meaning and its repeatability. He examines this through concepts of intention, event and writing, and critically explores meaning in performatives.

Part Three re-examines the theories and practices of Konstantin Stanislavsky, and deals with issues of his methodology that have not been fully explored in the context of integration and meaning. The second section of Part Three proposes an event based theory of practice, pedagogy and analysis called The Integrative Performance Technique. It challenges conventional history, draws from select aspects of the Stanislavsky Technique that allow for integration, and transfers the anti-hermeneutic philosophies into a repeatable practice that creates musico/choreographic/dramatic meaning in the act of performance without the subordination of the texts.



## Statement

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except when due reference is made in the text.

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Experience Robinson Bryon

## Acknowledgments

This thesis is the culmination of many ideas and creative outbursts that have been inspired, nurtured, allowed, and accelerated by many special people throughout my performance, teaching, academic and personal life.

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## PREFACE

"I must create a system or be enslaved by another mans"<sup>1</sup>

William Blake

Where there is opera there is conflict and competition. Much of the competition stems from an unresolved question of whether the music should be subservient to the word, or the word to the music and which of these texts contain an accepted notion of a fundamental and original dramatic meaning. The other main aspect of competition within the operatic genre can be found between the various arts involved. Dance, music, and acting, for instance, come to the genre with their own traditions, languages and practices of interpretation. Between the performing arts, the fine arts and the texts of music and the libretto there is much to reconcile. This thesis is about these conflicts, and the origins of continued practices and prejudices that relegate the texts of music and libretto, and the performance aspects of movement, acting, and singing or playing of music, to a position of competition. In the thesis I introduce a theory for co-operation between the texts and performance arts, as a way of fulfilling an early vision that inspired the very inception of opera and that to this day is still unrealised.

This thesis offers a critical account of operatic history, an exploration of key post-structural theories that open up the way for an anti-hermeneutic approach to meaning in the score, a critical account of particular aspects of performance theory focussing on the work of Konstantin Stanislavsky, and proposes a solution to the raised issues of meaning, and interrelationship within the process of performance and analysis of opera.

Within this work I propose that since it is in the event of the performance that dramatic meaning actually happens, then to choose or be aware of the fields of operations that contribute to this happening is essential if the desired effect is to have all these operations working together in a network of the dramatic event. Historically, the idea of a communal art form and a unity of the arts has been a re-occurring theme within the development of opera.

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<sup>1</sup> Blake, William. Rpt. Minna Doskow. William Blake's Jerusalem. Structure and Meaning in Poetry and Performance London: Associated University Presses Ltd. 1982. 186.

Due to a lack of recognition of the operations of performance and an assumption that the meaning is in the texts, such interrelationships have been denied.

The traditional treatment of the conflicts within the operatic genre have pushed the act of performance and the role of performer into a subservient position. The problems surrounding opera have traditionally been addressed through the texts or the organisation of the performance disciplines. History tells the story of a constant competition between the texts of score and libretto and between the aspects of movement, music, and acting. The entire performance practice of opera - from training, to analysis, to direction, to the actual performance - has been affected and moulded by these dilemmas and by traditional assumptions of what meaning and drama is and where it resides. This thesis offers a proposal, a challenge and a way of understanding where we are now and how we got here. More importantly, it is a possible way forward at a crucial time for the survival of the art form.

Opera is losing audiences rapidly despite various attempts to court younger people, modernise the stories, create provocative advertising stunts, introduce multi-media based devices, and bring opera back to the "people" via sporting events and free outdoor concerts. It is sadly losing the battle to keep what is traditionally considered the pinnacle of all artistic genres alive. The problems surrounding opera's conceivable demise and the questions to do with why there is an ongoing struggle between the disciplines of opera and the texts within it cannot be answered within the current understanding of what drama and meaning is. Essentially, with each newly offered approach we are engaging in the same play and simply changing the props.

This thesis aims to catalyse a questioning of presumptions and myths that have for centuries moulded the performance practice of opera and hermetically sealed the creative process of opera from the crucially needed vitality that might save it. This work is primarily an analytic and historic study. However the ultimate aim is practice. The theory and criticism within this thesis is aimed at injecting new life into the performance process by dispelling myths that sentence the performer to perpetual servitude to the texts and other prescriptions such as

blocking, choreography, musical direction, while retaining a chosen meaning of the drama. The other main aim of this thesis is to address the dilemma of integration of the performance art forms within the proposed theoretical model.

Since the medium of this work is one of a doctoral thesis and is limited to theory, I would like it to be known that during the writing of this thesis the theories and analyses have given rise to practical work with some 150 opera singers, actors and dancers within ensemble, workshop, and private tuition environments with great success. I have also, as an actor, choreographer, director and classically-trained singer, practised the work personally. This thesis does not document that particular work or rely on its success for its theoretical validity, but it has been supported by a large practical component. Unlike many of the theories that have moulded the performance practices of opera that will be explored in the first chapter, this work and the way of looking at opera proposed, has not been created in a theoretical vacuum. The ultimate aim of this work is not one of theory but practice; however, it is appreciated that within the current climate, a practice that challenges old ways so dramatically must be substantiated by a solid modern theory and criticism of those most coveted and vehemently protected traditions and assumptions that surround, and consequently impede, the art form of opera.

The thesis begins with a history of opera. This is not an attempt to shed new light or uncover new historical information. The point is rather to provide an understanding of the generally accepted story of operatic history. The first chapter looks at the history that is taught in schools to opera singers, directors, composers, and producers of today. It is a general survey of the main figures of operatic reform and as a result there are many valid and interesting composers, directors, librettists, designers and performers that are not mentioned. The reasons for this general and traditional re-telling of this story have to do with the messages about meaning, drama, and performance that are reinforced with each reading of it. To re-organise the story and tell it from a more modern perspective would miss the point of exposing the prejudices that are reinforced within this history. The point is a critical examination of the traditionally told story. The prejudices in this history profoundly

contribute to the current condition of operatic performance practice. Within the telling of this story I trace a hermeneutic bias supported by an assumption that an operatic work has meaning, and that this meaning remains present only to be passively unveiled in the act of performance.

The latter part of the historical chapter focuses on Wagner and Brecht, due to their substantial influence on the performance practices of opera. Much is left unsaid about their personal lives and political leanings. Dealing with these areas would require a substantial thesis of its own. The focus on both men revolves around a general understanding of their places in the history of opera and their particular responses to the questions of interdisciplinary theatre and the competition between the score and the libretto.

Within the history of opera there is an ongoing fight between the primacy of words over music or music over words, along with a myth of ancient origin and unity. Both of these assumptions have given rise to an acceptance of the idea that it is in one of the texts of libretto or score, or both, or a certain organisation of them, that renders meaning in performance. The drama has been thought to be contained in these texts and the answer to how these texts should be organised has been thought to lie in the past with the Ancient Greeks.

As a result of this constantly developing prejudice and history, the performer has either served these texts obediently or been reduced to an attraction. There are two main ways in which the performer has appeared in the history of opera. The first is as a depicter of the perfect organisation of the text. They have consequently been instructed not to get in the way of the words or the music and to let these flow through them. In these instances the performer becomes a vessel, or a puppet to the composer and the librettist, or (as in more modern times) to the director. The texts, or the direction of the texts, was assumed to hold the meaning and the performer's job was to be a vehicle for that meaning which they were encouraged to depict. The second role of the performer is similar to an attraction in a circus show. In this role the performer defies gravity with feats of high notes or clever ornamentation; the meaning is in the very novelty of the act. In these eras, the critics

traditionally blame the singer for becoming unruly and ruining the sacred drama. Strangely this word "drama" has never really been defined and its process has never been solidly identified within the performance practices of opera. This elusive drama is always returned to as an organisation or design of the texts, or disciplines, and the performer is once again rendered servile. The actual act of performance has never held the meaning of the intended drama, although at times it has become its own drama. Consequently, the processes of movement, acting, singing, and other performing arts within the genre have never been interlinked in co-operation to allow for the drama to happen in the act of performance.

The issues explored in the chapters on opera history give rise to such questions as authorship, performance, meaning, and interdisciplinarity. In the next section, "An Anti-Hermeneutic Theory of Opera", these are addressed with the help of both Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. This is not a comprehensive analysis of either of these men's works or philosophies. Rather, it specifically examines two essays that deal precisely with the subjects of happening, event, authorship, intertwining process, text, intentions, performance and organisation.

The first of these essay is Roland Barthes', "From Work to Text". In it he defines what he refers to as "Work", which is a set thing or an object, tied up with issues of filiation which can be held in the hand and is traditionally thought to contain an unchangeable meaning. This "work" is comparable to the traditional understanding of the text of opera. In Barthes' essay he distinguishes between "Work" and what he calls "Text". His text is a process of weaving interdisciplinarity which creates meaning in its act of happening. Within this section I discuss how his "Text" differs from "work" and collides with "work" in much the same ways that performance and traditional understandings of operatic texts collide to create the perpetuating dilemmas of competition and depiction, establishing a distinction between the currently understood vessels of meaning within the context of the score, libretto, and performance mediums.

Derrida's essay, "Signature Event Context", examines the problems and assumed structures of a meaning's transference. Within opera these structures are wide-ranging and set against

each other due to their organisation as explored in Barthes' essay, and also due to their assumptions of transference of supposed inherent meaning as explored in Derrida's essay. Derrida argues that meaning happens in the moment and is not fully repeatable in any essential form. The traditional structural boundaries that encompass the process of transference such as intent, writing, and event are undermined by context and the happening of the moment.

With the help of Barthes, Derrida, and my own theoretical intervention, I hope to shake the foundations of operatic history that have presumed that dramatic meaning is inherent in the texts, there to be uncovered or drawn out in performance. I put forward a process that will allow for a woven interrelationship between the arts that will allow co-operation toward a dramatic happening in performance

It has been argued that the answer to operatic reform is in the singer's skill of expression through acting. Recent treatises on acting for the singer acknowledge that the act of performance contains a potential vehicle for creating meaning. However, even here the prejudices imposed by operatic history are sustained. The prejudice is put into practice by privileging an origin of meaning over either the word or the music, and requiring that the performer express the meaning that is supposedly inherent in the favoured text. In this climate the performer is also to adhere to an intended meaning of the author of that chosen text.

Konstantin Stanislavsky was one of the first widely received advocates for the idea that meaning happens in the act of performance and that the performer has a responsibility and influence over this meaning. There is hardly a surviving practice of acting in western theatre that is not a development or a revolt against the Stanislavsky system. Although he was followed by many in his quest for meaning on the stage within the context of experimental theatre, he is the only proponent of these concepts that consciously created a method intended for all actors and all styles in that he did not set out to reinvent theatre or create a new theatrical genre. Stanislavsky was primarily concerned with the actor and his practice, although aspects of Stanislavsky's work flow into directing, writing, and design.



Stanislavsky's theories and practices to this day provide the basis of the majority of western acting training.

Whether acknowledged or not, most of the treatises on acting for the singer draw their basic premises from Stanislavsky's notions of characterisation, intention, and sensory work. Stanislavsky's theories and practices are the basis of modern performance practice whether by acceptance or revolt. It is for these reasons that I focus primarily on Stanislavsky. However, I acknowledge that without the explorations of such proponents of theatre as Meyerhold, Tairov, Vakhtangov, Craig, Appia, Copeau, Artaud, Grotowski, Brook, and many others, this thesis would not have been possible.

In the Stanislavsky chapter, I will examine the fundamentals of his acting System. Stanislavsky's work was a turning point for all performing artists because he gave their work credibility and honour. He rendered performance a craft to be respected. There is much written for and against the work that he produced at the Moscow Art Theatre in the early years of this century. However, there is little written about the fact that the later formulations of the "system" were directly informed by his work with opera singers.

The section on Stanislavsky is a critical account of what his system achieved within context, meaning, authorship, performance process and opera. It is not intended as an exhaustive study on current performance practice or theory. The emphasis will remain on Stanislavsky and his developments around the key issues of integration and meaning. The chapter critically examines the assumptions that the Stanislavsky system has been built on, and distinguishes between the aspects that allow for co-operation, integration and meaning in the act of performance, and the aspects that do not. It also draws out the aspects that can be retained as part of a new theory of integration and drama in the act of performance. The section is both a criticism of the Stanislavsky system and subsequent interpretations while at the same time a mark of my utmost respect for the man and his work.

Finally I arrive at the main point of the thesis, which is to introduce a new theory of drama and interpretation. The theory incorporates a practice and analytical method that will allow

repeatability of a dramatic event without the need for depiction or subservience of the performer. The method proposed allows meaning to happen in the moment without the danger of losing any aspect of drama that is interpreted from the text. More importantly it overcomes the current competition between the texts and between the performing arts. I call this new approach, "The Integrative Performance Technique". It is a process-based theory of practice and analysis that demands a mutual interdependence between all aspects of performance and the texts. With the IPT these aspects do not operate in parallel to indicate an assumed inherent meaning, rather they co-operate creating meaning in the act of performance.

The key focus of the last section is that of integration. The theory is demonstrated in an analysis of sections of the opera Carmen. However, any opera could have been chosen and analysis is only one aspect where the theory can be applied. Due to this being a written piece of work, to write of the performance would be useless since the entire point is that of experiencing the meaning in the act of the happening performance. The analysis chapter is there to provide a new perspective, a practical method, and above all leave questions open for practical discoveries in performance, pedagogy, design, production and direction.

## PART ONE: A HISTORY OF A PREJUDICE

This chapter does not claim to provide a new history of opera. It is an overview of a typical history of opera as generally understood by the practitioners and theorists of music. The reason I am recounting this narrative is to demonstrate that the way in which this history has been told is organised around the perceived problem of the proper relationship between textual components and meaning. This chapter aims to prove that we need to pose the question of dramatic meaning in a different way. The history of opera is fraught with the practical and theoretical debate over whether the words or the music are more important. In fact the entire history of opera tells a story of a fluctuation between the two extremes. It can be concluded that the operatic form is the result of this central and still unresolved dilemma. Traditionally, the story of this fluctuation is told historically moving from one composer and theorist to another and focusing on those that are known for their perceived reforms.

Constant shifts between the primacy of words over music or music over words have often been implemented in the hope of achieving a greater sense of meaning within the form. This meaning has been referred to as "affections" in the earliest writings.<sup>1</sup> By the time Wagner arrives on the scene meaning takes on an emotional or romantic aesthetic. When we enter the modern age with Brecht, this meaning is seen as being that of an intellectual nature.

Up until Wagner, the key to achieving this meaning was thought to lie within the practices, writings and philosophies of Ancient Greek theatre. In effect, the fluctuations within the history of opera and the majority of the reforms that have been implemented have been based on an untouchable ideal, an ideal that has never been experienced or witnessed by any operatic composer, director, or librettist, either living or dead. I will argue that, however, performance is an art of the now, the present, and that to rely on a past that is only represented in writing and pictures to dictate a practice of an aesthetic that is known for its experiential power is to render the practice, at best, a depictorial representation of that desired present experience of performance. The reforms and developments that are based on

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<sup>1</sup> Some key examples of these early writings will be explored in the following pages in which Girolamo

this tenuous notion of originated meaning, within the highly mythologised ancient Greek theatre, still dictates the majority of performance, pedagogical and compositional practices to date.

### *Before opera*

The ideas that brought about the advent of opera stemmed from a concern that vocal music had degenerated into a shallow and technical genre and had lost a deeper sense of meaning. Furthermore, it was thought that there had been a vocal music that imbued this desired quality of meaning at the time of the Ancient Greeks. Much of the vocal music in the fifteen hundreds was very busy and dense in character. The accumulation of many notes and voices was seen at first as an almost mathematical achievement of the highest proportions, but eventually, as a desire for deeper meaning evolved, this particular style was increasingly perceived as overbearing and indulgent. The characteristic of the music that catalysed this concern was highly polyphonic, with many voices moving over and through each other in a way that made it difficult to hear the poetry being sung, or even to follow one melody line. It is not difficult to imagine how this particular style of vocal music was thought to have been devoid of a meaning that could touch the soul, especially when the words were often not even audible and the exercise of composing had taken on that of a scientific rather than an artistic activity.

Carlo Valgulio, writing at the turn of the sixteenth century, gives an account of the sentiments that catalysed the changes which laid the foundation for the early developments of a new musical genre. He first states what he feels the aesthetic of music should be:

I believe that there is no one in the world so insensitive, so leaded, that he is not moved with song. Theophrastus rightly said in the second book on music that the essence of music is the movement of the soul, which drives away the evils from the soul invaded by confusion.<sup>2</sup>

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Mei(1519-1594) mentions affections of the soul.

<sup>2</sup> Valgulio, Carlo. "The Proem on Plutarch's Musica to Titus Pyrrhinus" Rpt. in The Florentine Camerata:

Valgulio turned to the Greek scholar Theophrastus for inspiration in forging a new musical aesthetic and criticising the old. The idea of "drawing the soul" was to remain a constant throughout the history of opera in that it helped to establish an aesthetic for the desired experience of vocal music throughout the centuries. More importantly, this idea was to remain so elusive that in the search for a structure or design that would "draw the soul", it became a substantial driving force in the constant shifting of the primacy of words over music and music over words. According to Valgulio, the music of his time fell sadly short of this ideal:

If music did not have this effect of drawing the soul where it wants, it would become in essence, nothing. I would lament here the music of our time, had it not long since been loudly mourned.<sup>3</sup>

If the desired affect was to create a meaning in music - music that is essentially created to be performed - it would follow logically that the "drawing of the soul" was to occur during the performance. If this were the case then it would be fair to conclude that a practice of performing or expressing would be a major candidate for reformation in a music maker's quest for a deeper meaning. Interestingly, the focus of the following centuries hardly deals with this drawing of the soul in the act of performance; rather this deeper sense of meaning is tackled through the texts of the music and the word. Most performance treatises (some of which will be explored further on in this section) focus on instructing the performer to strictly adhere to meaning that was thought to have been written into the music and/or the word, by literally imitating the text so as not to alter any meaning.

The focus on the music and the word rather than on the performer can be more fully understood in the context of the apparent high opinion of the composer as an authority of meaning and conversely the lesser status of the performer in his role as transferrer of meaning.

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Documentary Studies and Translations Ed. & Trans. Claude V Palisca. New Haven: Yale University Press. 32.

<sup>3</sup> Valgulio, The Florentine Camerata 32.

In the singer's lesser role in the art of music-making he was often regarded as intellectually inferior and in possession of an inflated ego. Valgulio offers an example of the prevailing attitude toward the performer:

Franchino Gaffuro would unquestionably agree - that excellent musician of our age, whose book, composed with grace and learning, none of our singers read, whether because most of them are ignorant of grammar, or because for the most part this type of man is consumed by envy, as Hesiod says. This much I say only to encourage those whom such evils afflict so that they may make every effort to dispel ignorance and envy from their souls, as if they were the most dreadful beasts. An incredible love of music and musicians compels me to say these things.<sup>4</sup>

It is, perhaps, this common understanding with regard to the singer's intelligence that exempted them from any role or responsibility as custodian of meaning. This could be one reason for the prevailing obsession with the organisation of the texts within opera in the quest for meaning. This exclusion of the performer as having a role in any aspect of the creation of meaning is no more evident than when Valgulio wrote of music and the elements that make up a performance. Notice how he does not give a mention to the singer and, further-more, how the only aspect of performance that is included is that of dance:

The parts of music are harmonia, rhythms, metrics, organics (orchestration), poetics, and dance. This is the universal division of music; all practitioners of these parts are called musicians, but the most excellent are called poets and their art poetics.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Valgulio, The Florentine Camerata 32.

<sup>5</sup> Valgulio, The Florentine Camerata 38.

### The Florentine Camerata

Operatic history traditionally begins with the theories and musical innovations developed and debated by the Camerata, the famous Florentine group of scholars, scientists, and musicians. The majority of the meetings were said to be held at the home of Giovanni Bardi(1534-1612) and were attended by such figures as Vincenzo Galilei, Giulio Caccini(1545-1618) (a well known singer and composer), Jacopi Peri(1561-1633) (credited by many with the composition of the first opera), Ottavio Rinuccini(1562-1621), and Jacopi Corsi(1561-1602).

These men continued the fight to reform the highly polyphonic style of music and to return to a state of greater meaning in art. They did this largely through studying and experimenting with ideas found in the Ancient Greek texts.

One of their most important conclusions was that the words ought to take precedence over the music. With this conclusion a hierarchy of meaning was established. As previously discussed, the performer was becoming established as the transferrer of meaning, and as such excluded from being a custodian of the meaning. With the growing establishment of the word's primacy over the music, and the performer's role as transferrer, it can be concluded that the words were to take precedence over everything, including the performance of those words. The word was then considered to have an inherent meaning, seemingly unchanged even in the performance of those words. This situation is not unlike one in which after ascertaining that a book has meaning, deciding that it is in the actual physical page where the meaning resides, and that the words are present to indicate and ornament the inherent meaning supposedly in the material of the page. The poet was considered the custodian of meaning and the action was considered to be the domain of the poet. The performer indicated that action, or provided an ornamental role to this "action of the poet".

In Bardi's text on how tragedy should be performed, *Discorso come si debba recitar*, he expresses this sentiment:

Let us now come to discuss the performance. It is of great importance to have the most excellent actors who express the action of the poet well, for a beautiful speech not well delivered or music badly sung will seem less worthy than it is: so a tragedy badly played will not make known its excellence and beauty. (Emphasis added)<sup>1</sup>

The poet was also seen as the creator of the meaning within the vocal music and the words were seen to hold that meaning. The singer was to serve that meaning. This positioning of the poet and the word were held in such high esteem that anyone who challenged such a concept was considered to violate any sense of morality or common sense:

It is so much more distressing when you find some who have the temerity to say that the words are not the principle thing in music. This is directly opposed to the good, right, honest, and fitting. In my opinion these wretched fellows have fallen into such folly through the shameless flattery of illiterate common people, who are heedless - for such is their nature - of anything good and perfect.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the singer's servile role to the text's supposed inherent meaning, the voice was seen as a distinct and almost separate phenomenon from the actual act of performance. The quality of the voice was also thought to have an inherent meaning, and when applied correctly to the created meaning of the poet could induce affections of the soul. This logic is found in a letter from Girolamo Mei (1519-1594) to Vincenzo Galilei (Late 1520s-1591):

Now nature gave a voice to animals and especially to man for the expression of inner states. Therefore it is logical that, the various qualities of the voice being distinct, each should be appropriate for expressing the affection of certain determinate states, and each, furthermore, should express easily its own affection but not that of another. Thus the high-pitched voice could not suitably express the affections of the intermediate and far less those of the low, nor the intermediate any of those of the

<sup>1</sup> Bardi, Giovanni. "Discorso come si debba recitar Tragedia" Rpt. in The Florentine Camerata: Documentary Studies and Translations Ed. & Trans. Claude V Palisca. New Haven: Yale University Press. 143.

<sup>2</sup> Bardi, The Florentine Camerata 121.



high or the low. Rather, the quality of one ought necessarily to impede the operation of the other, the two being opposites.<sup>3</sup>

With this comment we see a transgression of the text's inherent meaning. The very timbre of the voice was assigned an emotional meaning that was seen as essential. So it was perceived that it was the quality of the voice that provided the expression, not the singer's act of performance; just as it was the words that held the meaning and not necessarily what was done with those words. Mei wrote of the essential organisation of the vocal pitches and provided an example of the reasoning that brought about the concepts that still survive in the character and vocal categories exercised today within the *Fach* system:

It is likewise very well known that the pitches intermediate between the extremely high and the extremely low are appropriate for showing a quiet and moderate disposition of the affections, while the very high are signs of a very excited and uplifted spirit, and the very low of abject and humble thoughts, in the same way that a tempo intermediate between rapid and slow reveals a poised spirit, while a rapid one manifests an excited spirit, and a slow tempo a sluggish and lazy one. It is clear that all these qualities both of pitch and of time have by their natures the capacity to move affections similar to their own.<sup>4</sup>

With this letter we see that the musical organisation, namely the rhythm in this instance, was also to hold meanings of the spirit. Again, it was not in the manner or intent of performance that these rhythms evoked the meaning; it was the positioning, design or organisation of the note's timing in the text that held the dramatic meaning of the work. The singer was given maxims and rules, to adhere strictly to the organisation of the texts, in the hope of achieving the appropriate affections of the soul. It could be seen that the singer was a nameless vessel through which the meaningful texts passed. In his *Discorso mandato a Guilo Caccini*

<sup>3</sup> Mei, Girolamo, "Letter [to Vincenzo Galilei] of 8 May 1572" Rpt. in The Florentine Camerata Documentary Studies and Translations Ed. & Trans. Claude V Palisca. New Haven: Yale University Press. 57.

<sup>4</sup> Mei, The Florentine Camerata 59.

*romano sopra la musica antica, e 'l cantar bene*, Bardi once again returns to the writing of the Ancient Greeks for support of the text:

I would advise you, therefore, to fix forever in your memory what Aristotle says, that in rhythms are images of fortitude and the other things he mentioned. Above all else your principle objective should be not to spoil the verse in singing by making a long syllable short, or a short one long, as is habitually done every time; and what is worse, it is done by those who consider themselves great men in this art, with such poor grace and style that any connoisseur of good poetry reacts with great pain and distress, something unworthy of our century, surely.<sup>5</sup>

The singer then was to adhere strictly to rhythmic organisation. It was in this seemingly perfect organisation that the affections of the soul were held. It would seem that this rhythm was seen to have inherent meaning that was to be transferred when vocalised unchanged in the act of performance (if that is indeed possible). This rhythmic organisation, which was presumably the joint construct of the poetry (through the rhythm of the words) and the music (through the note values), was kept within the established hierarchy of meaning where the poetry prevailed. In Mei's letter he expresses distress at the music over-riding the poetry:

...Nor should we overlook the inestimable negligence of our musicians with respect to note values and rhythm in the various parts, whether each part is considered by or the entire corpus of them together. Extremely frequently, if not always, this is contrary to the nature of what would express the idea that the words signify, which arguably ought to be pursued beyond any other consideration. And this lacks any real distinction in each; rather it differs haphazardly from one part to the other, since often the soprano hardly moves, while the tenor flies, and the bass goes strolling in slipper-socks, or indeed the other way around.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Bardi, *The Florentine Camerata* 121.

<sup>6</sup> Mei, *The Florentine Camerata* 63.

Mei goes further to express the commonly held notion that when this hierarchy of music serving poetry is somehow disturbed, the affections are weakened and the audience's experience is compromised:

How much imperfection this causes and how much this weakens the expression of the affections, through which the listener is moved to experience a similar feeling, does not require further explanation, for it is something that should be obvious to the littlefishes, as they say, as well as to those who want to consider carefully the nature of each affection.<sup>7</sup>

It would seem that the audience was not thought to experience or be touched by a singer's performance; rather, they would experience an organisation of the texts. It would also seem that this organisation of the text had as an element of its design such power that it could affect the soul. A singer's expression, or any performance element that was not a strictly literal transference of the texts (if indeed possible), was thought to be substandard and immoral. Bardi expresses this viewpoint in his discourse to Caccini:

I would add that the best thing a singer can do is to perform a song well and punctiliously, as it was composed by its creator. And do not do as some, who - and it is comical- from the beginning to the end so spoil a madrigal with their unhinged passaggi, thinking that they will thereby be considered clever, that even the composer does not recognise it as his offspring. The fine singer must, in addition, execute his songs with as much smoothness and sweetness as he can summon and not persist in certain opinions, such as that music ought to be sung boldly.<sup>8</sup>

Within this stringent hierarchal structure, constructed with the supposed authority of the Ancients, and with the aim of creating meaningful affections of the soul, the singer and the

<sup>7</sup> Mei, *The Florentine Camerata* 63.

<sup>8</sup> Bardi, Giovanni, "Discorso mandato a Giulio Caccini detto romano sopra la musica antica, e 'l cantar bene". Rpt. in *The Florentine Camerata: Documentary Studies and Translations* Ed. & Trans. Claude V Palisca. New Haven: Yale University Press, 127.

performance were clearly at the very bottom of the rung. At best, the voice was like a condiment to the perfect text:

Apropos, the great philosophers, and specifically Plato, say that the singer must follow the verse of the poet, adjusting his voice like a good cook who adds to the food that he has seasoned well a little sauce or condiment to make it pleasing to his lord.<sup>9</sup>

It would seem it was not considered that there could be a favourable sense of meaning conveyed in the actual act of performance. It was in this peculiar state of affairs with regard to the singer, meaning and the audience's experience, that opera was born.

### *The Early Operas*

For centuries opera had been evolving from a few directions. From as early as the tenth century, liturgical dramas containing music and text had been a developing tradition. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there were Mystery plays known as *Sacre Rappresentazioni*, which are commonly considered to be the precursor to both the oratorio and the operatic genre. These *Sacre Rappresentazioni* utilised scenery and costumes to varying degrees and combined music and text. By the fifteenth century, within the various courts in Florence, Milan, Venice, Rome, Naples, Mantua and Ferrara, it was the practice to include a performance of a drama that, in addition to spoken text, included music to be sung and danced to. These performances were often put on as part of elaborate festivities, usually connected to a specific occasion such as a marriage, and took place in such houses of the families of Sforzas, Viscontis, Gonzagal, d'Estes, and the Medicis.

Opera as we know it is said to have begun with the production of *Dafne* in 1597, with a libretto by Ottavio Rinuccini (1562-1621) and music by Jacopi Peri (1561-1633). The major factor that differentiates this work from earlier examples is that *Dafne* was set fully to

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<sup>9</sup> Bardi, *The Florentine Camerata* 115.

music. With this continuous line of music there emerged a new form and a new declamatory style of the vocal line.

Jacopi Peri, like the previously mentioned Giulio Caccini, was a singer who aspired to the same ideals as that of Bardi's Camerata. Ottavio Rinuccini was the main poet in a break away Camerata that also aspired to the notion of the poetic text as prime vehicle of meaning, through affections, as an attempt to return to an ancient ideal and a reformation of the prevalent dense polyphonic style of composition.

A new vocal style called *stile recitativo* emerged. It was born out of the ideals of the early Camerata which revolved around the basic consensus that the word contained the meaning and, furthermore, that a subservience of the music to the word would allow that inherent meaning to come through the sung word with the aim of creating "affections of the soul". Prior to the development of the *stile recitativo*, there were styles already in place for solo singing, but these were different in that they were commonly applied to epic poems, madrigals transformed to solo song, recitative and airs. Peri's new style was particularly developed for dialogue within the context of music within theatrical drama

Peri's *stile recitativo* developed into a dramatic monodic form of melody. The melody was subservient and dictated by speech pattern and resulted in a declamatory and expressive note organisation which stemmed from the poetic content and was imitated through rhythm, tone, and pitch in a continuous style.

This restructuring of the priorities of melody and harmony from the consonant and dissonant organisation of the early madrigals to that of *Stile Recitativo* shifted the position of harmony within a dramatic structure. No longer was harmony to be based on strict modal intervallic relationships. It was now to be utilised in support of the melody which was still subservient to the word. Peri wrote of how he determined the inclusion of dissonances and consonances within this new philosophy:

I recognised likewise that in our speech certain sounds are intoned in such a way that harmony can be built upon them, and in the course of speaking we pass through

many that are not so intoned, until we reach another that permits a movement to a new consonance<sup>10</sup>

This view of the intonation of speech as a central element in the development of the harmonic structure consequently put the vocal line into a very powerful compositional position. The vocal line could now dictate the harmonic journey and consequently the dramatic evolution of a work as informed by the text.

So at this commonly recognised inception of the operatic genre we have a melodic practice where the vocal line was controlled by the text and the dramatic meaning resided in this line and the poetry. Furthermore, with Peri's *Stile Recitativo* the expression of the drama and affections was deeply embedded in the organisation of the musical text, which was subservient to the poetic text. In Peri's account of his organisation of the text of music and word it was in the name of affection and emotion that this organisation was designed:

Keeping in mind those manners and accents that serve us in grief and joy and similar states, I made the bass move in time with these, faster or slower according to the affections. I held the bass fixed through both dissonances and consonances until the voice of the speaker, having run through the various notes, arrived at a syllable that, being intoned in ordinary speech, opened that way to a new harmony.<sup>11</sup>

Though both Peri and Caccini were professional singers, it is interesting that the human and emotive element remained in the text and not necessarily in the act of performance, whether that be vocal technique or expression of drama. It would seem that all meaning that was to render affections or experience in the act of performance was predetermined by an organisational design of the musical and poetic texts. It was through textual narrative and harmonic modulation that the inherent meaning would be uncovered. The treatises on performance remained in favour of rules and maxims designed to keep the singer from obscuring the textual organisations for fear that any change would result in an obscuring of

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<sup>10</sup>Peri, Jacopi. "Le musica sopra l'Euridice" (Florence, 1600) Rpt. in Humanism in Italian Renaissance Musical Thought. Ed. & Trans. Claude V. Palisca. New Haven: University Press. 1985. 428-432.

the inherent meaning. The idea that meaning is rendered in the act of performance was still hundreds of years away.

Emotion and narrative were indicated through certain harmonies, such as the use of a tri-tone to indicate evil forces; much in keeping with the Camerata's studies, rhythm indicated urgency and feeling, catalysing affections. Poetry, through verse structure and the use of emotive words, took on the role of narrative and expression. The performer was a mere vehicle of transference.

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<sup>11</sup> Peri, Humanism in Italian Renaissance Musical Thought 428-432.

### Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) is traditionally seen as the first major operatic reformer. Although in theory he adhered to the notion that the words must preside over the music, in practice he initiated devices and expanded aspects of the musical text so that it too could contain dramatic meaning.

Traditional studies of Monteverdi within accounts of operatic history tend to cite his production of *L'Orfeo* (1607) as the prime example of his musical innovations.<sup>1</sup> *L'Orfeo* not only provides an ideal catalogue of examples of the innovations for which Monteverdi is so famous, but also marks the initial success of his important relationship with librettist Alessandro Striggio (1573-1630). Together Striggio and Monteverdi would collaborate on many operas bringing the art of secular drama to the fore and providing humanistic interpretations of the classic stories.

It was Monteverdi's appreciation of music's dramatic potential that inspired many of his major compositional innovations. For the most part the innovations were structural. He altered the organisation of harmony by using discordant tones much more freely than his predecessors, and used the relationships between consonances and dissonances so that they encompassed a harmonic structure which moved towards a tonal goal, at times using the cycle of fifths.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the widely prescribed university text, Donald Jay Grout & Claude V. Palisca's, A History of Western Music, *L'Orfeo* is cited as the main example of Monteverdi's works and innovations. Leslie Orrey categorises his section on seventeenth-century Rome within his, A Concise History of Opera. London: Thames and Hudson, 1977., with Monteverdi's work and states that "The time was ripe for a miracle - a word that is hardly too strong for *Orfeo*." In John D. Drummond's Opera in Perspective he focuses on *Orfeo*, and provides an in depth analysis of Monteverdi's musical innovations between the pages of Drummond, John D. Opera in Perspective. London: J.M Dent and Sons, 1980. 121-136.

<sup>2</sup> Since the point of this section is not to provide yet another reading of the operas being discussed, but rather to survey the musical innovations with regard to the evolution of meaning within the operatic genre, I will not be re-analysing the works cited. There is copious musicological research available in this area. I will however cite from time to time particular texts in the area that may be useful for further study. For a more indepth account of the comparisons between Striggio and Monteverdi's use of harmony refer to: Palisca, Claude V. Baroque Music. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1981. 29-47. and for an excellent and detailed account of Monteverdi's harmonic and melodic developments utilising *L'Orfeo* as the prime example see: Drummond, John D. Opera in Perspective. London: J.M Dent and Sons, 1980. 121-136.



Monteverdi also expanded the use and expressive properties of orchestration. In *L'Orfeo* the orchestra included some forty instruments. Although they never played at the same time the ensemble was considerably larger than Peri's arrangements which basically used a harpsichord with a few other accompanying instruments (such as lutes). Monteverdi on the other hand had a complete family of strings, sackbuts, flutes, cornets, trumpets, and an array of continuo instruments including a harpsichord and a pipe organ. Monteverdi made innovative associations between tone and poetic text. For instance, he used sounds to characterise moods for dramatic effect. A well known example of this is found in his use of the sackbuts to help illustrate the regions of hell within his *L'Orfeo* (1607).<sup>3</sup>

Within the surviving correspondence of Monteverdi, with particular regard towards the preparation of productions, it becomes evident that he was sympathetic to the plights of his singers.<sup>4</sup> He concerned himself with particular issues regarding ample rehearsal time to prepare the text and also sufficient time to make costume changes. However, there was still no performance practice that harnessed the act of performance as a vehicle for meaning. The practices that insisted in keeping the singer faithful to the text acknowledged through defence that the act of performance could potentially affect and thus alter the dramatic meaning. The insistence of complete submission to the written organisation was due to the fact that essentially the meaning was thought to be inherent in the texts. Furthermore it seems that it was in the best interest of those texts to keep the performers comfortable so that they could serve those texts as faithfully as possible.

Monteverdi's sensitivity to the singer extended to casting. He considered the tones of the voice when choosing singers to play roles and took into account what he felt was dramatically appropriate for larger and smaller voices. He requested that he be told in advance who was to sing so that he could alter the score to suit their vocal ability. However,

<sup>3</sup> This particular use of the instruments is noted in yet another reading of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*. For more detailed information see: Donington, Robert. *The Rise of Opera*. London: Faber and Faber, 1981. 169

<sup>4</sup> There is much evidence of Monteverdi's concerns and consideration regarding singers within his letters. Among the issues found in these letters are those to do with the technique of the singer, rehearsal processes, and staging. None, however, mention acting in the sense that it can create a meaning on the stage. See Stevens, Denis, Ed. & Trans. *The Letters of Claudio Monteverdi*. Faber and Faber, London, 1980. 341, 51,

it remained the job of the music to express the drama, and the affections and the job of the performer to be precise. Monteverdi's consideration of the performance worked to produce the most faithful imitation of his texts, not necessarily the best dramatic expression creating meaning in the moment of performance.

Monteverdi broke away from the strict monodic practices of his predecessors and expanded the recitative into a more melodic sweeping organisation of the vocal line that he felt was more in keeping with the meaning and affection of the words, rather than the literal rhythmic or pitch imitation of speech patterns. The result was more melodic than Peri's style in that the recitative's line was extended through a more sophisticated use of tonal organisation which resulted in a more lyric result than that of the strict declamatory style. The music did not blindly follow the poetic text, but interpreted its emotive meaning.

Monteverdi re-introduced an element of virtuosity and added density within melismatic passages that at times seem very florid. He added ornamentation to suit both his own interpretation of the dramatic meaning and the singer's ability to handle his composition. Monteverdi often wrote two versions, one more florid for the more accomplished technician and one less difficult. The conglomeration of Monteverdi's musical innovations were applied to solo airs, dances, ensembles (resembling the madrigalian structure), duets, and orchestral interludes. Monteverdi understood the necessity for variation within the dramatic context. John Drummond, in his book Opera in Perspective goes so far as to credit Monteverdi with the invention of varied repetition in music-drama:

Monteverdi was faced with a problem new to Western European music but which lies at the center of "opera": how to give musical shape to development narrative drama. The musical shapes favoured in post-Renaissance Western music rely upon

the repetition of remembered sounds to make their effect; repetition is however difficult to achieve in circumstances where dramatic action is continually developing.<sup>5</sup>

Monteverdi used repeated formal compositional structures, such as the twenty six orchestral interludes that he composed for *L'Orfeo*, which helped to differentiate scenes and allowed for dramatic emphasis. These differences served as distinguishing factors between moods and dramatic sections and helped to indicate aspects of character development. Narrative, character development, emotions, and moral meaning were indicated by the texts of either music or poetry.

Monteverdi used repeating harmonic sequences to emphasise dramatic structure. Drummond identifies one such instance in *L'Orfeo* as a precursor to the *Leitmotiv* of the Romantic era:

Officially, the leitmotiv was not invented until the nineteenth century, but if a *Leitmotiv* is defined as a memorable musical idea which recurs to mirror the return of a dramatic idea, and whose repetitions have a structural function, then Monteverdi's G minor/E major opposition must be regarded as a *Leitmotiv*. It is simply, a way of communicating drama through music, or as the seventeenth-century composers termed it, *Dramma per musica*.<sup>6</sup>

That opera was eventually defined as drama through music, rather than by the views of the Camerata as "drama through sung poetry", is due largely to Monteverdi's major contributions that challenged the strict primacy of poetry over music. By the application of melody, harmony, rhythm, and orchestration as an active interpreter of the poetic text Monteverdi made the text of music a sister text to the poetry and rendered it dramatically meaningful in its own right. This arguably set the scene for a future of incessant competition between the texts, a competition that makes up the traditional content of operatic history.

<sup>5</sup> Drummond, John D. *Opera in Perspective*, London: J.M Dent and Sons, 1980. 122.

<sup>6</sup> Drummond, *Opera in Perspective* 133-134.

### *Theory and Practice*

Monteverdi's theories focused on a distinction between the old practice where the music dominated the poetic text, and the new, where it was perceived that the poetic text should dominate the music in order to retain a pure and original meaning reminiscent of the Ancient Greeks. He called the former Prima Practica and the later Seconda Practica. However it is interesting that though his aim was to serve the text with "natural imitations of the text", Monteverdi's prominence in history is due largely to the many lasting contributions he made to the musical text. Most of these contributions as discussed previously have an expressive function. Ironically, they can be seen to have brought music more to the forefront in the continued quest for meaning.

In a letter to Giovanni Battista Doni (a wealthy patron of the arts with an avid interest in music), Monteverdi sheds light on his reason for distinguishing between practices, and refers to a treatise on the subject of Seconda Practica that was unfortunately never completed:

The title of the book will be as follows: *Melody, or the Second Musical Practice*. I mean the second as regards numerical order, in modern style; first in order, in the old style. I am dividing the book into three parts corresponding to the three aspects of melody. In the first I discuss word-setting, in the second, harmony, and in the third, the rhythmic part. I keep telling myself that it will not be acceptable to the world, for I found out in practice that when I was about to compose "the Lament of Arianna" - finding no book that could show me the natural way of imitation not even one that would explain what an imitator ought to be (other than Plato, in one of his shafts of wisdom, but so hidden that I could hardly discern from afar with my feeble sight what little he showed me) - I found out (let me tell you) what hard work I had to do in order to achieve the little I did do in the way of imitation, and therefore hope it is not going to be displeasing, but will rather prove successful - as is desired - because

in the long run I shall be happier to be moderately praised in the new style, than greatly praised in the ordinary; and for this further presumption I ask a fresh pardon...<sup>7</sup>(Emphasis added)

In Monteverdi's time the concept of bringing a story to life in a theatrical setting seemed to revolve around this notion of imitation of meaning. This meaning was thought to reside somewhere in the poetic text, to be uncovered and then imitated so as to induce affections. Monteverdi's musical innovations, however, rendered the composition a sister text, a text that could also tell a story with the use of themes, repetition, rhythm, melody, and orchestral timbre.

When Monteverdi grappled with the problem that "no one could show him the natural way of imitation, not even one that would explain what an imitator ought to be", he derived from Plato's Republic the idea that the art of performance is an expression of text, harmony, and rhythm. The performer was bound, still, to imitate the organisation and composition of two texts (music and poetry). The singer was not the "actor" of the drama. Monteverdi helped to render the musical text a holder and imbuer by way of imitation rather than a performer of the affections. The singer remained the vessel of transference.

It could be said that the cycle of music over poetry and poetry over music rendered the text the imitator of text for hundreds of years to come in that either the music was placed to express the supposed inherent meaning in the word, or the word to express the supposed inherent meaning in the music.

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<sup>7</sup> Denis, 410.

### The Librettists, Apostolo Zeno (1668-1750) and Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782)

When considering the opera of the sixteenth century it is impossible to deny the influence of two librettists who led the development of opera. They are Apostolo Zeno (1668-1750) and his most prolific successor, Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782). They both in their own times presided as court poet at the Habsburg court in Vienna under Charles VI. This was a time of major growth for opera, both in the public and court theatres. Through these two figures, opera acquired the unshakeable tag, *Dramma per Musica*, and as a consequence of their developments the old tragic opera evolved into what is now referred to as *opera seria* (this form will be discussed in further detail in the following pages).

From this point in history, opera became particularly complicated to define. As a result it seems that historians, enthusiasts, composers and singers are forced to pick sides between an old classical ideal as manifest in the theories of Zeno and the inevitable emergence of musical composition as an object of its own meaning. Drama became an elusive element which could be construed to lie between the music and the text.

Contributing to the complexity is the massive irony in the development of the art form. The irony lies within the changing perception of where meaning was thought to reside. Opera was born in an attempt to return to an ancient origin of meaning that was somehow executed via a perfect union of the arts. It was said to induce affections and speak to the soul. The first developers concluded that the form must rely on and be structured around the poetic text. Again, this construction was born out of the assumption that it was within the poetic text that the dramatic meaning was inherent. Monteverdi, in honouring these theories, activated the musical composition in an attempt to imitate the supposed inherent meaning in the text. However, rather than imitate he interpreted - which consequently created its own meaning. One of the greatest ironies of this time is that it set off a competition surrounding the residence of meaning. Through music's new found ability to interpret the poetic text via

musical devices, it became a site of meaning in its own right. Early notions of integration and affections of the soul became muddled.

This muddle gave way to an era of operatic development that Joseph Kerman refers to as, "the dark ages of opera".<sup>1</sup> During this time opera experienced a great period of activity in both Italy and France. Both places took the genre in different directions, again, ironically, alienating dramatic meaning from either textual designs or format. Kerman summarises the French style as "stilted entertainment combining Baroque excesses with the driest neoclassicism", and summarises the Italian style as having evolved into a "shameless virtuoso display, emasculating classic history into a faint tedious concert in costume."<sup>2</sup> It was in this operatic climate that Apostolo Zeno entered the scene.<sup>3</sup>

### *Zeno*

In the scholarly works and poetry of Zeno, we once again find an almost militant dedication to a classical ideal. His ideas were much in keeping with those of the Camerata, both arguing that the poetic text must take primacy. Zeno, however, placed music not so much as the servant of the poetic meaning but as more of an accompaniment to the poetry that was supposedly self-sufficient in expressing the drama. As a result, any question of integration or an ideal relationship between the poetic text and musical text drifted into the background.

Zeno's libretti were often compared to the plays of the French dramatists Corneille and Racine. This comparison was due partly to differences between the French and the Italian operas at the time. The French opera, typified by those of Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), were more formal in structure with greater attention to diction (partly due to the intonation of

<sup>1</sup> Kerman, Joseph, *Opera as Drama*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Kerman, *Opera as Drama* 40.

