

**Modernity's Dancers:
Essays on Mediation and Anachronism
in *Salome* and *Metropolis***

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on two “modern dancers” from the early twentieth century. The first chapter studies the figure of Salome in perhaps her most famous manifestation, the musico-dramatic imagining of Richard Strauss, before moving, in the second chapter, to an analysis of what I dub the dance scene of the robot Maria from Fritz Lang’s 1927 cult classic, *Metropolis*. If traditionally the reception of these dancing women has been strongly eclipsed by gaze theory and the female embodiment of the destructive potential of technology, here I explore how a multitude of other factors—musical, theatrical, technological, dramaturgical—construct each dance as a self-contained object.

As a point of departure for this project, I invoke the idea of the historical anachronism as that which does not simply withstand time, but that continues to *return* persistently throughout historical time. It is no surprise that opera, *Salome* notwithstanding, persists through the repetition of performances and thus “returns” again and again on the theater stage, multiplex cinema, and now further re-mediated on DVD. Film, moreover, exists by its very nature through the act of replay, and thus of multiple *returns* rather than permanence. In this vein, countless performances of *Salome* have reiterated similar ideas on *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics to the extent that contemporary performances, while new, still rely on an unspoken ideal of the scandalous, morose visuals of the Decadent *Salome* so that the gesture of return inherent to live operatic performances becomes a practice in repetition of the *history of Salome*. Indeed, a spectacle of bloody heads and writhing naked bodies seem *de rigueur* even today, as if unseemliness is scripted into the dramaturgy. But what happens when a production “unsettles,” to borrow a term from David Levin, this already very unsettled operatic text?

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In memory of my grandfather,

John A. Giordano

April 29, 1926 - April 14, 2012

I love you, Harry.

Preface

In her book, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, Sylviane Agacinsky dedicates a chapter to historical anachronism. The common conception of the anachronism is something appearing out of the time and place of its epoch of origin. Agacinsky refines this definition to that which does not simply withstand time, but that continues to *return* persistently throughout historical time. Created in the past, the anachronism is by definition what “survives or lives on; it is what reappears in some way shifted forward or backward in time.”¹

I find this conceptualization especially pertinent to opera, which is, all negative connotations aside, an anachronistic art. Opera persists through the repetition of performances and thus “returns” again and again on the theater stage, and, further remediated in multiplex cinema and on DVD. Furthermore, I was intrigued by a particular aspect of Agacinsky’s description of the anachronism as an artifact that obdurately returns bearing the false appearance of permanence. What society regards as the “operatic masterwork” certainly bears the façade of permanence through history. These two chapters develop this core idea of reappearance in relation to the opera stage and thus, develop the idea of *return* in relation to a specific, delimited performative context. An ideal text for this line of thought is Richard Strauss’s *Salome*. Not only because the opera features in the title role a biblical figure who herself has returned throughout history of multiple arts as a kind of relic, but also because the textual source and its possibilities for live performance have likewise conformed to an unspoken aesthetic in dramaturgical

¹ Sylviane Agacinsky, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia* (New York: Columbia

treatment that in my view behaves anachronistically. As Agacinsky comments: “we might wonder if our aesthetic habits—or, in other words, our attachment to forms—don’t encourage repetition as much as our technical and gestural habits do.”²

That aesthetics play a large role in prefiguring the “return” of artistic and technological anachronisms is the prime impulse for Chapter One. I found that many performances of *Salome* reiterated similar ideas on *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics to the extent that contemporary performances, while new, still rely on an unspoken ideal of the scandalous, morose aesthetic of the Decadent *Salome*. In this way, many performances of *Salome* become a practice of repetition of the history of *Salome*, so to speak. I was prompted to turn to a 2008 production that breaks down what I regard as anachronistic dramaturgy.

