



L'opéra dans le cyberspace : Médias, technologie et histoire /

Opera in the Web Age: Media, Technology and History

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*Medial Histories of Opera,  
the Rhetoric of Fidelity,  
and Mise en Scène as Interpretation*

Director Olivier Py has recently explained his staging of Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* with the following words: 'There is an orgy in the score, and therefore I stage an orgy. [...] I am completely faithful to the work'. For Py, then, staging an opera means making visible what 'is in the score', a course of action that ensures fidelity to the work. Such statements might seem rather uncontroversial to us now, but until the mid-twentieth century they would have been heard with bafflement: Why on earth should a director stage what is in the score rather than in the libretto? And why is the score equated with the whole work, so that being faithful to the score automatically means being faithful to the work? These imaginary questions from the past prompt more historical ones: How did such beliefs come about? And why?

I argue that the medial history of opera in the twentieth century might help us answer such questions. A comparison between audiorecordings and videorecordings shows radically diverging patterns of consumption, with the former dominating the medial landscape. This dominance, I suggest, contributed to a music-centred ideology of operatic dramaturgy. Such ideology has had a profound impact on the present-day discourse of mise en scène as a



faithful interpretation of the music. This discourse, however, now sits uneasily in a medial context in which video dominates operatic consumption. In my conclusions, I explore a few consequences of this tension, focusing especially on the epistemological issues raised by the coupling of fidelity and interpretation.

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