<sup>3</sup> This opinion offered by Kerman although contentious, is indicative of a common understanding that during this period in operatic history the genre fell into an era that lacked a deeper sense of meaning and drama. Since the point of this chapter is not to present an exhaustive study of opinions about various eras in opera, but is to examine such issues around the genre, reforms, composers, librettist and meaning, I will not focus on the various arguments of taste surrounding this particular issue.

the French language). The format contained more recitative than that of the Italian operas. Whereas the Italian style incorporated the elaborate aria, the French contained more simple airs.

Michael F. Robinson points out that perhaps the comparisons between Zeno's libretti and the French plays had more to do with particular theatrical conventions such as "supernatural phenomenon, dancing and divertissements."<sup>4</sup> The French relied upon devices such as ballet and simulated supernatural phenomena within the operatic structure that had little or nothing to do with the dramatic text. This aspect was later to be considered an abuse in that it was considered to subvert dramatic meaning. Wagner was to deal with this particular problem in great detail. (This point will be explored in the later chapter on Wagner.)

David Kimbell's comprehensive study on Italian opera summarises four of Zeno's major contributions to the libretto:

First, Zeno's real interest was drama not music: indeed he seems to have been largely indifferent to music. Music was therefore quite literally to be kept in its place. He did this by shifting it to the end of the scene.<sup>5</sup>

Kimbell explains that Zeno used music mainly for theatrical purposes, to render the drama more naturalistic. In this way the music could be seen as a sort of accompaniment or backdrop for the drama. The music had a similar position in the dramatic structure as that of the scenery. In this way Zeno could restore the poetic text as sole holder of meaning by confining music to a set position as server of the poetic text, this would be more in keeping with the neo-classical and literary humanist ideas of the early Camerata. Through attempting this ideal Zeno marginalised the musical text within the dramatic structure of opera. One of the ways he achieved this marginalisation was through the extended use of poetic text.

<sup>4</sup> Robinson, Michael F. *Opera before Mozart*, Hutchinson & Company LTD, 1966. 108.

<sup>5</sup> Kimbell, David. *Italian Opera*, Cambridge University Press, 1991. 187-189.



Kimbell explains how he did this through recitatives:

At the same time Zeno enlarged enormously the scale of recitatives between each of the musical numbers, so as to accommodate all the literary, philosophical and moral graces for which they might be admired by *cognoscenti*.<sup>6</sup>

Zeno also incorporated rapid successions of emotions into his libretti to satisfy the dramatic taste of the time. The "packing" in of emotional episodes can be perceived as the Baroque interpretation of the early notion of affections. Along with the apparent emotional requirement there was also the theatrical requirement of high spectacle to be incorporated into the plot. These elements of high emotion, elaborate set design and stage devices typify Baroque opera. It could be argued that these set devices and elaborate costumes of the era (which escalated in some cases to extreme proportions) created a performance event almost separate from the music and poetry, creating meaning in their own right.

The irony in Zeno's reforms lies in the fact that in an attempt to return meaning to the poetic text in the name of restoring dramatic meaning to the art form, he set the scene for chaos. There was little co-operation between the musical and poetic text, let alone the costume or set design. Kimbell expresses a view of this competition:

The fact that music was confined to the close of the scene, and that Zeno developed his dramas as fully as possible without reference to the needs of the composer, meant that composers were rarely called upon to exercise their finer skills in illuminating the dramatic climaxes, or intensifying the dramatic crises. The dawning scene that in the *dramma per musica* poet and composer were avoiding one another as much as they were collaborating was an important factor in the innovations and reforms that took place later in the century<sup>7</sup>

The "confining" to a place that lay outside the field of the narrative drama set the scene for the emergence of music as an audio scenery device which evolved into a virtuosic display.

<sup>6</sup> Kimbell. 188

<sup>7</sup> Kimbell. 187-189.

This display could only be set against the supposedly inherent meaning thought to lie in the poetry. The result was a marginalising of any dramatic meaning.

The drama became the very act of this competition as manifest in vocal and visual display. The performers were even further away from any role as imbuer of meaning due to the fact that there was still no performance technique that acknowledged any dramatic meaning in the act of performance. The singers became puppets in the competitive game between poetry and music. The singers were left without recourse or responsibility to produce meaning; they were to merely transfer the meaning that was thought to be inside the poetic text. Ironically the problem of the musical text being perceived to lose dramatic meaning has been traditionally blamed on the singer. It was a time when the vocal line became increasingly ornamented and virtuosic and therefore was seen as serving the inflated ego of the performer.

### *Metastasio*

The importance of Metastasio is largely due to the sheer saturation of his works throughout the medium. He is reputed to having written 70 librettos which were set over 800 times. Of these are 27 three-act operas which were set to music by Mozart, Handel, Gluck, Hasse, and many others. Metastasio's plots definitely have commonalities in them. When one went to the opera they would expect to see a certain sort of hero go through a certain sort of dilemma, with some young lovers romping about, and perhaps a king hanging around. David Littlejohn, in his essay, "When Opera was Still Serious" gives a most amusing account of his noble attempt to read through Metastasio's plots. He confesses to stopping after reading fifteen. He explains that by reading these plots one can learn the basic formula of *opera seria*:

... in each of these five or six characters are royal, noble or at least heroic. The sixth or seventh - there are never more than seven named parts - may be a confidant(e), who is there to permit his or her master or mistress to express intimate emotions, as

Desdemona does to Emilia. Occasionally one has need of a messenger to report offstage horrors ("É morto?" "É morto!").<sup>8</sup>

He goes on to explain that the plots characteristically contain two male castrato singers and two female. These singers due to the high vocal range came to represent "royal-type" lovers. This character list allowed for the highly elaborate nature of the plots for which Metastasio was famous:

These characters were either *not* in love with the people who loved them, or were prevented from consummating their love by affairs of state, disguises, promises previously made, or edicts of unfeeling royal fathers.

The more elaborate the plot the more opportunity for arias of the emotional nature that the audience had come to expect. Essentially, the operatic genre had become an evening of emotive and highly ornamented arias driven by convoluted plots and bridged by recitatives:

... arias of sensual torment and self pity that display soprano voices so well. The addition of a fifth or even sixth unhappy secret admirer, or *amant occulta* (who may also be the confidant or messenger), can add to the intrigue, and provide more opportunity for poignant vocal confessions of unrequited love.<sup>9</sup>

Littlejohn explains that there were lower voices but they were reserved for the "royal fathers, secondary generals, and villains". Their job was to "stir up the nonamatory portions of the plot (palace coups, wars with rival kingdoms, threats of tyrannicide".<sup>10</sup>

This placement of the lower voices to positions of authority and tyranny originated with the early notion that the tone of the voice had inherent meaning in and of itself, independent of any act or intention of performance.<sup>11</sup> Littlejohn explains that none of these tyrannical acts

<sup>8</sup> Littlejohn, David. *The Ultimate Art. Essays Around and About Opera*. Berkeley: University of California Press Ltd, 1992. 96-97.

<sup>9</sup> Littlejohn, 96-97.

<sup>10</sup> Littlejohn, 96-97.

<sup>11</sup> For a more comprehensive explanation of "action" and "intention" in performance, refer to the section titled "Konstantin Stanislavsky" in this thesis.

actually end in death, even though there are many emotive arias surrounding the dramatic subject:

...., no major character should actually *die* in an opera seria, because we want them all on stage for the finale); and to do all they can to keep the proper lovers from pairing off before the *ultima scene*, when (as a rule) everything comes out all right.<sup>12</sup>

It was within this model that the aria began to reign supreme, as a virtuoso tool to display singer's abilities. It is also where the hierarchy of the singer's fame determined the amount of arias given to them in an opera. It is important to mention that audience members of the eighteenth-century operas rarely went to experience the plight of characters or to see a dramatic story unfold in front of their eyes. They went to socialise and would often talk between arias whilst the libretto was being sung. They conducted private affairs, and when the performance caught their attention it most likely had more to do with hearing their favourite castrati sing a series of impressive runs. It would seem that *opera seria*, was not so serious.

Another ironic development of this time was the elaborate and illogical narrative as the driving force of the poetic text and virtuosic ornamentation as the main element of the musical text. Both texts can be seen to have lost dramatic meaning in the act of performance, especially with regards to the original intent of the Camerata, with regards to affects of the soul and integration. The texts were in a sense utilising particular aspects of their medium with a common aesthetic of elaboration and clever resolution. Although this aesthetic can be seen as a drama in its own right it was far from any cohesive dramatic meaning.

It could be said that Metastasio, if only by repetition, managed to take the mystery and importance out of the poetic text and left a gap wide open for the musical and virtuoso performance conventions of the time to take over operatic performance practice. This is not to say that the music or the performer was not capable of expressing the drama. But as we have established, the singer was cut off from the role of expressing the drama from the early

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<sup>12</sup> Littlejohn, 96-97.

days of the Camerata, and consequently during the time of Zeno the composer was banished, regardless of the fact that there was a precedence for musico-poetic compositional forms as created by Monteverdi. The lack of co-operation between the composer and librettist with regards to the expression of the drama which (from a multi-disciplinary point of view) is the joint responsibility of the performer, composer and librettist leads to the next set of reforms.

### *The sin of the singer*

In the second half of the seventeenth century, Italian composition of opera had developed sets of forms that were expected by the audience at every opera. Among these forms were an overture, usually consisting of a fast part followed by a slow part, then a more energetic section preceding the introduction of the singers. The singers main vehicle was the aria which took on a *Da Capo* format. Its form is basically A B A, where the second A is ornamented by the singer to show off his or her vocal abilities. The recitative adopted the function of setting up the aria and furthering the action. Many of these operas were spectacular, requiring elaborate stage machinery and devices for heroic entrances for the singers.

The scenery played an increasingly important part in the meaning and experience of the play. It was not just a series of back drops to indicate place, but with the use of mechanical devices it often played an active part in the drama. It lowered the gods down in a cloud, could swallow up a hero in an ocean or could chase away characters with a dragon. In fact the scenery was in most cases more active dramatically than the singer.

Apart from the display aspect of the singers music and performance, the recitative set the story, or explained the reasons for the aria to follow. The aria was filled with unadulterated emotion and since the *recitative* contained the explanation of its place in the narrative, there was no perceived need for any realism. At times arias were switched around to suit the singers temperaments and abilities regardless of the original place in the libretto.

It would seem that *opera seria* had drawn opera away from any sense of music-drama. This is not to say that there is no way of making these operatic texts meaningful in performance. It is precisely this dilemma that this thesis is positioned to deal with. The later chapters set the scene for a proposed solution.

Opera, it would appear, had come to an impasse. The poetic text had exercised itself into absurdity, the musical text into repetition and excessive ornamentation, and it would seem that the performers only recourse for action was through vocal virtuosity. The sets indicated the narrative action; voice type established the character; the story provided conventional interest; the music provided excitement and the performer hardly moved.

This overuse of virtuosity is one of the reasons why the singer emerged as the egoist that is traditionally deemed responsible for the decadence and debasement of this era. However it can be concluded that since there was an absence of a performance tradition that allowed the singer to be responsible for any dramatic meaning in action, it was inevitable that the singer would emerge despite the structure that was traditionally closed to them in practice and theory. The singer in this era simply joined an already established competition for the holder of meaning. The fact that this meaning was to be considered "undramatic" in any narrative or character-based sense, was also inevitable since the traditional notion of meaning in opera had never come off the page and onto the stage actively. The singer was always confined to a transference role. Their job was to indicate or imitate the supposed inherent meaning in the text. During this "dark age" of opera the texts of music and the word were in competition, so there was no cohesive dramatic meaning to be found in the score which was made up of both texts. It can be seen as inevitable that an independent meaning emerged in the act of performance. The meaning was transferred to that of ornamentation and virtuosity. This was the sin of the singer.

### Christoph Willibald von Gluck (1714-1787)

It is from this state of affairs that the next major figure steps onto the scene. Christoph Willibald von Gluck (1714-1787), defined himself against the reliance on musical formats that were not dramatically based, the fusion of the French and Italian traditions, an excess of vocal virtuosity, and the marginalisation of the poetic text and dramatic content. Gluck was not the only figure completely unsatisfied with the state of opera at the time. The intellectuals of both Paris and Italy embraced reform. This often led to passionate meetings such as the famous *Guerre des Bouffons*, where the French *opera comique* and Italian *opera buffa* were pitted against each other. There were many articles and pamphlets on the subject of operatic reform. One such pamphleteer, who had a great influence on the movement and precipitated the reforms of Gluck, was Francesco Algarotti (1712-1764). His article, *Saggio sopra L'opera in musica* (1755), spurned the Metastasian format by describing its main purpose as to, "delight the eyes and the ears, to rouse up and affect the hearts of an audience, without the risk of sinning against reason or common sense."<sup>1</sup> He also contributed some advice as to what the role of poet should be:

It is therefore the poets duty, as chief engineer of the undertaking, to give directions to the dancers, the machinists, the painters; nay even those who are entrusted with the care of the wardrobe and dressing the performers. The poet is to carry in his mind a comprehensive view of the *whole* of the drama; because those parts which are not the productions of his pen ought to flow from the dictates of his actuating judgment, which is to give being and movement to the whole.<sup>2</sup>

With this comment we see again, even in the throws of reforms, not only a return to the primacy of the text but now the text maker. Although this is a perceivably logical response to the chaos that the Metastasian format provoked in music drama, the suggestion put forth here can be interpreted as a demand to give the librettist complete control of the meaning. The text

<sup>1</sup> Algarotti, Francesco. "Saggio sopra l'opera in musica" (1755) Rpt. in Herbert Kupferberg. *Opera*. New York: Newsweek Books, 1975. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Algarotti, Francesco. (1755) Rpt. in David Littlejohn. *The Ultimate Art: Essays Around and About Opera*

was to indicate performance practice as well as all dramatic meaning. Here there is a continuation of the assumption that if the text or text maker indicates or imitates, in just the right manner, an intended meaning will be rendered in performance. It is also a return to the notion of an ideal and original design of the textual organisation that was thought to have existed in the time of the ancient Greeks.

Gluck, being a well-travelled and truly international composer, was poised for his eminent role of reformist. His early years were filled with operas written in the Metastasian style and, ironically, his first opera, *Artaserse* (1741), was set to one of Metastasio's librettos. It was not until Gluck was well into his career that his reformist operas emerged. The most famous is *Orfeo ed Euridice*, composed in 1762.

With *Orfeo* the chorus was given a dramatic role, the libretto simplified, the arias used where required to interpret the drama and the format of those arias was dictated by dramatic requirements which broke down the Da Capo structure. Like Monteverdi, the structure was musico-dramatic, where harmonies were used to create moods and precipitate the drama. For instance, flat keys were used for death; minors and majors for deliberate effect, and as the drama escalates so does the key structure.<sup>3</sup>

It was with Gluck's production of *Alceste* (1767), that the seed of integrated music-drama, later achieved by Wagner, was planted. In the dedication of the score Gluck makes his intentions clear:

I sought to confine music to its true function of serving the poetry by expressing feelings and situations of the story without interrupting and cooling off the action through useless and superfluous ornaments. I believed that music should join to poetry with the vividness of colours and well disposed lights and shadows contributing to a correct and well composed design, animating the figures without altering their contours. (emphasis added)

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Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. 57.

<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth analysis of a similar perspective to this study, refer to: Drummond, John D. *Opera in*



This dedication clearly states Gluck's intentions within his reforms for opera and consequently gives a perfect summary of his contribution to the art form. With his first sentence we see a returning to a notion of music's "true function". This function is the supposed original structural design of the integrated drama of the Ancient Greeks. Gluck then states that music should join the poetry, but insinuates that for it to be within a correct design it will provide colours and shadows and furthermore can animate but not alter. Essentially, music was to hand over any function of dramatic meaning in its act of sounding and to provide the likes of an ornament or scenery. In his dedication he goes further to provide an explanation of his aesthetic:

I further believed that the greater part of my task was to seek a beautiful simplicity, and I have avoided a display of difficulty at the expense of clarity. I assigned no value to the discovery of some novelty, unless it was naturally suggested by the situation and the expression. And there is no rule that I did not unwillingly consider sacrificing for the sake of affect.<sup>4</sup>

Gluck, yet again, reined in the impropriety of performance; the music was professed to be put back in its place of subservience to the poetic text. It was not until Mozart that music was to truly break out of its function of "serving the poetry". Even in the time of Monteverdi the music still adhered to the basic dramatic structure as set forth by the poetic text. It can be concluded that these traditionally labelled eras of musico-dramatic development were not so much musico-dramatic but musico-poetic. It is with Mozart that we begin to get an idea of what music can do out of the confines of scenery, emotion and colour. With Mozart, music begins to infiltrate the character, narrative, and emotional development as an active participant in the drama rather than an imitative one.

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Perspective, London: J.M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1980. 167-172.

<sup>4</sup> Gluck, Christoph Willibald von. Rpt. A History of Western Music. Grout, Donald Jay, & Claude V Palisca. 4th ed. New York: Norton. 1988. 571.

### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) is often treated as the almost uncomprehendable genius of music, due to both his prolific composition and uncanny craftsmanship in all aspects of music. He is duly credited with the merging of the Italian *opera-seria* and *opera-buffa* and the dramatic development of German *Singspiel*. However, despite his massive contribution to operatic writing, and recognised importance to the development of opera, he is often left out of the traditional list of operatic reformers.

The main reason for his exclusion from the list of reformers is most likely to be the fact that Mozart never politically positioned himself as a reformer. Monteverdi, Zeno, Gluck and Wagner were all self-proclaimed reformers who conscientiously and publicly sought recognition for their status. Mozart never set out to document his aesthetic in a conscious effort to go down in history as one of opera's great saviours. Evidence of the ideas that informed his compositions of opera can be found not in treatises but personal letters to his family, colleagues and friends.

The most controversial, and commented-on, statements that Mozart made can be found in this letter to his father:

...in an opera the poetry must be altogether the obedient daughter of the music. Why do Italian operas please everywhere - in spite of their miserable libretti - even in Paris, where I myself witnessed their success? Just because there the music reigns supreme and when one listens to it all else is forgotten. Why, an opera is sure of success when the plot is all worked out, the words written solely for the music and not shoved in there to suit some miserable rhyme (which God knows, never enhances the value of any theatrical performance, but rather detracts from it) - I mean

words or even entire verses which ruin the composers whole idea. Verses are indeed the most indispensable element for music - but rhymes- solely for the sake of rhyming - the most detrimental<sup>1</sup> (Emphasis added)

In the light of the preceding history, where music was subservient to the poetic text in the name of a pure and originated dramatic meaning, this comment is provocative to say the least. What is interesting is the varying historic interpretations of these issues raised in this letter. Einstein makes an obvious connection between Gluck and Wagner and comes to the interesting conclusion that all three composers fundamentally agreed regardless of their utterances:

This is as we have seen, exactly the inversion of the theory of Gluck and Wagner-, who in his reform-opera pretended to forget that he was a musician, and Wagner, who saw the curse of opera in the fact, which he had printed in bold type, 'that a means of expression [music] has been made the end, while the end of expression [drama] has been made a means. But in practice Gluck and Wagner agree with Mozart.'<sup>2</sup>

By their supposed "agreement", Einstein was probably referring to the idea that they were all somehow aiming for a piece of work that was not only good theatre but, in being so, attained some kind of interdependence between the musical, poetic and dramatic components of the work. They each approached the centre, so to speak, from different corners of the ring. Unification and reconciliation are re-occurring themes in the criticism of the operatic genre, even if these positions differ according to their assertions regarding what constitutes appropriate unification.

Gerald Abraham, whilst ostensibly reconciliatory, reads Mozart's words and presumes favour:

<sup>1</sup> Mozart, Amadeus. Rpt. in "The Operas." Gerald Abraham. The Mozart Companion. Eds. H.C.R. Landon & Donald Mitchell. London: Faber and Faber. 1956. 285-286.

<sup>2</sup> Einstein, Alfred. Mozart, His Character His Work. London: Cassell. 1946. 386.

Poetry must be the "obedient daughter" not because Mozart regarded the libretto as a mere peg on which to hang beautiful melodies, but because he was confident that he could convey so much of the drama in his music." Abraham goes on to propose that, "What it amounts to is perhaps this; a libretto has a negative value. A bad one can sink the best music; the best libretti cannot save poor music. But given a tolerable libretto, a composer, of the right sort can do the rest."<sup>3</sup>

Like Monteverdi and Gluck, Mozart dealt personally with his librettists and collaborated with them as partners. However, as we have seen in previous examples, the mere collaboration or recognition of the two aspects does not allow for a dramatic whole and moreover does not create a co-operation. It would seem that Mozart had found something else, something that allowed the music to be dramatic and to play a part in the stories. He had found something that rendered his works ageless in that, still today, we can associate with the stories and laugh at the jokes. He also found something that made us want to watch the action on the stage and not merely listen, although if you do merely listen you can still get a remarkable sense of the action.

This timeless element of Mozart's music could well have been a manifestation of the elusive element called drama. If so, then drama is not brought about through a perfect organisation of the texts but an activation of the text within the operations of the dramatic components of character, narrative, emotions and expression within the event of performance. Such an idea will be explored in detail in the following chapters, with particular focus on what these operations might be, and how they bring about the experience that could well be the "affection of the soul" that the early opera developers had sought.

Looking back to the assumptions of Mozart's predecessors, as described within the preceding pages of this chapter, we can understand how it was thought that the answer to opera's problems would lie in an organisation of the libretto and score relationship. In fact

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<sup>3</sup> Abraham, Gerald. "The Operas." Rpt. in *The Mozart Companion*. Eds. Lardon, H.C.R. & Donald Mitchell. London: Faber and Faber. 1956. 285-286.

the common critical perspectives of analysis and opera contain readings and observations that are justified and authorised by this exact assumption.

It is common knowledge that Mozart was a composer of incredible skill, nimble with his counterpoint, and could expand and bend formal structures. It could be argued that there had not been a composer since Monteverdi who substantially championed the musical text as a vehicle for dramatic meaning. Mozart, however, through skill and expanded developments in harmony, could utilise structures much more freely and gracefully than Monteverdi. Mozart had a larger array of instruments at his disposal than Monteverdi and used them to illustrate and execute elements of character and narrative.

Even without the use of a libretto, Mozart's music is intrinsically dramatic, and the majority of the readings of his works allude to this aspect by connecting the harmonies, orchestration, rhythm, and melodies, to characteristics within implied narrative, through resolution and/or development.

In Donald Mitchell's analysis of Mozart's K.388, a serenade for wind band, we find an example of the perceived dramatic principle within Mozart's instrumental writing:

This is a crucial juncture in the finale, the first movement of relaxation after unrelieved tension. The E flat variation is the most far reaching of the set, and introduces, almost in operatic fashion, as a new "character", not only a new mood but also of course a new key.<sup>4</sup>

Einstein describes the moment in a more reflective way, but still implies a sense of drama:

The finale, begins with impassioned and sombre variations in minor, anticipating the spirit of the finale of the C minor concerto, and seems about to end in minor also, when the E-flat of the horns falls like a gentle beam of light...<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell, Donald. "The Serenades for Wind Band". *The Mozart Companion*. Eds. Landon, H.C.R. & Donald Mitchell. London: Faber and Faber. 1956. 80.

<sup>5</sup> Mitchell, 70.

If Mozart's instrumental music is considered dramatic, then perhaps the sought-after elements that render a form, structure, work, or practice, "musico-dramatic" are not reliant on the organisation of the libretto and the score. Moreover, this argument of seniority could be observed as self-defeating. If one looks at a dramatic interrelationship between the musical and poetic text as a symptom or product of another element, then, like most products and symptoms, perhaps the "origin" or "source" of the elusive element is not an origin or source at all but a process. So whether the new key and the horns in Mozart's serenade for wind band K388 represent the introduction of a "new character" or a "gentle beam of light" is not the point; rather, it is the act of the change resulting in contrast. The process of movement brought about by the contrast or conflict that produces the drama can be interpreted in many ways. Furthermore it is not in the organisation of the key change or even the timing that is where the drama occurs and is experienced, rather it is in the act of performance. The possible solution of how and what acts is explored in the later chapters of this thesis.

One of the most distinguishing aspects of Mozart's work, be it operatic or instrumental, is the use of characterisation. In his absolute music it is often obvious that a motif could encounter, cross, clash, blend and thus evolve, much like a character in a play or operatic plot. Mozart's operatic characters differ from that of his predecessors in a few important ways. Firstly, the initial luxury of the "Buffa veil", which permitted more freedom to deviate from conventional constraints imposed by the *seria* model, allowed Mozart to write for characters that were accessible to his audience. The maid no longer simply served; she could be the leading lady, as in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. The soldiers could get into embarrassing intrigue, as in *Così fan Tutti*; and the bad guy could turn into a good guy mid-stream, as in *The Magic Flute*. And since Mozart did not maintain a strict *Buffa* style, he could develop the characters in more dramatic ways:

This element of writing for the masses reflected the worsening social conditions of the under classes and the coming of the French revolution. The humanitarian movement's effects seeped into all aspects of life and art and the stage was set for the

age of the enlightenment. Within the operatic plots that Mozart employed we see a more *Egalité* treatment of the characters. This treatment was in keeping with the most polemic political and philosophical attitudes of the time. The most obvious example of this treatment can be found in the very fact that his opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* was adapted from the Beaumarchais' comedy which faced serious objection from Louis XV because of its revolutionary implications. Pauly gives an explanation as to why this may have been the case with Mozart's opera of the same title in Vienna: "the idea of a barber and other commoners outwitting an aristocrat appeared too revolutionary even to "the revolutionary Emperor," Joseph II."<sup>6</sup>

Mozart was one of the first freelance writers. Before Mozart, successful composers were almost exclusively court-appointed. This aspect may have contributed to the fact that he wrote for his complete audience, including those in the "cheap" seats. It was an era in which the criteria for performance underwent change. The entertainment had to affect a larger and more varied audience in order for it to survive. The combination of the *buffa* style and the *seria* allowed Mozart to satisfy multiple social strata.

Another important aspect of the characters in Mozart's operas, is that he drew from *Comedia dell'arte*. Mozart's operas were not conventional *Comedia*, but he clearly drew from the scenario based drama and was influenced by the chaos and intrigue that often metamorphosed between stock characters within comedic improvisational structures.

It would seem that before Mozart the job of character development and action was primarily the responsibility of the librettists. Gluck and Monteverdi's dramatic content mainly consisted of musical contributions to the overall mood of a scene. Unlike early operatic musico-poetic structures, Mozart's librettists were aided, or as Sandra Corse puts it in Opera and the Use of Language, perhaps even subverted. When speaking of *Figaro* she mentions qualities that were applied to much of Mozart's operatic writing:

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<sup>6</sup> Pauly, Reinhard G. Music in the Classic Period, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973. 62.

But Mozart uses music to provide aesthetic effects that help move the language into another realm. As in The Marriage of Figaro, Mozart here sometimes contradicts or subverts the meaning of the words with the music, or he uses the music to heighten the implications of the text - implications that might otherwise be lost because of the rather straight forward quality of the poetry. Mozart also uses music to highlight and separate the conventional moral platitudes in the text in such a way as to suggest a larger interpretation for the opera; he pits music against words, then both against silence itself, to call into question the simple world view that the text alone might suggest.<sup>78</sup>

An important aspect of Mozart's ability to dramatise a score is in the very formats that he chose in order to develop the action, evolve the characters, and resolve conflict. Unlike the Baroque composers, Mozart did not rely solely on the recitative to explain the action, just as he did not rely on the aria to indicate the emotional content. This may be partly due to the fact that the recitative/aria formula was a trait of the *opera seria*, and as Mozart drew more strongly from the *Buffa* style, he did not have the need to rely on the *Seria* conventions.

In addition to the aria and the recitative, Mozart used ensembles to develop the action whilst at the same time allowing the audience to experience the emotional content of the character's journey. As in a "straight" play, there was action, character development, emotional expression, and conflict, all unfolding at the same time. Grout points out that it was more in the duets and ensembles that the "character delineation" took place, especially in the ensemble finales which he states, "combine realism with ongoing dramatic action and superbly unified musical form."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Corse, Sandra. Opera and the Uses of Language, Mozart, Verdi, and Britten. London: Associated University Presses Inc. 1987. 46.

<sup>8</sup> It is obvious that Mozart owed much of the character development, not to mention the basic plot material, to his librettists. (As with the libretti and score relationships in Mozart's opera, for the purposes of this study I will focus on what I feel was Mozart's unique contribution to the musico-dramatic structure.) This does not rely on his ability to consciously organise the score and the libretto so that it becomes dramatic, in fact there is little to support that this had anything to do with his process of composition. The focus will remain with Mozart's dramatising or even perhaps 'librettising' of the score.

<sup>9</sup> Grout, Donald Jay, & Claude V Palisca. A History of Western Music. 4th ed. New York: Norton. 1988. 618.



Mozart, by his organisation of the musical formal structure, rendered the libretto more like a play than an opera of disjointed, formalised emotional and active organisation. It was in ways such as this, that he contributed to the integration of the libretto and the score.

The other and most important contribution to the dramatising of the musical score is that Mozart made the music "act". It was not restrained to the job of indicating a quality of action, or a mood enhancer. That is not to say that Mozart's music did not shed light onto the quality of an action, or that it did not enhance a mood, but these qualities in practice are usually the symptom of contrast or change. In the case of character and narrative based drama this change is often manifest through a character's desire against an obstacle.

In Elaine Brody's Historic Anthology of Music in Opera, she presents the sextet that takes place at the end of act I in *Così fan tutti* (1790), as an example of one of Mozart's "elaborate ensembles". With it she includes a "schematic diagram" to show "the entire musical plan". This is a prime example of the conventional way of interpreting the dramatic and musical relationship within opera. It shows a relationship between the two texts and connects them with a subjective dramatic interpretation.

Tempo	Key	Meter	Measure	Dramatic Situation
Allegro	C	4/4	1-10	Don Alfonso introduces Despina to
Allegro	C	4/4	10-22	Ferrando and Guglielmo, who acknowledge her presence though flattery
Allegro	G	4/4	22-38	Despina and Alfonso discuss the boys
Allegro	C	4/4	38-54	Singing together the boys believe that Despina is favourably impressed with them. However, she tells Don Alfonso that she has her doubts  Dorabella and Fiordiligi are heard from within and Don Alfonso leaves the stage
Allegro	F	3/4	54-62	Girls are exasperated
Allegro	C	3/4	62-82	Girls turn deaf ear to the boys' pleas

Allegro	a	3/4	82-104	Despina and the boys kneel down and plead
Allegro	modulating	3/4	104-125	Successive and simultaneous singing with the boys pleading and the girls reject their advances
Molto Allegro	C	2/2	127-th close	The girls will not be won. The answer is no.

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The above diagram shows a clear connection between the music and action.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore it shows how the music can become an action of the drama through harmonic, dynamic and rhythmic devices. Mozart's use of melody and orchestration, which is not recognised here, is also integrated into the drama.

The idea that the music could work with other aspects such as dialogue, narrative, costume design, and set-design, rather than simply illustrate and express them, is one that Wagner was to work on in great detail in his *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). Kerman duly credits Mozart with his place in this development:

The meaning of a complete work of art will be manifest only in the medium that realises, consummates, or creates it. The vindication of opera as drama comes in such occasional, unique triumphs; and among these, Mozart has left our most precious examples.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Brody, Elaine. *Music in Opera, A Historical Anthology*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc. 1970. 169.

<sup>11</sup> The chart also exhibits some of the subjective pitfalls that contemporary musical analysis can lead us into. A connection can be drawn by pinpointing a corresponding relationship between action and musical changes. This, connecting the corresponding relationships between changes, is subjective in that it is the literal score and the literal libretto that is being used as the guide for action. Scores and libretti can be read in many ways and the variations multiply when the relationships between the score and libretti are considered. The fact is that there are many ways that dramatic situations can be read and a connection between the expressive elements, be they music, words, or even acting, movement, or singing, are dictated more by the event of the drama than the textual organisation of any of the expressive elements. Because Mozart made his music 'do' things, the music and poetic relationship also does things and is therefore more subject to an interpretation of the event, rather than a subjective reading of the relationship between the word and the score. The organisation therefore becomes a symptom of the dramatic event, the text is then performed, not read. This thesis proposes a different way of reading the relationship between the two texts within opera. Within the last chapter of this thesis there is an alternative analysis of this scene that illustrates other interpretation possibilities to the exact same text. See Page 183 in Part Three.

<sup>12</sup> Kerman, 108.

As a result of Mozart's musico-dramatic writing the performer was by implication invited to create a character, rather than the prior caricature. Through Mozart's musico-dramatic writing a character had a dramatic internal and external journey as expressed through the music and the words, not to mention a physicality through implied gesture. Mozart made the music an active member in the drama, and did not confine the music to the role of a pictorial tool. The possibilities of working with the music as a performer of a role was more of an option. However a practice was yet to be implemented where the singer/actor was seen as the imbuer of any meaning. So although the textual structure had opened up marginally through the play between the texts, there was no specific opening for the performer.

*Between Mozart and Wagner: The Singer as Sinner (Again)*

What Mozart did was nothing less than to realise opera's full potential as a mirror of the human condition; everything and everybody, after him is gravy.<sup>13</sup>

There is a common understanding within the theoretical context that, after Mozart, operatic composition went through an amount of "froth" before arriving at a new era of major reform. An exception can be found in Germany specifically in the only opera of Beethoven (*Fidelio*, 1805) and works of Carl Maria Weber (1786-1826), who is commonly considered the patriarchal figure within German romantic music. His use of chromatic harmonies, expanded orchestration, application of folk melodies, and folklore influenced Berlioz, Wagner, Debussy and Mahler. But as Orrey explains:

Turning to the nineteenth-century Germany and Austria, one is immediately struck by the small contribution made to opera by the great composers (discounting Wagner). Brahms, Bruckner, even Mahler wrote none at all. The Youthful Mendelssohn toyed with it, (*Genoveva*, 1850). Schubert, although much more enthusiastic, has left at least seventeen operas in various stages of incompleteness, but only one was performed in his lifetime (*Rosamund*, 1823).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Walsh, Michael. *Who's Afraid of Opera*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Orrey, Leslie. *A Concise History of Opera*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1977. 137.

This next era of actual reform was to occur in the work of Richard Wagner which consequently marks the inception of contemporary criticism of the operatic condition.

Operatic history between Mozart and Wagner includes the French grand tradition typified in the works of Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864). These works were usually loosely historical. However the plot was often illogical as it was subservient to the pageantry and patriotic hysteria that the score aimed to incite. They were lengthy and although there were some beautiful tunes to be found within the style, they were often isolated instances; such "highlights" were isolated from the text, the narrative, and sometimes even disjointed from the pageantry that they aimed to serve.

Grout proposes that at this time the creators of opera were working on three basic principles: "(1) give the public what it wants; (2) if a little is good then more is better; (3) the whole (that is the complete opera) is equal to the sum of its parts (that is the several musical styles of which the opera is composed)." He also, expresses his reservations about the overall quality: "The results while undeniably successful at the time and of great influence on the future course of opera, was not one that can now be contemplated with unmixed admiration."<sup>15</sup> With this statement Grout expresses the widely received notion that during this era in history opera had fallen into a loss of meaning.

Italian opera seemed to have been overridden by that of the French in the early part of the nineteenth century, but by the middle of the century the Italian style of *Bel Canto* took the reins. The works of Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868), Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835), and Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848), typify this style. Like the Grand French opera, often the dramatic logic was compromised in the name of spectacle and virtuosity. However with *Bel Canto*, the emphasis was not on the epic or heroic patriotism; it was on the vocal line. *Bel Canto* literally means beautiful singing. The music was melody-based with the line serving as a virtuosic vehicle for extravagant vocalism. With this style we are reminded of the era of the castrati, where once again the performer seems to take the centre stage within the form.

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<sup>15</sup> Grout, Donald Jay. *A Short History of Opera*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965. 317.

In both cases the performer/singer was exploited for their sheer vocal abilities and they were far from being considered custodians of the meaning. They were mere vehicles of affect, rather than active interpreters of the dramatic event.

Looking back at Italian and French opera, the historical assessment seems to be one of disgust toward the egoism of the performer. The "shallowness" of both eras is often attributed to the (intellectually inferior) and unruly performer being allowed too much control. However, both have in common a compositional and poetic textual design. And in both, the only times which acknowledge the performer in any sense, there was a common set up in the textual relationships. The opera of the high Baroque and of the Bel Canto era had in common disjointed plots, arias for their own sake, and poetic text that was swamped by ornamental score writing. Like the dancing bear in a circus show, the Castrati and the Romantic diva had to perform acrobatics, (although vocal in this case), for effect. This effect was supposedly to thrill the audience by the near impossibility and novelty of what they were witnessing aurally. To justify the music and text relationship within any sense of dramatic interpretation, was difficult. The design of the text placed the actual vocal acrobatics as the dramatic event.

With this emerging aesthetic there was the growth of populism that served and created the audience's desire for immediate entertainment. With this the composer and librettist's intent and meaning was defiled by the surface effects of mere show and gratification. This climate is not unlike the one that the early Camerata was revolting against, and not unlike that which Richard Wagner and Bertold Brecht were to challenge. It would seem that opera has a tendency to engage in the same play but with different props.

### Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Like most of the reformers of opera, Richard Wagner (1813-1883) was revolting against the conditions of his time. He took it upon himself to save the operatic condition from what he saw as the worst of the Bel Canto and French Grand operatic tradition. For Wagner opera had died. He felt that Mozart was the last composer to work with any form of dramatic dignity and went so far as to credit Rossini with the final death blow:

With Rossini the real *life history of opera* comes to end. It was at end when the unconscious seedling of its being had evolved to nakedness and conscience bloom; when the musician had been avowed the absolute factor of this artwork, invested with despotic power; when the taste of the theatre public had been recognised as the only standard for his demeanour.

Wagner felt that with Rossini there came a time "when all pretence of drama had been scrupulously swept away" and he lamented the demise of music's dramatic application:

It was at end, when the great musical public had come to take quite characterless melody for music's only content, a bandbox of operatic "numbers" for the only joinery of musical form, the intoxication of an opera night's narcotic fumes for the sole effect of music's essence.<sup>1</sup>

Much later in his life whilst writing his prose works, he detailed and mocked specific aspects of such musical composition that he felt subverted the dramatic power of a work.<sup>2</sup>

In Wagner's 1863 Criticism of the Opera House, one can get a first-hand understanding of his frustration, and an insight into the perceived role of the singer within the popular styles of the time:

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<sup>1</sup> Wagner, Richard. "*Opera und Drama*." Trans. William Ashton Ellis. Vol. II. London: (1895-1899) 82-87. Rpt. in Albert Goldman, Evert Sprinchorn. Wagner on Music and Drama A Compendium of Richard Wagner's Prose Works. NYC: E.P.Dutton & Co. 1964. 107.

<sup>2</sup> "An Italian opera must contain at least *one* aria to which one is glad to listen; if it is to have a success, the conversation must be broken, and the music listened to with interest, at least six times; whilst the composer

Most of these performances bear the character of a heedless devil-may-care, against which, as background, the efforts of single singers to force themselves out of the artistic frame, in order to gain particular applause for patches of their execution, seem all the more repulsive and give the whole a something of the downright laughable.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps more revealing to the condition of operatic performance practice of the time was the expectations of the audience. Wagner attributed the blame of the down fall not only to the singer and the structural relationships between the musical and poetic text, but also to the audience. Again, this is evidence of an anti-populism and an attempt to corner meaning within the text and the author rather than allowing its discernability to receivers, listeners or the audience:

In the opera house of Italy there gathered an audience which passed its evenings in amusement; part of this amusement was formed by the music sung upon the stage, to which one listened from time to time in pauses of the conversation; during the conversation and visits paid from box to box the music still went on, and with the same office as one assigns to table music at grand dinners, namely, to encourage by its noise the rather wise timid talk.<sup>4</sup>

The music of the Romantic era saw itself as a departure from the classical aesthetic of social obligation and politeness of structure, and a move towards grand emotion and nature. Along with the extremes that emotion brought and the colours and dynamics of nature came the inspiration for virtuosity. Wagner, it would seem, was in keeping with nature, emotion, and virtuosity (as evident from the unusual demands he placed on his singers and orchestra in later years), but the organisation of these aspects had to remain organic and true to the people, the story and the art. Any effect was grounded on a unity or totality. No performance or text was allowed to exceed the organic whole.

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who is clever enough to attract the audience's attention a whole twelve times is lauded as an inexhaustible melodic genius." Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 46.

<sup>3</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 45.

<sup>4</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 45

As a result, Wagner took exception to virtuosity for the sake of it, to the uninvolved audience, and supreme lack of communal responsibility and ceremony that had crept into the theatre, and to the divorced relationships between the musical and poetic texts. He fought a battle to restore theatre to his notion of the ancient classical ideal, to develop a music theatre environment that induced high ceremony, to return the art of music theatre to the people, largely restoring the perfect alliance between the word and music to create, *A Total Work of Art*. What is most important is how this Wagnerian striving for unity and alliance is understood today, for it contributes significantly to what is understood as appropriate operatic practice.

### *The Unity Myth*

Writing about Wagner has its recognised difficulties. John Deathridge begins his essay *A Brief History of Wagner Research* with this telling sentence:

It may seem foolhardy to begin an outline of Wagner research by announcing that such a thing is virtually impossible to write. Yet the fact must be faced at the outset that the bewildering variety of interests and standards in Wagner scholarship (or what passes for it) is congenitally resistant to systematic study.<sup>5</sup>

Wagner is a huge subject. The mention of his name conjures and often catalyses violent and passionate responses in a wide variety of contexts. His work, his life, and the interpretations of both, cross the axis of such varied areas as performance art, visual art, set design, music composition, architecture, literature, philosophy, politics, and religion. It is no wonder that a study of the man is "resistant to a systematic study". There is no shortage of Wagnerian studies. By all accounts, Richard Wagner was a dogmatic, arrogant, financially irresponsible, actively anti-Semitic, belligerent, masochistic, self opinionated, militant Christian, who maintained a very high opinion of himself. For each of these less than flattering adjectives there are accounts that are supported by, letters, and events that can be

<sup>5</sup> Deathridge, John. "A Brief history of Wagner Research." Rpt. in *Wagner Handbook*. Eds. Ulrich Müller, and Peter Wapnewski. Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press. 1992. 202.



found in the abundant amount of material written about the man. In fact it is commonly stated that there has not been a person so written about since Jesus or Napoleon.

Wagner may have been an unsavoury character but he undeniably brought the relationship of music and drama to new heights. He has been credited by Nietzsche as having returned tragedy to the practices of drama through music<sup>6</sup>. He inspired Baudelaire by creating a music which put the listener "under a spell", and provided "a voluptuous sensual pleasure" which "sometimes breathed the arrogance of life".<sup>7</sup>

He effectively immortalised himself and his music through the building of the Festival Theatre at Bayreuth, which, when not in use as a theatre for the annual performances of his massive composition *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*, stands as a monument to the man and his dramatic ideal. It also serves as a place of virtual worship for the members of the many chapters of Wagner societies around the globe.

Not only did Wagner inspire an enormous amount of material written by others, but, in addition to the libretti for his operas, he wrote an incredible bulk of material about himself and his ideas. There are two main difficulties about his writings. The first applies primarily to his biographical texts. He had a tendency to re-write his own history to suit his own over-powering self image. He romanticised his influences and often changed historical fact to suit the idea that he was somehow the chosen one for the task of reforming not only theatre but society as he knew it. His accounts of his own history have left constant discrepancies as historians fail to validate his claims and often find interesting contradictions of the facts that surround dates, and events that were supposed to have moulded this self

<sup>6</sup> The relationship between Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Wagner is one of the most famous artistic relationships of all time. Nietzsche's book "The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music", put Wagner's ideas in the company of such influential movements as the Greek Dionysian aesthetic and Schopenhauerian philosophy. Nietzsche tied Wagner's theories of music-drama in with this rich history in such a way that cemented Wagner's place as a primary philosopher of his time. The book caused considerable damage to the young Nietzsche's career as with its publication he became strongly associated with the highly controversial Wagner movement.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) The famous French poet, who championed Wagner when the French seemed to be rejecting anything Wagneristic. These particular quoted phrases are found in a letter to Wagner Dated February 1860 where he expresses his deep felt thank you to Wagner for writing music like no other. Rpt. in *Wagner: A Documentary Study*. Eds. Herbert Barth, Dietrich Mack, & Egon Voss. London: Thames and

proclaimed genius. What all this reveals is that Wagner's operatic treatises and statements related the definition of art to a broader moral and social project, one that still has implications for the way we negotiate the problem of meaning and interpretation today.

The second difficulty in Wagner's writing pertains to both his biographical and theoretical works. Arthur Symons sums up Wagner's prose style most eloquently:

He will leave nothing unsaid, even if there is no possible way of saying clearly what he wants to say. And he does somehow say things that have never been said before, or never from so near the roots. Often he says them picturesquely, always truthfully, energetically, and, above all, logically; rarely with much ease or charm.<sup>8</sup>

Wagner's style of writing was florid, verbose, and flamboyantly romantic even for its time. He often wrote incredibly long sentences that merely alluded to the argument that he claimed to be addressing. He led the reader on wild goose chases through his very subjective historic readings. These often concluded with an argument that his notion of theatre was the answer to the supposed chaos that the Italian, French, and Jewish people were responsible for trapping society within. His musical project was tied to reforming a national identity reminiscent of the unity and integrity of the Ancient Greek's. From the voluminous writing there are some undeniably influential insights, some wonderful tales, some interesting perspective's and some good practical advice if you can endeavour to find it amongst the fiction and fantasy.

It is, however, impossible to ignore Wagner's prose writings as the basic concepts within them have greatly influenced literary theory, theatre aesthetics, and even if indirectly, performance practice. It is often wondered that if Mozart had written his ideas down, he might have influenced operatic development as much as Wagner.

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Hudson Ltd. 1975. 193.

<sup>8</sup> Symons, Arthur. "The Ideas of Richard Wagner." *The Theory of the Modern Stage*. Ed. Eric Bentley. London: Penguin Books, 1989. 286-287.

Wagner's writing primarily deals with his notion of a total work of art, and lays out his theatre aesthetics. Between the years of 1849-1851, he completed the larger bulk of his prose writing. The years preceding this period can be summed up as a gestation period for his ideas, as the years following can be seen as a time of undying commitment to bring the ideas and concepts into fruition through practice.

His basic beliefs can be found within three texts; *Die Kunst und die Revolution* (Art and Revolution, 1849), *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (The Art Work of the Future, 1849) and, *Opera und Drama* subtitled *Die Oper und das Wesen der Kunst* (Opera and Drama subtitled Opera and the state of the arts. 1850-1851).