Indeed both Salome, the biblical figure and *Salome*, the opera, have returned throughout the centuries. While the argument could be made that all artistic forms return in this way, *Salome* had a particularly marked resurgence during the latter half of the nineteenth century, a resurgence, and even a craze, that reconstituted aesthetically her figuration, which still impends on current and future (re)presentation. Resurfacing most famously in a modernist context, this *Salome* saw her operatic “debut” in Dresden in 1905 with Strauss’s opera. This in turn gave rise to another anachronistic form, which has had since a permanent existence: *Salome’s* Dance of the Seven Veils. Around the turn of the century then, we might say that *Salome* had a conspicuous moment of *represence* which significantly altered her form that, as anachronism, already was resistant to

² Agacinsky, *Time Passing*, 116.

its own disappearance.³ This temporal “return” of the biblical figure was embraced foremost by Symbolist and Decadent artists and writers for whom Salome served as a form on which to project their own social and artistic ideologies.

In Chapter Two I extend the idea of the relic to broader reflections. We may consider the Dance of the Seven Veils as a relic because it comprises a form that transcends time, but also other mediums. As a dance scene, it relies on a particular aesthetic as well as a recognizable formal structure.

In creating a musico-dramaturgical adaptation of Salome’s dance, I propose that Richard Strauss codified—albeit unwittingly—a recognizable and reproducible form of the dance scene. In Chapter Two I analyze what I would argue is the least acknowledged *represence* of Salome’s dance from a formal and aesthetic perspective: the dance scene of robot Maria from Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*. This scene struck me for the way in which Lang seems to have used the dance as a recognizable theatrical device. In this sense, the “dance scene” can be viewed as a kind of technology, or “technologia,” in so far as it bears a resemblance to the “system of treatment” with which Strauss first rendered Salome’s dance scene. We might think metaphorically about the dance itself as Salome’s “machine” for the way in which certain components function within a closed system in which music, the audience’s gaze, and the performing woman interrelate accordingly. By reconceptualizing the dance in this way, Maria’s dance opens up the possibility for recognizing its use across other media beyond the opera stage.

³ Ibid., 110.

In many ways, this thesis is juxtaposition of Salome and Maria as two modern dancers that, along with their dances have not been explicitly thought of as interrelated. Salome and Maria share a number of commonalities between them. On the most basic level, their dances are strange moments that stand out as disparate from the larger operatic or filmic work in which they are embedded. This is due in large part to their spectacular nature which foregrounds and frames the act of looking for purely entertainment purposes.

For both Maria and Salome, technology becomes a major theme. With Maria, the technological aspect of her representation is quite literal. She is a robot whose performance is controlled by a creator, the mad scientist of Lang's film, *Rotwang*. Salome, on the other hand, portrays through her dancing a more inconspicuous technology of the body.

Salome's dance is hardly a moment of bodily expression, but rather one that is completely predetermined through a technology of the dance, encompassing the music, Salome performance is mechanical. Even the pacing of the removal of veils itself is a way to regulate with the music her body. Even Strauss himself, who advocated for Salome to be portrayed with the utmost dignity and move with refined gestures, ultimately "programs" her as if she were a robot. We might wonder whether or not the lurid, expressive motives of Strauss's dance music are not ultimately produced mechanically from the orchestra—and if together, the music and Salome's dancing do not essentially play out like sounds from a music box. The dance is replayed, like a record, and Salome becomes a dancing avatar not only for Herod, but for the audience, as

well. In accordance with the musical motives of the score, she performs her dance through mechanical monotony, just as Maria dances for the men of the city of Metropolis.

Chapter One

A Crisis in Representation: The Emancipated Salome

[The] liberated Salome largely remains unseen, precisely because the Salomes presented to us can still be seen all too well, and in step with Strauss's music, not at odds with it. The emancipated Salome is still a critical phantom; the real Salome is still a cheap date. She is a figure who, at certain moments in certain performances, may rise to the level of ambiguity the opera affords her, but has not yet been able to rise above it.⁴

Introduction

That Richard Strauss's *Salome* "has not lost its ability to shock," as the current advertising plug for the San Francisco Opera boasts, may be less a result of morbidly discomfoting themes that arise from the text, than trends in its reception and production which have proliferated since its premiere in 1905. Currently the Palm Beach Opera Company touts the theme "Seduction and Scandal" for its 2012-2013 season, which unsurprisingly includes *Salome* as the one opera that most overtly promises a *succés de scandale*. The Palm Beach season features in fact Nicola Luisotti's new production of *Salome*, which leaves little to the imagination as far as kissing bloody, decapitated heads goes. Luisotti's production, currently at the San Francisco Opera, is advertised as "scandalous when it premiered a century ago with its provocative 'Dance of the Seven Veils,'" and as "a chillingly erotic story still shocking and scandalous more than 100 years after its premiere."⁵

⁴ Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture: Wagner and Strauss* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 167.

⁵ "Salome," Palm Beach Opera, accessed April 17, 2012, <http://pbopera.org/current-season/2013-season/.html>.

Productions of *Salome* too often ride on the laurels of its supposed shock value. Recently, for example the 2008 Metropolitan Opera's *Salome* with Karita Mattila is placed in the context of a swanky urban flat and Salome is clad in a contemporary woman's suit. Mattila nevertheless undresses to the point of shedding the "last veil" and thus fulfills the promise of a vulgarized spectacle. One of the most luridly erotic stagings is the 2007, Berlusconi-era production at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, directed by Giorgio Albertazzi. The setting is rather conservative, featuring an unremarkable terrace in King Herod's palace, and the dance is a similarly predictable excuse to exhibit a starkly naked Salome. David McVicar's 2008 *Salome* at the Royal Opera House features a less salacious dance scene only to conclude with a disturbing display of pathological debauchery. Crazed and drenched in blood, Soprano Nadja Michael performs Salome's final monologue while grasping onto the head of John the Baptist and writhing around on the floor of the stage.⁶

Indeed, *Salome*, one of the most notorious debuts in opera history, is susceptible still today to the most indecent, shocking dramaturgical decisions; as John Williamson remarks, "few operas have provoked more critical discord on their first appearance than *Salome*, and the controversy still persists."⁷ And yet, *Salome* can also be approached critically as a site of *possibility* rather than of ritualized scandal. In a recent review for *Opera Quarterly* of Stefan Herheim's

"Salome," San Francisco Opera, accessed April 17, 2012, <http://sfopera.com/Watch/Listen/Grand-Opera-Cinema-Series/Series-3/Salome.aspx.html>.

⁶ *Richard Strauss: Salome*, DVD, directed by David McVicar (2008; London, UK: Opus Arte, 2008). The performance of Stefan Herheim's *Salome* at the Salzburger Osterfestspiele has not been released on DVD.

⁷ John Williamson, "Critical Reception," in *The Cambridge Opera Handbook to Salome* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 131.

Salome at the 2011 Salzburger Osterfestspiele, Micaela Barinello opens with the following insight:

Staging Richard Strauss's *Salome* means visualizing a world whose externalities are never objectively defined and whose characters cannot agree on what they see. The text presents its audience not with a concrete reality but a shifting mosaic of perceptions and impressions. But portraying an unstable visual field in a visual art such as stage production is a formidable challenge, and directors have tended to dodge these issues. Most often they resort to salaciousness, giving us a group of diseased, often drunken neurotics and an atmosphere tinged with exoticism that frequently slips into camp (even before reaching the ten-minute striptease and the severed head).⁸

Barinello's assessment brings to the fore important issues of hermeneutical inconsistency within the operatic text itself. Accordingly we may ask not only whether the characters experience the same reality, but also if Salome possesses agency over any of those realities and thus over her audience both onstage and in the theater: is dancing an empowering device, as a trap for the desiring gaze of the onlookers, or is she merely a plaything, the projection of King Herod's fantasy? As Baranello suggests, contemporary productions thrive on the effect of illusion

⁸ Micaela K. Baranello, "Review: Richard Strauss, *Salome*," in *The Opera Quarterly* 27 (2011): 331-337.