According to Symons, The basic content of all Wagner's ideas can be found in two of his earliest prose writings, "The Art Work of the Future" (1849), and "Opera and Drama"(1851).<sup>9</sup>

Essentially, Art and Revolution, which is the only other large text of Wagner's prolific writing period, glorifies the ancient Greek theatre as the ultimate dramatic, community and experiential event. Wagner reviews his current time and its cultural doom in the light of economics, values, and taste. He basically establishes his philosophy, backs it up with a reading of history, and articulates his personal aesthetic stance on art.

In his, The Art Work of the Future, Wagner delves more specifically into the effects of losing the Greek Ideal. He addresses the "separation of the arts" and ties it intrinsically into the decline and alienation of the people (Volk) and the debasement of theatre. From this he starts to touch on a notion of an integrated art form, which he labels, *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Total Work of Art).

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<sup>9</sup> "Wagner's fundamental ideas, with the precise and detailed statement and explanation of his conception of art, and of that work of art which it was his unceasing endeavour to create, or rather to organise, are contained in two of the earliest of his prose writings, 'The Art-work of the Future' (1849), and 'Opera and Drama' (1851). Everything else in his theoretical writing is a confirmation, or a correction, or (very rarely) a contradiction, of what is to be found in these two books;..."

By 'everything else' Symons means, the many essays and correspondence that at times give a more concise and comprehensible account of his aesthetic and ideas. Although, much of the information can be found in the two texts stated, I will utilise Wagner's own words in a variety of contexts. Symons The Theory of the

With *Opera und Drama*, we get the most complete and comprehensive understanding of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. He begins to address aspects of expression and production. He finds practical solutions to what he saw as an alienation of the people. He also formulates the idea of a special form of theatre, which was to be more honourable than opera, one that would synthesise music and drama, and embrace the people through its story.

As Wagner had a tendency to develop an idea in one text and then later expound upon it in another, I will not attempt to review each of these texts in a linear manner. So much of the information that is pertinent to this thesis is present in his written thought and then extended to his practice in the years that follow these texts. I will deal instead with certain themes that flow through all his work, be they literary or compositional.

### *Ideas and Concepts*

As, I have already stated, Wagner was most dissatisfied with the state of opera during his life time and his work is indicative of a general malaise regarding modernity - the sense that an ancient unity and integrity has been lost in the fall into urbanism and populism. One particular aspect of the compositional practices that he targeted was the use of effect to induce affect. In his most cutting criticism of Meyerbeer, who consequently gave him his break as a composer in France, he hones in on the offence:

The secret of Meyerbeer's operatic music is - *effect*. If we wish to gain a notion of what we are to understand by this "effect", it is important to observe that in this connection we do not as a rule employ the more homely word, *Wirkung* ("a working").<sup>10</sup>

Wagner expounded upon this notion of "effect", as a "trick" without substance. For Wagner, the substance had at its core a "cause". This is not unlike what Stanislavsky was later to label an "intention". For Wagner an effect without a cause could be likened to a device without a dramatic reason, or an emotion without desire. Such can be expressed as a

masturbatory action serving nothing more than some hedonistic need without grace, or relationship to other components of opera, namely, drama, text, singers, set, - that is, the complete content and context.<sup>11</sup> Such work by a composer was to Wagner without thought or feeling such that:

...the externals of art are turned into its essence and this essence we find to be - *effect*, the absolute effect, that is, the stimulus of an artificial love titillation, without the potency of an actual taste of love.<sup>12</sup>

Wagner observed that the use of these effects and devices robbed music of its organic relationship in drama by both the structural constraints and the compositional and decent intent.

### *A Question of Drama*

To define what Wagner meant by drama is not simple. He used the word repeatedly, while maintaining a singular importance for it. Sometimes he referred to drama as "the most perfect art work". Other times drama was a reference to the text or poetry. At other times it referred to the rapture and emotion within the music. However it always had in its context the notion of an emotional conviction and a synthesis of the elements of performance. He believed that at the essence of drama was feeling:

The Drama, as the most perfect artwork, differs from all other forms of poetry in just this - that in it the aim is lifted into utmost imperceptibility by its *entire realisation*.<sup>13</sup>

At the core of that entirety of realisation was the senses as the receptors of the entire "faculty of man", as drama was to be "carried from understanding to the feeling".

<sup>10</sup> Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama* 118.

<sup>11</sup> Derrida has identified this anxiety regarding surfaces, supplements, and effect without intention through Rousseau's essay on origins, and masturbation in: Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayam Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1976. 95-157.

<sup>12</sup> Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama* 119.

<sup>13</sup> Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama* 188.

Wagner's view of drama was a pure, absolute, spiritually and emotionally heightened, construct. It was not necessarily a dynamic relationship between anything. All elements were subservient to a unity and grounded in an organic whole. However he did believe in particular relationships, (which I will explore in further detail on the following pages), that had to take place between poetry, music and dance, and the audience in order to achieve the "drama". In effect, for Wagner, drama was a state to be achieved, for art to work towards.

Where Wagner referred to drama as a structure, he was often referring to his very idealic view of a Dionysian perspective of the Ancient Greek theatre.

### *The Return of the Greek Ideal*

The following sentence started his essay Art and Revolution (1850):

In any serious investigation of the essence of our art of today, we cannot make one step forward without being brought face to face with its intimate connection with the art of ancient Greece.<sup>14</sup>

With it Wagner intended to inspire change and raise the people's consciousness of the differences between art and economy in the time of the Greeks, and their own post-revolutionary context. From his idealic reading of the Greek theatre culture, he drew an aesthetic that his later methodologies attempted to realise. His understanding of Greek theatre informed his ideas about audience as a "conscience community" and its role as a "chorus", acoustics and communal architecture realised in the Greek amphitheatre. In fact, it informed every facet of his theatre and philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

Wagner believed that Greek tragedy was the ultimate voice for and by the people and he observed that the origins of the texts by which tragic drama was formed were to be found in

<sup>14</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 77.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on the political and aesthetic implications of German Romanticism's philhellenism see: Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. Heidegger, art and Politics: the fiction of the Political. Trans. Chris Turner. Oxford; Cambridge Mass.: B. Blackwell, 1990.

myth and folklore. Therefore it was from myth or stories of the folk that the theatre of the people would be derived. In fact he believed that myth embodied stories that were "purely human":

Greek tragedy is the artistic embodiment of the spirit and of Greek *mythos*. As in this *mythos* the widest-ranging phenomena were compressed into closer and ever closer shape, so the drama took this shape and re-presented it in the closest, most compressed of forms....As in drama the shapes that had been in *mythos*, merely shapes of thought, were now presented in actual bodily portrayal by living men, so the actually represented action now compressed itself, in thorough keeping with the mythical essence, into a compact, plastic whole.<sup>16</sup>

Within the following chapters, I will contrast Wagner's emphasis on non-separation of parts and unity with the idea of a dynamic whole.

### *Uniting by Division*

Wagner's "compact, plastic whole" needed careful analysis. He broke the whole into parts. In order to re-integrate the arts he first disintegrated them.

Wagner declared that dance was the most realistic of all the arts because its "artistic stuff was that of living man":

The Arts of tone and poetry become first understandable in that of dance, the mimetic art, by the entire art-receptive man, i.e. by him who not only hears but also sees.<sup>17</sup>

Although dance was the most "realistic" of the arts, Wagner believed that without a component of music (rhythm), dance was not yet "art". It was rhythm that inspired "movements which strive instinctively to impart to others one's emotion":

<sup>16</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 89.

<sup>17</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 100.

Rhythm is in no wise an arbitrary cannon, according to which the artistic man forsooth *shall* move his body's limbs; but it is the conscious soul of those necessitated movements by which he instinctively imparts to others his own emotions. If the motion and the gestures are themselves the feeling *tone* of his emotion, then is their Rhythm its articulate *speech*.<sup>18</sup>

Wagner manipulated speech so that it was closer to music than the spoken word. "Word speech", or spoken word, was merely the way of "making the intellect intelligible". But in order to heighten that and allow an emotional experience the poet had to give his words "without conditions, the determinant motive strengthened by a determinant force". That force was tone:

...to let this proclaim itself in the very utterance of a necessary, all-dominating feeling- there he can no longer work with the merely shadowing, expounding word speech, *except he so enhance it* as he has already enhanced the motive; and this he can do only by pouring it into tone speech.<sup>19</sup>

Having established that speech heightened by tone is more conducive to emotional experience, Wagner places rhythm within this design:

We thus arrive at the natural basis of rhythm, in the spoken verse, as displayed in the *lifting's and lowerings* of the accent: while this accent's utmost definiteness and endless variety can only come to light through its intensifying into musical rhythm.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, he incorporated components of music into the art of the word and justified it as an improvement on the word. Wagner was essentially aiming to marry music and the word, by locating the musical aspects of words with rhythm and tone, and systemising their usage. However, words as an "expression of the intellect" could be unruly. To solve this problem Wagner confined their usage within the poetic device, *Stabreim*. With *Stabreim*, the text

<sup>18</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 101.

<sup>19</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 196.

<sup>20</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 199.



was allowed a freedom that Wagner required from the word in order for it to integrate with his notions of drama, dance, and music. However, it also had an element of formal structure which provided a thread by which the text could interrelate on many levels within the drama and music, and his use of harmony and rhythm could be enhanced.

*Stabreim* is an unrhymed alliterative poem. Although in *Stabreim* there is not rhyme proper, (such as "eye" and "fly"), there are vowel relationships that construct the poetic phrase, such as in the word, eye and ear. Wagner describes the power of such relationships:

Their sensuously cognisable resemblance they [the words] win either from a kinship of the vowel sounds, especially when these stand open in front, without any initial consonant; or from the sameness of this initial consonant itself, which characterises the likeness as one belonging peculiarly to the object; or again, from the sameness of the terminal consonant that closes up the root behind (as an assonance), provided the individualizing force of the word lies in that terminal.<sup>21</sup>

For Wagner this way of organising words was particularly conducive to emotive power through its musical character. He also drew the connection that it was the vowel that is the organic and primal basic of speech. Humans sound in vowel first, after all. Having established this use of vowel as emotive, sensual and unfailingly human, he could also connect the use of *stabreim* to his Greek understanding of kinship and community:

An understanding of the vowel, however, is not based upon its superficial analogy with a rhyming vowel of another root; but, since *all the vowels are primarily akin to one another*, it is based on the *disclosing of this ur-kinship* through giving full value to the vowel's *emotional content, by means of musical tone*. The vowel itself is nothing but *a tone condensed*: its specific manifestation is determined through its

<sup>21</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 204.

turning toward the outer surface of the feeling's "body"; which latter - as we have said- displays to the "eye" of hearing the mirrored image of the outward object that has acted on it.<sup>22</sup>

### *Music Over Everything*

If "rhythm made dance art" and "tone renders words emotionally heightened" and drama was "the emotionalising of the intellect", then it is safe to say that for Wagner, it was essentially music that united the arts. However it was a new sort of music, a music that was not reliant on arias and ballet sequences. It was a music that had a dance-like flexibility and a poetic freedom of expression. This music served to ground, order and hierarchise all other elements within a primary unity.

Wagner was supported in his notion that music was the ultimate expression by one of his favourite philosophers, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). In his World As Will and Idea Schopenhauer, almost fanatically, speaks of an inner truth, a sense of personal responsibility, and demands personal sacrifice, while naming music the highest artistic endeavour of human creation. The combination of these concepts was particularly attractive to Wagner who saw himself as a man of great sacrifice and a musical genius. The words spoke to his very sense of identity. Sadly for Wagner, Schopenhauer was not as impressed with Wagner as Wagner was with him. Music was both a part and an organising whole. Music was that aspect that would prevent other elements dissolving into conflict or dynamic encounter.

Thus, we see that Wagner broke down the elements of opera into drama, dance, poetry, and music. For music he took a step further and broke it down into sub-components, exploring their uses and interweavings within his concept of drama.

Tone, as already discussed in regard to the word, held the honour of rendering the word emotional. Tone also had a particular connection with *Stabreim*, as one cannot sound a

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<sup>22</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 206.

vowel without producing a tone and *Stabreim* is all about a relationship of vowels. Wagner stated that certain characteristic tones defined different emotional expressions.<sup>23</sup>

If tone was a rendering into emotion, then the organisation of tone with pitches and rhythm into phrases (melody) had to have particular significance in the illustration of emotion:

Melody is the redemption of the poet's endlessly conditioned thought into a deep-felt consciousness of emotion's highest freedom: it is the willed and achieved unwillful, the conscious and proclaimed unconscious, the vindicated necessity of an endless-reaching content, condensed from its farthest branchings into an utmost definite utterance of feeling.<sup>24</sup>

Melody was a very important element in Wagner's story-telling. As discussed further on in the section on *Leitmotif*, he organised notes in such a way, as to tell elements of the story, and character development by the evolution and restructuring of the note relationships.

Wagner also described melody's relationship to harmony as:

That melody which we have seen appearing on the surface of harmony, is conditioned as to its distinctive, its purely musical expression by harmony's upward-working depths alone; as it manifests itself as a horizontal chain, so is it connected by a plumbline with those depths. This plumbline is the harmonic chord, of vertical chain of tones in closest kinship, mounting from the ground tone to the surface.<sup>25</sup>

Wagner connects harmony to the word as organised within a *Stabreim* structure. Once again he justifies his design by identifying and shifting in accordance with an illustration of emotional content:

<sup>23</sup> On this point of emotion and sound Wagner wrote: "From the instant of the musical intonation of the vowel in word speech, the feeling has become the appointed orderer of all further announcements to the senses, and henceforward musical feeling alone prescribes the choice and significance both of lesser tones and chief tones; and that, according to the nature of the tone clan whose particular member has been chosen to give the necessary emotional expression to the phrase." Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama* 209.

<sup>24</sup> Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama* 209.

<sup>25</sup> Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama* 214.

If we take, for instance, a Stabreim-ed verse of completely like emotional content, such as: *Leibe geibt Lust zum Leben*, then, as a like emotion is physically disclosed in the accent's Stabreim-ed roots, the musician would here receive no natural incitement to step outside the once selected key, but would completely satisfy the feeling by keeping the various inflections of the musical tone to that one key alone. On the contrary, if we take a verse of mixed emotion, such as: *die Liebe bringst Lust und Leid*, then here, where the Stabreim combines two opposite emotions, the musician would feel incited to pass across from the key first struck in keeping with the first emotion, to another key in keeping with the second emotion, and determined by the latter's relation to the emotional rendered in the earlier key.<sup>26</sup>

In this way Wagner activates an illustration of the emotional content of a phrase. With this idea he saw music's structural device of harmonic modulation as the regulating aspect for the emotions that were seen to be contained in the word. Furthermore, he felt that it was music's sole role to do so, in that "she [music] exerts a binding sway upon the "sensuous" feeling such as no other art has force for."<sup>27</sup>

As evident in Wagner's late operas, the harmonic dance from key to key and often the collision of keys to create a sort of hybrid modulatory journey is in parallel existence with the story as expressed in the poetry. But the music was not intended to be a free form shifting harmonic structure. In contrast to the music of Bach, Mozart, and the majority of Wagner's contemporaries, his harmonic choices were informed by the dramatic journey rather than conventional modulatory patterns.<sup>28</sup>

It becomes clear that Wagner favoured music above the other arts. This is interesting when we recall that he is often credited with the re-synthesising of the arts. There was clearly a

<sup>26</sup> Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama* 210-211.

<sup>27</sup> Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama* 211.

<sup>28</sup> Wagner did not mean to dismiss the ground tone however. He saw his harmonies as an integral part of the unified design: "The presence of that ground tone, and of the harmonic chord thereby determined, is indispensable in the eye of feeling, if this later is to seize the melody in all its characteristic expression. But the presence of the ground harmony means its *concurrent sounding out*. The sounding out of the harmony to a melody is the first thing that fully persuades the feeling as to the emotional content of that melody, which

hierarchal design in his attempted synthesis. In order to attain his notion of drama, he could not confine himself to pure music but only music as a hierarchising and originally unifying power:

...she (absolute music) can now and never, of her own unaided powers, bring the physical and ethical man to distinct and plainly recognisable presentment. Even in her most infinite enhancement, she still is but *emotion*; she enters *in the train* of the ethical deed, but not as that *deed itself*; she can set moods and feelings side by side, but not evolve one mood from out another by any dictate of her own necessity - she lacks the *moral will*.<sup>29</sup>

Wagner was of the opinion that to bring together the "aided powers" ie. text (poetry), dance, voice, and music as it had evolved, he would attain truth of metaphysical proportions. He felt that Beethoven had made this evident after having exhausted all other dramatic options available to him within his *Sturm und Drang* orchestral style. Beethoven finally elevated his message by utilising the voice in his Ninth Symphony. In a letter to Freiherr von Biedenfeld (1849), Wagner explained his basic premise for adding to absolute music:

Now the Greeks, and possibly in some measure also the drama of the Middle Ages, were able to make use of an element of musical expression for the benefit of the drama without essentially altering the latter. But in our time, the heroes of absolute music - that is, music independent of poetry culminating in Beethoven - have raised the expressive power of this art especially through the orchestra, to an entirely new and previously - even to Gluck - almost undreamed-of artistic potential. As a result the influence of music on drama is bound to be substantial since it will now naturally expect to develop this potential.<sup>30</sup>

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otherwise would leave to it something undetermined" Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama* 214.

<sup>29</sup> Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama* 157.

<sup>30</sup> Wagner, Richard. "To Freiherr von Biedenfeld." 17 Jan. 1849. *Wagner: A Documentary Study*. Comp. & Ed. Herbert Barth, Dietrich Mack & Egon Voss. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. 1975. 169.

Wagner gives the impression, in the above, that the "heroes" of absolute music in his day are the advocates of drama. He also alludes to the fact that it would be music's influence on drama that will save drama. However, he also believed that it was opera that killed drama and more importantly that it did this by coercing its artistic elements into an egoistic separation. Even though the elements were in effect separate, he believed they had an innate desire for unity:

But the *will* to form the common artwork arises in each branch of art by instinct and unconsciously, so soon as e'er it touches on its own confines and *gives* itself to the answering art, not merely strives to take from it. It stays *throughout itself* only when it *thoroughly gives itself* . . . :<sup>31</sup>

Wagner often claimed a moral ground whilst writing about his notion on integration and totality within theatre. The tone could well have been the result of Schopenhaurian influence. Having established that the arts are drawn to one another when they are in an organic state of giving and receiving, he explains precisely how each went wayward. Before doing so he once again puts music, (or a component there of), on the top of the list:

Of all these arts not one so sorely needed an espousal with another, as that of *Tone*; for her peculiar character is that of a fluid nature element poured out betwixt the more defined and individualised substances of the two other arts<sup>32</sup>

He saw that tone was seriously compromised when "neither of the other arts could bring herself to plunge, in love without reserve, into the element of tone."<sup>33</sup>

He declaimed that tone had to fight for its existence and was "forced to take for the very means of maintenance". He believed that its subservience to the word, particularly within church music, rendered it imprisoned.

<sup>31</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama. 122.

<sup>32</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama. 122.

<sup>33</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama. 122.

He saw the various art forms and select aspects as selfish characters that took their departure from an ideal unity. He wrote that poetry "took music into her menial service, for her own convenience". Dance likewise departed from the ideal unity when it "condescended to allow Music to hold the stirrup" and tone was seen to do this within the context of the oratorio.<sup>34</sup>

Dance and poetry were accused of going off in their own selfish directions in that they took "a personal lease of drama" by establishing other forms. Opera was accused of "taking from each whatever she deemed indispensable for the self-glorification of music."<sup>35</sup> Music, which can be seen as Wagner's favoured art was not without blame and opera was its great crime:

But Music at last capped all this ever-swelling arrogance by her shameless insolence in the opera. Here she claimed tribute of the art of Poetry down to its utmost farthing: it was no longer merely to make her verses, no longer merely to suggest dramatic characters and sequences, as in the oratorio, in order to give her a handle for her own distension - but it was to lay down its whole being and all its powers at her feet, to offer up complete dramatic characters and complex situations, in short, the entire ingredients of drama; in order that she might take this gift of homage and make of it whatever her fancy listed.<sup>36</sup>

So for Wagner, there was a distinction between the virtuous absolute music and the hedonistic selfish music of opera. Since Wagner essentially blamed opera for the down fall of drama and the dissolution of any former synthesis of the arts, it is not surprising that he wished to disassociate himself from the genre. After 1851, he no longer wished to be considered a composer of "opera", and insisted his works be called dramas. Later his work was to be coined music-drama. He denounced opera, and developed a new construct that included the communal values of the Greeks, the emotional expressivity of absolute music,

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<sup>34</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 123.

<sup>35</sup> Wagner, Wagner on Music and Drama 124.

the "pure humanity" of mythology, along with a metaphysical spirituality that comes with the perfect union. He called his perfect drama *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

### *The Manifestation of Gesamtkunstwerk*

It seems as if Wagner was left with two choices. In order to make his *Gesamtkunstwerk* a reality he had either to achieve a total overhaul of society, of theatrical practices, (which included the architecture of the theatres, placement of musicians, ethics of singers..., and of course political machinations, behind everything to do with music, dance, and drama); or to withdraw from society, create his own world and invite people to come. In a sense, the latter is what he did.

### *Bayreuth*

In a letter to Hans von Bülow (1861), Wagner expressed his dire need for a theatre of his own and spells out his reasons for the somewhat drastic option:

A single look at the present-day theatre has shown me once again that there is only one thing which will enable my art to take root and not to vanish, totally misunderstood, into thin air. I need a theatre such as I alone can build. It is *not possible* that my works should establish themselves in the same theatres where simultaneously the operatic nonsense of our time- -and that includes the classics - is put on, and where everything, the presentation, the whole approach and the desired effect, is basically in direct opposition to what I desire for myself and for my works.<sup>37</sup>

The development, the gaining of funds, the choosing of a location, and the building of this theatre caused Wagner (and the people that sponsored him) many personal and monetary difficulties. These are well documented, and read much like an opera in their own right. However, in the end, the theatre was realised.

<sup>36</sup> Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama*, 123.

<sup>37</sup> Wagner, Richard. "To Hans von Bülow." 17 Dec. 1861. *Wagner: A Documentary Study*. Comp. & Ed.



The Theatre was eventually built in the small town of Bayreuth, which is located in the centre of Germany, in the state of Bavaria. It was originally called, *Bühnenfestspielhaus* (Folk Festival Theatre), and was later shortened to *Festspielhaus*. Every element of its design lent itself to the performance of Wagner's Music-Dramas and was in keeping with the specifications of his *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Wagner did not allow for any unnecessary ornament. Everything was to contribute to what he referred to as "the drama", nothing was to be added for mere fancy.

The stage was unusually large, as Wagner had already begun to design the scenery arrangements for The Ring, and as he did not want any awkward shifting and noises to distract from the drama, or any interruptions, the stage was large: 95 feet wide and 126 feet deep. In this way he help to modify the practices of set-changing by putting the emphasis on the performance rather than the machinations. This aesthetic shift is still with us today.

The audience seating was greatly influenced but his notion of the Greek ideal. The seats were arranged in the shape of an amphitheatre. This allowed for some favourable functionality. Not only did it allow for a good view of the drama from every seat, but it created an acoustic design that is still considered to be one of the best in the world.

Along the sides of the walls, there were a series of frames that grew larger as the auditorium moved back. These frames served as a sort of looking box by which the audience would view the stage. Since they grew progressively larger, each seat had the effect of a framed stage regardless of the distance from the proscenium. The amphitheatre design did not accommodate the expected balconies or boxes from which Wagner witnessed the disrespect to music and drama in his earlier years at the Vienna Opera. Along with the balconies and boxes he also removed the prompters box from the middle of the stage. This is an adjustment with which the major opera houses of today also comply. Today, prompting is usually done by the stage manager from the right wing of the stage.

One of the most controversial requirements that Wagner insisted on was the hiding of the orchestra. He designed a pit that sat under the actual stage and a wall that concealed the players but allowed for the conductor to see the action. This hiding of the orchestra caused great difficulty in the early stages of rehearsal. In his *Das Bühnenfestspielhaus zu Bayreuth* (1873), Wagner summarised some of the architectural intentions behind the design of the building. In it he explains how his idea of concealing the orchestra was the starting point by which the rest of the design evolved:

...I believe I can best start by referring again to my conviction that the technical "hearth" of the music, the orchestra, must be concealed from view; for this *one* essential priority was the source from which the whole shape of the auditorium of our neo-European theatre gradually emerged.

He goes on to explain why the orchestra must be kept out of sight in the context of theatre:

But when it is a question of a theatrical performance, the sight must be accurately tuned and alert to perceive the scene, and that can only be achieved if it is completely impossible to see anything of the reality that may intervene, such as the technical apparatus used to create the stage-set itself.<sup>38</sup>

In keeping with the idea that the audience was to see only the drama and be distracted by nothing else, Wagner started the tradition of blacking out the house during performance. In his day it was common for there to be a dim light during the performance. This was probably so that the audience members could observe who was present, what fashions they were wearing and communicate across the auditorium during the opera. Today such behaviour would be considered blatantly disrespectful thanks to Wagner's (then considered)

<sup>38</sup> Wagner, Richard. From "In *Das Bühnenfestspielhaus zu Bayreuth*. (1873), Wagner describes the ceremonial laying of the foundation stone of the Festival Theatre 22, May, 1872" Rpt. in *Wagner: A Documentary Study*. Comp. & Ed. Herbert Barth; Dietrich Mack & Egon Voss. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1975. 221.

radical move. All this served to contain the meaning of opera within a pre-conceived unity; the audience was separate, passive and receptive rather than active. (It was this idea that was later explicitly challenged by Brecht.)

### *The Ultimate Drama*

Bayreuth was designed for the ultimate music drama, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, (The Nibelungs Gold). In between composition of The Ring, he wrote *Tristan und Isolde* (1865), and *Die Meistersinger*. Following The Ring he composed *Parsifal* (1882). In his earlier years, prior to the prose writing that allowed him to organise his ideas of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, he wrote the operas, *Rienzi*, (1842), *Der Fliegende Holländer* (1843), *Tannhäuser* (1845), and, *Lohengrin* (1850).

The Ring, however, has remained in history as one of the largest contribution to drama. When he wrote it, it was the longest "opera" ever written and to this day provides a ceremony to the notion of community and drama through its sense of event. The Ring is a huge undertaking for all involved. It is still performed at the Festival in Bayreuth annually.

One of the main reasons for it being a massive effort is its sheer length. It was conceived as a "stage festival play to be produced over three days and a fore-evening". This adds up to a full fifteen hours of music. It took over a quarter of a century to write. Wagner first chose the stories and wrote the libretto, and then composed the music. He endeavoured to stay as true to the concepts and ideas as thought out in his prose texts and as a result came up with a few compromises, but mostly innovative approaches to music, movement, set design, performance practices, and as we have already discussed even architecture.

"The Ring" consists of four Music-Dramas, *Das Reingold*, *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*. In keeping with Wagner's deep belief that the stories of the people (folk story) are to be found in the myths, (just as in the theatre of the Ancient Greeks), the texts from The Ring are all derived from stories that supposedly pre-date the written word.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> As J. Walker Mc Spadden points out in his charming book of these tales: "Centuries before they were set

Because of the mercurial nature of the stories Wagner arrived at for his text, The Ring is true to no particular source. He made a point of studying all that was available on the stories surrounding the Myths of the Nibelung. Thus Wagner's drama was not owed to any singular author but expressed the very life-blood of a national and communal whole. Wagner stated that the following were influential in his interpretation, and according to William O. Cord the first three were his primary sources. They were *Edda Saemundar*, *Völsungasaga*, *Nibelungen Not und die Klage*, *Deutsche Mythologie*, *Die deutsche Heldensage*, *Deutsches Heldenbuch*, *Heimskringla*, *Wilkinasaga*, and studies of both Franz Joseph Mone and Karl Lachman.<sup>40</sup>

Although Wagner completed the writing of the stories before he composed the music he did so with the intention of producing the ideal *Gesamtkunstwerk*, therefore the style and structure of the writing was designed to fit into the totality of Drama. Utilising the verse form of *Stabreim*, discussed earlier, he created a freedom within the text that rendered it almost musical prior to any setting of notes.

In a letter to Gailliard, Wagner gives some insight into his creative process and also, perhaps, the secret to the musicality of his texts:

Even before I set about writing a single line of the text or drafting a scene, I am already thoroughly immersed in the musical aura of my creation, I have the whole sound and all the characteristic motifs in my head so that when the poem is finished and the scenes are arranged in their proper order the actual opera is already complete<sup>41</sup>

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to music in the soul of Richard Wagner, some of them had been chanted around rude camp-fires by savage-looking men clad in the skins of animals. They were repeated by word of mouth long before even the rudest art of writing was learned; and in various lands they were known, though the stories often differed. Walker, Mc Spadden J. *The Stories of Wagner's Operas* London: George G. Harrap & Company, 1915. ix.

<sup>40</sup> Cord, William O. *An Introduction to Richard Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen* US: Ohio University Press, 1983. 56-57.

<sup>41</sup> Wagner, Richard. "In a letter to Gailliard, 30th January 1844". Rpt. *Selected Letters of Richard Wagner* Trans. Eds. Stewart Spencer, Barry Millington. London: J.M. Dent & Son, 1987. 117.

The music that Wagner wrote for his "Music Dramas" has inspired an amazing amount of analysis and dissection. It has been picked to bits, psychoanalysed, and has even been explored for its ability to infiltrate the collective subconscious of mankind.<sup>42</sup> During the course of such analysis there have been terms introduced that Wagner would not even recognise. What such analysis and extension indicate is the sustained commitment to a Wagnerian aesthetic that itself drew upon centuries of striving for an ultimate grounding and unity.

### *Leitmotif*

One instance is in Wagner's famous use of *Leitmotif*. These are essentially thematic melodic segments of music that last approximately between three and four bars. They are one part of the fabric of his music. Wagner analysts have worked out each *leitmotif* and followed it, much like an element of a strategic role playing game. This type of analysis may be interesting in the isolated study of treatments of thematic sequences but, in learning about Wagner's approach to a synthesised art form, this sort of dissecting and labelling is missing the issue of his intent and manifestation with regard to *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

To pull apart Wagner's thematic vignettes and label them, then follow their evolution through the drama, is an analytical choice that does not really deal with Wagner's compositional approach within his notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It is a method of analysis that perhaps has its worth in absolute music, but since Wagner's intent with *leitmotif* was to integrate drama, poetry, and movement with music and, more over, do it subconsciously (since he placed them in much the same way as a stream of consciousness sequence might flow); picking apart, one device of the composition negates the dramatic relationship to the drama. What I will be drawing from Wagner contrasts with this method. Later I will argue that disintegration or delineation of component parts in drama for the purpose of analysis leads to the act of depiction in performance rather than an activation of the dramatic event.

<sup>42</sup> Cord expresses this sentiment: "Wagner's dramatic probings into the inner reaches of man's experience revealed what was "realistic" by the standards he had set down, and his expression were not simply those of a personal or individual nature but rather those of the infinite mind, the mind that is found in myths, the collective and substantial thought of man as filtered and refined through the ages." Cord 109.

*Leitmotifs* were not invented by Wagner. Mozart, Weber, Liszt and Berlioz all used them. Wagner, however, made a major contribution to music with his particular way of changing and developing them as a way of allowing the music to tell a story as well as the text. For instance, he utilised motives to express character evolution, catalyse dramatic events, to inform the audience of secrets that the characters on stage did not know, to pre-empt a conflict, and to express the dramatic outcome of a situation. A *Leitmotif* was not a static series of notes. Wagner changed and evolved them constantly. This is commonly referred to as thematic transformation. By inverting a *Leitmotif*, Wagner could let us know that something strange was happening with a situation or a character. By adding a flattened note he could express an emotion that the character was feeling, and by changing the register and key of a sequence he could express whether the character, situation, or object was moving toward one moral direction or another. Moreover, the *leitmotifs* often overlapped and hybridised in order to indicate association. For Wagner this effect was a way of uniting all the music with itself and the drama.

Other commonly used musical terms that have been associated with the music of Wagner, are: orchestral melody, art of transition, unending melody, *Sprechgesang*, (speechsong) and musical prose. Again, these designations of operation overlap. For instance, the art of transition has to do with modulation, which has to do with a melodic element as manifest in the orchestral movement, which leads in Wagner's case to a lack of traditional harmonic resolution, which gives the listener the sensation of an unending melody<sup>43</sup>. All this, as Wagner states, is in sisterhood with the text, and with his use of *Stabreim*, the text is rhythmically and tonally put together for its intrinsic melodic patterns. Therefore, as the "aura of music" was conceived simultaneously with the text, a musical prose is developed as a direct symptom of the speech and song relationship. (In Part Two, An Anti-hermeneutical Theory, I will discuss the significance and difficulty of this supposed unity between speech and origin.)

<sup>43</sup> The most famous example of this unending harmony/melody relationship can be found in *Tristan and Isolde*, where the Tristan motif chord simply refuses resolution by travelling from f-d-d#-g#. This is not in keeping with the traditional I-IV-V-I patterns that the likes of Bach and Mozart utilised.

Through the use of harmony, melody, and rhythm as apparent in *Leitmotif*, transition, unending melody, *Sprechgesang*, and musical prose, Wagner created a music that not only depicted the drama on the stage, but was an active participant. The music made the drama happen, much like a story line or a character does. This is reminiscent of the way that Mozart utilised the melodic line and counterpoint to render the music part of the plot driven text. It is as though music acts as some pre-personal grounding element, prior to all human decision and event, as though music produces an ultimate frame or ground upon which all speech acts and decisions are established.

### *The Performer*

Wagner became increasingly concerned with performance practice as he became more involved with the dramatic output of his work. He felt that the majority of the singers of his day were poorly trained and highly ego oriented. He blamed this on the recitative-aria format, the virtuosity of the music of the day, and the audience that would demand nothing more of a performance than a few trills and a bunch of high notes. He did hope to open a school for singers, for the express purpose of training singers to act and sing in his works. This did not come to fruition, however, he took on many individual students. Mostly he taught them to understand the full story and the character, and not simply the music. In fact he was not adverse to changing notes if it suited the singer's voice better. He did not believe in gestural acting and felt that the movement would stem from an understanding of the poetry. This is an idea that Stanislavsky was to develop.

Wagner came to his practical consideration of the actor-singer fairly late in his life. It was not until 1872 that he wrote *Über Schauspieler und Sänger*, (On Actors and Singers). In it he expresses the importance of "mime", exclaims that since Shakespeare there have been no true developments in dramatic theatre, and states that only through music, namely "Music Drama", can an advancement be made.

For Wagner this often translated to a sort of abuse of the performer. He did not pay his singers of The Ring. If they asked for any payment then they were considered to be the

wrong sort to be graced with the singing of the ultimate work.<sup>44</sup> Wagner expected his performers to subordinate themselves completely to himself and his work. His music is also notoriously difficult to sing, in that there are many incredibly long phrases, bars upon bars that sit in the passagio and the upper register of the voice, and the sheer length of the works.

Wagner's training of the singer had little to do with vocal technique. He believed that if they believed in the religion that was the Wagner-music-drama reality, their acting and singing would all come together and their physical apparatus would rise to the occasion. Many singers lost their voices and even today the repertoire is considered appropriate for very few singers who are usually well into their careers.

Even in Wagner's own time, where there was supposed to be a perfect union between the arts, it would seem that the singer was not so much to act as be a custodian or interpreter of meaning. They were to be subservient to the conglomerate text, since it was considered so perfectly organised as to touch the metaphysical subconscious. For a good singer to assert their own interpretation would ruin the genius's spontaneous organisation.

### *The Director's and Designer's Opera*

Wagner had cut music history into the contemporary and the traditional. This does not mean that the composers and the opera designers and directors followed what Wagner did. In fact it was quite the contrary. A main aspect that has been followed is a fervent rebellion against anything of the past and an accelerated desire to reform. This is evidenced by the fact that past operas are increasingly performed but now as vehicles for the directors which commonly takes the shape of radical design and/or contemporisation. In the past reformers seemed to emerge about every century, after Wagner they seem to appear more frequently.

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<sup>44</sup> Wagner wrote: "Singers and musicians are receiving only their expenses from me, no 'payment'. Anyone who will not come to me for the honour and out of enthusiasm can stay at home. Much use a singer who only came for one of their insane 'fees' would be to me! A creature of that sort would never measure up to my artistic standards." Wagner, Richard. "Wagner on the finances of the Festival undertaking, in a letter to Friedrich Feustel, Lucerne, 12 April 1872." *Wagner: A Documentary Study*. Comp. & Ed. Herbert Barth; Dietrich Mack & Egon Voss. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1975. 220.



This newer trend of reform was not instigated by the composer or the librettist as in the past, but by the set designers and the directors of theatre.

Directors were given a method and a terminology to communicate to the performers by Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938). Stanislavsky laid the ground work so that the singers ability could stretch beyond that of a vehicle of sound. He gave the singer an acting technique. Unfortunately, the American appropriation of his system, which was coined "Method Acting" by Lee Strasberg, was essentially a derivative form of Stanislavsky's acting system in that it primarily included the inner work as published in two of the three texts exploring the system. As the American Method was mainly applicable to realistic acting and the filmic styles of the 1960's, Stanislavsky's innovations and pedagogy for opera have been marginalised within the contemporary training of opera singers. In fact all training for the singer that lies outside the field of actual vocalising is commonly perceived as an addition to the primary technique. Movement and acting is positioned to enhance or compensate for the voice. It is not yet an integral part of traditional pedagogy. This is due largely to the assumption that the act of performance has little or no meaning within the tradition of opera.<sup>45</sup>

Operatic history after Wagner shows a marked shift of emphasis from the former focus on the texts of the score and the productions of that score. This may have to do with the fact that the ability to document an operatic production has become more comprehensive with the advent of photography, film and video. We can now archive the visual and performance design of a production. As the majority of the operas performed are canonical and well known, it seems that we are more interested in a directorial interpretation so that we can see something new in the old. The director, it seems, has become the interpreter of the text, to the extent that text is now often subservient to production devices such as contemporisation and multi media.

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<sup>45</sup> The introduction of supertitles and subtitles within many opera houses can be seen as a perpetuating the limited use of an acting technique within operatic performance practice. The audience can understand what is going on in an opera regardless of the performers ability to express the drama. Later, in Part Three, I will explore Stanislavsky's Method and the application of acting techniques in opera in more detail.

There is a necessary distinction that must be drawn between the production and the performance of an opera. The performance is a one time thing, never to be repeated and is activated by the singer, actor, or dancer. The production is a set of factors that make up the design, blocking, choreography, and thematic concept. All of the production aspects must be repeatable by their very nature in the business. The production aspects could well be seen as a new set of texts, a score in their own right, in that they contain a set of rules that the performer is to abide by in order for a meaning to be transferred. Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) was a pioneer of this transition and his practice, writings, and aesthetics in many ways authorised this new role of director/producer within the modern age of music theatre. Opera following Wagner was still not the singer's opera; neither was it the composer's or librettist's, as it was in the past. It can be argued that opera has become the director's and set designer's opera.

Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) pitted himself against both Stanislavsky and Wagner. His traditional place in the history of opera and music theatre revolve around his collaborations with composer Kurt Weill (1900-1950) such as The Three Penny Opera (1928), The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahoganny (1929), and Happy End (1929). However it is not so much his collaborations with Kurt Weill that have had a lasting effect on the production and performance practice of opera. Brecht saw himself as a reformer of theatre. He typifies the contemporary rebel and socio-political hero of the theatre. Directors today are still affected by his anti-melodrama, anti-Wagnerian, anti-Stanislavskian, anti-bourgeois, and anti-establishment principles.

To ignore Brecht's philosophies and theories is to ignore the machinations of contemporary operatic performance practice: a practice that continues the subservient role of the singer/actor alongside a turn in the perspective of textual organisation within music theatre.

### Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956)

Brecht proudly marked himself anti-Aristotelian, anti-Wagnerian, pro-science and a Marxist apologist. He claimed to be advocating a responsible theatre where the people were no longer seduced by the "witchcraft" of sentimental drama (which he saw as stemming from the Aristotelian aesthetic and the Stanislavskian acting approach). It might be argued that Brecht's opposition to Stanislavsky was based on a misinterpretation. Stanislavsky did not promote only realistic, sentimental or a political drama, and the most effective actors of Brecht's style were indeed trained in the Stanislavsky technique. As for the Aristotelian aesthetic, one could argue that Brecht's work was but a natural progression of the same basis. (I will explore a more valuable understanding of Stanislavsky in a later chapter)

Brecht however clearly had a passion against what he called "culinary theatre": a theatre that adopts a hedonistic approach, theatre that is consumed for the sensual pleasure and mostly forgotten. He extended the notion of Epic theatre beyond that of his predecessors and with the development of his *Verfremdungseffekt* worked towards of practical social significance.

Brecht was revolting against the dramatic practices which were cultivated during a time when the travelling picture show was being superseded by purpose-built cinema houses. He also reacted against mass marketing, an increasing circulation of pulp fiction, the rapid growth of large cities, the fall of a monarchy, the creation of a social welfare system, a pervading socio-cultural scientific bias, and the promise of growing comfort for the masses with the expansion of the middle class. In retrospect we can see how the theatre of the time, which consisted largely of the drawing room variety, and had developed into light after dinner entertainment. We can also see why, with the disillusionment of the war, the excitement for the promises of science, and the diluting aspects of mass media, Brecht saw the theatre of the time as a seductive enemy against humanity and social reform.

It could be perceived that in this way Brecht was not unlike Wagner. Both were advocating an anti-popular, anti-modern argument. The two of them were against sentimentality for the

sake of some "higher" end, and felt that populism bred a consumer approach to art that alienated more profound communal experiences.

It is in this context that Brecht embraced drama and music as a powerful medium for social awakening and developed his concept of Epic Theatre as an educating force and a return to historic event, (a performance event that was not there for our consumption and evasion of the human condition but one that dealt with it in a critical manner). In order to achieve the desired requirements of his concept of Epic theatre he developed the notion of *Verfremdungseffekt*. Here, he sought to demolish the torporifying use of sentiment that he felt denied the audience the choice to see all sides of a situation. He sought to provide a structure and method by which the drama would unfold without bias and with a scepticism that would catalyse the audience into thinking and exploring the ramifications of the situations portrayed. In this way, Brecht sought a theatre in which the text did not already have a determined meaning, but was to be actively interpreted.

### *Epic Theatre*

The essential point of Epic theatre is perhaps that it appeals less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grips with things.<sup>1</sup>

For Brecht, Dramatic theatre was in direct opposition to his notion of Epic theatre. Where Dramatic theatre strove to inspire the audience to feel, to sympathise, to be scared, to laugh or to induce affect, Epic theatre made no conscious attempt to get the audience to be induced by affect through any sympathetic means at all. In fact, Brecht saw the effects of the dramatic stage as being coercive and damaging to society, in that they seduced the people and kept them from having objective opinions, diminishing the audience's ability to make responsible and informed choices about the situations portrayed.

<sup>1</sup> Brecht, Bertolt. "Schwierigkeiten des epischen Theatres". *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 27 Nov, 1927. Rpt. Brecht on Theatre. Ed. & Trans. John Willet. London: Methuen, 1986. 23.

When speaking of the Dramatic, Brecht's tone was often passionate and damning. In his notes on his opera Mahoganny he wrote a critique of music theatre and denounced the use of dramatic devices within modern theatre. He called the dramatic "hedonistic" and branded the form that used dramatic devices "culinary". He saw all this as self-indulgent and anaesthetising. He wrote:

Witchcraft of this sort must of course be fought against. Whatever is intended to produce hypnosis, is likely to induce sordid intoxication, or creates fog has got to be given up.<sup>2</sup>

With these strong words against the Dramatic theatre Brecht sought to reforge a relationship with the audience that he felt had become lost. In this reuniting he brought in the analogy of sport:

When people in sporting establishments buy their tickets they know exactly what is going to take place; and that is exactly what does take place once they are in their seats: viz. highly trained persons developing their peculiar powers in the way most suited to them, with the greatest sense of responsibility yet in such a way as to make one feel that they are doing it primarily for their own fun. *Against that the traditional theatre is nowadays quite lacking in character.*<sup>3</sup>

He believed that the audience had been demoralised by the theatre because they show up blind, knowing what they are going to deal with and are led like children. In a sense he wanted his audiences to grow up.

When being interviewed about his notion of Epic theatre and audiences, he was documented as saying:

I aim at an extremely classical, cold, highly intellectual style of performance. I'm not writing for the scum who want to have the cockles of their hearts warmed...I give

<sup>2</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 38.

<sup>3</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 6.

the incidents baldly so that the audience can think for itself. That's why I need a quick-witted audience that knows how to observe, and gets its enjoyment from setting its reason to work.<sup>4</sup>

He wanted his audiences to grow up, as far as social responsibility and taking control of their own opinions was concerned, but he never intended his theatre to become overtly serious and to be without a sense of play. He felt the over-seriousness and stodginess of the Dramatic tradition was the culprit in a deadening art form. He felt the key to attracting people to the theatre was to bring theatre toward the people's independence:

*A theatre which makes no contact with the public is nonsense. Our theatre is accordingly a nonsense. The reason why the theatre has at present no contact with the public is that it has no idea what is wanted of it..... But it stubbornly goes on doing what it no longer can do and what is no longer wanted.*<sup>5</sup>

When criticising the theatres that produced such performances, his Marxist stance becomes glaringly apparent in that Brecht criticised the commodification of theatre and its encouragement of audience passivity:

All those establishments with their excellent heating systems, their pretty lighting, their appetite for large sums of money, their imposing exteriors, together with the entire business that goes on inside them: all this doesn't contain five pennyworth of *fun*<sup>6</sup>

One of Brecht's clearest accounts about the requirements for his Epic form was first published in 1950. In it, he uses the example of what he calls a Street Scene. The situation described is that of "an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic

<sup>4</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 14.

<sup>5</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 7.