Salome. By Richard Strauss. Libretto by Oscar Wilde, trans., by Hedwig Lachman. Dir. Stefan Herheim. Perf. Berlin Philharmonic. Con. Sir Simon Rattle. Salzburger Osterfestspiele, Großes Festspielhaus. 21 April 2012.

and fantasy projections, often making “no attempt to clean up or modernize the more transgressive elements of the text.”⁹

It would seem the counterpart to this trend is Guy Joosten’s 2008 *Salome*, a production that is “shocking” only because it avoids reverting to any overdone gratuitous imagery. The production had its first performances at the Gran Teatro de Liceu in Barcelona and Theatre de la Monnaie in Brussels. The cast included soprano Nina Stemme in the title role, baritone Robert Brubaker as King Herod, and Mark Delavan as John the Baptist, with sets by Martin Zehetgruber, costumes by Heide Kastler, and lighting by Manfred Voss.¹⁰ For my analysis, I refer to a video recording of a 2008 performance at the Gran Teatro de Liceu, which can be found in full at the YouTube URL below, as the performance has not been released on DVD.¹¹ Joosten’s rendition purges the text of illusory desires, but also of obscenities, to deliver a revisionist performance that deconstructs these most familiar aspects of Strauss’s heavily traversed text. If Stefan Herheim’s production deals with the ambiguity of dramatic events as manifestations of psychologies and interiorities, Joosten’s production instead draws our attention to

⁹ Ibid., 335.

¹⁰ *Salome*. By Richard Strauss. Libretto by Oscar Wilde, trans., by Hedwig Lachman. Dir. Guy Joosten. Perf. Orquestra Simfónica del Gran Teatre del Liceu. Con. Michael Boder. Gran Teatre de Liceu. July 2008.

¹¹ “R. Strauss *Salome* (1905) 1/11 Nina Stemme, Robert Brubaker” [2008]. Video clip. Accessed April 5, 2012.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbQSAa0koRk&feature=bf_prev&list=PLF7F05EF1120C701C&lf=results_main

“R. Strauss *Salome* (1905) 8/11 Dance of the Seven Veils.” [2008]. Video clip. Accessed April 5, 2012. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVRiUsAPquw&feature=bf_next&list=PLF7F05EF1120C701C.

“R. Strauss *Salome* (1905) 11/11.” [2008]. Video clip. Accessed April 5, 2012.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmEkFtlSnyM&feature=bf_next&list=PLF7F05EF1120C701C.

the very same elements, but without staging extended moments of any one single character's fantasy. In other words, Joosten's *Salome* depicts an objective reality, while remaining faithful to the plot, and the characters' personae. Additionally, Joosten takes the novel opportunity to make a mockery out of some of the most clichéd and cherished moments of the opera. This revisionist treatment of *Salome* is best exemplified by the famous Dance of the Seven Veils, and by Salome's final monologue. These two scenes, therefore, are not only plot moments in the linear progression of the narrative, but are also instances of incisive commentary on *Salome*.

In this chapter, I provide a general discussion on the trend in current opera scholarship to study performances of operatic texts, as well as how new or so-called "radical" concepts can transform or undermine traditional operatic texts. An essential volume on this matter is David Levin's book *Unsettling Opera*. Levin's study provides the context from which I propose that Strauss's modernist work has always been "unsettled." Through a critical analysis of the performance of two most famous moments in *Salome*—The Dance of the Seven Veils, and the closing moments of Salome's final ecstatic reverie to the head of John the Baptist—I show how Joosten's *Salome* is a reinvention of this operatic text and its performance tradition. It is what we might call a "radical" production insofar as it objectifies and externalizes the unspoken expectations that have come to define every performance of Strauss's opera. The radical nature of this production lies not only in the setting, but also in the way it leaves little room for psychological

projections, and therefore exposes us to the “objective reality” of the opera. At the center of this project is a conception of the operatic text as enacted in *performance*—that is, something active and dynamic onstage with which we as spectators are asked, or rather forced, to engage.

Additionally, I work from the premise that the performance of an opera production is precisely where meaning and critical readings are found and are most valuable. Levin similarly critiques Carolyn Abbate’s often cited and polemical claim that the “drastic” quality of music is uncritical because we are inundated with the presence of sound as a phenomenon.¹² I wish to blur these lines by suggesting that what in the study of musicology is referred to as “the work” in the abstract, mystically immutable form, has the potential to be at once *present* and entirely *absent*.

Clemens Risi constructs a critical methodology with which to account for aspects of spectatorship that involve what he refers to as both “sense and sensibility.” He posits that the rise of *Regietheater*, or the “director’s theater,” has defined the audience’s perception of opera performances on the simultaneous grounds of intellectual stimulation and immersive experience, through both presence and representation:

On the one hand, producers and audiences derive intellectual pleasure from wrestling with new modes of reading and interpretation. On the other hand, we find moments that are formulated and experienced as something that cannot be described as the presentation of anything concrete (representation). Rather, they elicit

¹² Carolyn Abbate, “Music: Drastic or Gnostic,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 505-536.

first and foremost intensive responses and corporeal reactions to what has been experienced. These moments are frequently characterized by irritation, an interruption of understanding, intensity, a sudden consciousness of perception or time. They lead to a feeling of bodily participation (presence).

In each performance, the relationship between representation and presence, sense (*Sinn*) and sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) determines the act of perception. In the process, representation and presence in no way cancel each other out. On the contrary: sense and sensibility, *Sinn* and *Sinnlichkeit*, are co-determinate, conditioning one another.¹³

Here, Risi is critiquing the rigid binarism proposed by Abbate that active performances of music are unassailable to criticism due to music's supposed drastic quality and ability to stimulate our senses in the moment. I would take Risi's theory further with regard to the present analysis to suggest that we can indeed have both imminent enjoyment in the musical and dramatic presence of the text in abstraction, while still being critically involved through a particular director's interpretation. As we shall see, Joosten's *performative text* critiques and redefines the *operatic text* of Strauss's *Salome*. Joosten takes modern reinvention to an unprecedented level in order to use performance as a critical tool.

¹³ Clemens Risi, "Sinn und Sinnlichkeit in der Oper: zu Hans Neuenfels' *Idomeneo* an der Deutschen Oper Berlin," *Theater der Zeit* 6 (June 2003): 38-39, quoted and trans. in David Levin, *Unsettling Opera*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 10.

Staging the Unsettled

The decisions of opera directors run the gamut of reiterating history, casting characters in an ironical light, remaining faithful to notions of tradition through textual “fidelity,” or, in what is possibly the most frequent case with modern *Regietheater*, offer up a reading that is provocative and unexpected. This latter brand of radical stage practice typically incites the most controversy as evidenced by the by-now-classic Peter Sellar’s reimaginings of the Mozart-Da Ponte operas, with *Don Giovanni* in Harlem, *Così fan tutte* in a diner, and *Le nozze di Figaro* in the Trump Tower. This kind of critical interrogation of the canon by innovative directors has represented a growing trend in opera theaters over the last few decades. David Levin’s study considers “what happens when operas that are more or less comfortably ensconced in the canon—works by Mozart, Verdi, or Wagner—are thoroughly rethought and dramatically recast onstage” to ultimately examine how productions “unsettle a work that has been thought to be settled.” Levin takes the idea of unsettledness further to suggest that opera itself is unsettled due in part to the now customary integration of other expressive forms into the medium, such as dance and film, as well as textual and cultural analyses.¹⁴ Moreover, while Levin approaches the more recently “unsettled” productions of canonized works by Mozart, Wagner and Verdi, he also recognizes that some operas such as Alexander Zemlinsky’s *Der König Kandaules* are inherently “unsettled.” I wish to take this latter notion as a point of departure for *Salome*.

¹⁴ David Levin, *Unsettling Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 3.

Strauss's opera has indeed been "unsettled" since its premiere. The unseemliness is scripted into the dramaturgy, most strikingly in Salome's monologue, in which the singer must come into personal contact with a bloody, decapitated head. Thus the opera's dramaturgical center is about the performance of necrophilia. In this sense, the "unsettledness" to which Levin refers does not arise from creative directorship, but rather exists already as a dramaturgical problem in the operatic text. Therefore we might wonder if even *Regietheater* and its programmatically radical interpretations would be able to make us see *Salome* with fresh eyes, rather than replicating, ad infinitum, the same old scandal. Lawrence Kramer provocatively argues that *Salome* (and Salome) has never truly been emancipated from its traditional shackles, in the sense that every production, no matter how unorthodox, gets caught in the same mode of performance: "performances of *Salome* stubbornly keep reverting to the fin-de-siècle norm."¹⁵ For the decadent writer Joris-Karl Huysmans, and artists such as Aubrey Beardsley and Wilde, for instance, Salome served as a figure onto which they could project their own decadent and artistic ideologies. Thus, for such fin-de-siècle individuals, the Judean princess stood as a great symbol of undying lust, the morbid and sexual connotations of which carry on still today.