<sup>6</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 7.

accident took place." Brecht sets it up that the bystanders have not witnessed the accident and goes on to describe, "that the demonstrator acts the behaviour of driver or victim or both in such a way that the bystanders are able to form an opinion about the accident".<sup>7</sup>

This "acting of the behaviour of the driver, victim, or both" is done in quite a different way from Dramatic theatre. Where the dramatic actor would aim to achieve a physical and emotional state that is true to the character and the situation, the Epic actor would simply indicate or demonstrate the situation. In Epic theatre the aim was to prevent the audience from identifying too strongly with any character, so that they could maintain a critical detachment:

His demonstration would be spoilt if the bystander's attention were drawn to his powers of transformation. He has to avoid presenting himself in such a way that someone calls out 'what a lifelike portrayal of a chauffeur!' He must not 'cast a spell' over anyone. He should not transport the people from normality to 'higher realms'. He need not dispose of any special powers of suggestion.<sup>8</sup>

A crucial element that differentiated Epic from Dramatic theatre, is that Epic theatre must be of "socially practical significance". The situations must always give the audience something to deal with that may effect their perspective on relevant issues in their own lives. In Brecht's case those issues were almost always those of political or social significance. What he refused to recognise was that Dramatic theatre could do this also. Brecht's mistrust was probably due to the fact that most often the context of Dramatic theatre was of a personal nature. Later we will explore this concept of drama and how it does not need to be denegated according to Brecht's bias against a theatre of affect.

In 1930 Brecht put together a table that showed "certain changes of emphasis between the Dramatic and Epic theatre":

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<sup>7</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 121.

<sup>8</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 122.

DRAMATIC THEATRE	EPIC THEATRE
Plot	Narrative
implicates the spectator in a stage situation	turns the spectator into an observer, but
wears down his capacity for action	arouses his capacity for action
provides him with sensations	forces him to take decisions
experience	picture of the world
the spectator is involved in something	he is made to face something
suggestion	argument
instinctive feelings are preserved	brought to the point of recognition
the spectator is in the thick of it, shares the	the spectator stands outside, studies
experience	
the human being is taken for granted	the human being is the object of inquiry
he is unalterable	he is alterable and able to alter
eyes on the finish	eyes on the course
one scene makes another	each scene for itself
growth	montage
linear development	in curves
evolutionary determinism	jumps
man as a fixed point	man as a process
thought determines being	social being determines thought
feeling	reason

Perhaps the clearest distinction between Epic and Dramatic theatre is that Dramatic theatre aims to create an "illusion of the first time", an effect that allows the audience to experience the story unfolding in front of their very eyes. The audience is to experience the event with the actor on stage as if it is happening in the now. In Epic theatre there is no attempt to disguise the fact that the playing out of the situation is a re-creation. The very fact that it is looking back, is a crucial element regarding Epic theatre's part as being strictly historical. Brecht expressed what he perceived as being the different experiences of the dramatic and Epic audience by composing two short monologues that the respective groups might voice:

The Spectator of the *dramatic* theatre says: 'Yes, I have felt the same. - I am just like this, - This is only natural. - It will always be like this. - This human being's suffering moves me, because there is no way out for him - This is great art: it bears the mark of the inevitable. - I am weeping with those who weep on the stage, laughing with those who laugh.

<sup>9</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 37.



The Spectator of the epic theatre says:

I should never have thought so. - That is not the way to do it. - This is most surprisingly, hardly credible. - This will have to stop. - -This Human being's suffering moves me, because there would have been a way out for him. This is great art: nothing here seems inevitable - I am laughing about those who weep on the stage, weeping about those who laugh.<sup>10</sup>

Whether or not one believes that the dramatic audience is really so much more indiscriminate than the epic audience, these comments give us a good indication of what Brecht was aiming to achieve within Epic theatre. He wanted to catalyse the audience into thought, to incite a desire for social change in them. He saw the Aristotelian/Dramatic model as moving the audience to empathy and for Brecht that was not enough; he desired the audience to be moved to action. Theatre for Brecht was not only entertainment but potentially a social and political tool.

Brecht felt that much of the aesthetics and practices that were employed to execute the theatre of his time were in conflict with the effects that he wanted to achieve within Epic theatre. He felt that the practices of dramatic theatre aimed to coerce the audience into seduction. This included the sets (that intended to take the audience to a different place); music (that intended to evoke emotion or act as a background to enhance the place or situation); the texts (which carried the audience into an emotional journey); and the acting and movement (which encouraged the audience to experience the place, time, events and emotional journey of the characters within these contexts).

In order to bring performance practices more in tune with his criteria for theatre he strove to achieve a distance between the audience and the stage happenings in order to allow for a more critical experience by the audience. This distance occurred within the texts, the use of music, the set design, and the acting and movement techniques. To keep the audience from

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<sup>10</sup> Brecht, Bertolt. Rpt. Martin Esslin. Brecht a choice of evils, a critical study of The Man, His Work and His Opinions. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1959. 115.

identifying too closely with the action and characters while maintaining their interest in the situation was an interesting and difficult dilemma.

### *Alienation*

In order for Brecht to achieve the "effect of estrangement" or alienation that was so necessary in the performance of Epic theatre, Brecht developed the famous *Verfremdungseffekt*. It is probably more famous than the man himself and over the years has been the centre of much misunderstanding and controversy in the theatre. A large portion of the misunderstanding can be attributed to the English translation of the word. It is often referred to as the "Alienation Effect". The word alienation has negative connotations of disagreement and loneliness, or non-communication in English. These are not things that one would traditionally attribute to theatrical practices. By translating the word to French a better understanding of the true meaning emerges: *dépaysement*, *éstrangement*, or probably the best choice, *distanciation*.<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of this study, I will from now on refer to the *Verfremdungseffekt* as the A-effect.

The objective of the A-effect was to provide a distancing between the audience and the production, with the intention of keeping the audience from identifying too closely with any particular element, thus losing impartiality:

What is involved here is, briefly, a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labelling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this 'effect' is to allow the spectator to criticise constructively from a social point of view.<sup>12</sup>

Brecht saw the A-effect as serving specific purposes. One was to compel people to look at things they see regularly in a new light:

<sup>11</sup> I wonder if that is the avenue taken by Margaret Eddershaw in her essay *Brecht in Perspective* when she suggested that a better English translation of the word might have been, 'the distancing effect'. Eddershaw, Margaret. "Acting Methods: Brecht and Stanislavsky". *Brecht in perspective* Eds. Graham Bartram, Anthony Wayne. London: Longman, 1982. 128-144.

<sup>12</sup> Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 125.

A common use of the A-effect is when someone says: 'have you ever really looked carefully at your watch?' The questioner knows that I have looked at it often enough, and now his question deprives me of the sight which I've grown used to and which accordingly has nothing more to say to me. I used to look at it to see the time, and now when he asks me in this importunate way I realise that I have given up seeing the watch itself with an astonished eye; and it is in many ways an astonishing piece of machinery.<sup>13</sup>

He also saw the A-effect as a natural tool people use to re-assess their assumptions about the people in their personal and social lives:

To see one's mother as a man's wife one needs an A-effect; this is provided, for instance, when one acquires a stepfather. If one sees one's teacher hounded by the bailiffs an A-effect occurs: one is jerked out of the relationship in which the teacher seems big into one where he seems small.<sup>14</sup>

These examples from life do not, however, give a method by which the A-effect can be used on the stage except as an element already set up within the narrative of the drama. This was a common problem within Brecht's description of his A-effect. Most of his accounts of the effect were largely dependent on preconceived texts or situations usually which he himself wrote or devised.

In fact the entire aesthetic that he developed with the use of the A-affect and the application of *gestus* was reliant on a presupposed convention. There had to be a recognisable object to distance from and a recognised physical symbol or gesture within an established social context. The convention was there to be demonstrated as tightly directed by the narrative.

For the Brechtian theatre it was the narrative that did the acting or the doing. The convention provided the event, and the performer subordinated him/herself to this cycle. Brecht theatre feeds of an existing context: The bourgeois context. He is criticising something already

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<sup>13</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 144.

exists. The performer was an indicator of the action within the social context as activated by Brecht's narrative. Once again we find that the performer was still kept from activating meaning. The narrative and the social convention were the custodians of meaning for the Brechtian theatre.

It is this point that leads me to question the validity of Brecht's reputation as a developer of a new acting technique let alone his own claim that he took the craft a step beyond Stanislavsky since it is clear with the organisation that the actor was not to act at all. The performer did not actively perform, toward, against, across the drama; rather they demonstrated the narrative which was regarded as the primary focus of activity.

### *Alienation as a Performance Technique*

Margaret Eddershaw points out in her text on the acting methods of Brecht and Stanislavsky that there are some fundamental differences. She describes the acting in a Brechtian play:

The acting is, as it will be throughout, in an almost cartoon style, using sparse vocal effects and clear, diagrammatic gestures; mimicry rather than a behaviour. During the scene the actors at some point appear to be speaking to each other in a relatively realistic way as though we were not present, and at other moments they address us directly, implicating us in the play's action and involving us in the performance. When the episode is finished the actors indicate this by simply becoming themselves, becoming actors again.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the article she specifies some differences between Stanislavsky's and Brecht's performance approaches. All of which can be traced directly to Brecht's "avoidance of illusion and the blocking of the audience's will to empathise with the characters".

The Brechtian actor/singer was required to "address the audience directly" and "avoid treating the audience as a single unit". He would have the actor divide the audience into

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<sup>14</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 144.

<sup>15</sup> Eddershaw 129.

groups of friends and enemies and address parts of the text accordingly. The Brechtian actors were also to "distance themselves from their roles." They were not to get involved with the inner life of the character. Rather they were to demonstrate or indicate the emotional life through the action as given directly in the text only. Rather than develop a logical through line of action to make sense of the various happenings and behaviour that a character was involved in during the course of a play, Brecht stressed the need for the actor to emphasise the inconsistencies.<sup>16</sup>

Brecht's methodology was designed to serve a meaning within his texts and the theatrical style that he saw as appropriate for his own political and creative exploits. The demands that he placed on the actor were solely to serve his own needs. Brecht's practice was grounded on the moral program of Marxism. Like Wagner he believed art had a social and unifying function. For Brecht, theatre would elevate the audience's consciousness to a realisation of its own social conditions and responsibilities, activating the audience (but according to a pre-existing historical program.) Stanislavsky aimed to create a system of acting to serve the act of acting a system that was not a style of acting (as he proved during his creative life by applying his techniques to such diverse styles as naturalistic theatre and opera) but a process that he hoped could be developed and used to bring any style to life.

As Eric Bentley pointed out in his 1964 article, Are Stanislavski and Brecht Commensurable? the A-Effect was not as new a development for theatre as Brecht had claimed:

The 'Alienation Affect' is not alien to the tradition of comic acting as Stanislavsky and everyone else know it - what Brecht is attacking is the tragic tradition in its attenuated form of domestic, psychological drama of pathos and suspense. But the Charlie Chaplins and Zero Mostels practice Alienation as Monsieur Jourdain

<sup>16</sup> The "through line of action" was a term developed by Stanislavsky. It was based on the "logic of human nature" where by one is thought to move through life from one desire to another. This particular aspect of Stanislavsky's system served the naturalistic style far better than the avante garde. In the following chapter on Stanislavsky in part three, this aspect of his work is explored in detail with particular regard to various style application possibilities.

composed prose. Perhaps it takes a German intellectual to make such heavy weather of the thing.<sup>17</sup>

Although the A-effect was not the apparent theatrical invention or the new technique of acting that it was promoted to be, it did however bring about some theatrical devices that are used within both opera and "straight" theatre regularly. I would argue that some of the devices when taken out of the context of Epic theatre often remain just that, devices.

### *The Set Serves the Text*

Brecht's A-effect determined the sets and costumes, the use of props, movement and blocking, and the connection between music and drama. For Brecht the use of set was not a way of transporting the audience to another reality. In fact it was crucial that the audience retained the awareness that they were in a theatre, witnessing a performance by actors on a stage. Often as part of the set, the machinery and cables, ropes and flies that were required for its use during the show were left exposed:

If the set represents a town it must look like a town that has been built to last precisely two hours. One must conjure up the reality of time. Everything must be provisional yet polite. A place need only have the credibility of a place glimpsed in a dream.<sup>18</sup>

The set was also there to serve the narrative and the action as depicted in the text. This meant that what was incorporated in the set was somehow to symbolise a critical point in the narrative or to be used by a character to further the narrative. As part of Brecht's sets he often incorporated signs or placards that had writing on them which told the audience what was happening, or where it was happening, or when it was happening. They were often written fairly crudely and always without emotion, although the facts portrayed were often emotive.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Bentley, Eric. Are Stanislavski and Brecht Commensurable? Tulane Drama Review. Vol 9 no 1 1964. 74.

<sup>18</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 233.

<sup>19</sup> For instance in Brecht's play, 'Mother Courage' (1939), the first sign reads. "Spring, 1624. General

For Brecht the props that were used were as authentic<sup>20</sup> as possible and again only present when required for the furthering of the narrative.

Brecht's A-effect (as manifest in the movement and/or blocking) was restricted to movements that were only necessary for the depiction of the situation. Just as he believed the character should be born out of the action as depicted in the text, he believed that all movement should indicate or demonstrate the happenings, to serve the narrative. With this Brecht made constant use of symbolism within his direction of movement.

### *Gestus*

Brecht's philosophy of movement and gesture began at the inaugural stages of his development of ideas concerning epic theatre. In an article from *Versuche* (Berlin 1930), he laid out his first "full statement" on Epic theatre and in it, introduced the term *gestlich*. John Willett describes the term as follows: "*Gestus*, of which *gestisch* is the adjective, means both gist and gesture; an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude, expressible in words or actions."<sup>21</sup>

The "gist" from Brecht's perspective is not the "gist" of the character or the inner life that the character is experiencing. It is not the gist of a particular time, but the gist of Brecht's historical narrative. It is again, the "gist" of the plot narrative. So every body movement and piece of staging incorporates a justification and indicates the text. This use of *Gestus*, therefore demands an integration between movement and drama within the context of the A-effect.

When applied not only to movement as serving text, but expanded to the use of music, there is a practical link that can be drawn among the music movement and drama. Kurt

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Oxenstjerna recruits troops in Dalarna for the Polish campaign. The canteen woman, Anna Fierling, Known as 'Mother Courage' loses a son."

<sup>20</sup> Brecht's props and costumes did not use illusionary devices such as fake jewels or hollow statues. He had craftsmen make the objects that were needed just as they would make them for 'real' life and rather than include elaborate costuming he would cloth the actors in sackcloth and make no apologies for the fact.

<sup>21</sup> Weill, Kurt. "*Über den gestischen Charakter der Musik*". *Die Musik* (p 419) March 1929. Rpt. *Brecht on Theatre* Ed. & Trans. John Willett. London: Methuen, 1986. 42.

Weill, in a publication that preceded Brecht's first account of *Gestus*, claimed that music was an important component in the use of *Gestus* in theatre: "It can reproduce the *Gestus* that illustrates the incident on the stage; it can even create a kind of basic *Gestus* (*Grundgestus*), forcing the action into a particular attitude that excludes all doubt and misunderstanding about the incident in question."<sup>22</sup> Later in 1957, after many practical experiences with the application of *Gestus* in its musical application, Brecht wrote:

To put it practically, gestic music is that music which allows the actor to exhibit certain basic *gests* on the stage. So-called 'cheap' music, particularly that of the cabaret and the operetta, has for some time been a sort of gestic music. Serious music, however, still clings to lyricism, and cultivates expression for its own sake.<sup>23</sup>

Brecht stated that his "most successful demonstration of Epic theatre" and his most successful utilisation of the A-effect was the 1928 production of The Threepenny Opera. It was a collaboration between Brecht and Kurt Weill that was inspired by the libretto of John Gay's Beggar's Opera. Brecht's description of the 1928 production of The Threepenny Opera brings to the fore the most significant differences between the part music plays in Epic theatre as opposed to Dramatic theatre:

This was the first use of theatrical music in accordance with a new point of view. Its most striking innovation lay in the strict separation of the music from all the other elements of entertainment offered. Even superficially this was evident from the fact that the small orchestra was installed visibly on the stage. For the singing of the songs a special change of lighting was arranged; the orchestra was lit up; the titles of the various numbers were projected on the screens at the back, for instance 'Song concerning the Insufficiency of Human Endeavour' or 'A short song allows Miss

<sup>22</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 42.

<sup>23</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 87.



Polly Peachum to confess to her Horrified Parents that she is wedded to the Murderer Macheath'; and the actors changed their positions before the number began.<sup>24</sup>

### *Separation of the Performing Arts to Serve Texts*

Both the "Separation of the music from all the other elements of the entertainment offered" and positioning of the orchestra as being "installed visibly on the stage" were two elements that were in direct opposition to Wagner's notions of music in theatre. The lack of separation was to Brecht a direct link to the kind of dramatic/Aristotelian theatre that he despised:

So long as the expression 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (or 'integrated work of art') means that the integration is a muddle, so long as the arts are supposed to be 'fused' together, the various elements will all be equally degraded, and each will act as a mere 'feed' to the rest. The process of fusion extends to the spectator, who gets thrown into the melting pot too and becomes a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art..<sup>25</sup>

Wagner's intent within his *Gesamtkunstwerk* was not to create a "muddle" and in Wagner's understanding the elements of drama were not to be "fused". Wagner was looking for a communal interrelation between the arts that he adopted from his notion of the Greek ideal. The fusion, if any, would have been that of the poetic and the musical texts. However he never actually achieved such a fusion within the conventional musical/poetic structures. Rather, he radically altered the poetic text and the musical text to create a textual fusion of a fashion, his fashion. Within this *Stabreim* or *Leitmotif* "fusion" married by rhythm, melody, harmony, and meaning he did not effectively address any relationship (or lack thereof) in the performing arts. he did not integrate the aspects of performance. His scores aimed at integration but this was still at the level of music and poetic text, not the production or performance aspects that create his music-dramas.

<sup>24</sup> Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 85.

<sup>25</sup> Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 37.

Brecht's revolt against "fusion" stemmed from his ongoing fight for the power of the audience, and the power of questioning in a socio/political context, where the lack of individual and moral questioning had serious ramifications. He believed that in order to keep musical theatre from feeding the insidious "witchcraft" of sentiment, and succumbing to a mere "culinary" purpose, words, music and setting had to be more independent of one another. This was a requirement of Epic opera, aimed at the utilisation of the A-effect in every aspect.

In the same article that sets out the differences between Epic and Dramatic theatre, Brecht provides a chart where he lays out the differences between Epic and Dramatic Opera:

DRAMATIC OPERA	EPIC OPERA
The music dishes up music which heightens the text music which proclaims the text music which illustrates music which paints the psychological situation	The music communicates music which sets forth the text music which takes the text for granted which takes up a position which gives the attitude

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Much of the music of the time complied to the elements actually aiming to satisfy the Epic model. One could say that musically the ground was already being laid for the music of Brechtian Epic theatre. There was a movement away from the grander forms toward the more intimate, ensembles and chamber groups. With the works of such contemporaries as Milaud, Stravinsky, Léger, Ravel and Porter we can also draw a connection between a crisscrossing of performance mediums and ensemble music. This climate surely allowed Brecht the freedom to explore his notions of the separation of the arts within his anti-Wagnerian stance.<sup>27</sup>

This "honing" down of the music to a more approachable and criticisable form can be seen

<sup>26</sup> Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 38.

<sup>27</sup> John Willet, in his chapter 'the music' from his book 'The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht', discusses the consequences of the musical trends of the time: "All this means that the relations between lowbrow music and the new anti-Wagnerian aims of the younger serious composers were for a time very close: that the actual scale of performance was being cut down, harmonies clarified, melody emphasised, orchestration tightened up. An element of classical balance was being reintroduced. And for some reason this trend expressed itself, not in orthodox opera but in short and rather frivolous stage works, where the means were economical." Willet, John. *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht, A Study from Eight Aspects*. London: Methuen, 1967. 12.

as a reaction to the Romantic era typified in the larger-than-life music of Wagner and Beethoven. This new music was less intimidating to the lay ear, partly due to the use of less complex harmonies, more simple melodies and smaller units of this shifting from one aesthetic to another and the mechanism behind the transition is discussed by Roland Barthes in his book, *Image-Music-Text*:

In short, there was first the actor of music, then the interpreter (the grand Romantic Voice), then finally the technician, who relieves the listener of all activity, even by procuration, and abolishes in the sphere of music the very notion of *doing*.<sup>28</sup>

### *The Singer/Actor Serves the Text*

In Brecht's notes on The Three Penny Opera, he made distinctions in performance practice for the singer that had effects on the singers interpretive ability. The singer was no longer to be a technician of the music, or a virtuoso serving the music. The singer was returned to the "doing" of the narrative, not the music, by way of a functional relationship within the text as manifest in the A-effect.<sup>29</sup>:

When an actor sings he undergoes a change of function. Nothing is more revolting than when the actor pretends not to notice that he has left the level of plain speech and started to sing. The three levels - Plain speech, heightened speech and singing - must always remain distinct, and in no case should heightened speech represent an intensification of plain speech, or singing of heightened speech. In no case therefore should singing take place where words are prevented by excess of feeling.<sup>30</sup>

This approach to vocal expression was very different from the approaches that preceded Brecht and was made largely possible because of the "un-serious" style of music he employed to accompany his texts. The very structure of these works allowed for a break between word and song and the song contents often served narrative or commentary. The

<sup>28</sup> Barthes, Roland. "From work to text." *Image Music Text*. London: Fontana Press, 1977. 150.

<sup>29</sup> I will later describe this notion of "doing" in more detail in the following chapters on Stanislavsky and the Integrative Performance Technique.

performer did not have to justify the shift into song which in the more traditional styles often started in the preceding speech or within a recitative structure.

For the more traditional music structures the performer was required to apply the techniques of the dramatic school, where singing was considered a heightened form of speech. In context, the notion of heightened speech was logical as most of the songs within dramatic music include subjects of heightened emotion and in order to make the relationship between music and word make sense the performer must justify this with an often melodramatic outburst into song.

Brecht believed that this emotional content in song was another form of "witchcraft" and "culinary" hedonism that would render the audience passive and uncritical:

The actor must not only sing but show a man singing. His aim is not so much to bring out the emotional content of his song (has one the right to offer others a dish that one has already eaten oneself?) but to show gestures that are so to speak the habits and usage of the body.<sup>31</sup>

Brecht however softened his stance on the unemotional within certain contexts<sup>32</sup> and toward the end of his life began to express regret for not having investigated the uses of the other performance theories.

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<sup>30</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 44.

<sup>31</sup> Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 45.

<sup>32</sup> Lotte Lenya, one of Brecht's most famous actor/singers and wife of Kurt Weill, recalls a conversation during rehearsal with Brecht that took place just after the war: "Now at that time, there was a big to-do about epic theatre - everything was epic, everything was Entfremdung (sic)- alienation. I said, 'to hell with that, I'm singing "Surabaya Johnny" the way I always sang it'....Right in the middle of it. I stopped for a second and said, 'Brecht, you know your theory of epic theatre - maybe you don't want me just to sing it the way I sang it - as emotional as 'Surabaya Johnny' has to be done?'... He said, 'Lenya darling what ever you do is epic enough for me.'" Later in the 1950's Brecht softened in tone and finally, after admitting that he had never actually achieved a purely 'epic' work, he began to look at his work more philosophically: "So far as theory goes I offend against the inflexible rule that the proof of the pudding is in the eating - which happens to be one of my own favourite principles. My theatre (and it can hardly be held against me) is in a naïve sense a philosophical one; that is to say, I am interested in people's attitudes and opinions. My whole theory is much naïver than people think, or than my way of putting it allows them to suppose" Brecht, Brecht on Theatre 248.

In his later years, Brecht also expressed regret for not acknowledging the work of the past and it appears he developed a more critical attitude to his own approach:

I hardly ever got around to mentioning these still valid rules [of dramatic theatre], and many who read my hints and explanations imagined that I worked to abolish them. If the critics could only look at my theatre as the audience does, without starting out by stressing my theories, then they might well simply see theatre - a theatre, I hope, imbued with imagination, humour and meaning - and only when they began to analyse its effects would they be struck by certain innovations, which they could then find explained in my theoretical writings. I think the root of the trouble was that my plays have to be properly performed if they are to be effective, so that for the sake of (oh dear me!) a non-Aristotelian dramaturgy I had to outline 'calamity!' an epic theatre.<sup>33</sup>

### *Perpetuation of a Problem*

Brecht's technique of alienation within his epic theatre changed the aesthetics of performance. Its exposure of the theatrical illusionary devices, its use of placards of text to emphasise the narrative, and its reliance on depiction and demonstration, rather than affect or experience could be interpreted as the intellectualising of the emotion. He did this by taking out all of the illusionary devices within theatre and making the narrative the main expresser of the meaning. Emotional elements, if any, had to be positioned in such a way as to invoke thought and critical analysis. (This could be explained by Brecht's Marxist background: In Marxism it is social and historical existence that explains consciousness. This means that all human behaviour must ultimately be reducible to explanation and historical causality). Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, on the other hand with its use of Leitmotiv and harmonic transition to induce experience of metaphorical proportions, made the poetic and narrative text subservient to the musical. He attempted to utilise music as a tool to enter the subconscious and cause spiritual/communal experience. Consequently he could be seen to

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<sup>33</sup> Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre* 248.

emotionalise the intellect. Wagner, following Schopenhauer, posited a realm of experience, that was not directly representable in words and needed to be evoked through music.

However with Brecht and Wagner, as with all the reformers, there was a constant bias toward text whether it was musical or poetic. There was the unwavering notion that the dramatic meaning is somehow inherent in the word or the note, and that it was the organisation of these that would induce affections, meaning, thought and/or experience.

Along with this assumption, there seems to have been a constant to-ing and fro-ing power play between the music over word, or word over music. Whether it was prose text utilising its poetic or narrative aspects, or musical text drawing from its harmonic, rhythmic or melody aspects, it seems that what was sought was a perfect or original balance between the elements of the separate texts or between the two texts themselves. The entire history of opera tells the story of these struggles. The evolution of opera has been determined by a departure from one textual bias to another. (I use text here in Barthes' sense of Work: it is as though some present object could govern a proper relation to an opera's meaning, and this could be pre-determined.)

The major shifts within the aesthetic of opera have always been guided by a shifting from either music to written text, or prose to music. Such shifts were often catalysed by the dissatisfaction that opera was not attaining its original dramatic potential. The Camerata, Monteverdi, Gluck, and Wagner turned to the Greek ideal for a solution. Each sought to reform and each did so by professing that the word must have precedence over the music. However, as I have already stated, in the cases of Monteverdi and Wagner, it was the music that they championed in practice. All this was in the aim of regaining a lost immediacy of meaning, not corrupted by the "effect" or "ornaments" of performance.

Both Mozart and Wagner addressed the power of music. Mozart did so by unashamedly proclaiming that the poetry must be the obedient daughter of the music. Wagner, as an advocate of the Greek ideal, could not so bluntly take that stance. However with his sympathies to Schopenhauer's philosophies he found a way to make a similar statement. Both Wagner and

Mozart can be interpreted as having made music take on the qualities that were seen to be the job of the poetry. With their use of themes and *Leitmotif*, they could let the music activate character and plot developments, and with the use of the orchestral timbre they could describe or give flavour to a character or perhaps a moment in the plot much like an adjective. Both can also be credited with manipulating the known structural constraints of opera. Mozart fused the *Buffa* and *Seria* styles. Wagner changed both the poetic and musical text. He created a *Stabreim* to make the words more musical, expanded on the rules of harmony, created new timbre for the orchestra, and did away with the aria/recitative structure all together. His creation was such a deviation from the known, that he insisted that it be referred to as music drama rather than opera.

It was perhaps Brecht that was the most vigilant advocate of the word over music. He would have made the Zeno and Metastasio proud. The music, acting, singing, and even the sets, had to bow down and serve the narrative. Furthermore the literal text played an active part in the drama with the display of placards to emphasis the narrative.

## PART TWO: AN ANTI-HERMENEUTIC APPROACH TO OPERA

The previous chapter of this thesis has described the accepted history of opera by tracing a hermeneutic bias. This is the assumption that an operatic work has a meaning, and that this meaning remains present only to be passively unveiled in the act of performance. Whether the musical or poetic element has been favoured, disputes regarding the appropriate hierarchy have relied upon some notion of a proper relation to which performance ought to be subordinated. Further, the frequent invocation of the ideal of Ancient Greece presupposes that Greek tragedy conveyed meaning immediately, and that modern performance practice has "fallen" into mere display, technique or surface at the expense of the work's deep meaning. In this chapter I will attempt to offer a critique of these assumptions and prejudices that operatic history has so profoundly established. To do so I call on two thinkers who are renowned for tackling assumptions of meaning within hermeneutically-based practices of writing/reading and communication. They are Roland Barthes, and Jacques Derrida.

Neither Barthes' nor Derrida's writings cited in this study are about opera or theatre, however they deal with the written word and the complications surrounding issues of meaning and experience. These are issues that are central to the desires and difficulties that have spurred opera from one reform to the next. Both Derrida and Barthes offer a new perspective that has interesting ramifications when applied to the operatic question of origin and meaning, and the dilemma of the primacy of words over music and music over words. Both Barthes and Derrida explore a shift from inherent meaning, and mythical origin towards the notions of text or event. Barthes refers to such a shift as an "epistemological slide": a change in the very nature of what it is to know.

Jacques Derrida has described the history of Western philosophy as "logocentrism": the assumption that truth, meaning or sense exist prior to their specific textual incarnation. (By text Derrida refers to all those pre-semantic features that make meaning possible, including inscription, tone, rhythm, syntax or, as he terms it, difference) What Western thought has not been able to confront is the event. Any act of meaning, knowledge or logic relies upon



elements that exceed the inner meaning of the knowing subject. To speak, mean or know demands some system of difference, syntax, structure or writing. This is not just to say that we think through language. For Derrida, language itself relies on pre-linguistic events: the sounds, rhythms, tones and differences of concrete languages. (This is why Derrida's own work is laced with puns, and also why he refers to both James Joyce and Stephane Mallarmé as writers who foreground the event of writing: all those actions that produce meaning but are themselves not strictly meaningful. In relation to opera history and theory, the hermeneutic bias (or belief in a grounding presence) is evidenced in a history of disputes and reforms regarding the primacy of words or music, as though some element held the foundation of the work's proper and original sense. This assumes that the work has a meaning and that proper performance would be the unfolding of that meaning. (In later chapters I will explore how the notion of event can be translated to performance. Recognising the event acknowledges that a performance always exceeds what is given in advance either by the author's intention or the actor's intention; an event affirms and recognises the positive role of performance.)

Alongside Derrida's critique of "logocentrism" or the metaphysics of presence, Roland Barthes theorised a distinction between the work and the text. Roland Barthes' essay, From Work to Text (1971) distinguishes between what he calls work (which operates much like the musical and poetic texts in opera as discussed in part one) and a new object called text which "comes not from an internal recasting of disciplines but from their encounter in relation to an object which traditionally is the province of none of them".<sup>1</sup> He calls this object Text. It is not to be confused with the texts of libretto and score that have been referred to in the previous chapters. For the purpose of distinction, the Text of Barthes will remain underlined and capitalised through out this study.

The notion of work has governed traditional theories of interpretation. A work is deemed to have a proper, inherent and present meaning - a meaning there to be disclosed by the passive reader or critic. Further, a "work" is self-contained, and is defined against what

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<sup>1</sup> Barthes 155.

Barthes affirms as "interdisciplinarity" and "intertextuality." His notion of the "text" unpacks these two notions. A text is interdisciplinary: Freudian psychoanalysis or Marxist economics, for example, were not obedient to their disciplines; they re-created and re-invented the notions of mind and labour, and did so by not respecting boundaries. This can be likened to an understanding of the operatic work or text. An operatic work would have to concede to conventions, traditions, context and a given discipline. To look at an opera as a text, on the other hand, would be to ask how it works, what it might do, and the sort of events it might make possible. (I will explore these possibilities in a later chapter on Integrated Performance Technique.)

Barthes' opposition between work and text is not symmetrical. A Work defines itself as a work by marginalising text. Certain elements are seen as parasitic or contingent to a central meaning. (In opera this is evidenced in the denunciation and subordination of performance.) A text, on the other hand, does not privilege a different set of elements. It is not another hierarchy to challenge the notion of the work. A text aims to be non-hierarchical by affirming all those elements involved in meaning production - including inscription, rhyme, material elements of signification and tone. A Work grounds itself on some notion of meaning; a text recognises any such ground as the outcome of a textual event. This gives rise to Barthes' notion of intertextuality. A text is not a self-contained object with an inherent meaning; a text means only by being activated. And any activation is just the production of further text. Text needs to be understood, then, in its widest sense: not just as written text but as including all forms of difference such as action, practice, movement and spatial and visual differences. What Barthes' opposition emphasises is the event of reading. Reading is not just the passive repetition of a meaning that is given in advance. Reading is itself a positive and productive event.

Jacques Derrida expands Barthes' notion of event beyond that of reading to include elements that exceed the decisions of critics and readers. In Limited Inc he refers to an "undecidability" that necessarily conditions any decision. Any speech act, for example, relies on factors that are not decided by the speaker. Derrida defines these factors as

grammatological all the material elements of sound and syntax that effect meaning but are not themselves meaningful. (Later in my chapter on Integrated Performance Technique I will argue that a theory of performance must consider the entire drama or "happening" - including all those features that lie beyond the intentions of any single author, work or interpreter.) To affirm the grammatological, rather than the logical, dimension of text leads to a heightened responsibility. We can no longer argue that an interpretation (or performance) simply follows from a work. Rather, we need to recognise the event of any reading or performance through the notion of a grounding or limiting context; for context is also the outcome of undecidable features (the syntax, difference or system that precedes meaning.) A context is never fully present nor is it determining; it cannot function as a proper origin. In his essay, "Signature Event Context" (1972) Derrida deals with the assumptions of meaning and hierarchy that surround the notions of "communication" and "context". Derrida also elaborated more fully on a notion of "event", which will continue to play an increasingly important role throughout this study of operatic performance theory. Before looking at Derrida's essay in detail we need to turn back to Barthes' to understand how the notion of text problematises our standard notions of interpretation.

### Roland Barthes (1915-1980) "From Work To Text"

In "From Work To Text", Roland Barthes describes the Work as, "a fragment of substance, occupying a part of space" that can also be "held in the hand" and is "caught up in a process of filiation". The Work in Barthes' sense is much like the musical and poetic texts within the history and practice of opera. Their similarities go beyond the fact that they are fragments of the substance, occupy space and can be held in the hand as libretti and scores. As the previous chapter has illustrated, the score and the libretti have traditionally been caught up in a process of filiation. The composer and the poet are the fathers of the score and the libretti, and are given a paternal authority within performance practice and have been maintained as the holders of meaning. Throughout the history of opera we see a shifting of primacy between these two Works, but the fact remains that it is from either the libretti, or the score, or both that the meaning has attempted to have been derived, and adhered to in performance. It is not the performance that holds the meaning. Furthermore, in the two times in history where the performer emerged; the age of the Castrati and Belcanto, the singer has been historically criticised for their "lack of meaning" in that they exhibited virtuosity rather than the more "deeper" meanings attributed to the score or libretto.

From the beginning, the Camerata endeavoured to find the perfect marriage between what they saw as the elements of an ancient music practice. They focused on the words and music. Wagner, who returned to the ideal of marriage in an ancient Greek image also focused on the elements of words and music, although he alluded to the performance practices of dance and acting in his search for a "total work of art". Essentially it was the words and music that Wagner reorganised and not the practices of singing, acting, or dancing. Brecht developed a new procedure for acting within his notions of gestus and alienation that further served the narrative aspect of the words. Rather than reorganising the word he reorganised the acting and music to serve the Work.

Barthes, however, argues that there is something else other than the Work. He starts with the notion that this "something else" is the consequence of modern interdisciplinary ways of

thinking and research. He refers to the connection between "linguistics, anthropology, Marxism and psychoanalysis." Each one of his examples has within it a system, a philosophy, a context, and a tradition that is unique. In this way the disciplines are not unlike that of the Works that make up opera which are traditionally considered as self contained wholes of words and music. The performance disciplines of acting, dance, movement and singing, also become Works when directed and choreographed and even set-designed when the director, choreographer, and designer become authors in their own rights. The product of performance is then subordinated through these processes of filiation, processes by which whatever is performed or interpreted is attributed to its rightful author or owner.

Barthes proposes that this new object that affects the idea of the work, "comes not from the internal recasting of each of these disciplines, but rather from their encounter in relation to an object which traditionally is the province of none of them". Barthes is referring to the notion of structure, a notion that enables a radical recasting of how we think about meaning production. In "from Work to Text" Roland Barthes extends the insights of structuralism to argue for a radically anti-hermeneutic approach to meaning and interpretation. In general, structuralist linguistics argued that no term in a language is meaningful in itself. A language only works as a set of conventional and arbitrary differences. There is no necessary or essential reason why a language expresses one set of differences rather than another. One of the most common examples given for this is the colour spectrum. Whereas some languages distinguish between grey and blue, others have only one word for both. And it is not difficult to think of words and distinctions in one language that have no equivalent in another. This may seem to be a simple point but it has important consequences for art theory and interpretation, for it suggests a necessary untranslatability in all texts and languages. According to structuralism, words or signifiers are not the tokens of already given meanings. On the contrary, meanings are only possible because there are material and specific tokens that make differences and distinctions possible. This means that language is not just the vehicle or medium of communication; it is only because of the specific, arbitrary and differential function of linguistic signifiers that meaning and communication are

possible. This means that we might have to reverse the order of aesthetic interpretation. It is not that there is some meaning which the artist, writer or composer then expresses through some medium. The medium is actually what produces the meaning. A meaning cannot, then, be divorced from the specific event of its inscription or the materiality of its production. This might be described as an anti-hermeneutic approach. There is no meaning "behind" a work or utterance: meanings are the effect of specific text and signifiatory events.

Opera has had its fair share of "internal recasting". In fact the entire history of opera can be perceived as repeated attempts to recast the words, the music, and/or the relationship between them. Furthermore, the reformers have each time abided by notions of origin, hierarchy, filiation, and the idea that there is an inherent meaning within the texts. This has usually resulted in the submission of one and the reorganisation of the other, an internal recasting. It could be said that each of the shifts in history were an attempt to achieve "something else" via a perfect union or a submission of one of the texts. This something else was often referred to as drama. In each stage of history there is an attempt to attain this elusive element. In the earliest days it was through the perfect organisation of the music to serve the poetry. This organisation was to induce affections and create drama in the ideal image of the ancient Greeks.

In this example, as in all of the examples discussed in the previous chapters, it could be seen that neither music or poetry were brought to encounter an object that was "traditionally the province of none of them". Nevertheless it is most evident that the reformers of opera from the Camerata to Brecht, did at times aggressively attempt "internal recastings" of the music and/or the poetry.

Barthes goes further to say that the interdisciplinarity "cannot be accomplished by the simple confrontation of specialist branches of knowledge." It can be argued that most "multi media" practices within current operatic performance practices come dangerously close to "simple confrontation", and why should they be different since the very performance disciplines that render opera a performance medium - movement, music, and acting - have done the same for centuries? Furthermore, how could these disciplines do anything differently since their

traditional purpose has been simply as a vessel for the words and music which have been in constant confrontation? Confrontation is not about a mutual interrelationship between disciplines, it is about competition where subservience is demanded. Such is the tradition of operatic composition and performance practice from its very core.

Barthes further stresses that interdisciplinarity is "not the calm of an easy security; it begins effectively (as apposed to a mere expression of a pious wish) when solidarity of the old disciplines breaks down." Barthes refers to this as an "epistemological slide", and opposes this to an all important "break". Barthes refers to a slide rather than a break because he does not want to suggest some conscious decision to re-ground theory on a new foundation. He seeks to challenge the very notion of foundation through the event of structure. Once we take the idea of structure seriously we have to recognise that knowledge and learning are the effects of movements that are not within the realms of decision and knowledge. Wagner and Brecht's work could well be seen as attempted breaks of operatic tradition. However it can be argued that they created their own styles rather than affirming those new processes by which opera continually refigures itself. In fact as history tells us, every reform was a self-professed break in the name of a new or more proper foundation and against what was supposed to be a problem with opera's imbalance. If opera would dare to "epistemologically slide" what would we have and how do we begin, and when would we know if we have found it? Barthes suggests that the "new object" is "obtained by the sliding or overturning of former categories." He calls this object Text.

After introducing the idea that this something else, that he refers to as Text, begins effectively and has been brought about by interdisciplinarity and is more of an epistemological slide than a break, he sections his essay into seven numbered sections where he proceeds to distinguish between the Work and the Text.

In his first section Barthes establishes how the Text differs from the way Work occupies space (such as in a libretto or score), and is a fragment of substance. He stresses that this new object called Text is "not to be thought of as an object that can be computed". Where the Work can be described as a product, Barthes says that the Text is a process, more

specifically "a process of demonstration", and "exists in the *movement*, of a discourse". Moreover, the Text is "experienced only in an *activity of production*". So Barthes' Text is performative rather than written.

Initially, it seems that Barthes sets up a quite clear distinction between a "work" and a "text" and then gathers a series of other terms and oppositions according to this over-arching dichotomy. Broadly speaking, what Barthes' describes as a work can be likened to the conventional understanding of literary meaning. A work is a unified whole with an inherent meaning which simply awaits interpretation. A work can be the object of commentary, for it is regarded as a deeply significant and well-ordered object that contains a meaning, a specific significance and contextually determined sense. Furthermore, a work is the production of an author's intention - and because of this certain interpretations can be regarded as legitimate while others might be excluded as aberrant. A work is located in an institution and canon of great works and, as such, is therefore the bearer of cultural weight and value.

What seems like a simple opposition in Barthes is, however, more complex. The opposition between a work and a text is not symmetrical. A work only operates as a work if it represses or excludes the notion of text. A work is the effect of a text that denies its status as text; it operates as though there is some deep, inherent meaning which can act to govern, ground and limit interpretation. But any such meaning or interpretation would itself be a text. A work has to exclude texts, or has to delimit legitimate from illegitimate meanings. And it can only do this through commentaries, decisions and interpretations that are themselves texts. Whereas a text does not rely on anything other than itself (and can therefore recognise any work as a text), A work has to base its status as a work on some unavowed distinction between proper and improper. (And this distinction is itself textual - inscribed, effected and written - but cannot recognise itself as such.) So what looks like a simple opposition in Barthes is actually a reflection on types of opposition. A work opposes itself to texts by asserting itself as proper, essential, grounded and legitimate. A text, however, recognises that all oppositions are textual events and essentially ungrounded. A work therefore relies on the notion of some pre-given authority in order to operate. A text recognises all authority as



the effect of textual distinctions and operations. And this means that the distinction between work and text is a distinction between ways of reading and interpreting. To take something as a work is to subordinate one's interpretation to some putative meaning of sense that grounds and limits the work (whether that be author's intention, historical context, or received convention). To take something as a text is to affirm one's interpretation as an event, or as an act that is not grounded or pre-determined by some meaning or sense. It is to recognise that the text itself effects meanings and differences, rather than being the bearer or vehicle of meaning.

Where is this Text within the tradition of opera? Throughout the history of opera there has been no text in traditional performance or compositional practice. Within the current hermeneutic belief system that encompasses the practice, pedagogy and composition of opera, there is no possibility of Text. The most important insight for the purposes of this study is that this Text of Barthes' is not "an object" such as the score and the libretto, "to be computed", or reorganised, or re-placed hierarchically, or re-styled; but is a "methodological field". A field such as this for opera would have to take into account the music and the words, along with the performance disciplines that make up opera. Such a field would allow for the sort of integration that the history of opera courts, while at the same time not demanding of it a style, or design, thereby rendering it yet another Work. Conceivably then, this field could allow for a dynamic emphasis among the words, music, movement, acting, singing, set design, without the necessity for subservience.

In the second section, Barthes concerns himself with hierarchical relationships and states that the Text does not stop at good literature; it cannot be contained in an hierarchy, even in a simple division of genres. So this Text must operate within a different paradigm than that of confrontation, competition, and hierarchy. Barthes goes further to say that not only does it not concern itself with hierarchal classifications but it actively subverts them: "What constitutes the text is, on the contrary (or precisely), its subversive force in respect of old classifications."

It is with this point that Brecht's developments can be shown to be more of a Work rather than Text. Brecht's work hinted at notions of such a Text with its critical element and the notion of distancing to allow for intellectual crossings of opinion that melodrama did not. However, in practice and design the "subversive force in respect of old classifications" could be seen as a perpetuation of classification, rather than a subversion. Brecht still affirmed a proper relation of performance that would be guided by the political intent of the drama; he still regarded performance as a vehicle that ought to subordinate itself to the programme of critical thinking.

Barthes' third section focuses on the semiotic ramifications of Text. Like music and word within the traditional accounts of opera, he states that the Work closes on a signified - some pre-given of independent meaning. The very fact that the meaning has been perceived to be in either or both the signs of musical or poetic text, leads the signification/performance of these to remain closed. It has been traditionally thought that it was in the organisation of the musical and/or poetic texts that would render an experience or affection and thus imbue meaning, not the signifier/performer through the act of performance. Barthes also states that the Work "functions as a general sign and it is normal that it should represent an institutional category of the civilisation of the sign." The entire history of opera and its prejudice is a more than apt example of just this phenomenon. For opera, and hence performance, have been reduced to signs of some sense or meaning. Against this, Barthes affirms the positive nature of semiotics; meaning is only possible through specific and concrete events of signification. This is why a text is opposed to the sign, for the sign refers beyond itself to some meaning, whereas a text is a process and production without a central, pre-given or founding meaning. Within this context of semiotics Barthes explores the role of Text. He states that it can "be approached, experienced, in reaction to the sign". He explains how the Text's practice is different from the Work:

[Text], on the contrary [to Work], practices the infinite deferment of the signifier, is dilatory; its field is that of the signifier and the signifier must not be conceived of as

'the first stage of meaning', its material vestibule, but, in complete opposition to this, as its *deferred action*.<sup>1</sup>

How is the performer (who is in the field of signifier) to contribute and allow for Text? How would this deferment effect them? Would they do the deferring or would it happen through them. How would this movement of deferred action effect their relationship to the Work? Barthes elaborates on this deferred action and its infinite quality:

Similarly, the *infinity* of the signifier refers not to some idea of the ineffable (the unnameable signified) but to that of a *playing*; the generation of the perpetual signifier (after the fashion of a perpetual calendar) in the field of the text (better, of which the text is the field) is realised not according to an organic progress of maturation or a hermeneutic course of deepening investigation, but, rather, according to a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variations.<sup>2</sup>

Again with this notion of playing over some notion of the ineffable we return to the idea of fluctuation between and process rather than a set organisation or idealised product. Barthes' notion of infinity and perpetual calendar is more spiral than a perfectly formed circle, again allowing process and lack of closure. Barthes refers to this as "a system with neither close nor centre"<sup>3</sup>. The entire history of opera unfolds a series of searches for an ineffable art form, with common assumptions revolving around organics and hermeneutics.