As I have suggested, there is an objective reality with which *Salome*, over time, has come to represent and which re-presents itself to us again and again in (live) performance. In more traditional operas, we may take this objective reality to be the operatic *text*. Most often, the familiar and anticipated moments of an operatic text are musical numbers: Leporello's catalogue aria in *Don Giovanni*, or

¹⁵ Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture*, 167.

Violetta's tragic final aria in *La Traviata*. But the characters and events of *Salome* have acquired a degree of autonomy from the music and seem to exist on their own as "living pictures" whose history and cultural baggage impend, irrevocably, on every performance. Salome's monologue, for instance, is both an aria and the notorious image of a woman fondling a bloody head.

Operagoers today are in some respect spectators with a presupposed body of knowledge about the history of a work and of its productions. From this knowledge, we form expectations about that which is presented to us by directors and stage designers, who are intermediaries between the audience and the fulfillment (or denial) of such expectations. The issue of what a production *does* to a text is at the forefront of current scholarly inquiry on opera. Despite the tendency to refute the normative function of scores and librettos for their actualizations in performance, productions, nevertheless rely on a standard of convention that arises from an accrued performance history of an operatic text, directors' personal ideas about the historical, and often, the integration of contemporary social, political, or artistic issues. The tension brought about through this juxtaposition of operatic tradition and contemporary concerns suggests the presence of an immutable, albeit silent and invisible text which is contrasted through that which is travestied or exalted in the course of reinvention on stage. Thus, opera becomes the constant interplay between the *presence* and *absence* of such a text, as mentioned above. Moreover, "tradition," as a concept, may exist in relation to a particular work (i.e., the expectations of the catalogue aria in *Don Giovanni*, or a particular *mise-en-scene* for a production of *Siegfried*),

or through the very socio-cultural ritual of opera. Presumably the goal of a radical staging of an operatic work is to edify us in unexpected and compelling ways. This may be achieved by highlighting particular subtexts present in the libretto, or by imposing an entirely external concept that resonates with a particular director's aims.

Therefore, *Salome* in performance is the summation of a number of previous performances and their relation to the operatic text. The scene of Salome's kissing the head of John the Baptist however has also accrued a long history in painting and iconography, which the operatic character of Salome has then inherited for the stage. Within a larger discussion of the power of the gaze in the opera, Lawrence Kramer comments on the *tableau vivant* nature of the final monologue.¹⁶ The gaze, itself a force which freezes Salome in place, holds her under a kind of lens, as she is not just an operatic figure, but an historic and artistic icon, as well. Her iconic nature is also apparent in the dance scene. In reference to Salome's monologue, the complement to the dance scene, Kramer points out how "the scene strips Salome of the gestural freedom of her dance and exposes her to the full power of the gaze"; she is "frozen" here as the "music stretch[es] time out like taffy."¹⁷ If during her dance Salome is frozen on stage, it is because this scene is a pictorial moment grafted into the dramaturgy itself. Her very representation *on stage* is akin to the painted depictions of her by the Symbolist and Decadent artists at the time prolonging a subject known throughout history from the Bible to later literary and painterly sources. Salome's history in

¹⁶ Ibid., 141.

¹⁷ Ibid.

pictures, clutching the bloody head, consists of the repetition of an aestheticized image – something that if not timeless we can define as an anachronism in so far as it retains an irreducibility in form despite its ability to undergo transformations through time. In her book *Time Passing*, Agacinski propounds a definition for the historical *relic*. As a cultural or artistic object, the relic retains a particular form despite transformation and movement through time. More than this, the relic seems as if to emerge from a distant time and place, arising as “strange and fascinating...remains that...encumber the present.”¹⁸ Additionally, Agacinsky suggests we collectively ascribe a degree of aesthetic fidelity to perennial forms, despite a change in function. This fidelity thereby shapes our perception of concepts and their content, even if they become clichés or commonplaces.¹⁹ Salome is a relic because her form has stayed the same through a long, heterogeneous plurality of histories from biblical times to turn-of-the-century modernism, and persists still today.