Within this evolving model of Text that Barthes refers to, where would an active signifier/performance be able to respond to the Works? What would define their role, their activity, their reason for being on the stage, what would be their response-ability. In an operative Text it seems that fluctuations would happen and process would happen, but what is the performer to do if the meaning no longer resides in either the Work (music or words) or the Text (of which the performer is part). As we will explore further on, perhaps the meaning is to come from the happenings or more specifically, the Event.

<sup>1</sup> Barthes 158.

<sup>2</sup> Barthes 158.

<sup>3</sup> Barthes 159.

It does not take a lot of imagination to see how opera is like a woven fabric of words, music, instrumental performance, singing, acting, movement as in dance and gesture, set design. But it becomes clear in the review of the history of opera that there is a pattern of unweaving this mesh and assigning precedence to one element, ironically in the hopes of creating a unity. Barthes, however, says that Text is "not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an over crossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination."<sup>4</sup> It could be seen that opera's perpetuation of coexistence rather than cooperation has been set up by the perceived necessity to interpret meaning from the word and/or the music.

Within all this seeming lack of format or structure is the question of what an audience would actually experience if such an idea were applied to opera. Although Barthes does not talk about the audience *per se*, he does speak about the "reader". He says that "The reader of the text may be compared to someone at a loose end"<sup>5</sup>. He goes on to say that:

what he perceives is multiple, irreducible, coming from a disconnected, heterogeneous variety of substances and perspectives: lights, colours, vegetation, heat, air, slender explosions of noises, scant cries of birds, children's voices from over on the other side, passages, gestures, clothes of inhabitants near or far away. All these *incidents* are half identifiable: they come from codes which are known but their combination is unique, founds the stroll in a difference repeatable only as difference."

Though the "reader" or audience member perceives "multiple....." things, Barthes considers them, or perhaps their combination, or perhaps their crossings, incidents. Are incidents happenings or little events? Does the audience member, like the reader see/experience/perceive things happening in the performance of an opera, within the Event of the drama?

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<sup>4</sup> Barthes 159.

<sup>5</sup> Barthes 159.

<sup>6</sup> Barthes 159.

In Barthes' fifth section he states that in the Work the "author is reputed the father and the owner of his work" the Text is read "without the inscription of the Father." He states that "no vital 'respect' is due to the Text it can be *broken*". This he says abolishes "any legacy". However the author is not completely demolished, Barthes states: "It is not that the author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest'".<sup>7</sup>

It is in this section that Barthes introduces the concept that I will expand as the structural premise of a new performance theory of opera. He explains that the Work is affiliated with the "image of an *organism* which grows by vital expansion, by 'development'"<sup>8</sup>. Such affiliation was never more prevalent than in the reforms of Wagner. Opera has often been thought of as an organism. It may be for this reason that its growth has not been one of development of interrelationships but of putting together. In contrast to this idea, Barthes says: "the metaphor of the Text is that of a *network*, if the Text extends itself, it is as a result of a combinatory systematic (an image, more over, close to current biological conceptions of the living being)."<sup>9</sup> This idea of a network, in relation to the performance of opera, will be explored in detail in the following chapters.

In the sixth part of Barthes' essay he talks about the "distance between writing and reading." He begins by stating that the Work is "normally the object of a consumption". This is reminiscent of Brecht's notion of "culinary art", except that Barthes is not speaking of a class-based "quality". In fact, he is subverting the very notion of such. He says "it is the "quality" of the work (which supposes finally an appreciation of "taste") and not the operation of reading itself..." For Barthes "The Text (if only by its frequent 'unreadability') decants the work (the work permitting) from its consumption and gathers it up as play, activity, production, practice."<sup>10</sup> He says "the *Text* itself *plays*"<sup>11</sup>. So it would seem that a process is not consumable. It must be experienced, therefore catalysing change or difference in the reader or audience. The gap between the audience and the Work is in this way

<sup>7</sup> Barthes 160-161.

<sup>8</sup> Barthes 161.

<sup>9</sup> Barthes 161.

<sup>10</sup> Barthes 161-162.

<sup>11</sup> Barthes 162.

shortened in that the reader or audience is now involved in the Text. Barthes writes of a joining of the reader and the text in a "single signifying practice".<sup>12</sup> Furthermore he states that the Text "asks of the reader a practical collaboration".<sup>13</sup>

This idea that the Text itself plays is reminiscent of Mozart. In the last chapter I stated that he was perhaps the first musico-dramatic composer, though traditionally both Monteverdi and Gluck have also been called such. In my reading of the history the latter two fall more into a category of musico-poetic in that they were organising the text to fit in with a notion of drama, rather than activating the text. Mozart, on the other hand, made the music do things. It played characters, by physicalising intentions, responding to outer stimuli, reacting to a situation, rather than simply depicting or indicating the emotion or mood within the scene.

One of Barthes' most poignant statements in regard to the reader, who for the purposes of this study I have grouped in with the audience, reads as follows:

The reduction of reading to a consumption is clearly responsible for the 'boredom' experienced by many in the face of the modern ('unreadable') text, the avant-garde film or painting: to be bored means that one cannot produce the text, open it out, *set it going*.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of opera it would seem that there is nothing within the performance to set going because the performance has been reined in to depict the pre-scripted, whether that be directorial or text born. The production is indeed a Work, rather than a Text that allows the audience involvement. They can at best consume and pretend not to be bored by the lack of activation. Or if they are like most of the fans of opera that I have encountered, they can create their own Text despite the Work.

Barthes starts his last section by stating that the "final approach to the Text," is "that of pleasure."<sup>15</sup> He says that "the Text, it is bound to *jouissance*, that is to a pleasure without

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<sup>12</sup> Barthes 162.

<sup>13</sup> Barthes 163.

<sup>14</sup> Barthes 163.

<sup>15</sup> Barthes 163.

separation."<sup>16</sup> If we return to the previous ideas of betweenness, crossings and stereophony, this idea of non-separation becomes clearer. With such properties separation becomes irrelevant to the process. Perhaps the introduction or allowance for Text would remedy the coexistence (separation) of the performance disciplines within opera and allow for cooperation or mutual interdependence. In keeping with such an idea, Barthes says that "the Text is that space where no language has a hold over any other, where languages circulate (keeping the circular sense of the term)."<sup>17</sup>

There is clearly a language of music, poetry, libretto, dance, gesture, acting, and singing. To allow coexistence of these aspects, Text can serve not only to support the undoing of the hermeneutic assumptions that have riddled operatic history and practice, but more importantly contribute to a solution and a process-based perspective that would allow the meaning to finally come from the historically elusive element called drama.

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<sup>16</sup> Barthes 164.

<sup>17</sup> Barthes 164.

Jacques Derrida (1930- ) "Signature Event Context"

"Signature, Event, Context" is the first in a series of essays that Jacques Derrida directed against the theory of performatives as it was first articulated by J.L. Austin and later by John Searle. In this essay Derrida undertakes a critique of the ideas of performativity and communication, and he also theorises his own concept of "event" in contrast with the notion of context. Austin's theory of performatives is of central importance to twentieth-century Anglo-American understandings of language and meaning. In keeping with the tradition of analytic philosophy, Austin attempted to provide a theory of meaning that would not rely on mental or psychological entities such as "intentions", "ideas", "mental events" or "meanings." On the contrary, Austin aimed to show that we understand utterances only because of socially shared conventions. Performatives, as described by Austin, are instances of one type of use of language. In a performative utterance, such as "I now pronounce you man and wife", the speaker does not describe a state of affairs, nor express an intention, nor given an order; the performative works like an action. The performative, "I now pronounce you man and wife" does something. This shifts the emphasis from language as being the mere vehicle of some intent or meaning to the way in which language functions as a social force. (And it is this aspect of Austin's theory that, in part, gains Derrida's interest and approval.) When we utter a performative our statements only work or perform their function because of a recognised series of social conventions and a recognised legitimate context. And for Austin this has implications for language in general. It makes no sense to look behind an utterance to some speaker's intention or, as though there were first some mental private sense that is subsequently expresses in language. On the contrary, meaning for Austin is nothing other than the shared and recognised forms of social and linguistic exchange. In the case of performatives in their strictest sense, statements uttered by the clergy, judges, law enforcers, and statements such as promises and commitments only work successfully in legitimate contexts. This means that meaning is not something that is harboured by words themselves; meaning is produced through social exchange, conventions and recognised contexts.



If we extend this to the interpretation of art works we can see that there is no essential meaning that is "held" behind the work of art as a material object; the art work only has meaning because there are conventions of reading and recognition. We know how to interpret a Baroque score because we recognise the conventions of context - the historical circumstances of production and the expected conventions of performance. Austin's theory therefore has two main effects. It helps to explain how it is that we recognise and share meanings - not because there is some intrinsic "meaning" that words simply convey, but because meaning is nothing other than contextually recognised and shared conventions. Secondly, this theory also grounds texts in a context. We can't argue that a text is open to unlimited interpretation, because a text is always articulated in a context and a context determines the way in which a text is read.

For the most part Derrida accepts the first steps of Austin's theory. Like Austin, Derrida agrees that it is impossible to appeal to a speaker's or author's intention as something that might govern or control the meaning of an utterance. For any authorial intention or meaning would already be expressed through language. We can't grasp a pre-linguistic or private sense or intention behind an utterance, for any such assumed meaning or sense would already be linguistic. And so, again like Austin, Derrida argues that meaning is the effect of a certain force: an utterance or work has no intrinsic or essential meaning; it is only meaningful because of repeated, recognisable and shared conventions.

Where Derrida differs from Austin is over the issue of context and event. In order to undertake this critique Derrida begins with the notion of iterability. A word will only work or have force if it is repeatable or iterable. If there is merely a singular use of a term - a once-off sound - then it cannot be meaningful. Meaning is generated only through repeatability. It is because a word can be used in more than one instance that it functions as a word, and not just a sound. For when a word is recognised, or works, as a word it is because two speakers recognise the same function. There can be no singular sense, for meaning and sense are only possible through shared and repeatable conventions. So far Derrida is, then, in agreement with Austin. But the difference begins to emerge when he examines the

consequences of repeatability or iterability. If it is the case that a word only performs because it is repeatable then this means that a word cannot be contained or limited within a single context. As an example, Derrida takes what Austin dismisses as "parasitic" instances. Austin argues that words uttered in a play - a promise or wedding ceremony performed on stage for example - are not authentic instances of performatives. They are not uttered in a genuine context. But Derrida insists that this dismissal of fictive or parasitic utterances is illegitimate. How can Austin decide what constitutes a genuine or parasitic performative? Austin makes this decision with regard to contexts. A performative uttered on stage is infelicitous or parasitic, Austin argues, in relation to genuine cases. But what Derrida aims to show is that all language acts have this infelicitous or parasitic character that exceeds the limit of context, and he makes this argument by way of the notion of an event.

How is it that this shared context of meaning is generated? Austin treats language as something that takes place within context. And because of this he can distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate interpretations. But if we take Austin's theory seriously we see that this is not possible. Firstly, it is the very repeatability or conventionality of words that renders all contexts essentially open. A word only works if it is repeatable, or if it can be used in more than one context. And so this means that a context cannot limit or ground a work. A performative can be uttered on stage, and a promise can be used in a fiction precisely because there is nothing limiting the use of these utterances. And this is why such utterances are essentially unstable. We can extend this to the interpretations of texts for performance. It's possible that we could argue for legitimate interpretations of Hamlet by appealing to the context of Renaissance drama and the conventions of tragedy, and we could even appeal to what we know about the life of Shakespeare as a way of providing a limit and legitimacy to possible interpretations. But, according to Derrida's theory, the fact that we have to appeal to a context, shows that no text harbours a meaning in itself, and that texts are therefore essentially open to re-interpretation and re-contextualisation.

Derrida's second, and more significant contribution to this debate over meaning issues in his use of the notion of event. If it is the case that a context is a shared background of meaning

and conventions, how is it that such contexts arise and are subsequently recognised? According to Derrida, while a word only works through repetition and iterability, it is also the case that each repetition is never a full and faithful repetition but is also always a singular event. This has a number of consequences. First, a context is never a stable ground, for each use of the word or meaning is also an event in itself, and therefore changes the shared context. Secondly, a context cannot operate as some ground or horizon within which meanings can be limited, for a context itself is a textual event. For example, to say that the meaning of a work is determined by its context one has to appeal to other works that are themselves also interpretable, repeatable and essentially unstable. A context is never a pre-given and stable unity but itself a textual event - open to repetition, decision, interpretation and re-inscription. Thirdly, while texts and meanings only work and have force through repeatability there must also be the event of their particular inscription on each and every occasion, and this renders a certain singularity and non-semantic dimension to language. For example, every performance of Hamlet is, on the one hand, the repetition of a recognised and conventional meaning. But at the same time there are also those essentially singular events that make this general meaning possible; the materials of production, accidental features of each repetition that exceed the text's sense, and enabling conditions which are neither subject to interpretation nor decision.

Like Barthes, then, Derrida insists that a text, by its very nature, cannot be subordinated to some meaning or sense. For meaning is only possible through the singular and essentially unstable event of each repetition. It is because meaning functions through repeatability and convention that it is also essentially not capable of being limited by a context. For a context is itself only recognisable through convention and repetition. Where Derrida differs from Barthes is in his extension of the insights of a text's inherent instability to an ethics of reading and interpretation. Barthes' celebration of the text is almost utopian in its vision of freeing texts from meaning, interpretation and contexts. Derrida, however, argues that a text's essential undecidability leads to an intensified interpretive responsibility. No interpretation or reading can appeal to some context as a pre-given ground, for a context itself is an issue of interpretation. Each interpretation or reading is, therefore, a decision. If

text's are essentially undecidable, and if each reading is an event - and not just the replication of a pre-given meaning - then this raises the stakes of interpretation. There is no question of uncovering or disclosing some latent meaning, but there is also no possibility of remaining in complete textual indeterminacy. Each reading or interpretation is a responsible decision with certain effects, forces and events. Derrida rejects a notion of autonomy - the idea that interpretation can be grounded on some self-present intention that can control all aspects of the text. But he also insists on the idea of responsibility - a text is an event that has a certain force and effect that exceeds intention but for which we nevertheless need to be responsible. There cannot be a complete free play of the text; each reading is an event of determination. But it is an event precisely because it is not grounded on any pre-given or essential sense which the interpreter only discloses or reveals.

Derrida begins "Signature Event Context" by questioning what is meant by the word or action "communication". He refers to it as a "strange figure of discourse" and suggests that one must ask "whether or not the word or signifier "communication" communicates a determinate context, an identifiable meaning, or a describable value."<sup>1</sup> In traditional understandings of the word and its function these three options seem to cover the scope of both the word and the signifier.

Within the study of opera it is traditionally in the operation of performance that the meaning (which has been assumed inherent in the libretto and score), is "communicated". With this assumption in mind, Derrida's three options readily apply. Performance within opera communicates, determinate contexts, - be they societal, cultural, or stylistically driven - and communicates identifiable meanings, - be they symbolic, stock characterisations, or gestural metaphors. Derrida challenges these apparent parameters of communication by questioning the traditional usage of the word and its actions. He states that in order to ask the question of what a word or signifier communicates we are "constrained to predetermine communication as a vehicle, a means of transport or transitional medium of a meaning and moreover of a

<sup>1</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "Signature Event Context." Limited Inc. Northwestern University Press, 1972. 1.

unified meaning"<sup>2</sup>. He then poses the idea that essentially drives the rest of his essay. Perhaps the idea of communication is problematic, indicating the impossibility of a single sense that is then given through the vehicle of language: If communication possessed several meanings and if this plurality should prove to be irreducible, it would not be justifiable to define communication a priori as the transmission of a meaning.<sup>3</sup>

If communication were no longer considered to be simply the "transmission of meaning" then there would cease to be the traditional hierarchical relationship between the meaning and the transmitter or transmitted. In the previous chapter which outlines opera's traditional prejudice it is clearly established that the meaning within operatic writing and performance practice has been dictated and held in the score and/or the libretto. With this so firmly established throughout the centuries, it follows that the performer is bound to the role of transmitter. Within these established assumptions of communication and performance the performer is not permitted to create meaning, or participate in any way other than to "transmit" a meaning that is supposedly, inherent, pure, and authentic.

Derrida raises some questions about such traditional hierarchical designs. Firstly he challenges the constraint on meaning exercised by the use of the word "communication". Derrida questions notions of a transmission or communication of meaning by arguing that "one characteristic of the semantic field of the word *communication* is that it designates nonsemantic movements as well."<sup>4</sup> Derrida states that:

Here, even a provisional recourse to ordinary language and to the equivocations of natural language instructs us that one can, for instance, *communicate a movement* or that a tremor [*ébranlement*], a shock, a displacement of force can be communicated - that is, propagated, transmitted. We also speak of different or remote places communicating with each other by means of a passage or opening.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 1.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 1.

<sup>4</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 1.

<sup>5</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 1.

This is a point that for performance one might imagine would be obvious, since the "language" of performance is that of movement, music (played and sung) and action or acting. However as explored in the previous chapter, these disciplines have been tied down to serve the texts, to utilise their "languages" to merely depict or indicate the meaning in the texts. The disciplines, that were tied down by the roles of depiction were not permitted to use their "languages" to communicate meaning within or from the discipline. Furthermore through this tradition of literal and conventional symbolic depiction (gesture, voice typing, tableau blocking), the disciplines of performance have been denied a process-based interrelationship. Their action is bound by depiction and indication of a supposed meaning supposedly gleaned from opera's conglomerate texts.

Having brought to our attention that the very performance of communication can communicate in and of itself, Derrida warns of the temptation to perceive the expression as more meaningful than the word:

We would not assert, as one might be tempted to do, that semio-linguistic communication acquired its title *more metaphorico*, by analogy with 'physical' or 'real' communication, inasmuch as it also serves as a passage, transporting and transmitting something, rendering it accessible. We will not assert this for the following reasons:

- 1) because the value of the notion of *literal meaning* [*sens propre*] appears more problematical than ever, and
- 2) because the value of displacement, of transport, etc., is precisely constitutive of the concept of metaphor with which one claims to comprehend the semantic displacement that is brought about from communication as a non-semio-linguistic phenomenon to communication as semio-linguistic phenomenon."

<sup>6</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 2.

This notion of displacement is one that I have already explored within the Roland Barthes' essay. One of the major points about his term Text is its relationship to meaning. As Barthes insists, text is "not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination."<sup>7</sup> Derrida's concept of metaphor is not unlike Barthes' idea that the Text is "radically symbolic": not just generating extra meaning, but continually re-generating meaning without limit. So it would seem that both Derrida and Barthes are suggesting that the meaning is not in the text or the performance but in something between them, a passage, or perhaps even a network of passages, within a "methodological field".

Derrida then deals with the possible objection to his own position: the idea that "the ambiguous field of the word "communication" can be massively reduced by the limits of what is called a *context*..."<sup>8</sup>. Traditionally the "context" in which something is "communicated" helps to determine its meaning. In order to challenge traditional assumptions of hierarchy and degrees of meaning within writing and communication, Derrida questions traditional understandings and operations of "context": "Is there a rigorous and scientific concept of *context*? Or does the notion of context not conceal, behind a certain confusion, philosophical presuppositions of a very determinate nature?"<sup>9</sup> A large portion of Derrida's essay is dedicated to demonstrating "why a context is never absolutely determinable, or rather, why its determination can never be entirely certain or saturated."<sup>10</sup> The contextual assumptions from which literature is born have much in common with that of operatic writing.

Derrida spells out this literary context through an examination of the traditionally understood functions and origins of writing. To do so, he calls on Condillac's Essay on Origin of Human Knowledge. Derrida argues that the predicates layed out within the work are representative of a traditional understanding of writing's function and origin. The first major

<sup>7</sup> Barthes 159.

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 2.

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 3.

<sup>10</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 3.

assumptions that he addresses have to do with the reasons for writing in the first place. He argues that the understood origins and functions of writing have traditionally been placed under the "authority of communication". That is, writing is seen to be the mere vehicle or repetition of some sense or meaning that precedes the system of written text. He summarises this presupposed function of writing by stating that if men write it is:

- 1) because they have to communicate;
- 2) because what they have to communicate is their "thought," their "ideas," their representations. Thought, as representation, precedes and governs communication, which transports the "idea," the signified content;
- 3) because men are *already* in a state that allows them to communicate their thought to themselves and to each other when, in a continuous manner, they invent the particular means of communication, writing.<sup>11</sup>

So it is assumed that there is the idea, or thing complete in itself, and then there is the communication of writing, representations of thought and idea. Furthermore, it is the "communication" that does the transporting of this idea. Then it follows that you have the live thing, the idea, and then representation, then writing, communication or performance. If the latter are representations of the idea - or self-present replications - do they have their own force; are they still happening? In fact can they be happening and retain the original meaning and content of the pure idea? If they are to happen or fall within a field of process such as Barthes' "methodological field", they are going to change and alter the meaning and as a result subvert all the prepositions of origin and purity.

If this is the case, the traditional understanding of the writing and organising of the music and the word as manifest in the score and the libretti within the assumed context of purity and origin in the Ancient Greek ideal must be challenged. The entire history of opera revolved around futile attempts to attain this origin and purity in a live form without

<sup>11</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 4.



permitting the steps of writing, representation, communication, and most importantly performance to happen.

The very fact that you can have effective or "talented" performers who induce an "experience" of the drama, and in the other extreme, performers who leave the audience bored, when both performers have been directed to "perform" the same representative structure via signs of gesture and text, is contradictory to the assumed functions and effect of writing. The very fact that Mozart's, *Le Nozze Di Figaro*, has inspired so many different styles, genres, qualities, thematic perspectives and functions of performance, disproves the notion that Mozart's writing to his absent audience retains the meaning and moreover the content. The custodian of meaning and content shifts with each production within its context. It can lie within the set design, a diva's star power, the directors provocative reading, a committed performance, but never in Mozart's texts, simply because they are not the live things that are happening.

Derrida addresses this idea of absence by using the analogy of the sender and the addressee. He points out that: "The absence of the sender, of the receiver [*destinateur*], from the mark that he abandons, and which cuts itself off from him and continues to produce effects independently of his presence and of the present actuality of his intentions [*vouloir-dire*], indeed even after his death, his absence, which moreover belongs to the structure of all writing..." He bluntly states that "Representation regularly *supplants* [*supplée*] presence". For operatic performance it is important to clarify the sender and addressee relationships. In the previous example, Mozart would be the sender to the addressee, who could be the performer (or reader of the score). The aspect that has been ignored within traditional performance practices of opera is that the performer is then the sender to the audience who are the addressees. Derrida's notions of supplanting presence and cutting off and abandonment of a retention of meaning apply to both relationships: neither the composer nor the performer can own, govern, limit, or remain present to a text once it has been sent. In order for a sign or text to be received it must already be absent from the author or performer.

Traditionally, partly due to the fact that this notion of absence and context has not been addressed within the operatic compositional and performance practices, it was assumed that the composer and librettist organised and wrote what the audience was supposed to experience. In the search for a mythical origin of the Greek Ideal it was assumed that the perfect writing of the score and poetry would induce affections of the spirit. This phenomenon is still held as truth and has been supported from the earliest days of the Camerata right through to opera's more modern era with Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Within this tradition the meaning of opera is understood to come from the writer and go to the audience. The performer has been merely a vehicle of transference, which may account for the pedagogical lack of acting and movement training for the singer with an emphasis on language and musical theory.

Within the following chapter we will explore this concept with regards to all prescriptions. Pre-scribed aspects within performance extend beyond that of the score and libretto. Within current performance practices, blocking, choreography, set and costume design can all become prescribed "works" (in Barthes' sense). Furthermore, it is often assumed that the meaning of the performance lies within such prescriptions and the performer is the transferrer of their meaning.

Toward the middle of Derrida's essay it becomes increasingly clear that he is not only subverting notions of inherent meaning supported by assumptions of origin, context, and communication; he is also introducing a new notion that the written word is not necessarily a dead thing. Derrida moves toward an idea that the written word is productive. It can perform. It is alive. His notions of absence and presence, sender and addressee, and his emphasis on the place or passage, intensifies the concept of a difference, alterability, movement, and even performance. He states that:

To be what it is, all writing must, therefore, be capable of functioning in the radical absence of every empirically determined receiver in general. And this absence is not a

continuous modification of presence, it is a rupture in presence, the 'death' or possibly the 'death' of the receiver inscribed in the structure of the mark.<sup>12</sup>

Again there are some ideas in common with Barthes' Essay. Barthes speaks of his Text being "radically symbolic". Derrida is basically proposing that all signs by their very assumed communicable function imply absence, and that the movement of the sign from the addressee to the receiver "disseminates" meaning. Derrida also implies an interestingly similar understanding of the structure of this phenomenon. Where Barthes refers to a network as a metaphor for the Text, Derrida says that:

The possibility of repeating and thus of identifying the marks is implicit in every code, making it into a network [*une grille*] that is communicable, transmittable, decipherable, iterable for a third, and hence for every possible user in general.<sup>13</sup>

Derrida's essay concerns the act of writing. For Derrida the emphasis could be read as the activation and the reading of writing so that it is experienced within the principles of Text:

To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn, and which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning, offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten.<sup>14</sup>

These concepts when applied to opera could effect the way a work (score or libretto) are read, perceived and interpreted so that their supposed meaning is not merely represented in symbolic action, but are action in themselves, and are to be performed with. The meaning would fluctuate between the singing, the score, the words, the movement and the acting. The performance would then become a play. The concept of writing as performance would not only effect the writing of new score and libretti, but the writing of choreography, direction, blocking, set design. All aspects of writing in Derrida's sense can apply to aspects of design, especially since these are attempted to be repeated and thus transfer meaning in the

<sup>12</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 8.

<sup>13</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 8.

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 8.

absence of their designer. In current performance practice these aspects become prescriptions and Works rather than live, process based aspects that cooperate or Play.

Derrida, like Barthes, addresses concepts of authority. Derrida also targets certain aspects of the affiliation problem. Derrida deals with the idea of the signature and what it is assumed to mean. In traditional terms it not only insinuates ownership, but implies an untouchable inherent intent originating from the writer, and the fantasy of sustained, repeatable and unalterable transference of meaning:

For a writing to be a writing it must continue to "act" and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of a temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written "in his name."<sup>15</sup>

Having established that writing performs, Derrida takes a look at assumptions of meaning within performative aspects of communication. Before doing so he examines the aspect of "experience". He establishes that the possibility of altered iterability is inherent to the act of writing. With this in mind, the mercurial aspects of meaning's transference extend to that of performance. Writing is then no more subject to the manipulations of context and communication than performance. Neither process is more authoritative, meaningful, or more connected to origin. Derrida goes so far in this direction as to say "...there is no experience consisting of pure presence but only chains of differential marks"<sup>16</sup> We might recall Barthes' examination of incidents which he used to help define his Text, for it is the incidences and the Events or happening that are experienced

<sup>15</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 8.

<sup>16</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc 10.

All these *incidents* are half identifiable: they come from codes which are known but their combination is unique, founds the stroll in a difference repeatable only as a difference. (Barthes)<sup>17</sup>

Having dismantled the traditional concepts that meaning and purity are inherent or originated in both the written and the spoken word, Derrida explores the status of event. He begins to attack the authority of event by (again) looking at an ability for repetition:

We should first be clear on what constitutes the status of 'occurrence', or the eventhood of an event that entails in its allegedly present and singular emergence the intervention of an utterance [*énoncé*] that in itself can be only repetitive or citational in its structure, or rather, since those two words may lead to confusion: iterable.<sup>18</sup>

So, in returning to the concepts of sender and addressee, signified and signifier, and iterability, Derrida believes that an event changes and is altered in performance. The event is not the holder of meaning either, for in production its meaning has the inherent possibility for change. For Derrida it would seem then that the meaning is only in the moment: that an event is an event only in the performance. The event is performance, and the meaning is performance. The author has given his or her intended meaning away to the various moments that it will erupt into within an infinite amount of contexts and ways of communication.

### *Conclusion*

Derrida and Barthes have similar but different perspectives to offer this anti-hermeneutic approach to opera. Both aim to subvert traditional assumptions that the meaning is inherent in the text and is authorised by notions of origin, purity and signature. This is of particular interest to operatic performance theory since the entire history of opera shows that it is indeed these traditional assumptions - a performance process caught up in depiction and indication - that perpetuate the separation of artistic disciplines within pedagogical and

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<sup>17</sup> Barthes 159.

performance practices, that perpetuate a lack of interrelationship and cooperation between the arts, and that perpetuate an incessant return to a mythical origin. Furthermore it has perpetuated a constant transference of the power of authorship ranging from the musical director, the stage director, set designer, composer, librettists, and even the Diva or Star.

These notions of authority, origin, and inherent meaning in the literal word and music and the creative processes, activities and behaviour that stem from the basic traditional assumptions exclude drama by design. What is meant by drama in this sense will be explored in part three to follow.

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<sup>18</sup> Derrida, Limited Inc. 17-18.

### PART THREE: TOWARDS A METHODOLOGY

#### Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938)

Throughout the tumultuous history of opera there has been a relentless search for a way to induce "affection" or "experience" through the art of operatic writing. Operatic history shows that the answer is not to be found in an exclusion or emphasis of either the text of music or word. The history of opera reveals a serious lack of emphasis placed on the practice and pedagogy of the performance of the score and libretto from a perspective that allows performance to hold meaning in and of itself. The majority of the performance techniques and practices that are in current use continue to adhere to the basic understanding that the performer is there to serve the written score and libretto. This phenomenon is largely based on the traditional assumption that it is in the score and libretto that the meaning takes place.

In the previous chapter the idea that meaning is not inherent in texts is criticised. Through Derrida and Barthes, the traditional notion that the meaning is inherent or there to be uncovered, communicated, organised or authorised, is disproved. Derrida and Barthes' cited essays have in common the basic concept that it is in a process not a product that meaning happens, and in exploring this idea they both emphasise the importance of performance.

In turning to the art of performance it is most important to take a close look at Konstantin Stanislavsky. He is not only considered the father of theatre, but is responsible for giving the actor/singer a system of acting that extended beyond that of depiction and indication. Before Stanislavsky, acting consisted of empty gestures, positioning of the performer in artificial picturesque formations, the distortion of faces to show emotions, and heavy declamatory style of speech. The theatre belonged to the director, and the playwright and the actors were pawns. In many ways operatic performance practice is still in this state.

There is not a system of acting or performing in practice in the western world that is not influenced by Stanislavsky's developments in the analysis of text and practice of acting. As

Michael Saint-Denis states: "Even if the System is today surpassed, Stanislavsky remains a sure master. He will provide the young with a point of departure towards new discoveries."<sup>1</sup>

In order to address the problems of meaning and experience within operatic performance practice, a study of Stanislavsky is essential. He developed the "grammar" of acting that includes such common terms to the stage as, motivation objective/intention action characterisation affective emotional and sense memory, and magic if. It is almost impossible to walk onto a stage without hearing parts of the language of his system used within the process of putting together a performance. Due to film and stage directors being employed to produce opera, the use of variations on Stanislavsky's grammar is increasing.

Before Stanislavsky there was no such grammar or technique whereby the performer could create a role or even train his instrument to be believable on the stage. Training of a stage performer used to consist of ballet classes, fencing, voice and/or elocution. How to put these together, in what way they were relevant to the development of a role, and how to interpret a libretto or script was not apart of the training of the singer/actor.

Stanislavsky came to the conclusion that part of the deficiencies within the art of the stage had to do with the simple fact that the stage performer had no common language with other performers and directors that could aid in the process of creating an inspired stage performance. He felt that in this, musicians had an advantage:

How lucky to have at one's disposal bars, pauses, a metronome, a tuning fork, harmony, counterpoint, properly worked-out exercises to develop technique, a vocabulary in which to describe artistic concepts, to understand creative problems and experiences. Music has long since recognised the importance of such vocabulary. Music can rely on recognised basic rules and not, like us, on pot luck.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Dennis, Michel. "Stanislavsky and the Teaching of Dramatic Art." *World Theatre* Vol VIII # 1. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Stanislavsky, Konstantin. *Sobranie Sochinenii*. (Collected Works in 8 volumes 1951-1964). Vol I. 310-311.



The most important element of Stanislavsky's System that effects this study is not so much the grammar of his methodology but its inner workings and the belief system and incorporated assumptions of meaning that lie behind it.

Stanislavsky came to acting not as an academic. He was first and foremost a performer, then a teacher and director, and finally a writer. His highly pragmatic approach is one explanation for the non-linear and, at times, illogical way his system was devised. This study is not an attempt to give a detailed account of the system. However, I will include a basic overview of some of the key terms for the purposes of understanding the context within which his philosophies of meaning originated.<sup>3</sup>

Stanislavsky's system is the direct result of his own difficulties and the personal crisis within his own practice of singing and acting. Early on in his career he became painfully aware that there were great performers of his day, such as actors Mikhail Semenovitch Shchepkin(1788-1863) and Tammaso Salvini(1829-1916), and opera singer Fyodor Ivonovich Chaliapin(1873-1938), who could achieve states of great inspiration consistently. This state of inspiration was one that Stanislavsky searched for throughout his career. For Stanislavsky it grew to include a sense of sacredness by the actor in respects to the stage, a relaxed and easy instrument, a sense of the "I am" (being present on the stage in the moment as the character), and a naivete that allowed for the "illusion of the first time" within each repeated performance. Perhaps the most important aspect of this inspiration was that the actor have a sense of belief in their character, the circumstances surrounding the drama, and what they do.

For Stanislavsky the art of acting was synonymous with a sense of truth. The art of the singer\actor was in a sense the art of make-believe, with the basic understanding that if the performer believed so would the audience:

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<sup>3</sup> It can be argued that there is no way to understand the system by way of academic study. So much of the work is designed to be 'experienced' within the contexts of exercises and the practice of acting. For Stanislavsky acting was about 'doing' and every concept within his system is best revealed through the 'act' of doing.

Truth on the stage is whatever we can believe in with sincerity, whether in ourselves or in our colleagues. Truth cannot be separated from belief, nor belief from truth. They cannot exist without each other and without both of them it is impossible to live your part, or to create anything.<sup>4</sup>

In a sense Stanislavsky could be seen as a pioneer of behavioural psychology and linguistics. As neither of these had been developed to any great degree in relation to dramaturgy, Stanislavsky had to rely on his keen sense of observation and his ever growing understanding of theatrical genres and practices. The early parts of the system were developed for the performer. Further on in this section when the focus turns to the later stages of the System, it can be observed that the director and teacher in Stanislavsky started to intervene. This helped to create a more balanced approach to the process of acting on the stage. The early stages of his work are often regarded as focusing primarily on the internal. In the latter stages he made adjustments and consequently integrated the entire psycho-physical instrument through what is termed, "the method of physical actions".

This early stage is most important in the understanding of the evolution of what Stanislavsky perceived as meaning and truth on the stage and more importantly it marks a crucial turning point in the role of the performer within theatre. Through the development of techniques and exercises that enabled the performer to exercise truth, there came a new age where the performer was not only capable, but obliged to act as a transferrer of meaning. This meant that meaning was not some timeless object held by the text but part of dynamic performance. Within Stanislavsky's early work, the exercises and techniques that were developed had mostly to do with the actors sense of himself and were reliant on emotional and physical investment and commitment. For Stanislavsky, the aim was to achieve inspired performances that demanded the audience experience something. The audience would experience when the performer experienced. The distinction between indicating or depicting emotion, character and conflict and truly living it in the moment is the basis of his System of

<sup>4</sup> Stanislavski, Constantin. *An Actor Prepares*. Trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. London: Methuen, 1996. 129.

acting. Through his life as an acclaimed actor, director and teacher, he developed the system and although he never saw himself as a writer, he kept journals and note-books documenting his discoveries from adolescence on. Eventually his writing became the central text for acting training world-wide.

### *Relaxation*

One of the first of aspects of Stanislavsky's system that was developed was Relaxation. Throughout years of observation and the development of exercises to do with states and acts of relaxation, Stanislavsky discovered that it aided in creating a state of being where by the instrument was open to receive stimuli. Actors achieved more balanced working interrelationships between the mind and the body. Both of these aspects were found to be crucial in the ability of the performer to "radiate" a sense of truth and respond in the moment to the circumstances of the drama. Like Derrida, then, Stanislavsky was critical of the idea that meaning derived from a self-present intention:

Thoughts are embodied in acts and a man's actions in turn affects his mind. His mind affects his body and again his body, or its condition, has its reflex action on his mind and produces this or that condition. You must learn how to rest your body, free your muscles and, at the same time your psyche.<sup>5</sup>

Relaxation was also crucial in the act of creating a character that had a different psychology and physicality from the actor or singer playing the character. If an actor "puts on" physical characteristics over their own tensions that are the result of their own personal circumstances, the instrument will get bogged down, create tension, and be unable to respond as the character or receive stimuli. Not clearing the instrument of as much superfluous tension as possible before performing is likened to painting on a dirty canvas. Stanislavsky found this aspect of relaxation to be most important to the singer of opera due to the fact that their physical state affects the sound of the voice directly:

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<sup>5</sup> Stanislavski, Constantin, Pavel Rumyantsev. Stanislavsky on Opera. Trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1975. 4.

In the process of projecting his voice a singer is obliged to tense certain muscles (of the diaphragm, the intercostal muscles, the larynx); that is to say these are 'working' contractions which are necessary to the actual singing. It was the principle aim of the whole series of exercises prescribed by Stanislavsky to make a distinction between the working contractions and superfluous tensions, thus leaving all the other muscles completely free. <sup>6</sup>

When confronted with a resistance by singers to accept the need for such exercises Stanislavsky said:

These exercises, develop a sense of tranquillity, of self-control and power as well as the clear understanding of one's muscular structure. For singing mannequins such exercises are indeed superfluous, but for living human beings, if they wish to remain such on the stage, they are imperative. <sup>7</sup>

It is disturbing that even today, some seventy years after these words were uttered, we still see opera singers serving as mannequins to adorn the supposed meaning of the score and libretto. The point that Stanislavsky had to offer the operatic performer and the problems that he observed within their lack of performance technique remains valid and more essential than ever. If performance is to have meaning then the preparation of that performance must also have meaning. And this would change the very notion of meaning : not the comprehension of some cognitive content but an experience

### *Tempo Rhythm*

One of the musical terms that Stanislavsky used both in the development of musical and "straight" theatre is rhythm and tempo. His fascination with these aspects began early in his career when he was studying to be an opera singer with Fyodor Komissarzhevsky. At the same time Stanislavsky was discovering that his voice was not suited for opera, he began to develop this element of his system that survived throughout its many changes. The young

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<sup>6</sup> Stanislavski, Stanislavski on Opera 4.

Stanislavsky conducted experiments with Komissarzhevsky's students with the aid of an accompanist and improviser. The experiments would involve living, moving, and sitting silently in rhythm to music. Although the experiments were discontinued when the Conservatory refused to support them, Stanislavsky continued with his fascination:

How lucky you singers are. The composer provides you with one most important element - the rhythm of your inner emotions. That is what we actors have to create for ourselves out of a vacuum. All you have to do is listen to the rhythm of the music and make it your own. The written word is the theme of the author but the melody is the emotional experience of that theme.<sup>8</sup>

For Stanislavsky the Tempo-rhythm was essential to the quality of action. In life we always, at every moment, have what Stanislavsky called tempo-rhythm. By tempo he meant the speed of physical action, be it the inner feeling of pulse or the outer rate of physical movement. By rhythm he meant our varying intensity of experience, both within and outside of us. This could be likened to Derrida's notion of writing. Meaning is not some pure content that is then inscribed. In order to mean, there must already be some tone, difference, sound, or syntax.<sup>9</sup>

The idea of Tempo-Rhythm provided a language and a practice by which the actor/singer could recognise the outer stimuli or inner feeling that could alter their state of being (both physically and emotionally). For instance if a person is walking on the beach during a sunset, their tempo-rhythm is quite different from when walking down a city block in a dangerous part of town with the sound of sirens blaring. Stanislavsky's belief in truth on the stage precipitated the idea that an artist must always evoke an appropriate tempo-rhythm for the scene. Tempo-rhythm took into account the general tempo of the scene as well as the specific inner rhythms of the individual characters.

<sup>7</sup> Stanislavski, Stanislavski on Opera 5.

<sup>8</sup> Stanislavski, Stanislavski on Opera 12.

<sup>9</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "Tympan". Margins of Philosophy. Trans. Alan Bass. Sussex: Harvester, 1982.

For Stanislavsky, the application of tempo-rhythm to opera was important and obvious, but he found that most opera singers had not understood the significance of this issue:

Just like the spoken word, stage action must be musical. Movement should be continuous, it should stretch out like a note on a stringed instrument and break off, when necessary, like the staccato of a coloratura soprano. Movement has its own legato, staccato, fermato, andante, allegro, piano, forte, etc. The tempo and rhythm of action must accord with the music. How is one to explain that this simple truth has not yet been grasped by opera singers? Most of them sing in one tempo and rhythm, walk in another, gesticulate in a third and feel in a fourth <sup>10</sup>

Stanislavsky's main objective in the staging of opera was the synthesis of voice and action, music and drama. A crucial element in this process was the application of tempo-rhythm. The correct and appropriate tempo-rhythm, derived from the musical score, gives truth to the action of the scene and helps to stir emotions and feeling within the singer/actor. When coaching a young man on a ballad Stanislavsky remarked:

From the instant the music begins you are completely in its power. Your nerves, blood, heartbeat must all be in accord with the rhythm proposed by this music. Yet, to seize this rhythm, live with it, let it permeate your whole being, is no easy matter. One must proceed by degrees. The simplest thing is to beat measures, the stresses. That is the easiest to accomplish, yet this affects only, as you might say, the extremities, the periphery of the your body.

It is not rhythm which will determine the essentials of the composition or your life as part of it. I am speaking here of the inner rhythm which makes you act differently, breathe differently. It is the thing that carries away your emotions, arouses them, giving them both keenness and power. <sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Stanislavsky, Konstantin. My Life in Art. Trans. G. Ivanov-Mumjiev. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 443.

<sup>11</sup> Stanislavski, Stanislavski on Opera 12.

The application of tempo-rhythm is not to be misunderstood as a mere literal execution of physical or verbal beats. Tempo-rhythm is a living, changing element of action which takes into account the subtleties of character, subtext and given circumstance. Stanislavsky's fictitious teacher, Tortsov, criticised those who treated tempo-rhythm mechanically:

There is little to choose between this attitude towards tempo, this lack of sensitiveness, and the soulless grinding out of the melody on a hand organ, or the tick of a metronome.

He compared the sensitive awareness to tempo-rhythm needed by an actor/singer, to that of a gifted conductor:

For musicians of that sort, an andante is not an inflexible andante, an allegro is not an absolute allegro. The first may at any time impinge on the second, or the second on the first. This life-giving oscillation does not exist in the mechanical tick of a metronome. In good orchestras the tempi are constantly, almost imperceptibly, shifting and blending like the colours in a rainbow.<sup>12</sup>

In Stanislavsky's work with his opera students he would spend entire rehearsals on tempo-rhythm alone. He would first assign to each singer a series of actions that conformed to the necessary development of the scene. Then he would require that they be executed within the framework of the music phrase, and in the same rhythm. The aim was to fuse the rhythmic music with vocal and physical expression.

### *Emotional Memory*

In his quest for truthfulness on the stage Stanislavsky discovered the simple yet powerful concept that the memory and the senses provide a direct link to the emotional life of a person. From this, he developed Affectivememory which later became Emotional Memory. The premise of the memory techniques is again reliant on the basic idea that when the

<sup>12</sup> Stanislavski, Constantin. Building a Character. Trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. London: Methuen, 1996. 240.

performer experiences the aspects of the drama as "real" then the audience will be compelled to experience the drama also. More importantly, if the performer is not engaged enough to allow for a semblance of belief as manifest in their body, action, and emotion, then they will not be truthful. Stanislavsky derived the idea that a memory can trigger the responses and belief of both emotional states and sensory experience from the writings of French psychologist, Théodule-Armond Ribot who proposed that: "to re-experience an emotion, one must first re-experience the emotion's imprint. By recalling the sensory atmosphere of a past activity, one can recapture the past emotion." <sup>13</sup>

Sense memory involves the engaging of all the senses by the actor/singer in order to create the world in which they are acting. A performer who acts by indicating or mimicking what they think is the appearance of someone feeling an emotion or sensation and is not half as engaging for an audience as a performer who is actually experiencing that sensation or emotion. If the performers in the opening scene of *La Boheme* do not feel the cold through their veins, see the dim light and the flicker of the candles, hear the creak of the floorboards and the noise of the carriages outside, smell the musty air and taste the hunger in their mouths, then the audience surely will not either. They must see, hear, taste, touch, and smell, and not simply appear as if they are doing so.

Emotional recall is the use of one's own vivid life experiences to conjure up the more complex feelings required for a role, such as love, anger or fear. In order to play Tatyana in Eugene Onegin, when she falls so completely in love, it would be useful if the actor could draw from a sincere experience of her own love, in order to recreate sensations such as the lightness in her heart, the sinking of her stomach whenever he looked her way, and the new found perception she had of her world. Stanislavsky considered that an emotional recall can be best accessed by first remembering specific individual sensory details. In scene six of Tchaikovsky's Eugene Onegin, when the character in the title role appears at the Gremin Ball, he is feeling disillusioned with his fruitless wanderings. In rehearsals for the scene,

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<sup>13</sup> Ribot, Théodule-Armond. "Problèmes de Psychologie Affective" Rpt. Mel Gordon The Stanislavsky Technique: Russia. New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishers, 1987. 39.



Stanislavsky directed the actor playing Onegin to attempt to achieve this emotional state of being through the experiencing of a related physical sensation. He links this to the suggestion that the music should also be experienced physically by the performer:

act as though you were seriously ill and yet are concealing the fact. There is something in your body that never ceases to ache, it gives you no respite. Try to find this sensation in your back. Let the long drawn out melody of the polonaise flow down your spine, like a never-ending, racking pain. You must convey a sense of spiritual oppression. Look for it in your body, in the physical rhythm of the way you walk, the way you let yourself down into a chair.

Stanislavsky suggested the use of sense memory to achieve this effect:

But remember that you are not merely expressing bodily indisposition but 'soul-wearying nostalgia'. Usually this nostalgic yearning is demonstrated by gloomy eyebrows, the biting of lips and a tense face. But you must keep your face always free of tension so that it can at all times be ready to express any and all your feelings of nostalgic weariness and sadness: find the rhythm for it in the way you bear yourself. Try to recall how you behave physically when you are sad or upset. That is exactly how you will behave when you are physically exhausted. So look for Onegin's deep boredom with life not in your eyebrows but in your back.<sup>14</sup>

These sensory-based exercises have been the bane of much of the Stanislavsky technique's problems. However, such problems are perpetuated largely by the ill-informed. The American Method acting, which was loosely based on the Stanislavsky System, has had a tradition of over reliance on these sensory exercises to the exclusion of crucial in-depth physical and vocal training and a lack of theatrical choices within the depiction of drama. Much of the difficulty with the Method acting technique was due to the fact that Stanislavsky publications containing the later aspects of his System were not available to North American

<sup>14</sup> Stanislavski, Stanislavski on Opera 137.

readers until after the New York City Actor's Studio, had formalised a technique they claimed was derived from Stanislavsky. Furthermore the actors that had defected to the States and taught the Americans a premature version of the Stanislavsky System had left before the sensory work was integrated into the physical through the later development of Method of Physical Actions.

### *Magic If and Imagination*

Within the early stages of Stanislavsky's work, it is clear that he himself was not solely relying on Emotional Memory. He was a man of theatre and his early influences were of the fantastical genres of circus, opera, operetta, and puppet theatre. For Stanislavsky the imagination played a big part in the "making-believe". Stanislavsky was also aware of the dangers of over-using the Emotional Memory. The technique is compelling and potentially can lead the inexperienced actor into such a sense of belief that they tend to "ride their state of being" rather than live with moment to moment reality within the given circumstances of the drama.<sup>15</sup> Stanislavsky warned his actor/singers of such:

If any actor says 'I entered into my role so completely, was so powerfully affected by it that I began to weep and could not stop', then he must be warned that he has taken a wrong turn. That way lies hysteria. That is not art. We must understand the emotions, and have a technique to control them... The creative capacity of an actor and singer is a science. You have to study, develop it, as you do other forms of science.<sup>16</sup>

Stanislavsky was very fond of telling a story about a young boy who spent all day riding a broomstick and treating it as if it were a beautiful stallion. The boy did this with full commitment until an adult approached and commented on his fine horse. The boy proudly

<sup>15</sup> "Given circumstances" is a term used by Stanislavsky to mean the context of the play or scene. This includes the time of history, time of day, the weather, the social standing of the character being played, the events that have just happened, the relationship past and present between the characters in the scene or referred to of any influence whatsoever.

<sup>16</sup> Stanislavsky, Konstantin. Rpt. Robert Cannon. "Stanislavsky and the Opera." Opera Vol 33, #11. 1982. 1114.

corrected the adult, declaring that it was a broom stick. In essence, the ability to play and use one's imagination is the craft at hand.

Many theatrical situations faced by the actor/singer will be outside of their personal experience, precluding the use of Emotional Memory to generate the necessary state of being. Stanislavsky developed the notion of the magic-if to deal with this problem. "If I were Siegfried" or "if I were Papageno" in a particular situation, how would I act, how would I feel, what would I think. The ability to use one's imagination to create a feeling of truth from the unbelievable or the out of the ordinary is one of the goals of the system. Stanislavsky explained the importance of this feeling of truth:

In it is contained the play of imagination and the formation of creative belief; in it is contained the best possible defence against stage falsehood, as well as the sense of proportion, the guarantee of a child like naïveté and the sincerity of artistic feeling.<sup>17</sup>

Whilst coaching a well established prima-donna from the Bolshoi about her work on the character Tatyana from Tchaikovsky's Eugene Onegin, Stanislavsky employed the magic-if technique to help her engage with the character's given circumstances

'If' I am Tatyana, if I want to give my love, I want to disclose to you the inner most secrets of my heart, I want to explain to you that I am the singer about whom my song tells, that I am waiting for love, that my mind is in a turmoil, that I am overcome by anguish, and that I am full of forebodings. This is what your mood is like; these are your intonations of the first act. Not to get your voice ready for the first note, for, being trained, your voice will take the first note by itself as it should be taken, provided your feeling is right.<sup>18</sup>

Unfortunately, singers have often repressed their imagination with regards to the role and the character, and remain self-consciously concerned only about the quality of the voice. This is

<sup>17</sup> Stanislavsky, Konstantin. "The Systems and Methods of Creative Art". Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage. Trans. David Magarshack. London: Faber and Faber, 1980. 179.

<sup>18</sup> Stanislavsky, Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage 180.

vain and unproductive simply because the use of the imagination and the complete commitment to the role and its given circumstances can and will only enhance the voice, infusing it with a depth of emotion and allowing for more subtle interpretations of the material.

For Stanislavsky, a well developed imagination was essential for the good actor. He composed many exercises for the development of imagination and it was the focus of preliminary lessons for new students, who were then expected to employ their imaginative skills in every and all other undertakings. At one of the first lessons at the Opera Studio Stanislavsky explained the usefulness of the magic if:

In all your beginning exercises you must develop your imagination. Without that faculty an actor can do nothing on stage. As a means of extending your imaginative powers you will have to invent all sorts of 'given circumstances'. Using the magic formula 'if things were so and so', surround yourself with imaginative life for a part, when you know all the facts concerned with it and you enjoy this - then it becomes a reality.<sup>19</sup>

Stanislavsky placed great importance on the creative capacity of an actor's imagination. The magic if formula is the system's way of countering the notion that an actor has to have experienced a circumstance in order to play it well: "It transfers the actor from the world of reality to a world in which alone his creative work can be done."<sup>20</sup> Whilst preparing for one of the Rimsky-Korsakov evenings, Stanislavsky explained the importance of the magic-if to a young singer, in relation to the given circumstances of the ballad "Serene, serene is the sky-blue sea":

Now answer these question put to yourself: Who is he? And who are you? Why are you gazing at the sea? Where does this happen? When?... If you are a Greek woman, Aspasia for instance, the sea is a familiar, and intimate, element of your life.

<sup>19</sup> Stanislavski, Stanislavski on Opera 10.

<sup>20</sup> Stanislavski, Stanislavski on Opera 33.

But if you are from the North and are looking at the sea for the first time, your attitude towards it in this song would be entirely different. If you are a modern woman and have just come to a seaside resort, there would be a third variant. The point is to arouse your imagination, to feed your fantasy. This is all part of the 'magic if'.<sup>21</sup>

Regardless of Stanislavsky's understanding of the importance of the imagination within the context of making something meaningful and truthful in the process of performance, the compelling nature of the emotional memory exercises seems to have defined his system to the point of alienating modern operatic pedagogy. The emotional exercises have been taken on and developed within highly internal directions often adopting the values of therapy rather than theatre. Two of the major misconceptions that stemmed from the over reliance on the emotional memory, is that the Stanislavsky technique is applicable only to naturalistic theatre and that in order to utilise the technique the performer is required to bring themselves into highly emotional states. Both of these assumptions understandably alienate operatic performance practice. It could be concluded that the mis-information and direction that the American Method acting took, has been partly responsible for the reluctance of a genuine and proven acting technique to be employed within the training and performing of opera.

The first way to counter act this mis-information is to look at Stanislavsky's working life. Stanislavsky had a long and successful career working with opera singers that is rarely acknowledged within the usual criticisms of his technique. In fact the young Stanislavsky began his career in pursuit of the operatic stage. His later work on The Method of Physical Actions, which among other things provided a physical means toward the internal, was largely the result of teaching and producing opera. In 1918 he was approached by the State Academic Theatres to help improve the dramatic quality of the opera performances. In 1924 when the Opera Studio was separated from the Bolshoi, it was re-named the Stanislavsky Opera Studio. In 1926 it became the Stanislavsky Opera Studio-Theatre, and in 1928 the Stanislavsky Opera Theatre. Before he died, he opened the Stanislavsky Opera-Dramatic

<sup>21</sup> Stanislavski, Stanislavski on Opera 16 - 17.

Studio for the purposes of experimenting with his system at a time when his techniques were beginning to come full circle in that they were converging with his old student and ardent critic, Vsevolod Meyerhold.

Essentially for Stanislavsky, there was no acting in acting. Acting was about doing and the early exercises to do with relaxation, emotional memory, sensory work, and others, that have to do with concentration, awareness and the values of allowing the intimacy of solitude on the very public stage. All have in common the objective to enhance the quality of the doing.

In the last five years of Stanislavsky's life there seems to be a shift in his approach. Whereas in the earlier years Stanislavsky's techniques and exercises concentrated on aspects of belief in the actual act of doing - whether it be sensory, or circumstantial - the later years moved toward the dilemma of what to do. An actor/singer who can do believably on the stage has only half the problem solved. How does the performer decide what to do? Which aspects from the script or score guide them, if any? In Stanislavsky's later years he started to consolidate his previous work and began to address this problem through the text analysis and the use of action.

### *Method of Physical Actions*

Stanislavsky's development of the method of physical actions was due largely to his dissatisfaction with his earlier attempts at stylised theatre. It became increasingly necessary to find a conscious means toward the subconscious, rather than the other way round. He had already established a way of working from the inside out, through the applications of one's own sense memory and emotional recall, by using the magic if, and imagination. But the system now included a way of working from the outside in. With stylised theatre, the actions and gestures are often choreographed and determined first. This new technique aided in fusing the outward actions of the character with an appropriate inner state of being, and reduced the often lengthy rehearsal times necessary to develop characterisations using inner technique only:

It is easier to lay hold of physical than psychological action; it is more accessible than elusive inner feelings. Also physical action is easier to fix; it is material, visible. Actually there is no physical action which does not involve desires, aspirations, objectives, or feelings which justify the action; there is no act of imagination which does not contain some imagined action. In the generation of physical actions there must be faith in their actuality, a sense of truth in them.<sup>22</sup>

Stanislavsky realised that a complete performance included mutually interdependent external physical and internal psychological elements. If an actor/singer were to go on stage and only execute empty physical movements without some corresponding inner state he would seem incredibly mechanical and false. Similarly, the actor/singer who went on stage filled with thoughts and feelings and could not express them would be awkward, to say the least. With Stanislavsky's method of physical action, he made a distinction between physical movement, which is a mechanical act, and physical action, which has some reason for happening, an inner justification.

Stanislavsky noticed that within operatic performance practice there was the all too familiar sight of awkward arm and hand movements, and stock gestures, with no known specific purpose or reason except to change position every now and again, or to vaguely indicate some vague notion of "drama". Such performance practice was a likely by product of the traditional concept that the singer was there simply to serve and indicate the score and/or libretto. This lack of sincerity and meaning within the act of performing left Stanislavsky frustrated: "I do not at all understand for what reason you are doing this exercise, why one arm is above your head and the other is wound around your body - if there is nothing else to it, it's just 'ballet'."<sup>23</sup> When Stanislavsky described something as "ballet", it was derogatory, he was referring to poses and gestures which lacked inner meaning. That kind of movement was empty and had no reason for being on the stage. Movement could be generated from an inner state of being, and/or a set of physical actions could be decided on by the performer to

<sup>22</sup> Stanislavsky, Constantin. Stanislavsky's Legacy. Ed. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. London: Max Reinhardt Ltd., 1959. 46.

express the drama. These actions then need to be justified emotionally and intellectually, by drawing on the actors imagination or by looking to the given circumstances of the work. On the one hand, Stanislavsky's method is not a relativism, the actor is required to respond to the work. On the other hand the process of finding a set of physical actions that have a strong and appropriate direction, based on the character and the given circumstances is not an easy one. It requires a good deal of experimenting, analysis, and improvisation. The reward is a coexistent stream of actions and emotions that serve the drama, and allow the actor/singer to achieve a psycho-physical involvement with the work. Stanislavsky, following on from the innovations of his followers such as Eugene Vakhtangov and Michael Chekhov, came to the realisation that "...*internal feeling and character identification could be stimulated by pure movement, action, and rhythm.*" <sup>24</sup>

In essence, when someone does something, be it physical or otherwise, he experiences and symptomatically feels something. When the actor/singer is truly experiencing something, instead of merely indicating or mimicking what someone looks like when they are experiencing, then they are so much more interesting. For Stanislavsky doing from intent was truthful because its symptom was organic experience.

Stanislavsky believed that when the performer experiences the audience has no choice but to experience with them. The method of physical actions gave an alternative to the de-powering need to indicate and freed the actor/singer to experience because she or he was doing something. Acting is doing!

### *Actions and Intentions*

In life all people can be normal people, while on stage not everyone succeeds in being normal. In life everyone has organic lines, the actor on the stage alone has not got them. It is only on the stage that an actor can think of anything under the sun while singing a passionate love aria to the audience and at the same time clasping the

<sup>23</sup> Stanislavski, Stanislavski on Opera 7.

<sup>24</sup> Gordon, The Stanislavsky Technique: Russia 208.



leading lady to his heart without even bothering to look at her. When an actor makes a declaration of love on the stage he puts his hand on his heart, rolls up his eyes, sighs, and so on. If you ever tried to do the same in real life the girl you were in love with would certainly take offence and send you packing, but for some reason that sort of thing is considered quite normal on stage.<sup>25</sup>

What the actor/singer does on stage should depend on what the character wants to achieve; on their intention<sup>26</sup>. A character must want something or she or he has no reason to be doing anything. It does not even have to be an active want, but it must be strong and have something at stake. In a lecture to his opera students, Stanislavsky discussed the relationship between actions and intentions:

If your various 'I want to's' are properly fused with your correct physical actions, it is not only my heart that will say to you 'I believe', but all the hearts in the auditorium will identify their own feelings with certain feelings of the people you are representing on the stage and become one with them.<sup>27</sup>

The actor/singer's intention is the "I want" element of the action. It is the reason a character does something. Stanislavsky was aware that the idea of being truthful within the act of performing was foreign to the majority of operatic singers. He stressed:

It is important that the producer should constantly remind the young opera singer that he must never sing his lines to no purpose and that he must always discover the meaning between the lines of his text, the 'I want to' without which he will never get the thought-word-sound, but only the sound, taken correctly or incorrectly from the technical point of view, but always empty and quite devoid of meaning.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Stanislavsky, Constantin. Rpt. David Magarshack. Stanislavsky-A Life. London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1950. 400.

<sup>26</sup> This word Intention is also translated as Objective and purpose in other texts concerning the system.

<sup>27</sup> Stanislavsky, Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage 174.

<sup>28</sup> Stanislavsky, Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage 135.

The choice of an intention moulds the performance for the actor/singer and the audience. More importantly it affects the overall meaning of the drama. If, for instance, the actor/singer playing the role of Mimi in *La Bohème* decided her intention at the beginning of her first scene was to find some food and warmth, she would knock on the door with that intent, examine Rudolphe with that intent, she would sing her first lines with subtext (the inner thoughts and feelings not expressed in the libretto, that were influenced by that intent) and she would enter his apartment with that intent. However, if she decided that Mimi wants an adventure, everything she did would be acted according to that intention. I am not saying that either choice is better, or even appropriate, but if the actor were committed to her intention, either one or the other would be truthful and interesting and the audience would be able to experience both sympathetically. When someone has an intention, they do things to achieve that intention. Whether they succeed or not is often the least relevant factor. For Stanislavsky the actor/singer must always be trying to achieve an intention. The things that the artist chooses to do to achieve an intention are called actions. Essentially, actions are little intentions to achieve a big intention.

As an example, I will choose something that most of us can relate to. My intention is to get to work on time, and my given circumstances include that it was 7:30 and I had overslept. I did not have a car so I took the bus, and it was raining outside. My actions would possibly read as follows: I would get up, wash quickly, grab a quick piece of toast for breakfast, find some money for the bus (probably while I was still eating), grab an umbrella, lock the house up, run to the bus, wait for the bus, get on the bus, and give my money to the bus driver. These are all things I would do to achieve my intention in the context of my given circumstances.

Actions for Stanislavsky were arranged in a "logical" order that allowed for the unfolding of the drama and moment to moment reality. Actions should be logical and feed from one to the next in order to give a sense of moment to moment reality. One must be taken to its full potential before the next starts or there is a danger of becoming general and vague. In opera,

the actor/singer must never forget the music when composing their actions, as the two are married in the drama. Stanislavsky addressed this in relation to Wagner:

The production notes of Richard Wagner contain, among other things, the secret of producing an opera. You can bring Wagnerian heroes to life and make human beings out of them if you can wean them from everything 'operatic' and plan their actions in consonance with the 'inner meaning' of the music and not the 'external' effects.<sup>29</sup>

### *Super-Objective and Through Line of Action*

As actions work toward the goal of the intention or objective, the intention or objective works toward the super-objective. The super-objective is just as it sounds. It is essentially the big intention for the entire play. An intention usually encompasses the duration of a scene, and an action a moment or so. The super-objective was of supreme influence and importance in determining what was done in the role and what the interpreted meaning of the play was:

In a play the whole stream of individual, minor objectives, all the imaginative thoughts, feelings and actions of an actor, should converge to carry out the *super-objective* of the plot. The common bond must be so strong that even the most insignificant detail, if it is not related to the *super-objective*, will stand out as superfluous or wrong.<sup>30</sup>

The Super-objective of the play, like an intention or an action is determined as a verb. Since acting for Stanislavsky was process-based and about "doing" the use of a verb within the grammatical construct of the desire was of paramount importance.

Stanislavsky's concept that acting was doing toward a desire or intention is fundamental in the understanding that it was the super-objective that contained the meaning. The meaning of the play was in the performance, but the performance was toward the super-objective. The

<sup>29</sup> Stanislavsky, Stanislavsky's Legacy 43.

<sup>30</sup> Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares 271.

super-objective was for Stanislavsky intimately connected with not only the act of performance but also the supposed desires of the author:

The Super-objective contains the meaning, the inner sense, of all the subordinate objectives of the play. In carrying out this one super-objective you have arrived at something even more important, superconscious, ineffable, which is in the spirit of Griboyedov (the author) himself, the thing that inspired him to write, and which inspires an actor to act.<sup>31</sup>

The design and execution of the actions toward the Intention toward the Super-objective was called the through-line of actions. It followed a linear logic from the beginning to the end of the play:

That inner line of effort that guides the actors from the beginning to the end of the play we call the *continuity* or the *through-going action*. This through line galvanises all the small units and objectives of the play and directs them toward the super-objective.<sup>32</sup>

The through-line of actions not only provided a logical sequential way to depict the dramatic events but it tied in all the aspects of the system and compartmentalised the use of the exercises in a way that could serve the play and the playwright's perceived intention:

If you play without the throughline of action, you are merely going through certain disjointed exercises of parts of the system. They are useful in classroom work but they do not do for a whole performance of a part. You have passed over the important fact that all these exercises have the principal purpose of establishing fundamental lines of direction.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Stanislavski, Constantin. Creating a Role. Trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood. London: Methuen, 1996. 78.

<sup>32</sup> Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares 274.

<sup>33</sup> Stanislavski, An Actor Prepares 275.

Stanislavsky's throughline of action depended on the constant move from action to action. One had to flow into the other just as from scene to scene one intention had to flow into the next. All this was toward the ultimate goal of the Super-objective. The way that one action or intention was catalysed to the next was the result of a clash with an obstacle:

Yet no movement, striving, action is carried out on the stage, anymore than in real life, without obstacles. One runs inevitably into counter-movements and strivings of other people, or into conflicting events, or into obstacles caused by elements, or other hindrances. Life is an unremitting *struggle*, one overcomes or one is defeated. Likewise on the stage, side-by-side with the through action there will be a series of *counter-through actions* on the part of other characters, other circumstances. The collision and conflict of these two opposing through actions constitute the dramatic situation.<sup>34</sup>

### *Character*

Because Stanislavsky developed a technique where the actor's quality of doing was rendered meaningful in performance, he is often said to have freed the actor from the constraints of the text. He is credited with allowing the actor to participate and create meaning through both the reality of doing as explored in the imagination and sensory work, and in his choice of actions and intentions explored in his Method of Physical Actions. Actions stem from the desires of the character toward the super-objective.

Stanislavsky's entire technique can be viewed from the perspective of the character. It is a technique of doing truthfully both internally and externally within the given circumstances toward the intention. Every aspect that affects the reality of doing must take into account the inner and outer life of the character, its history, its social standing, its physical aspect, and

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<sup>34</sup> Stanislavski, Creating a Role 80.

its desire. What the character experiences and the emotions that are expressed, are essentially the result of the character's actions and intentions against the obstacle that are within the play.

For Stanislavsky the character was not born solely from the information that was supplied by the playwright instead the actor/singer's own emotional responses played a crucial role. The meaning extended beyond the work to its activation. Stanislavsky developed a technique where by the role came mostly from the actor's "creative emotions":

The difficulty of this aspect of emotional perception is that the actor is now coming to his part not through the text, the words of his role, nor by intellectual analysis or other conscious means of knowledge, but through his own sensations, his own real emotions, his personal life experience.<sup>35</sup>

Stanislavsky drew a distinction between character and caricature. This is of particular use for the opera singer in that many of the roles within opera originate from the stock characterisations of *Commedia dell'arte*, or in the case of the chorus, general bodies of mass such as towns people or soldiers. Stanislavsky advocated the characterisation of such caricatures:

Other actors, who possess more acute powers of observation are able to choose subdivisions in the general categories of stock figures. They can make distinctions among military men, between infantry and cavalry, they know soldiers, officers, generals...They endow the representations of these various groups with features which are characteristic for them.<sup>36</sup>

Stanislavsky stressed the necessity for the actor/singer to always remain in character when on stage. Breaking out of character was one of the worst possible things an actor could do. It ruined all sense of belief in the drama, not only for the other players on stage, but for the audience as well. Essentially, it lowered the entire tone of a performance and broke the

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<sup>35</sup> Stanislavski, *Creating a Role* 25.

creative state. During the third rehearsal of Massenet's *Werther* at the Opera Studio, Stanislavsky criticised a singer who stopped acting when he had finished his aria:

What is your conception of a pause on the stage? You have just finished your aria. You have carried out all the pieces of your part and its problems with the utmost conciseness. You 'were' Werther. But where has he disappeared to now? I don't see Werther, but a man who is happy to have sung his arias satisfactorily without being interrupted once. But the magic goes on; the sounds are still resounding. We are all sitting here entranced by the life you have created for us. Life goes on, but you are standing as though everything has come to an end. Come to an end, mind you, because you are no longer uttering a sound.<sup>37</sup>

Stanislavsky's idea of character was not only developed outside of the boundaries of the text, but had to continue living when the text ceased in order to honour that text. This idea and practice of characterisation is one of the most empowering aspects of performance in that it is one aspect where the performance artist is permitted to interpret and activate meaning.

### *Subtext*

The aspect which moved the art of performance away from the literal indication of the text was Stanislavsky's use of subtext. Sonia Moore, a teacher of the Stanislavsky System, puts the subtext in context with actions: "The action brings out the meaning of each moment of the play as the subtext brings out the meaning of the words."<sup>38</sup>

The idea of the character's inner monologue is involved in Stanislavsky's notion of subtext. It gives the character an inner life that is not directly linked to the constraints of the literal text. The character can have thoughts and those thoughts will affect the underlying thought or meaning that corresponds to a line.

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<sup>36</sup> Stanislavski, *Building a Character* 27.

<sup>37</sup> Stanislavsky, *Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage* 276.

<sup>38</sup> Moore, Sonia. *Training an Actor. The Stanislavski System in Class*. New York: Penguin Books, 1983. 255.

The subtext, in order to be logically linked to the super-objective, has to be informed by the character's desire in the given circumstances. Just as in life, the meaning of what you say is more informed by the given circumstances, the character that you are, and the want or need that you are acting towards, than the literal words. The systemisation of this basic behavioural fact, was a huge step in the moving performance from servitude to the supposed meaning of text into a process with its own meaning. Benedetti describes the importance:

Acting is no longer imitation. The task is not to find intonations and gestures which conform to the features of the script, or to match acting conventions with literary conventions. The script loses its status as an object 'out there' to be copied. It is drawn into the creative process and is transformed by it.<sup>39</sup>

Within the current performance practice of opera the performer still largely remains the servant to the texts of music and word. In a later section I will explore why Stanislavsky's notion of subtext, along with the other ideas that freed the performer from the role of subservience, seem not to have been taken up by contemporary performance practices of opera.

### *Text Analysis and the Derivation of Meaning*

If the result of a scholarly analysis is *thought*, the result of an artistic analysis is *feeling*.<sup>40</sup>

All experts of the Stanislavsky system return to the relationship between feeling and truth.<sup>41</sup> Stanislavsky's method of analysis provides the frame work by which all these aspects of truth are executed. It also provides the way that the written text is brought off the page into performance. This frame work dictates what aspects of the feeling, truth, and intent are to be included in the performance. As explored earlier, all the aspects of the system must move

<sup>39</sup> Benedetti, Jean. *Stanislavski an Introduction*. London: Methuen, 1989. 46.

<sup>40</sup> Stanislavski, *Creating a Role* 8.

<sup>41</sup> This is seen in the idea that a gesture simply executed is ballet, whereas a gesture with feeling beneath it is real and organic. The same applies to a line without desire (another aspect of feeling) which becomes manifest in subtext as empty or lacking artistic merit. Likewise, a character without a history, a context or



toward the super-objective. It is in the process, rules and values of analysis that this super-objective is determined. Since all the choices that reach the stage have to fit into the framework and into the chosen intentions, actions and super-objective from this process and values of analysis, the determination of what is ultimately meaningful and what is not is to be found in this ultimate step.

One of the most interesting dichotomies to be found in the Stanislavsky System is between the incredible dedication to truth and feeling of realness from the part of the actor as manifest in the physical and emotional instrument and a seemingly strict adherence to the playwright's text. Interestingly, it is not so much the literal text that supposedly held the meaning as the subtext. For Stanislavsky, the meaning was not even the contextual information that was gleaned from the literal text with regards to character since his concepts of characterisation went beyond these. It was not strictly the narrative aspects, in the traditional sense, where narrative would dictate the depiction of action on the stage. This was shown in the sections, actions and intentions method of physical action and super-objective. Rather, Stanislavsky was dedicated to the idea that the playwright had an intended meaning that should be honoured. The playwright had put the truth and meaning in his script and it was the actors job to find it. It was there to be uncovered because the playwright put it there. This uncovering differed from traditional interpretations in that it involved activation and performance:

Thus the line of analysis takes its point of departure from the external form of the play, from the printed text of the playwright, which is accessible to our consciousness, and it goes from there to the inner spiritual essence of the play, that invisible something which the playwright put inside his work, and which is largely accessible only to our subconscious.<sup>42</sup>

Stanislavsky felt that it was important for the actor to be wary of identifying too closely with the text at the initial stages. His rehearsal process supported this as did his advice on the first

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an emotional and sensory response to these from the player is seen as two-dimensional.

reading. The actor was not to plan his role or his actions as an initial reaction to a text. The idea of separation would free them to act more creatively in rehearsal and maintain the all important notion that the meaning of performance was in the inner and outer life of the character as he/she goes through the through line of actions toward the super-objective. The meaning was essentially in the performance rather than the uttered word. However in the first reading it was expected that the actor connect with the author's supposed intent:

At first reading the play should be presented simply, clearly, with understanding of its fundamentals, its essence, the main line of its development, and its literary merit. The reader should suggest the playwright's point of departure, the thought, the feelings, or experiences for the sake of which he wrote the play.<sup>43</sup>

As both Derrida and Barthes explored in the previous chapters, this concept of essence, originated intent (by an absent author), and merit, is one that limits aspects of performance and process. This is clearly not what Stanislavsky intended for his system, but is perhaps one of the areas that got in his own way. Stanislavsky was so attached to this almost God-like view of the author that he felt that connecting with his supposed meaning would result in artistic inspiration: "It is important for actors to find the angle of vision from which the playwright views his work. When this is achieved they are carried away by the reading."<sup>44</sup>

For Stanislavsky it was not only in the process of reading that the playwright dictated meaning, it was also in the imaginative aspects he developed that initially freed the performer from the strict indication of the script. These aspects of the system were ultimately put in servitude to the text which within the process of analysis and rehearsal procedure were arguably centralised: "An actor is completely free in creating his dream, as long as it does not stray too far from the playwright's basic thought and theme."<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, within the later analytical methods, Stanislavsky's earlier developments to do with imagination were

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<sup>42</sup> Stanislavski, *Creating a Role* 12.

<sup>43</sup> Stanislavski, *Creating a Role* 6.

<sup>44</sup> Stanislavski, *Creating a Role* 5.

<sup>45</sup> Stanislavski, *Creating a Role* 20.

sometimes seen as ornamentation to the playwright's text: "The imagination of the actor adorns the text of the playwright with fanciful patterns and colours from his own palette."<sup>46</sup>

With this in mind it is understandable why Harold Clurman, the director/teacher who was one of the foremost champions of the Stanislavsky System in America stated: "The Purpose of the Stanislavsky Method is to teach the actor to put the whole gamut of his physical and emotional being into the service of the dramatist's meaning."<sup>47</sup> There is a discrepancy between the notion that the meaning of the drama was finally rendered in the act of performance, through using Stanislavsky technique, and that this truth could only be executed once authorised by an often absent playwright.<sup>48</sup> This is difficult especially when Stanislavsky acknowledged the independence of his Method of Physical Actions within the process of analysis and the execution of a dramatic meaning in its own right:

...my method of creating a physical being automatically analyses a play; it automatically induces organic nature to put its important inner creative forces to work to prompt us to physical action; it automatically evokes from inside us live human material with which to work: it helps, when we are taking our first steps toward a new play, to sense its general atmosphere and mood. All these are the new and important possibilities of my method.<sup>49</sup>

A major argument of this study is that it is these exact possibilities, of which Stanislavsky was so proud, that he did not explore fully. In fact they have been denied partly due to Stanislavsky's own rehearsal plans, analytical methods and lack of definition with regard to the dramatic event. Within Creating a Role Stanislavsky set out a process of rehearsal which embodied the aspects of his system explained in the earlier books, An Actor Prepares, and

<sup>46</sup> Stanislavski, Creating a Role 5.

<sup>47</sup> Clurman, Harold. "In the USA." World Theatre Vol VIII #1. 34.

<sup>48</sup> Much of Stanislavsky's success came about within the plays of his 'present' friend and playwright, Anton Chekov. Perhaps this contributed to his dedication to the author's meaning. However, more often than not the author is 'absent' or as Barthes described: "It is not that the author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest'" Barthes 161. How would the artist determine his essential meaning assuming that there is indeed such a thing?

<sup>49</sup> Stanislavski, Creating a Role 248.

Building a Character, and combined their content within a process of preparing a role for performance with the text.<sup>50</sup>

Within Stanislavsky's set plan of rehearsal the actual play is not introduced into the rehearsal process until the through line of actions is established from a break-down of the basic facts of the play. The point of this seemingly radical move was to make sure that the words came as a symptom of the doing, and that the lines were subordinate to the action. Stanislavsky did understand that ultimately the drama was in the action not in the text. A most crucial aspect of this process is the definition of the "facts" by which the actions, intentions and super-objectives were chosen. Since all aspects of the emotional and physical action and characterisation stem from these, the understanding of what is meant by fact is most important to the origin of meaning within the performance of the drama. Stanislavsky got the idea of telling the basic facts to his actors from Nemirovich-Danchenko:

Let the actor learn by heart and write down the existing facts, their sequence, and their external physical connection with one another...one is not able to retell its contents much better than it is done in the advertisements or the condensed librettos.<sup>51</sup>

Stanislavsky uses the play Wit from Woe written by Alexander Sergeyevich Griboyedov, to illustrate the concept of external "facts". Within these external "facts", as stated by Stanislavsky, we see implied intentions and the setting up of events, both of which are interpreted. The first of these facts is basic background and helps to establish a moment before the action which in turn gives a clue to the state of being of the characters:<sup>52</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Since Stanislavsky was more pragmatic than academic, his process of rehearsal and process of analysis are closely linked. Because of this they will be explored concurrently. The majority of information that deals with the rehearsal process and the analytical method that was developed within the system is found in the latter of the three book trilogy that constitutes the texts on the system that are often considered the "bibles" of acting technique. The last one of these is titled Creating a Role. Its intended title was An Actors Work on a Role. It is largely an editorial creation as Stanislavsky died before its completion. In fact it can be concluded that Stanislavsky died before the completion of the actual System itself. He considered it like a science and expected it to be subverted, expanded and experimented with.

<sup>51</sup> Stanislavski, Creating a Role 13.

<sup>52</sup> Stanislavski, Creating a Role 14-15.

1. A meeting between Sophia and Molchalin has continued all night.

for the subject of study the next twelve are as follows:

2. It is dawn, they are playing a duet of flute and piano in the next room.
3. Liza, the maid, is asleep. She is supposed to be keeping watch.
4. Liza wakes up, sees that the day is breaking, begs the lovers to separate quickly.
5. Liza sets the clock ahead to frighten the lovers and turn their attention to danger.
6. As the clock strikes, Sophia's father, Famusov, enters.
7. He sees Liza, flirts with her.
8. Liza cleverly evades his attention and persuades him to go away.
9. At the noise Sophia enters. She sees the dawn and is astonished at how quickly her night of love has passed.
10. The lovers have not had time to separate before Famusov confronts them
11. Astonishment, questions, angry uproar.
12. Sophia cleverly extricates herself from embarrassment and danger...

Upon reading the play it is obvious that these "facts" are indeed an interpretation of some of the events of the situations and even perceived emotional responses presented in the text of this play. It is interesting to note what Stanislavsky has put in and developed, what he has left out and what he has kept brief. It is understandable that any such list would be subjective. Stanislavsky was aware of this, which is why he stated: "As work progresses it is necessary to come back all the time to fresh re-estimates, which add to the inner substance. Moreover the facts should be newly evaluated everytime you repeat your creation

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of a part."<sup>53</sup> But the difficulty is in the various forms that these so called facts take. If they are there to create a skeleton upon which improvisations can be executed to find a logical sequence of behaviour that will allow the inner and outer aspects of an instrument to co-exist in truth; they are destined to run into problems because situations, events and emotions require different operations. Situation, when connected to narrative, is something that is there, already written. Stanislavsky made it clear that one does not perform the narrative or even the situation. He also made it clear that one does not show or depict emotion. Events, however, are a symptom of process; they happen. Situation, as set in narrative and emotion, when perceived as set, are products.

The connecting aspect within this analysis could have been the idea of "event". Stanislavsky did touch upon its aspects to connect various textual and practical perspectives when he was experimenting with Wit From Woe:

As I did these test experiments in achieving the state of "I am" I became convinced that simple action is not enough; there must be incidents. In this way you do not only begin to exist in your imagined life, you also are more keenly aware of the feelings of other people, of your relations with them and theirs of you.<sup>54</sup>

As explored in the previous chapters, incidents, happenings and events are all part of the same concept in that they happen. In the next chapter, how they happen is explored. An event or incident is the result or symptom of an action against an obstacle, be it emotion, physical; situational, chemical Stanislavsky confined himself within his text analysis to the emotionally originated action and therefore set in motion events that he saw as a human, organic, real. If acting is about doing, from a desire toward a larger desire that ties the entire logic of the character's behaviour and inner and outer impulses together, all the facts demand action of some sort. The incidents and happenings interpreted from this "factual" analysis are determined by the reading of the event of the scene. If the event is "Girl gets caught" then the relevant happenings are as follows:

<sup>53</sup> Stanislavski, Creating a Role 42.

2. It is dawn, they are playing a duet of flute and piano in the next room.
3. Liza, the maid, is asleep. She is supposed to be keeping watch.
4. Liza wakes up, sees that the day is breaking, begs the lovers to separate quickly.
5. Liza sets the clock ahead to frighten the lovers and turn their attention to danger.
6. As the clock strikes, Sophia's father, Famusov, enters.
7. He sees Liza, flirts with her.
8. Liza cleverly evades his attention and persuades him to go away.
9. At the noise Sophia enters. She sees the dawn and is astonished at how quickly her night of love has passed.
10. The lovers have not had time to separate before Famusov confronts them
11. Astonishment, questions, angry uproar.
12. Sophia cleverly extricates herself from embarrassment and danger...

The phrases underlined are then the events that Stanislavsky's system could then be applied to. It would be from this logic that the super-objective would be derived. If the event were read as "A chaotic day in the life of the Famusov house" then the activated happenings could be as follows:

2. It is dawn, they are playing a duet of flute and piano in the next room.
3. Liza, the maid, is asleep. She is supposed to be keeping watch.
4. Liza wakes up, sees that the day is breaking, begs the lovers to separate quickly.
5. Liza sets the clock ahead to frighten the lovers and turn their attention to danger.
6. As the clock strikes, Sophia's father, Famusov, enters.
7. He sees Liza, flirts with her.
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10. The lovers have not had time to separate before Famusov confronts them
11. Astonishment, questions, angry uproar.
12. Sophia cleverly extricates herself from embarrassment and danger...

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<sup>54</sup> Stanislavski, Creating a Role 33.

It is the choice of the event that determines the various "as ifs" that are required to make the scene believable. The event also determines what through line of action against which obstacles will make the chosen/interpreted incidences eventuate. Furthermore, the choice of "event" determines which elements of the narrative, emotional involvement, and situation are necessary as part of the analysis to be activated. These "facts", that Stanislavsky made such an important step in his process of analysis, not only are open to interpretation, thus negating the requirement to honour the author's intended meaning, but are a crucial step toward delineating the aspects of the play to be dealt with within improvisation and to determine the super-objective that controls the activated meaning of the performance. These "facts", potentially through their lack of specificity with regards to the doing, dilute the meaning of the performance process by fragmenting its intended event.

An event will always happen, and it is essentially from what happens on the stage that the audience derives its sense of meaning. Stanislavsky's use of "facts" rather than the honing in on events as a part of analysis and preparation retains what I described in previous chapters as the hermeneutic prejudice: the "facts" limit, contain and govern the performance. Stanislavsky himself is known to have said; "Generality is the enemy of all art".

### *The Stanislavsky System and Multi-disciplinary Performance*

#### *A Question of Internal and External*

One of the explanations as to why Stanislavsky used the idea of "external facts" to initiate the process of putting a play together, rather than incidents or events, which he himself loosely acknowledged to have interrelationship catalysing properties, is that the separation of the "inner" and "outer" aspects of the technique and the instrument was such a large part of his philosophy. Stanislavsky and his critics often divide his system into the internal and external. This can be somewhat confusing since his later practical work endeavoured and succeeded in making the internal and the external mutually interdependent. The reasons for his separation are understandable when it is taken into account that before Stanislavsky there



was little or no "internal" justification for "external" gestures or utterances. Stanislavsky was the first to establish an "internal aspect" of the technique, but in doing so he essentially filled the gap between the two and created a wholeness of a sort.

As late as 1934, Stanislavsky listed what he felt were the most significant elements of the internal and external aspects of theatrical expression. He listed these in two diagrams the first of which can be found in its entirety in Robert Lewis's book Method or Madness<sup>55</sup>.

#### **Complete internal inner feeling**

Action itself.  
 Magic "if".  
 Given circumstances.  
 Beats.  
 Problems - (choice of little actions or activities, e.g. to run).  
 Imagination.  
 Emotional memory.  
 Attention - (the object).  
 Feeling of truth - (belief in what you do).  
 Exchange of sentiments - (speaking to the eyes).  
 To recreate emotion to show different colours - (e.g. despair to recreate joy).  
 The fluid of exchange of emotion.  
 Control that removes clichés - (judge of yourself).  
 Finishing of problems (beats) and mastery in movement.  
 Theatrical personality and scenic sympathy - (taking away bad things that make bad personalities).  
 Ethical discipline - (props, make-up, quarrels).  
 Tempo-rhythm - (connects things with feelings, leads to seeing, then you begin to live).

#### **Complete external**

Relaxation.  
 External tempo and rhythm.  
 Placement of voice.  
 Diction - (feeling of the soul of the language by knowing the nature of the sounds).  
 Rules of speaking - (1. intonation, 2. pauses, 3. accent to do design, 4. get things from comma).  
 The sentiments of the language.  
 Movement.  
 Dancing.  
 Fencing.  
 Sports.  
 Acrobatics.  
 Plastique.  
 The way of walking.

A list of the aspects within the diagrammed boxes titled "Complete internal inner feeling" and "Complete external" are shown above. Within the diagram a long line is drawn with the text "Work on one self" which stands along the two internal and external boxes to show the

<sup>55</sup> Stanislavski, Konstantin. Rpt. Robert Lewis. Method or Madness. New York: Samuel French Inc., 1958. 35.

inclusion of both as part of the "work on one's self". Also, both sections have a line drawn from them that comes to a point where the words, "the part", are written. The external aspects are linked with "Process of expressing your emotion", and the internal with "process of Feeling (internally)". It is clear that Stanislavsky expects these seemingly separate aspects to relate because he has included a line down the side of both the internal and external boxes with the text "Transaction" written on it. For a more comprehensive breakdown of the diagram refer to Lewis's book but for now the point is to recognise that Stanislavsky sought to bring together seemingly separate aspects of the internal and the external within his diagram.

In another diagram Stanislavsky drew in the early nineteen thirties as an attempt to explain his system; again there are two columns included which are titled slightly differently but still intending to illustrate internal and external aspects. The contents are similar:

#### **Internal Theatrical State**

Imagination  
Units and Objectives  
Attention and Objects  
Action  
Feeling of truth belief  
Internal tempo-rhythm  
Emotion memory  
Communion  
Adaptation  
Logic and coherence  
Internal characterisation  
Internal stage charm  
Ethics and discipline  
Control and finish

#### **External Theatrical State**

Relaxation  
External tempo-rhythm  
Voice  
Speech  
Vocal technique  
Language and its laws  
Movement  
Fencing  
Physical expressiveness

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Again, it is clear that Stanislavsky separates the internal from the external and it is also clear that he intends them to be connected. This time they are connected with a line down the

<sup>56</sup> Benedetti, 61.

middle of the two columns which originates at a box of text which says "through the conscious to the unconscious". The line culminates at a box on top with the text, "proposed super-objective" in it.

Both of these diagrams are, as Lewis puts it "attempts to put down in some organised form what good actors are doing when they are acting well"<sup>57</sup> Although they are not quoted here in their entirety it is clear that Stanislavsky saw that there were both internal and external aspects of the work. In the first, the seemingly separate aspects are culminated in "the part" and "work on one's self" and in the second, with the "proposed super-objective", and as a journey "through the conscious to the unconscious".

The separation of the internal and external is further emphasised in the very fact that his book, An Actor Prepares, largely sets out the internal aspects of the work where his book, Building a Character, deals with elements of physical characterisation.

The various aspects cited in both diagrams are of mutual significance to the traditionally separated aspects of the performer. This thesis proposes that perhaps it is the separating of these aspects in the first place that causes the problems of interrelation of aspects of the performance instrument and the role. Relaxation is a prime example of the dilemma of separating internal and external origin and symptomatic effect. Does one start to relax because there is an inner impulse, (as Stanislavsky would treat the act if it were on the stage, for example, having an inner justification); or does the relaxing start from the outer physical aspect and symptomatically effect an internal state of being? It affects both. This same dilemma goes for the examples of tempo rhythm, action, makeup and so on.

It seems that Stanislavsky was caught up in an idea of origin. The basic premise of his technique, both practical and analytical, was that the meaning of action was initiated in the internal. A gesture without an inner impulse, an utterance without an internal justification or any so called "physical" act without a desire was "ballet". Within this idea was the

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<sup>57</sup> Lewis, 25.

assumption that the inner rendered the action meaningful, while at the same time Stanislavsky invented the idea that the inner and outer were not separate entities in actions.

As stated earlier, this perceived emphasis on the internal emotional aspect has been one of the reasons for pedagogical and practical resistance of applying the Stanislavsky system to opera. Ironically, in Stanislavsky's later work, with the development of method of physical actions, he effectively did away with the need for any inner/outer separation, thus negating the need for internal origin. With the method of physical actions Stanislavsky had developed a way to render all the inner and outer aspects of his technique mutually interdependent in action. It is said that he never actually approved of the name "method of physical actions" due to the implied separation in the title: "Stanislavsky did not think that "method of physical action" was a good name for his new idea; but he purposely emphasised the "physical" because he believed that the physical being was inextricably bound up with the inner being."<sup>58</sup>

I propose that for the purposes of utilising and applying the techniques that are transferable to multi-disciplinary theatre, the Stanislavsky System be looked upon as incorporating two different aspects.

1. The reality of doing or the quality of doing
2. Analysis/design and plan of what you do.

Looking at the technique like this, we can retain the ground-breaking work that Stanislavsky contributed to the practices of making a performance meaningful in action, and leave behind some of the assumptions that bind the direction, interpretation, and act of singing/acting to the limitations of authorship which essentially limit the interpretation of the dramatic event.

By separating the system into the doing and the "what to do's" (the practice and the plan, the execution and the preparation and the journey in the moment and the map) it is then possible

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<sup>58</sup> Kedrov, M.N. "Journal of the MAT." December 15, 1939, Rpt. Leslie Irene Coger. Stanislavsky Changes his Mind. Tulane Drama Review. Vol 9 no 1 1964. 64.

to free the quality of doing from the line of action that Stanislavsky designed within the use of his method of physical actions in his text analysis technique. The idea that every action follows a "through line" of action down a singular path towards the "super-objective" ignores the fact that every action will have physical, chemical, physiological, spiritual and musical reactions which set off new actions and create the event that is "drama". The recognition of all these aspects, and aspects still not yet discovered, could be likened to the concept of a "network", as explored by Barthes, or text or writing as defined by Derrida.

In the following chapters I will explore the use of this network. I will also argue that the delineation of other aspects of this network, allows for a technique of analysis that can incorporate various performing disciplines within an interrelated network to create a dramatic event. Within this new analytical method, elements such as "quality of doing" that Stanislavsky pioneered and developed are essential.

In his later years Stanislavsky de-emphasised the use of Emotional Memory largely because it took the actor away from the script and into their own unrelated feelings and reality. With the loss of Emotional Memory, Stanislavsky became more dependent on the author for the meaning of the play. Emotional memory was reliant on the actor's own feelings and interpretation of the events that occur in the play. However with Stanislavsky's idea of analysis and ultimate aim toward the "super-objective", the meaning shifts again to the supposed intention of the playwright and away from the actor. The reasons for abandoning the Emotional Memory technique are understandable. However, the necessity to return to the author for meaning does not necessarily connect with those reasons except to inadvertently say that the temperament of the performance artist is somehow unruly and incapable of being structured within a dramatic design. This is reminiscent of the problems that were faced with "unruly" singers during the time of the Camerata, Bel Canto, and Castrati.

Although Stanislavsky encouraged the development of the character and his impulses to stem from the actor's own feeling, often explored away from the script, the ultimate action and aspects that were allowed on the stage were directly connected with the throughline of action

toward the super-objective. Every move and every utterance was intention-based, but more important is the fact that the intention had to be authorised.

The fact that all aspects come from intention and are determined and developed through the emotional reaction, effects the quality of that intention. Intentions are motivational, stemming from emotional desire. Therefore the intentions that were developed in the analysis were psychologically based. This poses a problem for multi-disciplinary theatre in that it alienates the idea of impulsive action, or reflex momentum (such as those often incorporated into modern dance). For example, in Baroque and Bel Canto operatic writing the highly ornamented sections could be justified by psychologically-based action, but the sheer amount of repetition often demands an almost trance-like unravelling of action that does not necessarily adhere to the supposed logical organisation of human behaviour. It is agreed that in order for an action or phrase or movement to be meaningful it must have the entire instrument involved, but perhaps inner origin and psychological justification are not the only way to achieve this.

### *Logic of Human Behaviour*

The system was ultimately designed to work within the logic of human behaviour drawing from the laws of nature. To the question, "What does acting mean?", Magarshack answers: "It means, Stanislavsky maintains, that while on the stage the actor thinks and acts correctly, logically, consistently, and in accordance with the laws of human nature, as demanded by his part and in complete agreement with it."<sup>59</sup>

Not all the things we do in life are logical, in fact some of the most dramatic actions that happen in life are illogical. It was this idea that existence could not be contained within logic that led Derrida to criticise Western philosophy as "logocentrism". Sometimes the most interesting performances are indeed series of "illogical" action. Modern dance can take the form of a series of continuous responses against each other, without psychologically-based

<sup>59</sup> Magarshack, David. "Stanislavsky." The Theory of the Modern Stage. Ed. Eric Bentley. London: Penguin Books, 1989. 232.

inner meaning, as part of its event. A lot of modern operatic composition, such as that of Philip Glass is highly rhythmic, bouncing off itself. The mere shape or the mere act of bouncing is the action: again, not necessarily stemming from psychological motive. So the very fact that it is assumed that all action stems from psychological motive toward the super-objective coming from the author's supposed intent, renders such originated action a particular style. This is fine if that is a choice and not an assumption by systematic design.

One of the fundamentals of the Stanislavsky system is that performance is the symptom or the by-product of action against obstacle. The same logic that says that one does not indicate a product such as emotion or execute a gesture without an internal process (because the outcome will be of a certain quality that for the theatre is fake and empty), can be used to look at the assumptions that Stanislavsky's process places on the values of what is theatrical. If the process is always internally justified, adhering to the apparent intent of the author, and moving toward and within the logic toward a psychological desire, then the product of the theatrical experience will be limited. It limits the outcome to potentially being bound within the constraints of stylisation, and also limits the aspects of the performer's instrument to the psychological. The dramatic event will in effect always adhere to some notion of the organic within a linear logical sequence of happenings.

### *The Score as Dramatic Text*

Stanislavsky utilised the notion of subtext to glean an underlying meaning from the written word and to connect it with an internal desire and truth. In Stanislavsky's use of subtext he never referred to the musical text's subtext. A Wagnerian opera within its woven fabric of *Leitmotifs* is a musical meal of subtextual unfoldings. It is the *Leitmotifs* that tell the story that are assumed to contain the meaning. The subtext of these *Leitmotifs* actually contain a large aspect of the narrative. Although Stanislavsky was enchanted with music and even utilised the notion of tempo rhythm as a major part of his system, recognition of the musical text was very limited even within his direction of opera. This is ironic since it was the very fact that music had a grammar and acting didn't that catalysed the development of the system.

If in the choosing of actions and ways to execute them within the performance practice of opera, we abide by the rhythmic bias that Stanislavsky set up, the production will result in a particular style. The symptom of the elements that are used to create action creates a certain style of performance. Style is essentially a symptom of the quality or genres of actions against obstacles. Within music there are elements such as melody, harmony, dynamics, and timbre that also have expressive elements intrinsic to the dramatic event that could be activated. Mozart's work is full of both rhythmic and melodic gesture. Handel's harmonies often divulge more action than the libretti. Each of these aspects inform the artist and audience about the action, the character, the narrative, and the circumstances especially if chosen as part of the activated fabric within the dramatic event. If these are not acknowledged they run the risk of merely ornamenting or accompanying the drama. More importantly the meaningful relationship between the performance and the text is then dissipated by design.



### Between Stanislavsky and the Integrative Performance Theory

Since Stanislavsky there have been many extensions of, revolts against, and bastardisations of his system. The Integrative Performance Theory owes much to all of these. Contemporary discussions of the Stanislavsky system have mainly developed around questions and competitions between the inner and the outer, the psychological and the physical, and the subconscious and conscious oppositions. Not since Stanislavsky has there been a systematic approach or technique that has come any closer to marrying the supposed separate aspects of performance in the western theatre.

One of the first revolts against Stanislavsky's System can be found in his own student Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) who developed Biomechanics as a reaction to what he felt was a limitation of an internally based system. Biomechanics consisted of a series of specific exercises that taught the performer self-awareness in three-dimensional space. They enhanced the efficiency and expressiveness of movements and gestures, and developed dynamic and rhythmically musical qualities of stage movement. Meyerhold saw acting as a psycho-physical process that could be broken down into a recurring cycle, with each action being made up of an "intention", its "realisation", and an attenuated "reaction" preparatory to a new "intention". Actions or gestures could clarify an intention, qualify it or contradict it. Gesture was never casual or spontaneous, but always deliberate and significant. Although seemingly against Stanislavsky's approach, Meyerhold admitted that their work was along the same lines but approached from different directions. He said:

More frequently it seems to me that the difference between Stanislavsky and me is mainly a matter of terminology. What he calls "the task" I call "the motive". But we are speaking of one and the same thing.<sup>1</sup>

Within the struggle between the internal and external elements of expression there came a movement away from the literal meaning of the texts toward the recognition of the actor as

<sup>1</sup> Gladkov, Aleksandr. *Meyerhold Speaks, Meyerhold Rehearses* Trans. Alma Law. Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997. 168.

an activator of meaning. Largely through the acceptance of gesture and movement as a meaning that could contradict a text yet, still operate within its narrative structure, there was an increasing acceptance of the idea that movement was the original locale of meaning and expression. Through this the authority of the writer was challenged. Gordon Craig (1872-1966) stated that, "The father of the dramatist was the dancer" and that "A dramatic poem is to be read. A drama is not to be read, but to be seen on the stage. Therefore gesture is a necessity to a drama, and it is useless to a dramatic poem".<sup>2</sup>

Since it was the performer that executed the gesture and movement, the gesture maker was elevated to a central role. In the case of Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) with his symbolic and anti-realistic staging, this manifested almost literally in that he used the performer and his moving three-dimensionality to dictate the designs of his lighting and sets. Through this emphasis on the physical there was also a bias toward the musical text, since it was the music that was perceived to catalyse much of the movement.

It took a practitioner steeped in the Surrealist movement to delve unashamedly into the implication of giving the full expression of the meaning to the act of performance and to the exclusion of narrative, psychological realism, and even the physical stage, as it was known. Antonin Artaud's (1896-1948) ideas were not completely new. Both Meyerhold and Appia had played with these notions, but with Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty", they were taken to new areas of expression and interrelationship. Artaud spoke of a language of theatre that was not about dialogue but an extension beyond words. He said: "Once aware of this language in space, language of sounds, cries, lights, onomatopoeia, the theatre must organise it into veritable hieroglyphs, with the help of characters and objects, and make use of their symbolism and interconnections in relation to all organs and on all levels."<sup>3</sup>

Jerzy Grotowski also placed the actor as the main activator of meaning within his "Theatre of the Poor". He did this through rigorous training of the psycho-physical instrument and the

<sup>2</sup> Craig, Gordon. "The Art of the Theatre The First Dialogue" *The Theory of the Modern Stage*. Ed. Eric Bentley. London: Penguin Books, 1989. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Artaud, Antonin. "The Theatre of Cruelty". *The Theory of the Modern Stage*. Ed. Eric Bentley. London:

rejection of all aspects that were not of that instrument. His theatre was a reaction to what he saw as "rich" theatre where lighting, music, sets, and costumes obscured the essence of theatrical meaning.

These proponents, and many others that I have not mentioned, were all in search of a meaning on the stage. Within this search, issues to do with meaning, text, authorship, and interrelationship re-occur. The Integrative Performance Theory is indebted to all of these developments in that they expose a constant appeal to issues that revolve around the internal and external origins of meaning in the act of performance, the bias toward certain texts, the difficulties surrounding authority and authorship, and the problems of integration within these oppositional constructs. Unlike many of the previous developments in theatre, the Integrative Performance Theory does not reject the internal, or the physical. Furthermore it leaves the option open to create a piece of theatre in any style of the past or yet to be invented. Most importantly, it allows for the aspects of the instrument, the texts, and the stage devices, to operate mutually interdependently, (if so chosen), without the exclusion of any element.

It can be said that since Stanislavsky there has not been a way of analysing, putting together and executing a piece of theatre that has been solely devised for the process of performance, and that since Stanislavsky, development of performance processes has become centred on the relationship between the psychological and the physical, thus precluding any dramatic event that lies outside the limitations of a supposedly original psycho-physical field. For example, Stanislavsky's method looks at how a character's inner life might be outwardly expressed. What is not fully considered is a more general event that exceeds individual intent.

Current performance practice for the operatic singer/actor seems to be less influenced by the developments of experimental theatre and more influenced by Stanislavsky's ideas. Walter Felsenstein (1901-1975) is a prime example. His work is directly connected to Stanislavsky's in that he advocated an intention based technique for the singer/actor. He also

utilised the notion of desire and intention as an element to integrate the singer's instrument within a dramatic context:

All technical elements of dramatic singing, such as breathing, intonation, and rhythmic flow, are not simply outside the role (and interfering with the spontaneity of expression) but are an integral part of the emotionally conditioned physical action<sup>4</sup>

The Integrative Performance Theory aims to aid in the integration of the singer/actor's instrument, role, text, blocking and all other elements of the performance, but does not rely on a psychologically based action to do so. Neither does it rely on the physical. One of the problems of such a purely psychological approach, is that multi-disciplinary theatre becomes limited to a psychological or physical origin of expression. That is, either the character's inner thoughts or body are regarded as the proper locus and limit of meaning. Often the physical biasing processes of performance and production gain their structure and format from the assumption of a generally available intention. The internally based production practices have traditionally based their meaning on the objectives of the characters as manifest in the author's narrative.<sup>5</sup>

With Felsenstein's use of intention and his methods of characterisation it becomes clear that he was highly influenced by Stanislavsky regardless of the fact that in his writings, these ideas are rarely attributed to Stanislavsky.

In more recent treatises on the art of acting and interpretation for the singer/actor within opera there is still a dilemma between the primacy of texts, and where an acting technique is put forth, a strong influence of Stanislavsky is apparent.

In Raymond Warren's, Opera Workshop, he provides a model for interpretation of opera for performance. Essentially the model incorporates a reading of these operas and puts forward

<sup>4</sup> Felsenstein, Walter. Rpt. The Music Theatre Of Walter Felsenstein. Trans. Ed. Peter Paul Fuchs London: Quartet Books, 1975.19.

<sup>5</sup> The most virulent exponent of this approach is to be found in Method Acting, which for years claimed to be Stanislavsky's system. The major difference between Stanislavsky's system and Method Acting lies in the fact that Method relies almost exclusively on the internal aspects of the technique. Its sense of meaning and

ways of expressing, but does not provide a method for executing this expression. In this way this model is a prime example of the majority of information available to the singer who wants to not only sing but act or express the drama of an opera more fully. Warren takes a position with regard to primacy and the texts; he states that the "drama is primarily articulated by the music", and that this is "the essential nature of opera."<sup>6</sup> For Warren the essential meaning is in the music, and all his readings of the scenes are coloured by this assumption. Warren's final line in the book sums up his entire attitude to performance of opera. Talking about music as the "most free of the arts and yet in its own way the one most under the control and restraints of the continuing passage of time". He goes on to state that: "It is the art of the opera performer to understand this and to make the inevitable compromise seem natural."<sup>7</sup> (With the Integrative Performance Technique, however, no such compromise is required, and the biasing of one text over another is a recognised choice that is understood to have its effect in the style of the production.

In an approach that seems similar to the Integrative Performance Technique, Daniel Helfgot and William Beeman have set out to challenge the denigration of performance in opera. In The Third Line we see a dissatisfaction with the lack of emphasis placed on the performance skills of the opera singer. These authors advocate that the singers learn to act in order to take responsibility for the meaning on the stage. Furthermore, Helfgot and Beeman offer a method for their theory of expression on the stage, but that is where the similarities with the Integrative Performance Technique end, for their theory is again based on the supremacy of one text:

The Whole notion of "the third line" as we present it in this book hinges on understanding the concept of the composer as the dramatist who defines the interpretation of an opera text, coupled with the concept of the singer as interpreter of the composer's implied dramatic action. In subsequent chapters, what we are saying

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belief are authorised by feeling. This will be explored in detail further on.

<sup>6</sup> Warren, Raymond. Opera Workshop. Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995. 203.

<sup>7</sup> Warren 264.

to singing-actors and directors is that they must look to the music for the ultimate interpretation of the operatic text<sup>8</sup>

Not only do they place the music as the origin of meaning from which the actor/singer will derive the interpretation of the drama, but within the "third line" the actor/singer must "accept the premise that the composer knows what he or she wants dramatically when composing the score and always sees it as a way to shape the text - literally as well as a musical work".<sup>9</sup> For the many reasons already examined in the anti-hermeneutic chapter, the Integrative Performance Technique is not built on the same premise.

Of course there have been many more figures of theatre and opera that have dealt with issues of textual bias, authority, and the internal and external origins of meaning within performance practice. This theory is indebted to them all. This section does not aim to give a comprehensive study of all figures of history between Stanislavsky and today, but rather to survey key issues and movements that have influenced this work.

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<sup>8</sup> Helfgot, Daniel, William O. Beeman. The Third Line : The Opera Performer as Interpreter New York: Schirmer books, 1993. 41.

<sup>9</sup> Helfgot 41.

### The Integrative Performance Theory

This chapter deals with the questions that have been posed historically in the first chapter. Relating this to the uptake of Stanislavsky, I will now consider questions of words over music or music over words along with the questions of inner and outer, psychological and physical, subconscious and conscious, with respects to a performance process based analysis. These questions will be addressed, not by engaging in the competition between internal and external, and the competition that has been set up between music, acting and movement, but by dealing directly with the operations of drama. This new approach will allow for a mutual interdependence between the arts in a multi disciplinary theatrical practice, namely opera. The fundamental difference in this proposed approach is the shifting of idea that meaning resides in part or all of the score to the idea that meaning happens in the act of performance. Within this new understanding it becomes not only possible but crucial to acknowledge the fields of performance operations and their interrelationships that create the network of activity creating the dramatic happenings or events. Such a concept has not been possible within the traditional, hermeneutically based understanding of opera even within its ideal image as the communal art form or its historic striving for a perfect unity of the arts. Traditionally there has been a marked lack of recognition of the operations of performance, supported within the assumption that the meaning resides in the text. Due to this there has been a denial of the interrelationships between the processes of the contributing arts within the operatic form.

Within this chapter I will argue for an effective aesthetic for opera. I will do this by re-introducing some concepts within this new context and introduce some for the first time. They are, event, happening, obstacle, action/intention, and the Integrative Performance Dynamic. Following their explanation I illustrate possible applications of these terms and there operations to the analysis of select scenes of Bizet's Carmen.

## *Event*

Event is what happens.

Traditionally the factor that encompasses the operations of a performance, regardless of whether those operations are action (in the Stanislavsky sense of "doing") or depiction-based, has been the notion of theme, as gleaned from the narrative. For instance, a director or performer can look at Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and decide that the theme is love and then go about making the drama appear on the stage with this theme in mind. This is a tool that is used to give the performance a cohesion, an aim, and serve as a delineating factor that will reign in unruly elements of depiction. Regardless of what theme is picked, however, there will always be an event. Something will happen in the act of performance. Within the well known "love" theme of Romeo and Juliet there can be many possibilities of events. For instance the event of the play can be seen as, "society drives teenage lovers to suicide", or "love prevails over prejudice", or "family feud comes to bitter end", or "lovers choose each other over family", or "hope and love are destroyed by family feud". That is, an event is the particular local or non-general instance that articulates the theme. (This can be related back to Derrida's use of event. Any meaning will also have to occur through the event of an inscription.

Events are not confined to that of the "straight play". Events occur in the act of performance and since opera is acted on the stage, an event will always occur. Something will happen on the stage in the act of performance, something that goes beyond the organisation or interpretation of the texts. This something is a thing of the performance. Regardless of the interpretation or organisation, something will happen in performance. This is the event. It is the non-ideal or non-general, but never the less necessary, aspect of any performance.

In the section on Mozart, I cited a conventional model of interpreting opera through Elaine Brody's analysis of the sextet<sup>1</sup> that takes place at the end of act I in *Così fan tutti* (1790). She exhibited her analysis with a "schematic diagram" to show what she refers to as "the entire

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<sup>1</sup> Brody 169.



musical plan".<sup>2</sup> Examining the musical and poetic texts from the perspective of event rather than the assumption that the text holds an inherent meaning allows for more performance options. Below is a small example of some of the ways that the relationships between the music and the poetry can be interpreted if the analysis is event-based rather than textually based.

Some of the possible interpretations of the event of Mozart's ensemble are:

- a) A manipulation by a sick old man
- b) Boy's Games
- c) Women Triumph
- d) A test of love

These are not all the options. There are an indefinite number of choices that could be made. None of these choices require a change of text. All of these can be supported and justified with the musical and poetic texts supplied by Mozart and Da Ponte.

In the following diagram I have retained the basic structure of Elaine Brody's analysis but have shown how the dramatic situation can be effected by the notion of event. All the choices listed correspond with a relationship between the poetic and musical text. It is the choice of event that determines what is happening between the texts and more over the event that renders them mutually-interdependent in performance.

DA= Don Alfonso DS= Despina F= Ferrando G= Guglielmo D= Dorabella FI= Fiordiligi

Tempo	Key	Meter	Measure	Dramatic Situation
Allegro	C	4/4	1-10	a) DA initiates the manipulation by leading DS to believe that she is all important b) DA, G, F present the lie c) DS sizes the boys and DA up d) The elements of the test are presented
Allegro	C	4/4	10-22	a) Boys fall into line b) F&G butter up Despina c) DS falls for the flattery d) F&G check if DS recognises them
Allegro	G	4/4	22-38	a) DS falling for the scheme, flirts with DA b) Boys confuse and baffle DS by their appearance c) DS mocks boy's appearance d) DS tries to work out what is going on, fails

<sup>2</sup> See Page 47 in Part One.

Allegro	C	4/4	38-54 (48-54)	a)DS Questions the appropriateness of the boys for the girls b)DA quells DS doubts with flirtation c)DS begins almost finds cracks in the scheme d)The test is set and the games begin Girls call to DS
Allegro	F	3/4	54-62	a)DA hides to look over his plan b)FI & D scold Despina as boy plan next move c)Girls try to get DS to dismiss boys. d)The resolve of the girls challenges the boys to their next move
Allegro	C	3/4	62-82	a)DA mocks the girls as they fall directly into his plan. b)boys remain calm & resolved that their plan is full proof as girls protest their presence c)girls make pact to remain true to love d) boys begin to penetrate girls resolve as girls protest fully
Allegro	a	3/4	82-104	a)D,F,G. like puppets in DA. hands. plead for girls cooperation b)F,G,DA, have won DS over to the point that she completely joins their side c)Girls struggle to hold their position d)Girls consider the advance and reject it
Allegro	modulating	3/4	104-125	a)Girls play into DA's hands by getting over excited b)Boys rile girls to distraction c)Girls build up their resolve d)Girls push against obstacle of temptation as boys try to think of a way to break their resolve
Molto Allegro	C	2/2	_7-the close	a)Girls win ....this one b) Boys and DS patronise and mock girl's emotions c)Girl's sense of honour triumphs over deception d)True love wins!

Again this re-organisation of Elaine Brody's diagram does not show all the options. The point is that there are many ways to interpret the relationship between the musical and poetic texts. The meaning of the drama, supported and woven into this relationship between the music and the words, is not inherent in either of the texts but is chosen as part of a dramatic event. This can be related back to Derrida's notion of event and decidability. Because a text has no self-present meaning that is simply re-presented in performance, we have to recognise that performances have the quality of a decision. A performance is an event that cannot be determined in advance by some original meaning or sense. This also means that an event-based interpretation exceeds the domain of the subjective. If an event occurs between elements it cannot be subordinated to, or governed by, an intention. It is in the event that dramatic meaning happens.

What Elaine Brody provided was a subjective reading. The subjectivity of reading also included her breakdown of the musical design. The relationship between the music and the words is not merely structurally sectioned by changes in rhythm, harmony and narrative but is decided according to Brody's perception of a given or inherent order. The chart could be restructured based not on textual contrast but event changes. Events are subject to choice and are activated in performance. Such analysis would be appropriate for a medium that is created for performance rather than reading. Conventional analysis provides subjective or intention-based readings stemming from the assumption of authority, given for centuries to the texts, supported by a notion that meaning is inherent in the texts regardless of performance.<sup>3</sup>

There are two main points to this exercise. The first is the idea that these events and perhaps many others can be chosen from the same theme. The other is that the choosing of the events has not altered the score in any way. However the choice of an event will immediately give rise to an interpretation of character, narrative, theme, set design, acting style, gestures, actions, intentions, through lines. Another important point that will be explored in detail further on is that there will always be an event, regardless of whether one is chosen or not. Furthermore, it is the event that is remembered, interpreted and experienced by the audience, not the theme or narrative. This is the case because it is the event that happens not the theme. We are effected by what happens.

Traditionally, this idea of event has been used by the news media in such formats as "the head line". In this form it is assumed that the event contains the "essence" of the story or a condensed version of the "facts". Derrida's previously cited essay, helps to deconstruct this notion that the event is somehow a reading of the essential meaning of a happening.

In two examples of event options for Romeo and Juliet, "love prevails over prejudice", and "hope and love are destroyed by family feud", we observe that these are contradictory in

<sup>3</sup> In interpretive theory the idea that a text is the bearer of the author's meaning was described as the "intentional fallacy". A text cannot be subordinated to the author's intention, for this is always an object of further text and interpretation. See Winsatt, W.K., "The Intention Fallacy", in David Lodge Ed. Twentieth-

meaning even though they are gleaned from the same text, with the same given circumstances. Since they are so different, yet have the same textual origin, it is clear that the event is not the essence of the text nor an essential reduction of the plot. However the choice of event will definitely effect the meaning that is transmitted through performance because it will effect the choices of what is done on the stage.

It is in the performance that event happens. Event is subject to choice. This would be where the notion of event described here intensifies and departs from Derrida's use of event. Like Derrida, the event as described here refers to the way in which performance is effected by what exceeds the given text, character's intentions and authorised intention. However, unlike Derrida, I wish to emphasise choice, rather than seeing the event as a "decision" that emerges from an anonymous undecidability. The event for a performance works like an umbrella under which all the actions, intentions, obstacles and conflicts in the texts, characterisations operate. (This will be discussed in detail further on). This idea of event also has its ramifications for other arts, such as lighting, set design, costume design and film editing. Just as Derrida and Barthes explored the concept that the writing can perform, the stationary arts can also perform especially if they are rendered active contributors to the dramatic event, (rather than merely depictorial). This thesis however, focuses on the performance disciplines within opera. For now it is important to recognise that the way the event happens is through the performance of the work. There will always be an event, something always happens. whether an event is chosen or not.

If an event is not chosen, then there is a risk of the event of the production becoming something outside of the dramatic field, thus losing the specificity of the texts. For instance, the event of many operas during the Belcanto era was reduced to "soprano shows off" and in some modern contemporised productions the event becomes "director exhibits his cleverness". This is not to say that a soprano cannot show off and a director cannot be clever whilst still allowing a dramatic event to happen. However, in such examples it is not only the text that is diminished but also aspects of expression and performance. If an event is

based only on the perspectives and operations of the producer/director or the singer then the rest of the operations such as movement, acting, and conducting are also alienated from the performance event and are put in the position to compete or function in isolation, or to serve as indicative tools for the isolated operations under that event.

For this reason, within multi-disciplinary performance practices the choice of event is especially important in that it helps determine the relationship between the arts within the practice. And this emphasises that this relation cannot have a pre-determined nature, as has been sought throughout the history of opera. Often the event is assumed to be provided by the text, narrative or plot. In Wagnerian opera the event is traditionally assumed to be given in the musical texts largely through the inclusion of *leitmotifs*, and other orchestral devices. As a result of this the operations of conducting are considered to be of foremost importance. In a Benjamin Britten opera such as Peter Grimes, the imposed events are often psychologically based, partly because of the profound story and development of the characters. As a result of this the acting and physical type of the character is considered of foremost importance. In Mozart's "Magic Flute" the imposed events are often graphically based, manifesting in clever set designs due largely to the Masonic symbolism within the work. As a result of this the set design and choreography is considered of foremost importance.

When you go to one of these operas the audience has an idea of what is going to happen (and not going to happen) in performance due to the conventionalisation of the performance practices of these operas and also due to traditional assumptions of performance event. When a production deviates from the conventional it is considered radical. Whether something is radical or traditional is not the point however. The point is that the choice of an event - whether it be a conscious creative choice within the process of putting together a performance, or an assumed choice due to conventional readings and practices - will effect the interrelationship or lack of interrelationship between the processes of the performing arts involved. Often the event is assumed as part of the musical text or the poetic text. In the musical text, often the event adheres to a stylistic boundary such as Romantic, Baroque or

classical. At other times it is informed by a structural organisation of the musical text such as that of the Sonata form, or da capo aria, or recitative and aria relationship. When the event is informed by the boundaries of the poetic text it often adheres to a narrative or plot element. Events can be informed by many factors such as plot, theme, narrative, the performance artist's abilities or lack of ability, set design, funding, poetry, musical structure, historic context, character, social context, or other contemporary issues.

When an event is chosen there is much that is determined about the production:

1. The choice of event will design a field by which the processes of performance aspects will operate. The art forms that are involved in the event will be engaged in the process and the other ones will be left to indicate, depict, or support the others.
2. The choice of event will create the style of the piece. The style is a symptom of the various "doings" on the stage and their relationships to each other within an event.<sup>4</sup>
3. Choosing an event that is informed by limited conventional aspects will block and limit performance processes and textual aspects that come from other fields of operation.<sup>5</sup>
4. Through the choosing or not choosing of an event, the operations of meaning are put into play. By picking an event that does not allow for all artistic operations to contribute to the happenings, the work will be subject to a finite meaning. In order for an audience member to interpret a depiction or indication (performance sign), they will need to understand some idea of the creator's context to get it. But context, according to Derrida is not a self-present ground, any more than the text is. Indication and depiction are what happen when the event is limited and the performance is left to define the meaning. This is also a point that was brought out by Barthes in his essay "From Work to Text", when he wrote: "The reduction of

<sup>4</sup> For instance, to let the character's development within a contemporary social context determine the event will often produce a naturalistic style. To let the rhythmic elements and a symbolic set design determine the event will result in a highly choreographed style.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, when Stanislavsky directed Eugene Onegin and was informing the happenings of the scene by the Tempo Rhythm of the character's inner and outer life, he not only produced a naturalistic expression in the work, but lessened the aspect of melody and orchestration as part of the expression. When Australian director, Barry Kosky rendered the event of his 1996 production of Nabucco as the set design and clever

reading to a consumption is clearly responsible for the "boredom" experienced by many in the face of the modern ("unreadable") text, the avant-garde film or painting: to be bored means that one cannot produce the text, open it out, set it going." Barthes' argument can be interpreted for the stage as expanding on the idea that the audience's inability to engage in the meaning due to the reliance on depiction or product, renders the audience's experience dead.

The performer's role in opera has traditionally been one of indicator, while the event has been primarily seen as text (music and/or word)based. However, there is another option for expanding the event so that it does not block performance operations or diminish the texts.

Since the event is what happens on the stage, then to choose or be aware of the fields of operations that contribute to a happening is essential if the desired effect is to have all these operations working together in a network to allow for the event. Historically, the idea of a communal art form and a "unity" of the arts has been a re-occurring theme within the development of opera. Due to a lack of recognition of the operations of performance and an assumption that the meaning is in the texts, such interrelationships have been denied.

In order to end up with an event that allows for all the "doings" of performance, the director or performer must take into account the performance aspects that are included in the "doing" of the performance piece. For instance, many singers take into account the "doing" of the singing, and the "doing" of the vocal line. They often ignore the orchestration, the timbre, the plot, the body as manifest in movement, and even the meaning of the actual words that they are singing. Likewise, directors often acknowledge the operations or doing of blocking, shapes, movement, set relationships with the blocking, the plot, and rhythm, but ignore operations of melody, orchestration, singing and dance.

One of the ways of remedying this is to work within a broad event that will allow for specificity. There are many performance disciplines within opera and rarely is there a director, singer, actor or dancer who knows, has practised, or is fluent in the "languages" of all of them. Often the aspects that are brushed over or alienated from the doing, are those of

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multi-media devices, he lost Verdi.

the discipline or field that the creator is unfamiliar with. To brush over is to alienate the action of the unfamiliar discipline rendering it either depictorial or outside of the dramatic event. The "doings" of all these disciplines however is not so dissimilar within the context of event. All the processes of music, movement and acting can be broken down or perceived as actions against obstacles, creating happenings within the event. It is the conventionalised depictorial aspects that alienate the disciplines from each other and put them in a position of competition. One of the most famous examples of this competition and alienations of the performance arts from each other is the fight that Wagner had in France about the inclusion of a ballet sequence within his opera Tannhauser. It was the convention of the times to always have a ballet regardless of the dramatic context. When Wagner refused to include one he was booed off the stage by the Jockey club. One could wonder what would be possible if Wagner had thought of a process-based dramatic event. How many options arise for movement within the drama, manifesting in something that could still satisfied the desire for ballet. A ballet would then, not be confined to a conventionalised depictorial form within an event of French society, but would entail a new field of operations from a chosen dramatic event, arising from Tannhauser.

There is an art in picking an event, just as there is an art in all forms of interpretation. However, opera practice has never recognised the fact that there have been assumed events, due to traditional performance processes and understandings of the origin of meaning as inherent in text. It is important therefore, to question the conventional interpretation of event and recognise the limitations and competitive dynamic that has been imposed on the operational aspects of performance.

One way to address the operations of performance practices is to temporarily dissect the "doing" aspects of the mediums involved. For instance, the operational aspects of music can include: rhythm, tempo, harmony, timbre, orchestration, melody, structural format such as da capo sections, ensemble organisations and ornamentation. As previously discussed in the section on Mozart, he utilised the play between rhythms and melody within the contexts of

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<sup>4</sup> Barthes 163.



his ensemble pieces to activate dramatic happenings. These activations of melody, rhythm and ensemble organisation, because they are of the "doing" field and not merely depictorial, are in a sense like the "actions" of Stanislavsky.

There is no reason why every aspect of the performance arts in opera cannot achieve a purpose of "doing" rather than depiction. This is possible if the event that is chosen allows for all operations to "act" against an "obstacle" to create a happening that will occur within the event. Such an event would have to be broad and allow for specific functions. For instance if in the case of Bizet's Carmen the chosen event for the Seguidilla scene, (which pre-emptes her escape from prison with the help of the besotted José), was "woman ensnares man", then the various aspects of the music, the words, the movements, the vocalisation and the acting, will create happenings through various actions, rather than depict some vague notion of a love scene and danger.

One can look at the event in a "global" way, expanding it past the boundaries of the texts of Carmen and examining what happens in the world when "women ensnare men" in all situations, in different cultures, in the animal kingdom (such as a spiders), in politics, on the streets or in royalty. Various ideas that are physical, musical, audio and sensory are spurred into action. It is not only in acting that action occurs, but also in music and dance.

The choice of an event that allows all aspects to contribute to its happenings will "de-conventionalise" the operations of the performance aspects and allow for an authentic operation rather than symbolic depiction. The word authentic here is not used in the sense that it is "more real". It is used more in the way that Fritz Perl explored, as a system that sought to capture the human themes of genuineness and being.<sup>7</sup> In the context of this theory, authentic has to do with an action that is present within or creating the event. An authentic aspect of performance is recognised and chosen, it is not just allowed to happen or subordinated to some supposed textual meaning. The structure of the various operations will

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed account of "authenticity" in this context, see: Tosi, Donald, Steven W. Leclair. Theories and Application of Counselling. Springfield, Illinois; Charles C Thomas. 1987.

be woven like a web of actions against obstacles creating happenings within the chosen event. The performance will be alive, creating meaning as it acts.

### *Obstacle*

Drama is Conflict.

If there is no obstacle there will be no drama. The obstacle defines the through line of action. For example, if the intention, or main objective for the scene is to "find the keys" then the character will do actions that will help him find the keys, until they are either found or some external or internal stimuli ceases the immediate requirement "to find the keys". The implied obstacle is that the keys are not yet found. If they are found there will be no drama and consequently no reason for any actions. Obstacles, however, can be seen as a driving force not only in acting practices but also in music. A melodic/harmonic structure with an implied intent (or movement towards) a cadence against the obstacle of dissonance can be seen as the "doing" factor of most Baroque music. And this creates a happening of "a cycle of fifths". Similarly, a rhythm against the time signature can create a happening of syncopation.

Obstacles can manifest as physical happenings (such as the idea of tensions against release and contraction against extension to create dance). The physicality can manifest in bodily characterisations. For instance, if in "The Hunch Back of Notre Dame", the actor or singer is struggling to hold his back up, rather than indicating a hunch and a deformed man, he will contribute to the event by allowing his body to happen rather than depict. Through doing the acts of the character's body, rather than the acts of an actor or singer on the stage, he will experience the events of the drama, rather than the event of the actor in an opera. He will also create, through action against obstacle, the meaning of the drama, rather than some meaning of his own personal event as the singer on the stage.

Obstacles create the momentum of the actions. They move the drama along. Without them there are no actions. All of the operational aspects of opera can be perceived as action, as doing something within the event. If it is the obstacle that spurs the doing along, and if there

is no action without the obstacle, then the obstacle is central to the happenings. If that obstacle is employed within all aspects and is employed to create a happening within the chosen event then the performance processes will have no choice but to interrelate within the drama. Competition and depiction will no longer be an assumed structural organisation. It will be present only if it is chosen as part of the dramatic event.

An obstacle, within what I define here as Integrative Performance Technique, is not confined to psychological or physical origins of struggle. There does not have to be an internal or external need for an object of desire and something else stopping the character from getting that desired object. This is one option but there are others. A concept of juxtaposition and collision is also put into play.<sup>8</sup> This is a necessary expansion on Stanislavsky's notions of intention if his developments on the meaning of performance are to be utilised within the performance mediums of dance and music. Further more, this expansion frees "straight" acting from limits of naturalism whilst still allowing for the all-important aspects of belief. So the quality of Stanislavsky's doing is retained and it is the design of what to do that is altered.

### *Action and Intention*

Stanislavsky emphasises the need for the specific in the moment. He also emphasised the idea of belief in the moment to create an engaging performance for both the performer and the audience. His ultimate work revolved around his "method of physical actions", which incorporated actions toward intentions, and then toward the "super objective". Within the Integrative Performance Technique I expand the operation of intention and action past the psychological origin as manifest in motive, and incorporate the idea of force or momentum so that the inclusion of musical, and dance aspects can do within the event without assuming role of character as written in the plot. It is within event that multi disciplinary practices can

<sup>8</sup> Notions of juxtaposition and collision have been previously documented and explored within early filmic techniques. Sergei Eisenstein, (who saw himself as a virtual grandchild of Stanislavsky due to the fact that he was taught by Meyerhold, who was taught by Stanislavsky), was the father of Montage. Montage is an editing technique that among other things dealt with the problems of sound and images. In his quest for an interrelationship between these filmic aspects, Eisenstein dealt with juxtaposition between shots, music and image, aspects of one shot, lighting and sound.

interrelate and still retain the freedom of many different styles. Due to the previously discussed idea that psychologically based "intended" meaning is linear and subject to affiliation, this technique will not utilise Stanislavsky's "super-objective" as the ultimate goal of the moment to moment action.

Opera's history is riddled with reforms that have focused around the recognition that opera was not reaching its audience. There are hundreds of years of evidence that the creators of opera had a desire to "effect" its audience. Stanislavsky found that the audience is effected when the performer is affected. He emphasised that if a character does something then they will experience as a result of the doing. If that doing is within the intention of the character then the actor will experience the character's feelings and physicality. However, if that actor is doing as the actor and indicating emotion, then the actor will experience the body of himself forcing and trying to show the character's plight. Operatic performance practice has been dominated by the later process, the process of being an actor rather than the doing of the character. The fact that a performers role has been to depict the texts has left not only the performer void of the characters experience, but has left the audience void of a dramatic experience.

There are always actions, always intentions, always happenings and always events. If they are not somehow decided, chosen, recognised and acted as part of the dramatic event they will be subjected to often personal events of the writer or performer's origin against their own personal obstacles. These will not honour the texts in performance.

Just as obstacles are expanded to include juxtaposition and collision, within Integrative Performance Theory the Stanislavskian intention and action is expanded to include force, momentum and movement. This is a development on the former "motive" based intention that was activated by a character as interpreted from the plot. It is recognised that such an intention is a choice and not the only vehicle for action within a dramatic event.

Forces can employ an implied intention not necessarily character based, but perhaps physical, or chemical, or vocal. This will allow the performers of all aspects of performance

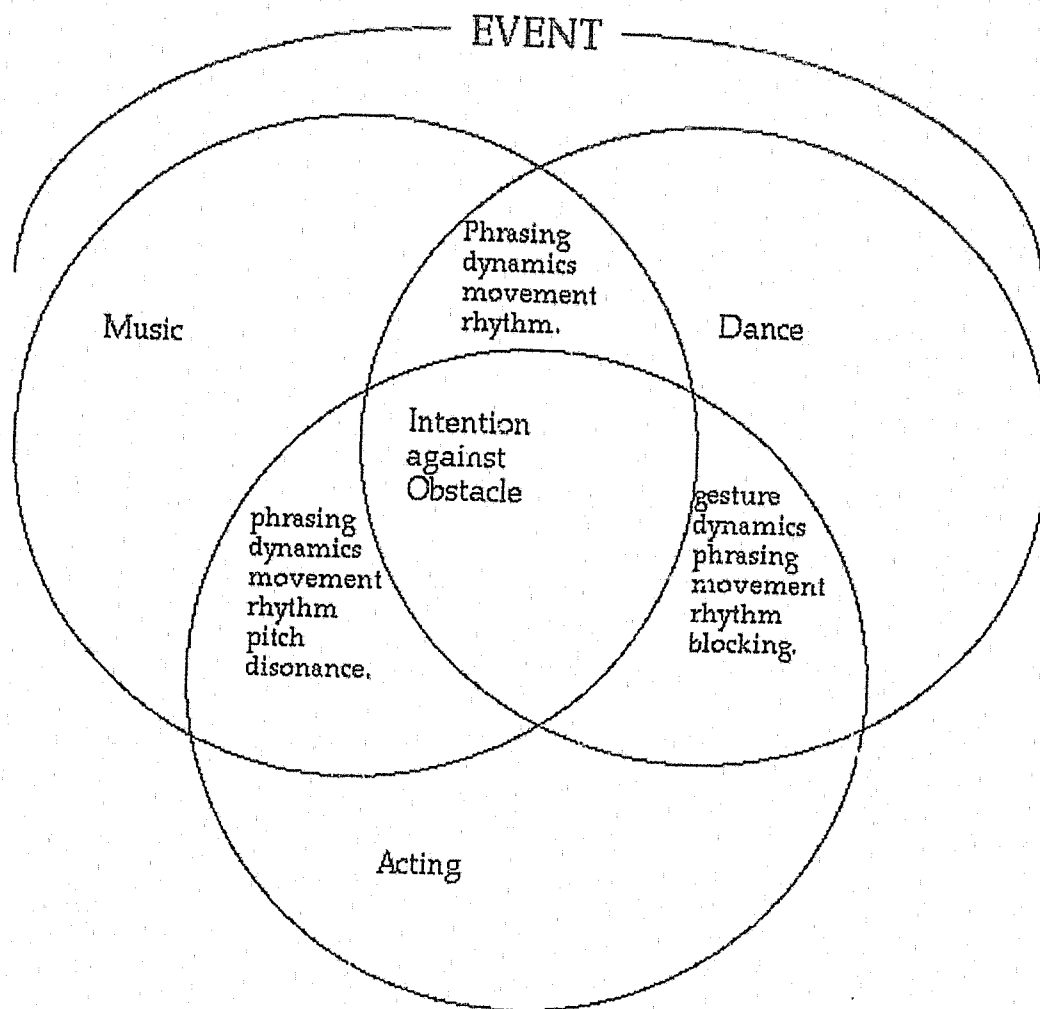
to engage with the dramatic event. Intentions and actions can include forces. For instance, melody or movement against an obstacle of harmony with the implied intention "to get to the end of the phrase", or perhaps a rhythm's intention to "hold strong" against a syncopated theme. An intention and action sequence can then operate with a field of choreography for instance: a dancer's intention "to reach the sky" against the obstacle of gravity. An intention action sequence can be applied to that of the voice, such as a soprano's intention "to set the voice free", against the obstacle of a downward moving theme.

The possibilities are endless and always interpreted. However, the act of doing is inevitable. It is important to recognise that the "doing" of all the performance disciplines against inevitable obstacles will create happenings. If these happenings, obstacles, intentions and actions are not of the field of the dramatic event, they will be of or create another event and the audience will witness and experience it.

*Interrelationship and the Event/Obstacle/Intention Dynamic Within Performance Disciplines.*

This is not a linear technique and does not necessarily have a first then second step. However, when the performance is in action there will always be actions against an obstacle, creating happenings within an event. Regardless of its style or genre, there is no such thing as a performance that does not contain this dynamic. The creator's job is to recognise these operations and their dynamic positioning, and understand them so they can be used in creation and analysis. The creator can be the director, producer, actor, singer dancer, set designer, choreographer, lighting designers, publicist, composer and/or poet.

The following diagram describes the relationship between the performing disciplines within the concept of event:



In the centre of the diagram, in the area where the fields of acting, dance and music overlap, we have intention against obstacle. In music the various intentions against obstacles (as written, performed, and heard), result in the symptoms that we perceive as music. For instance, at a most basic reduction, waves against the ear drum create the happening of hearing. That which is considered music is in constant flux but every symptom, whether it be pitch, rhythm, dynamics, harmony, is the result of an intention against obstacle. The intentions change and the obstacles change, but the fact that there is a dynamic of intention against obstacle does not change.

Some of the other aspects of intention against obstacle have already been discussed. In acting, the character's desire against a plot-driven obstacle or perhaps an internal obstacle creates the symptom of emotion, gesture or bodily tensions. For dance, as previously

mentioned, the idea of tension against release or contraction against extension can create movement as manifest in dance. Many choreographers use this exact process through analogy. It is common practice to describe the quality of a movement by the imaginary pushing against a substance. To raise the arms as if against mud would create a different symptom from raising the arms as if in bubble gum. The symptom of action against obstacle creates not only the discipline, but the style and genre. This is done often by a quality within the action or obstacle and "happens" as a juxtaposition, moving through, or conflict between these.

In the diagram there are over-lapping areas that contain symptoms of the various actions against obstacles. The symptoms are those that belong to both fields of performance operations against their respective obstacles. Within the diagram one can see that the symptomatic aspects of some of dance and music's intentions against obstacle are similar. It is important to realise that one does not "do" dynamics, but creates a dynamic through action against obstacle. Likewise, one does not "do" a character but creates one through various physical, emotionally based actions against obstacle. Tension is not "done", but is created through an action against obstacle.

The aspects by which we have usually defined the arts have been these symptoms, and not the processes by which those symptoms are created. A symptom however, is a product, whereas the process of actions against obstacles creates meaning by their very act of happening. In some "hybrid" performance practices the similarities of these symptoms form the basis of a supposed interrelationship between the arts. For instance, if dance is fast then colours of red are employed and emotions seem angry and the music loud. By putting a bunch of depictorial similes together, the operations of these arts are not woven but are placed in parallel, next to each other. A theme does not necessarily make the operations interrelate; it just renders the performance aspects sister products and slaves to a similar theme. This is what occurred with traditional notions of the meaning being inherent in the word. The meaning is seen as inherent in the theme and again the arts are left to depict a supposedly present meaning. To parallel the arts is not to interrelate. Fashionable

contemporary terms like "hybrid" and "multi-media" often imply an interrelationship but merely parallel in practice. As a result the performances do nothing different from the opera of a hundred years ago. They simply create a different "look" to the same prejudice. This prejudice will continue to prevail as long as the meaning is considered to lie somewhere other than in the act of performance. It will also prevail until performance is recognised as a process rather than a product.

In order to free operatic performance practice from the slavery of depicting the text, and in order to allow the separate performance elements to "act" together against obstacles creating the woven fabric of the dramatic event, the distinction between the products and the actions must be recognised. Stanislavsky also made it clear that in order for the audience to experience the drama, it is the drama that must be brought about in action.

This approach is a move towards an active aesthetic. It is not about doing away with depiction as a choice, but about challenging depiction as the obligation imposed by traditional assumptions of meaning and conventionalisation of event. Even the so called "radical", "contemporary", "post-modern" and "relevant" productions more often than not adhere to the same processes of depiction, and only change the symptomatic ingredients of the recipe. The Integrative Performance Technique is about allowing the various aspects of music, movement, and acting, to be active ingredients so that they are the elements giving birth to the dramatic event in performance.

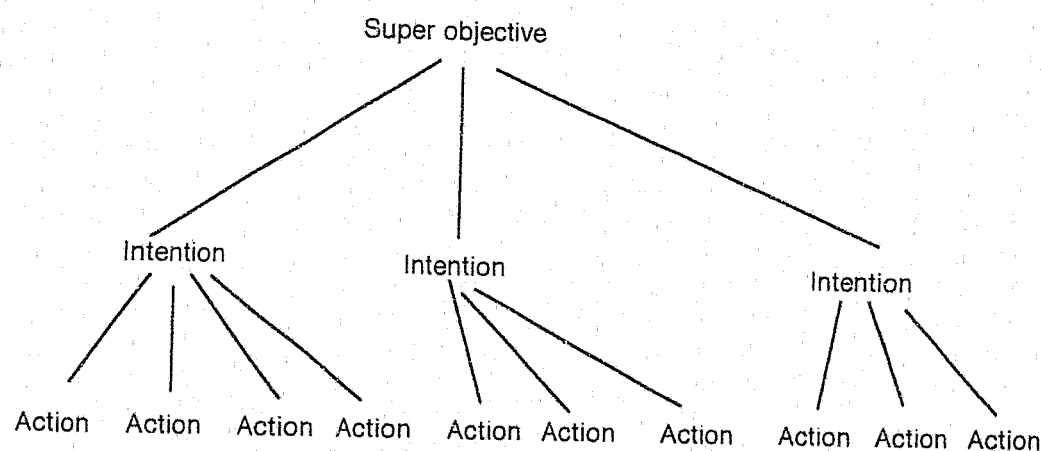
*The Design of Dynamic Boundaries and the Operations Within the Dramatic Event.*

The event is made in performance. All the actions toward intentions against all the various obstacles within every operating element on the stage create the dramatic event. The ways of approaching this dynamic are numerous and the process of creation will affect the ensemble relationship, the style, and emphasis on the psychological or physical, or poetry, or music. This is not a linear process. The order is not fixed because the origin is not the issue. The



issue is that the dynamic between these elements within the performance of drama is universal.

Stanislavsky ascertained that a character has an intention or a want for the section or scene and then goes about "doing" actions to achieve that intention. For Stanislavsky the ultimate goal was the super-objective that works much like a larger intention incorporating the entire work. It was linked to the psychological in that it stemmed from desire, and ultimately drew its meaning from a supposed intention of the author. The diagram below shows a basic layout of this organisation



As already discussed, the nature of actions and intentions within the Integrative Performance Technique is expanded from the Stanislavsky model to include those outside of the field of character within the plot, and incorporate motion and force and free the origin from motive. The basic structural idea that actions are things that are done towards intentions is retained, as is Stanislavsky's emphasis on the quality of "doing" and the belief that is required of the performer in order to affect the quality of experience that will affect the audience. The introduced factor is an emphasis on the obstacle. Stanislavsky spoke of obstacles but did not emphasise them as a central element to the design of a piece. The intentions against the obstacles for the section will create the event of that section, whereas individual actions against individual obstacles will create little events, which are defined here as happenings (another introduced element). In the IPT it is the Event that delineates the recognised aspects of the performance dynamic and the ways in which the texts, set design, acting, movement,

singing, and all other aspects of the performance are activated, not the super-objective. Furthermore the event is a choice made with the full responsibility of the interpreter, not adhering to a supposed intent of the author.

Actions are things that are done towards an intention. Actions can move through or against obstacles and the effect is always a happening. A sequence of happenings will contribute to an event, or an event is made up of a lot of little events called happenings. Events and Happenings are symptoms of the collision of actions against obstacles. Things do not always work in the way of one action against one obstacle resulting in one happening. Sometimes there can be a number of actions against one obstacle arising in a number of happenings, or one action against a number of obstacles creating one happening. The possibilities are subject to choice and will likewise affect the style and genre of the piece.

Another aspect is the possibility that the action of one pattern can be the happening of another, and that the action of another element can be the obstacle to some other action. It is live, and of the moment. It is in this way a performance. Essentially the dynamic of operations within an event is more like a network than a series of parallel patterns of actions against obstacles creating happenings. At any point in the sequence a new sequence can be catalysed, or one already in motion can conclude and change to another. The dynamic is not two dimensional or linear, neither is it uni-disciplinary. The factor tying the design together is the acknowledgment of the event which acts as a recognisable boundary within which these sequences occur.

This implied form of the design is more like a holograph than a photo, more like a series of interrelating aspects than a depictorial set of objects; it is active by its very design. The integrative performance model works much like that of a holograph in that if you take a section of the woven processes, it contains the entire event. In Michael Talbot's book, "The Holographic Universe", he explains the phenomena:

If a piece of holographic film containing the image of an apple is cut in half and then illuminated by a laser, each half will still be found to contain the entire image of the

apple! Even if the halves are divided again and then again, an entire apple can still be reconstructed from each small portion of the film (although the images will get hazier as the portions get smaller). Unlike normal photographs, every small fragment of a piece of holographic film contains all the information recorded in the whole.<sup>9</sup>

Within the IPT this principle applies to moments of the performance. If the event of Romeo and Juliet is chosen to be "society drives children to suicide", then the various happenings within the play will contribute to this event. As these happenings are the result of the various actions against obstacles that can be executed as movement, music, or acting, then a moment or series of moments will reflect the entire event. The way that Romeo reaches toward Juliet to dance with her will contain, perhaps, the action of "to touch her", against the obstacle of fear that he may be discovered as being from the "wrong society" and the happening could be "the taste of forbidden fruit". The forbiddenness will give a reflection of what is to come; the obstacle will effect the experience of the action and draw attention to the danger; and the urgency of the action will show us the desire of youth. All of these aspects created in the interrelated dynamic of the design will give us a moment of the event. The event will be in the moment and the moment in the event.

The event can also juxtapose with an intention, and in fact the result is often more engaging. For instance if the intention for a character is "to get to work" and the event is "a journey to work", then there is little conflict within this scene. However, if the event is "an accident", we become strangely interested. The idea of obstacle can be applied in the macro-organisation and the micro-moments. An obstacle is essential for every aspect and level of the drama

Another perhaps obvious fact is that there are many intentions operating in one piece. Sometimes the collision of these are each other's obstacles. Sometimes the obstacle is born of the music and internal block, or a poetic element. But the effect of the various intentions, actions against obstacles creating happenings are the woven fabric creating the event.

<sup>9</sup> Talbot, Michael. The Holographic Universe. New York: Harper Collins, 1992. 16.

### The Integrative Performance Theory Applied: Towards a Technique

This technique is not an attempt to invent a repeatable and pure meaning. As Barthes explored with his notion of "Text", it must be living and to hone it down or label it is to kill its activity. Derrida also questioned the "meaningfulness" of event when he pointed out that a pure event is not a repeatable. Similarly, this technique is not claiming to create a re-iterable process, but to provide the living boundaries that are required within the medium of the stage whereby a network of utterly changeable actions against obstacles can occur to create the dramatic event. Every performance will be different.

There are necessary requirements for repeatability on the operatic stage. The audience expects to see the same production that their friend saw the night before. A repeat production must retain the same flavour of many years previous; an understudy must appear in the same opera as their predecessor. Traditionally, the control on the issue of repeatability has been that of maintaining a set field of depictions, such as the same musical text, poetic text, costumes, blocking, sets, musical expression, gestures, choreography, etc. Within the Integrative Performance Theory these elements, when they have been set previously will be referred to as prescribed. There are certain ways of dealing with these to activate them and include them in the event rather than have them remain in the dead field of depiction.

The dynamics of the previous graphs illustrate an approach that helps create the boundaries of a network by which a great many unrepeatable happenings can occur within performance. This is also a way to allow the necessary responsibilities required of the performance medium, whilst permitting the performance process to create the meaning in action. As long as the event is being adhered to, the elements will work interdependently by design.

In order to explain further aspects of the theory and practice we will turn to specific operatic examples as taken from the opera Carmen<sup>1</sup>. Carmen is an opera that traditionally boasts inclusion of all the performance art forms by way of its very plot and character structure.

<sup>1</sup> Carmen is an opera in four acts composed by Bizet to the libretto by Meilhac and Halévy from a novelette by Mérimé (1875, Paris). The score that will be quoted is: Bizet, Georges. Carmen. Köncmann Music

The main character is a gypsy who is required to dance and sing as part of the plot and text prescription. However, even with this included element, there is still the tendency to parallel the aspects of dancing and singing rather than activate them within the drama.

*Carmen* is clearly a narrative-based opera. It has been chosen as an illustrative tool for exploring the IPT mainly due to its canonic place in the repertoire, as an opera that most people will have an understanding of. The Integrative Performance Theory and Technique can be applied, however, to any performance piece that has an event, namely all performance pieces.

### *The Chorus*

A chorus often produces problems in production. They are all singing the same piece and the variation in the parts usually serves the purposes of harmony rather than drama. They are a mass of people costumed to incorporate various socio-economic groups. Such is the case with *Carmen* and the well known cigarette chorus.

The women have been working in the cigarette factory. The chorus opens with the ring of the break bell which Bizet has specified in the score (*On entend la cloche de la manufacture*). This is accompanied by a busy rising quaver sequence.

Figure A

Figure A shows a musical score for the beginning of the cigarette chorus in Bizet's *Carmen*. The score is for Violons (Violins) and Altos. It features a busy rising quaver sequence. The tempo is marked Allegro. The lyrics are: (On entend la cloche de la manufacture). The score is numbered 1 through 7.

The musical texture becomes dense rapidly, culminating in a punctuated compound meter and an upward chromatic movement in the first flute. This is emphasised by a forte dynamic, increasing density in the orchestra, and an increasing rhythmic drive due to fragmented smaller units.

Figure B

18 19 20 21

Fl. *ff*

Haut *ff*

Clar. *ff*

Bass. *ff*

Cors *ff*

pns *ff*

pp *ff*

Timb *ff*

vns *ff*

velles *ff*

C. B. *ff*

Changez le SOL en SI.

<sup>3</sup> Bizet 59.

In Bar twenty-one all drops off into silence before the introduction of the men's section (not shown). A translation of the men's poetic text is as follows:

*"See them! Impudent, flirtatious looks, all of them with cigarettes, between their teeth"*

The music is slow and contained, especially contrasting to the chaotic excitement of the music that was introduced in figure A.

The girls have now poured out of the factory and are usually smoking cigarettes that engulf the stage with a thick grey cloud. A rising and falling motif is introduced:

Figure C



4

Variations on this rising and falling motion occurs throughout the entire chorus in varying sweeps and degrees starting on different pitches and extending through different note values.

In looking at figure A, the traditional methods of musical analysis would begin to examine what Bizet meant by the sequence. This of course is a limited exercise, in that we do not know what he meant, and moreover, what he meant by this sequence or what he did not mean has no bearing on its operations on the stage within a chosen dramatic event. This stance is in direct opposition to traditional music analysis that is still part of the pedagogy of music today.

We begin to ask what this sequence may be doing, who may be doing something through it, whether the sequence is part of an obstacle, or whether it shows us that something is happening? If something is happening, what action against obstacle is it a result of? For

<sup>4</sup> Bizet 61.

instance, could this sequence contain the happening of a man's (we will call him number I) action of trying to contain his excitement against the obstacle of showing too much? Then could that happening (as manifest in the music) become the obstacle for another man (II), who's action is to impress his mate, man (III), while his little tag along brother (I) is losing his cool and embarrassing him? This sequence as in figure A now plays a part in the drama by serving as both a happening and an obstacle within the dramatic event of "men assemble to ogle at the girls". The musical text no longer depicts but acts. This sequence of happenings and action-against-obstacle would perhaps be contained in the event of "men assemble to ogle at the girls". This in turn, would become just one of the many happenings when the focus on the section became larger to include the entire chorus for which the event could be seen as, "women take a break from their work".

All prescriptions - be they costumes social standing such as the gentry, soldiers, gypsies, music, poetic text and blocking - must not simply be stated or postured but activated within the dramatic event. Within the event of "men assemble to ogle at the girls" a soldier would do different actions against different obstacles than that of a gypsy. Characterisation is the symptom of the various physical, emotion, social, and narrative based actions against obstacles that is required of a part. What is commonly practiced is an aimless posing and singing to little avail except to follow the conductor or show the best side of a face. When it is this that is activated, then the happenings are truly outside the dramatic event and consequently diminish the texts.

Another aspect of this use of the Integrative model, within the chorus, is that the chorus members have a process that will demand individuality while at the same time allowing for a cohesiveness through the event. The choices of action work with the music so that the aspects of music and acting are not in competition and therefore not splitting the concentration of the performer; rather they are enhancing the performance.

In figure B we can observe that it is a chromatic rising sequence, perhaps building in urgency toward a climax of some sort, then completely stopped with silence. We could begin to make up some narrative story about this such as "a man is so excited at the prospect



of seeing his girl that he stumbles through the crowd". The syncopation represents the stumbling, and the rising theme depicts his heart beat. He sees her and is silenced by her beauty. If in the process of analysis toward production, these stories are made up, then we are in effect simply creating miniature narratives. These narratives will be subject to exactly the same difficulties that have been proposed in the earlier part of this thesis. This story is not doing anything...there is still the need to choose actions against obstacles to make the aspects of the story happen. A story is not a piece of drama until it is activated.

Rather than look at what the musical or poetic text is depicting, the Integrative Performance Technique focuses on what is the happening within the dramatic event. This is done with the understanding that in order to create this happening there will be a dynamic of action against obstacle. If, however, the depictorial avenue is taken and the action is rendered that of depiction the texts will be dead before they hit the stage floor.

In figure C, for example, a choice can be made that there is some notion of smoke rising and falling. It is called the cigarette chorus and there is usually smoke all over the stage hanging in the air appearing to dance to the music. Bizet has provided a strong musical and visual image. It is arc-like and as stated before, this arc-like theme reoccurs in sections of the piece.

Figure D



5

In figure D the expanded arc-like pattern re-occurs throughout the choral and orchestral writing. If you look at the shape of the entire Cigarette chorus it becomes apparent that there

<sup>5</sup> Bizet 66.

is an arc of rising and falling encompassing the whole of the piece. It reaches its height at figure E with rising semiquaver phrases ending on a sustained chord.

Figure E

The musical score for Figure E spans measures 102 to 104. It features four staves: Flute (Fl.), Horn (Haut.), Clarinet (Clar.), and Bass (Bns). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music is characterized by rising semiquaver phrases that culminate in sustained chords. Measure 102 shows the initial rising phrases. Measure 103 continues the development, with the Horn part marked '1<sup>o</sup> cresc.' and 'f'. Measure 104 concludes the sequence with sustained chords across all parts.

6

Any thematic sequence is not of the drama until it is activated within the event, as chosen this time for this example as "women take a break from their work". The structure of the music is a prescription that can be taken into consideration within the design of the actions against obstacles. If it is not it will have no option but to lie outside the field of the event or to take the traditional operation of depiction.

If the event here is "women take a break from their work" the happenings will somehow have some formal structure of that event by the very act of operating within that event. Some of the possible happenings of such an event could be:

- a letting go of the morning's events
- realisation that their fingers are hurting
- chatting among friends
- grouping of women to friend and foe
- factionalising of the work hierarchy

<sup>6</sup> Bizet 71.

private moments

day dreaming about what to do when the day is finished

smoking

snacking

flirting with the men outside

stretching....

Many more could be thought of depending upon the style and choices of direction and characterisation of the chorus members.

All of these happenings must be activated as actions against obstacles, not depictions or showings. For instance, someone might "let go of the morning's events" as a result of the action "to work out exactly what that girl meant when she criticised me" against the obstacle of "being too tired to really care". The obstacle wins and she lets go. If however, the action was "to let go of the morning's events" then there will be another obstacle. The obstacle may be the pain she is feeling in her back, the happening may be "stretching" or "smoking". Again the possibilities are endless.

The happenings are little events in this context which are micro "women take a break from their work". The relationship between the happenings and the event is that of a macro-micro interdependence. If the actor/singer were to depict or pretend to do any of the actions without pushing against or through obstacles in the field of event, the moment would not be a part of this macro-micro design of activity.

This rising and falling sequences could be physicalised as a part of smoking. It could be the inhaling and exhaling of the smoke which could contribute to the happening of smoking. This figure can shift between action, obstacle and happening. For instance, it takes on the action "flirting" against an obstacle of too limited a time to get satisfaction, which could create the happening of "frustration" or "urgency", etc... It could take on an aspect of the happening of stretching against the obstacle of pain within the event of "women take a break

from their work". The rising and falling sequence could be an obstacle to push against; it could be the internal impulse to sit, against the obstacle that if the girl sits she feels she will not stand again.

These choices which focus on the rising and falling are form, are simply that, choices. There are many aspects to both the musical and poetic text that could have been targeted. By choosing and incorporating these into the event, the other aspects of text and performance will not be isolated. They will co-operate within the parameters of the chosen event. Because the nature of event is one of macro/micro, like that of a holograph, and because the happenings are little occurrences that are in the field of the event, the design does not subvert or destroy the musical or poetic organisation or structure but rather renders it active.

This would not be the case if the members of the chorus were to do actions toward intentions toward a super-objective in the Stanislavskian tradition. Musical and physical form is not linear. If a super-objective were set, the effect would be one of parallel acting with music and movement, or at best some sort of relationship bounded by the force of a character's motive. The Integrative Performance Technique dynamic structure, however, renders the performance disciplines mutually interdependent, and the text active by expanding the boundaries out of the literal notion of objective and into the three dimensional notion of event.

### *Fight Scene*

The other chorus involving the women in the cigarette factory is commonly called the fight scene. It starts, unusually, with a scream coming from behind the factory walls and the girls running out, affected by the scene they have just come from. The scene that is not shown that precedes this is a violent fight involving a knife which takes place between Carmen and another girl named Manueila. The music begins with figure F:

Figure F

The musical score for Figure F consists of three staves: Violons, Violoncelles, and C-Basses. The tempo is marked 'Allé vivo.' and the dynamic is 'f' (forte). Measures 1-4 show the Violons playing a short, urgent phrase. Measures 5-9 show the Violoncelles and C-Basses playing a rolling quaver sequence. The score is numbered 1 through 9 at the top.

7

The opening ornamentation in the first violin for the beginning four bars sounds urgent and alarming in character and is directly followed by a rolling quaver sequence which is usually accompanied by the girls running out of the building. This music is introducing the fight scene. The repetition in the first four bars could lead us to believe that there is some emphasis involved. All of these interpretive aspects are, although seemingly obvious, subjective readings, in that they are my own chosen interpretation of the text, authorised by no inherent meaning within the music, narrative, situation, or poetry. The interpretation is my own responsibility. The responsibility being to render them active within the dramatic event.

There is no reason that although these are seemingly illustrative aspects, that they cannot be activated. In fact, to become a part of the dramatic event they must be activated as part of the Integrated dynamic. These aspects which are traditionally seen as depictorial or illustrative can become physicalised. For instance, if there is no one in sight on the stage, the music could serve within a basic event of "a fight". Since the idea of action and obstacle no longer adheres strictly to that of character and motive, the first four bars in figure F can serve to warn against fear, or maybe on a more basic level, (which would allow the string players to perform the event), the action could be to hold their bows still, against the anxiety imposed

<sup>7</sup> Bizet 126.

by the fight, resulting in the happening of vibrato or shaking. Within these choices the music extends beyond that of merely depictorial and is now an active part of the drama. It is incorporated into the performance dynamic of the dramatic event. In this way the Violin players become active participants in the dramatic event rather than mere vehicles of textual depiction.

If the music were to serve the action of "introducing the fight chorus in a way that told the audience of the alarm that was about to occur" then the happening, would at best be the occurrence of an alarming introduction. An introduction has no bearing on this scene. Usually "an introduction" is not a happening within a fight. Therefore to lean on the musical text to provide that drama through illustration within the event ought not to be an option. Furthermore, anything else on the stage would either be in competition with its depictorial action or merely parallel, depictorially. Illustration is not an action within this fight, it is an action within a presentation. If the intended dramatic event is one of presentation then it is not the drama of Carmen that we are speaking of.

Within the poetic and musical text of this chorus there are two sets of girls. The ones that are for Carmen and the ones that are for Manuella. Both groups are trying, within the poetic text to put their story forward to the soldier, Zuniga. Carmen is nowhere to be seen until the end of the section.

This chorus provides an interesting example of what happens in the texts when an obstacle shifts. In figure G:

Figure G

41 42 43 44

1<sup>re</sup> SOPRANI.  
*Cigarières.*  
- sieur, é - coutez - nous! é - coutez - nous! é - coutez - nous! é - coutez - nous!

2<sup>de</sup> SOPRANI.  
*Cigarières.*  
- sieur! é - coutez - nous! é - coutez - nous! é - coutez - nous!

Violoncelles.

C - Basses.

8

The girls are at the height of the fight; they are singing, "listen to us". Their words are extended over the bar lines, as they are for the majority of the time that their implied action is "to get Zuniga's attention". Their obstacles could be each other. The musical organisation can be chosen as the happening of this obstacle, in that the happening in such situations is that of chaos, of people trying to get a word in as soon as the other shuts up, speaking over each other. Following this sequence the stage direction that Bizet has included explains that "Zuniga is pulled over to the side by one of the sets of girls". If this is the case then within this choice of event the obstacle for this group must now change. They no longer are fighting against the other girls to be heard, they have Zuniga's attention. The music here changes.

<sup>8</sup> Bizet 130.

Figure H

49 50 51 52 53

1<sup>re</sup> SOPRANI.  
Gigarières.  
ô - cou - lez - nous!

2<sup>de</sup> SOPRANI.  
Gigarières.  
ô - cou - lez - nous!

Violoncelles.  
pp

C - Basses.

(tirant Zuniga de leur côté)  
La Blanneli-ta di - suit - Et répé -

9

The beginning to their side of the story is heard with little competition from the orchestra as shown in bars 52 and 53. There is a marked reduction in density, though the continuing quaver sequence in 3/4 retains its momentum. As is evident, the sung text is now on the beat; the girls are telling their side of the story and are being heard. It seems that Zuniga's attention has produced some order. The obstacle for the group singing can be seen as now having shifted from that of not being heard, against the fear of other group's invasion, to perhaps the smaller note values which could provide the obstacle of their excitement against the need to get the story out clearly, or perhaps as their heart beats against the calm they want to exhibit in order to make their story sound the more rational. If the music is used as part of the performance then it will not only contribute to the event, but it will be brought into the field of awareness of the performer and thus not be competed with but enhanced. The words can be utilised in much the same way. Their meaning can have subtext, or action, or even be an obstacle.

There is quaver sequence (first seen in Figure F, bar 5) that maintains the chaos throughout the scene. It ceases at the point that Zuniga loses his patience, (according to the stage direction). At this point in the narrative he sends soldiers into the factory to ascertain what has happened. The stopping of the quavers can be seen as a calm of that has been brought to

<sup>9</sup> Bizet 131.



the craziness of the women fighting. However at the last bar of Zuniga's music and poetic text, the music gives an indication that the authoritative hand of the law has had little effect against its obstacle of the reoccurring quavers. (Figure I).

Figure I

104 105 106 107 108 109 110

2 Clarinettes en LA.

2 Bassons.

2 Cors en RE

Violons.

Altos.

ZUNIGA.

Violoncelles.

C-Basses.

*pp legg.*

*arco.*

*pp*

*arco.*

*pp*

*arco.*

*pp*

*arco.*

*pp*

*pp*

vous Et voyez là-de-dans qui cause ce tapage!

10

On Zuniga's last note (bar 110) which is authorised by a definite perfect cadence, there is the beginning of another cycle of ascending chromatic chord progressions. The quavers accompanied the girls fight for Zuniga's attention in the previous section, so their return (bar 110, Figure I) is ominous. The music has become the action, passing through the cadence, through Zuniga's authority. The happening could be seen as "Zuniga fails".

<sup>10</sup> Bizet 137.

### *Duo*

The Duo takes place within the second act and includes the recitative between Carmen and José at the tavern just after he has been released from prison, where she makes him jealous by telling him that she has been dancing for the officers. It also includes her dance for him, the sound of the retreat outside, summoning him for roll call, the fight over his telling her that he has to leave for roll call (including her telling him that he doesn't love her), the famous flower duet where he professes his love and then her asking him to go away with him and live the life of a gypsy and his struggle then decision to leave.

The foregoing is much like the list of supposed "facts" that Stanislavsky used as part of his text-analysis method. They are recognised here as subjective in that there is room for differing interpretation. There are many possible readings. This section on the duo is a study on how to use the IPT within a most stringent application of prescriptions. The prescriptions that will be imposed here will be the texts, traditional costume, traditional choreography, and a strictly narrative interpretation of the events as derived from the plot. Even with these imposed prescriptions the IPT expands the seemingly narrow options of activation.

I will break up this sequence into four main sections for the purpose of studying the many possibilities of event choices for this reading and for the explanation of how to chose happenings. The four sections are:

#### DUO interpreted sections

- 1) She dances for him/bugle sound while she is dancing/he tries to go
- 2)She gets angry/says that he doesn't love her/he takes out flower that he has kept
- 3) flower aria
- 4) she sings about going away with him /his final good bye.

This break-down is narrative based and informed by the structure of such prescriptions as the music and the text. I could however have broken it down primarily by the key structures, or by lines, or choreography However to choose the event for this, a narrative based opera which has a conventional tradition, we will stick to the all familiar narrative structure.

The duo has many options for events. Below is a list of six possible options, although there are many more. There are also options that are not narrative based. For instance as a dance piece this entire Duo could be seen as "an explosion", where the happenings of "boiling", "pressure building", "false calm", "heat", "spurting", "screaming", "hissing" or "oozing", could all be manifest as physical actions against obstacles. And this would create a dance sequence weaving with interpreted actions, happenings, and obstacles within the texts. The principles are the same for all processes that include a dynamic between action, obstacle, and happenings.

Six possible events for the entire duo section would be:

- A. Fight between love and duty
- B. War of wills
- C. Establishment of a relationship
- D. Power struggle
- E. Lovers quarrel
- F. Making love

Because the subject for focus at the moment is the entire duo section, A through to F are considered events. If the subject of focus were the entire opera, they would now be happenings. These events, within the Duo have possible happenings within their sections.

Below are examples of possible choices for happenings within the duo events for the shown sections

Fight Between love and duty

- 1. a stand off
- 2. duty is overcome
- 3. exploration of the strength of love
- 4. the challenge

War of wills

1. infiltration of the enemy
2. the dilution of José's resolve
3. a false surrender
4. Carmen's secret weapon fails

Establishment of a relationship

1. making love
2. first fight
3. kiss and make-up
4. pushing the boundaries of the union

Power struggle

1. an exercise of sexual power
2. José becomes impotent/loses power
3. the finding of strength through love
4. fight

Lovers quarrel

1. the initiation of a conflict
2. Carmen bates José
3. An apology
4. opportunistic ploy fails

### Making love

1. foreplay
2. teasing
3. attempt to make Carmen feel safe
4. the affects of "too much too soon"

With all these options it becomes clear that there are many possibilities that can arise to effect what is to happen on the stage. All of the above choices are supported by both texts. In order for any of the implied meaning within these choices to be brought to fruition they will have to be activated through intention and actions against obstacles. These activations, in fact, can work between the disciplines by making the musical text and the poetic texts work against each other, or any of the disciplines against each other, or a discipline against a text. The possibilities are many as long as they work within the dynamic of action against obstacle creating a happening that contributes toward the dramatic event. This aspect of the IPT allows the texts and the performance disciplines to work mutually interdependently within a chosen dramatic event and furthermore it frees them from a servitude to depicting the prescriptive aspects.

In order to explore a possible process of analysis using the Integrative Performance Dynamic, the example "Making Love" will be examined. This next section will focus on the first section of the duo, which has been interpreted as having the happening of "foreplay". It can be broken down into smaller happenings that may occur during the scene. These happenings could be attributed to the field of music, text, acting, or singing. However, there will always be the effect of actions against obstacles. One of the best ways to establish possible happenings is to take the event away from the narrative and to examine it in a broader sense. The question that is asked is, "what happens when people, animals, political parties of different cultural contexts, engage in foreplay?" The answers can be vague, as this is a process of exploration, not performance execution. Some possible ideas may be:

tantalising

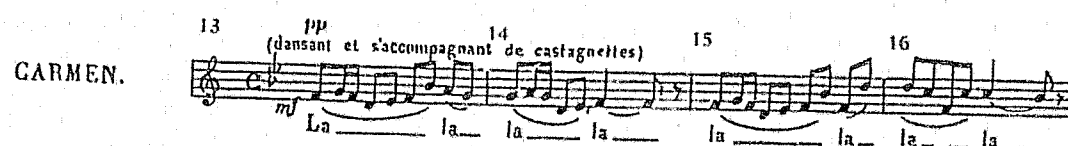
losing self  
 fear  
 playing  
 testing boundaries  
 preening  
 biting  
 anticipation  
 teasing  
 frustration  
 offerings  
 promises  
 violence  
 intimacy  
 role playing  
 use of food  
 letting down of personal guards...

Some of these are verbs, which means that they can be activated. If they are then they are made part of the field of actions or intentions. Actions and intentions are the doing aspect of performance. Happening and events are not done; they occur as a result of actions against obstacles. Emotions can be happenings, but not actions. This is because one cannot do an emotion; an emotion is the result of an action against an obstacle. Actors/singers who try to do emotions find that they inevitably have to indicate or depict. Their action then is to look sad or happy, or whatever emotions they have chosen. The happening for that moment is the result of depiction, usually manifesting in distorted facial expression, posturing and tension.

We will decide that Carmen's intention for this first section of the Duo, where she dances for José within the chosen event of foreplay, is "to seduce". An intention, as you will recall from the Stanislavsky chapter, is the main want or need of the character for the section. Within the IPT, the intention, like the action, has been expanded to include force and momentum. However the traditional use of the term intention is still appropriate when looking for an intention of a character within a narrative based piece.

In the scene Carmen plays the castanets and dances to the theme below. The words are simply a repeated melody sung on "La". There are two main sections, one on the tonic the other the dominant.

Figure J



11

Some of the actions that Carmen might engage in while dancing for José and singing the music shown in figure J are:

- to excite
- to check if he is getting turned on
- to make him want to touch her
- to torture him

These actions can be attributed to the texts, vocal tone or movement in any way. Perhaps they change every two bars for the first two and then four bars for the next, and later when she gets to torturing, the dominant sequence comes in emphasised by the forte marking (see Figure L). In order to be able to weave in all the aspects of the texts, there needs to be a recognition of the actions against the obstacles.

The relationship between the action, obstacles and happenings could be mapped out as follows:

<sup>11</sup> Bizet 271.

Actions	Against Obstacles	Happenings
To excite	against a fear of his temper	she dances/ nervousness
to check if he is getting turned on	the apprehension about his reaction/ her own awareness that her friends may be listening	teasing/ apprehension
To make him hunger for her	his coolness	role playing/ anticipation
to torture him	the fact that he hasn't lost it yet	frustration/ excitement

The musical line in the bars 13 and 14 of Figure J, can be activated to excite by weaving through him; or perhaps the line is the happening in that she sings as a response to her wanting to excite him against the obstacle of her fear. Perhaps the musical line is the obstacle that she must push against, in that she has sung it so many times before for lovers that she has to make it fresh to excite him. Perhaps the poetic text of "la" takes on a subtext to work with any of these ideas. Perhaps the dance steps take on actions, or obstacles or become happenings. As long as they "do" within the chosen dramatic event of foreplay, then the performance arts will be interrelated rather than paralleled, and the texts will be activated.

During the course of Carmen's singing there is the introduction of a musical obstacle. It is the bugles sounding from afar. They represent the retreat and José's requirement to leave for role call. He tells her what the sound is and what its significance is. She is in a position to compete with it or use it.

Figure K



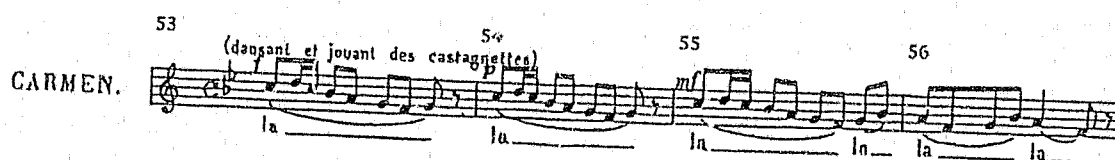


Her response in the poetic text is

"Bravo! I did my best, It is dreary dancing without an orchestra. Thank God for this music, it is heaven sent"

Directly following that line she returns to the "la la" theme, not at the beginning of it but in the second more urgent section. The urgency is illustrated in the musical text by the forte dynamic and the dominant key. It is also emphasised in the stage directions by the instruction of Carmen's dancing with the return of the castanets.

Figure L



13

This emphasis illustrated by the forte marking and modulation to the dominant key must not happen just because Bizet says it should. If so, the dramatic event would be lost and the result will merely be a depiction of Bizet's score and Meilhac and Halévy's libretto. Below are some of the many options that are available to the performer playing Carmen, for action within this moment, if the event is taken into account. When the event changes, the doing must change also, because the doing against the obstacle creates a happening contributing to the event.

Duo Event and section event

Fight Between love and duty  
a stand off  
War of wills  
infiltration of the enemy  
establishment of a relationship  
making love  
Power struggle  
an exercise of sexual power  
Lovers quarrel

Possible actions for this moment

to block the noise  
 to challenge him  
 to get his attention back  
 to win over the bugles  
 to put him back into line

<sup>13</sup> Bizet 273.

the initiation of a conflict  
Making love  
 foreplay

to excite him so that his is blinded to other  
 stimuli

Of course the actions above are just Carmen's. José will need his own. Their obstacles do not need to always be each other. Sometimes it may be the sounds outside, sometimes the music, sometimes the poetic text. The main point to be emphasised is that actions, intentions, happenings and events are completely subjective. They are there to be interpreted, and more importantly, if they are not and it is assumed that the meaning is in the texts rather than an event, then an event of depiction will occur. This is usually not the aesthetic desire of the producer, singer or actor, but it is a certainty if the text is relied upon to produce the drama.

What the Integrative Performance Technique aims to achieve, is a way of looking at performance where the text can be activated and the drama can happen. The result of this will be the empowerment of the performer as an activator of meaning along with the idea that the text will finally live.

Through this interpretation of the duo which has had many prescriptions imposed one can see how the aspects of the texts and the performance disciplines can be rendered both mutually interdependent and active within a set traditional style. In fact it could be argued that such a process could indeed revitalise the traditional. But this is not its purpose.

The IPT is a most useful tool in the contemporisation of opera in that with it there can be a retaining of the event with a changing of prescriptions. Also the IPT could be seen to reduce the need for subtitles in that the happenings are easier and more readily understood and experienced by the audience than depictions. The IPT could be utilised within the multi media performance in that the media aspects could be incorporated into the drama by design and expand out of the all too common gimmicky approach which is essentially a fancier aspect of depiction or the result of the media element falling outside the field of the dramatic event. The possibilities are endless, but event, action, obstacle, and intentions are unavoidable.

## CONCLUSION

The theory developed within the Integrative Performance Technique, as laid out in the preceding chapter, introduces a new approach to the way theatre can be conceived, perceived, studied, developed, written, taught, and performed.

This thesis proposes a fundamental shift in thinking of the origins of meaning within the context of drama. There are two main assumptions which continue to inform the writing, performance practices, direction, pedagogy, and historic interpretation of theatre. The first is the assumption that the meaning of drama is somehow inherent in the text. For opera that text includes the score and the libretto. In the search for a way to best transfer meaning onto the stage, composers and librettists of opera have scrapped about the virtues of one text over another for centuries.

The other major assumption that has permeated the development of opera is that of an ideal origin. Throughout history there has been a constant returning to some idealic notion of the ancient Greek theatre where every element of text and performance was said to work together in a communal relationship rendering the audience affected. It has been assumed for generations that the answer to rendering meaning in the performance and therefore to the audience lay in the past. This "origin" assumption can be seen to go back further than even Aristotle's day, in the very notion that singing is somehow more meaningful than speaking. As humans we are thought to have sung or sounded before we spoke or wrote. This primal connection along with the attempted applications of an ancient Greek ideal, has given opera the illusion of substantiality and meaningfulness, completely separate from the quality of performance or dramatic elements of the event.

These assumptions have permeated through to every single aspect of creation, analysis and study of opera. Shifting away from the idea that the meaning is in the text and is substantiated by the past, toward the idea that the meaning happens in the act of performance within an event, has ramifications for all fields of conception, perception, historic study, analysis, production, writing, pedagogy, and performance.

To rise to the challenge of the shift in thinking proposed by this thesis would transform the training of singers. The current common practice of isolating vocal tuition from movement and acting training would no longer be necessary. There would no longer be three separate processes and languages between the musical director, the conductor, the singer/actor, the chorus master and the producer. If meaning is rendered in action in the performance event, then the process and action of that performance event would be the pedagogical and performance focus rather than the learning of the separate "signs" that the various performance disciplines of voice, movement, and acting contain.

Traditionally, performance training of opera singers includes the idea that a certain essence must be put into or drawn out of the performance to make it substantial. There are a plethora of devices and tricks such as gesture, voice colouring, and intonation to name a few, that are applied in the name of this goal. The Integrative Performance Technique is directly set against this process and aesthetic. Essence and substance is something that happens. The fact that one cannot "do" essence and substance seems to have alluded trainers, directors, performers, and writers for hundreds of years. Rather than try to put in or draw out this essence the Integrative Performance Technique deals with the essential dynamic and allows the substance to happen.

In the chapter on Stanislavsky it was proposed that we abandon the traditional sectioning of practical performance technique into internal and external. The new sectioning becoming the "quality of doing" and the "plan of what to do". This is likened to the journey and the road map, or the act of creating and the design. By this new sectioning of the practical aspects of performance, the quality of doing aspects could be retained from Stanislavsky's work and the "author" dominated analytical methods could be abandoned if so desired.

This new sectioning has practical ramifications for the training of the performance artist. The Integrative Performance dynamic of actions against obstacle creating happenings within events can then be applied not only to work on the drama, but to the development of the instrument. The IPT dynamic works within the fields of the physical, emotional and vocal aspect of the instrument and recognises their mutual interdependence.

The use of event within the training of the performance instrument creates a necessary boundary that determines the field of study. For instance the singing of a note could be the event. The breathing, intercostal movement, tongue movement, diaphragmatic movement, vocal onset, vibration of the vocal chords, and any and all tension in the body, either required or superfluous, all fall into either actions, obstacles or happenings. Many students make the mistake of trying to "do" the happenings. Doing happenings is impossible, they are always the symptom or result of an action against an obstacle. If an action or obstacle lies outside the field of the event, which in this case is the singing of a note, then the student will create happenings outside that event. If the student tries to do, or act with the diaphragm they will create a happening outside the singing of a note. The diaphragm is an involuntary muscle, nothing should be intentionally done to it in the process of singing, however something should happen to it as the result of other actions against other obstacles. The old phrase "sing from your diaphragm" has set up the problem where by the happening is turned into an action, the resulting happening is usually of tension and a depressed note.

Breaking down the operation of the event allows for useful aspects within learning. Breaking down and diagnosing happenings into actions against obstacles helps to determine what the singer is doing, or what the singer is doing against, to create a happening. Once these are determined either aspect of the problem can be addressed. If a student has the problem of sucking their tongue back into their throat when they breath in, usually they have a resulting tension in their abdomen and chest, and often shift onto their heels whilst sucking in the breath. Looking at these factors and exploring what is happening, what is being done and what the obstacle is will enable the student to respond differently. The student will have a responsibility to the desired happening, a tool for witnessing the problem without engaging in the problem outside the event, and they can begin to establish a personal technique.

This idea of a personal technique is often out of the question in traditional pedagogy where the focus is on obtaining a product, rather than understanding a process with the recognition that every student comes to the work with their own social, political, personally derived obstacle and action tendencies that manifest in the voice, body, and psychology. By utilising

the Integrative Performance Technique dynamic, desired happenings can be achieved through the understanding and application of actions and obstacle towards a determined event.

Of course this is not only applicable to the singing of a note. An event can be a phrase, a movement, an acting piece, a dance, a gesture. The possibilities are endless but the principle remains the same. There is always an action against an obstacle creating a happening within events whether these are recognised or not.

The event is the primary boundary which allows for the recognition of the integrating process based aspects within it. In the singing of the note there is body, psyche, and voice. Where traditional pedagogy focuses primarily on voice and sends the student elsewhere for bodywork (that lies outside the ridged understanding of basic postural organisation for voice), and expects the student to repress or "deal with" all the action tendencies of the psyche. The Integrative Performance Technique works on the understanding that these are inseparable in action. The Integrative Performance Technique dynamic also insures that training does not get overly focused on the psychological, becoming therapy rather than performance. This would lie outside the event of the singing of a note. The psychological, physical, and vocal actions and obstacles that are required to create happenings within the event of singing a note are what remains in study. The voice, body and psychology and any other aspect are dealt with within this dynamic. This integral dynamic occurs whether it is recognised or not. The challenge is to acknowledge this and cease the coating on of devices that send the student spinning into dynamics of actions against obstacles which alienate them from their own performance style.

The training of the instrument is guided by the "quality of doing" aspect of the technique. The "what to do" contains the process of analysis and the production plan, choreography, and all other aspects of the performance. The events become the dramatic events. The Integrative Performance Technique chapter within this thesis explains these principles in detail.

The Integrative Performance Technique dynamic can also be utilised for historic study and music analysis. Current music analysis methods cite a text or portion of text and then provide an interpretation of its meaning. The Integrative Performance Technique analysis would diagnose possible events, happenings, actions or obstacles thus distinguishing between possible meanings in the writing, the performance and the historical context through the exploration of the active dynamic that operates within these very different fields.

The Integrative Performance Technique can be used to study the dynamic relationship between the textual aspects and explore these aspects positionings within the event. This helps to define an era or a style. A style is the symptom or happening of a dynamic relationship between action and obstacle. Mozart's operatic writing can be seen to incorporate action within the melody more often than the happenings or the obstacles. His orchestration can be perceived to play the part of the happening as a response to the action and obstacle dynamic within the other aspects of the music. This can be tied into the historical context. Mozart was writing at a time of new found humanism, and it makes sense that the melody as sung by the person was activated within the dramatic event. The human held the action and his voice was emerging.

Wagner differs from Mozart in that his main historic obstacle could be seen as mortality itself, not the lack of voice for the people. His music can be seen to embody the largeness of a happening that is the symptom of the actions of immortality against mortality.

The Integrative Performance Theory differs from many other subsequent theories since Stanislavsky in that it does not aim to reinvent theatre, or reject any specific aspect of the theatre of the past. Rather it proposes a way of looking at performance as a series of interweaving dynamics. Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty" and Grotowski's "Theatre of the Poor" and anything ranging from naturalism, to melodrama, to the avant garde, could be examined, analysed and executed by the Integrative Performance Technique if so chosen. Because it is a dynamic there is no linear process required. An ensemble could, for instance, improvise on "happenings" to work out actions against obstacles to create a desired event. A piece could be born out of the pushing against, moving through, moulding within,

exploding over, a series of obstacles. A performer could likewise improvise on a chosen "event" to explore the many available happenings. These "happenings", "actions", "obstacle", and "events" can be physical, emotional, spiritual, chemical, vibrational; there are no rules, simply a recognition and, therefore, a response-ability to an already existing performance dynamic.

The application of the Integrative Performance Technique within multi-disciplinary theatre such as opera provides a common language of dramatic expression to all art forms. Traditionally, the various disciplines come to the operatic genre with their own languages and traditions of expression. Usually the problems of integration are by-passed and the best result is the parallelling of these disciplines within a common theme or concept. By choosing an event (as in the ITP) there would be a common aim that is agreed on or searched for within rehearsal. All the music, movement, acting and singing will be activated and will operate within that event. Such a production would attain a mutual interdependence of each discipline, a dynamic co-operation, rather than a competition or parallelisation. The musical director, the choreographer, the producer, the singers, the dancers, could still come to the work with their own styles and disciplines, but rather than compete for their way of depiction, they could communicate to each other through the language of this dynamic and then work within the strengths of their own disciplines on how to bring this about. The Event would stay intact, no element would have to lie outside that event. The text would be honoured and the meaning would happen in the act of performance.

If the repeat of a production of opera was to be approached in this way, perhaps with a different cast, in a different time, and in a different city, the operation would be an easier and more economical task. Commonly, re-staging is transferred and communicated through an assistant director with the use of prescriptions such as sets, blocking, costumes and some vague depictorial notion of "well she did it like this, not like that". It is not surprising that repeat performances often lose something in the transference. This could be because it is not in the sets, blocking and costumes that the meaning happens. It happens in the act of performance. The Integrative Performance Technique provides a language by which an



"event" can be re-activated through the use of the Integrative Performance Technique dynamic. In this way meaning will happen in the act of performance that supports the imposed prescriptions. The action will exceed a puppet-like depiction, which is all too often the only option left to performers of such productions. Rather than the prescriptions being presented in the rehearsals as a rigid structure from which to depict, the aspects for transference could be events and the dynamics that bring them about in action on the stage. In this way the new cast would not have to simply repeat the performance, and the supposed meaning of the old cast (which is not actually possible), but would be able to utilise their own talents and choices. A new meaning could occur, but nothing from the prescriptions would be compromised. In fact they would be re-activated, not merely re-presented.

The quality of doing and the plans and analysis aspects of this study have implications for instrumentalists, lighting designers, set designers, costume designers, directors, choreographers, dancers. All of these practices can be studied and executed utilising this technique. In fact they abide by the basic process whether they recognise it or not.

This way of thinking has ramifications for science, psychology, sports, architecture, writing, anthropology and many other fields that lie outside the scope of this thesis. Essentially it provides the necessary boundary of event. This boundary however does not stifle the process, in that it is defined by process. The talent of the practitioner is in their choice of event and their choice of what actions against what obstacles create happenings within that event.

This thesis began by restating the common history of opera which so clearly establishes a cycle of the shifting primacy of the text of music and the word, along with a practised subordination of the performer. With this chapter I did not uncover any unknown material; rather, I exposed a typical prejudice that is taught and generally accepted as the fundamental understanding of operatic development.

In Part Two I examined and utilised Roland Barthes' essay, "From Work to Text", and Jacques Derrida's essay "Signature, Event, Context". They both deal with issues of

meaning, transference, performance and authorship and are presented to open the way for the Integrative Performance theory. The Integrative Performance Technique does not abide by the prejudice and practices of meaning imposed by opera's traditional history; so with the help of these key post-structural texts and my own theoretical intervention, Part Two provides the necessary links to do with "event" and performance that permit a new theory of integration and provides an approach from which to critically examine the Stanislavsky Method.

Konstantin Stanislavsky provided the foundation from which all modern western performance theory and practice has either deviated from, revolted against, or developed upon. Part Three provides a critical account of what his system achieved within the context, meaning, authorship, performance process, and opera. There have been some interesting experiments and theories to do with meaning and performance within theatre since Stanislavsky. However, the focus of the section remains on Stanislavsky because the Integrative Performance Technique retains key aspects of the Stanislavsky theory that have not been surpassed by subsequent developments.

The Integrative Performance Technique is essentially a response to the historical question of originated meaning as manifest in an ideal mythical and primal notion of the voice, and the hundreds of years of assumption that says that the texts of score and libretto hold the meaning of the drama. The Integrative Performance Theory aims to challenge the practitioner to question the assumptions that are placed on their practice and pedagogy of the performance art, and explore new ways of working and creating opera. This thesis is a proposal of a new way, as a response to the history, and as a development on the Stanislavsky system, an application of postmodern critical thinking, but ultimately an expression of the desire to empower the performer and therefore the performance of the texts.

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