Interestingly, and with Strauss’s opera especially, the perennial form, or *relic* of Salome as the biblical figure of the dancing Judean princess is for the first time rendered through and during *performance*, supported by music to transfix literally her image and the head in time, and through time. Furthermore, since Salome resurfaced prominently as a site of fascination for artistic modernity at the turn-of-the-century concluding with Strauss’s opera, her status as relic is particularly notable. As a “relic,” then, in addition to having a continued existence through *historical* time, Salome plays out, time and again, on the stage, in the here

¹⁸ Agacinsky, *Time Passing*, 113.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

and now of the performance. This is the Salome that has been executed through exhaustive, predetermined dramaturgy, and is especially susceptible to a clichéd, kitsch repetition. In this chapter, I hope to reveal through an analysis of a performance that in my view most “emancipates” the work how many productions of *Salome* have fallen into a dramaturgical “rut.”

My analysis will focus on two scenes: Salome’s Dance of the Seven Veils, and the last moments of Salome’s final monologue. Through a close reading, I will show how Joosten’s rendition of *Salome* is an uncharacteristically contained spectacle, antithetical to the gory, passionate outbursts of necrophilia that have characterized many productions. I will then analyze the infamous Dance of the Seven Veils, wherein we get neither a dance, as such, nor any variation on the stripping of veils, but instead a kind of extradiegetic referencing of the dance.

The Production

Guy Joosten's *Salome* at the Gran Teatre del Liceu features a muted industrial stage set, with dingy, concrete walls. The entire opening scene seems to have been submerged within John the Baptist's underground prison. We see a glimpse of King Herod's dinner party, which has been placed at the far back of the stage, encased within makeshift walls so as to occupy a separate area on the stage. The stage layout literally segments the action into two discrete scenes for an opera that takes place as one episode. This differentiation of space is symbolic of the relationship pitted between John the Baptist and the rest of the characters. Ironically, the imprisoned prophet here is granted the mobility to enter and exit his "prison" at will, while the guests in turn are restricted to the confined space of the banquet table—in a sense rendered prisoners, themselves. Herod, his court, and dinner guests seemingly live in fear of the holy man, calling at times on "secret service" to protect them.

Already, the starkly unfinished stage design contributes to an overall *mis-en-scène* of imperfection—a place open for revision, repair, and possibility. Kind Herod is dressed in a black suit, unmistakably resembling fashion mogul Karl Lagerfeld. Herod's soldiers are recast as secret agents, donning black suits, dark glasses, and handguns. They circle around the banquet space, which is enclosed by a crude barrier made from bare planks of wood covered with heavy plastic sheets as if freshly pulled from a construction site. Contrasting ostentatiously with the crude outer walls of this bunker is a spectacular chandelier hanging from the ceiling.

Permeating both the interior of the banquet space, and the outer area that surrounds it is the acousmatic voice of John the Baptist. Aurally omnipresent, the prophet's physical body remains outside the caged-in banquet area for the entirety of the drama until the very last and very unexpected moment. After Herod's fatal command, "Man töte dieses Weib!" John the Baptist, having been beheaded, steps in full-bodied and in the flesh, juxtaposed with the image of his severed head.

Far from portraying Salome as the typical *femme fatale*, Joosten depicts her as a more naïve, youthful character. Stemme's modern, sleek appearance contributes to our impression of her innocent persona. She is clad in a modest, pure white, silk gown, adorned with a single black bow at the shoulder. Her hair is neatly pulled back into a youthful ponytail; on the whole, she exudes a girlish countenance, fresh-faced rather than sultry. In spite of this unthreatening façade, Salome nonetheless exhibits an assertive presence on stage—cool and ennobled.

Through this depiction of Salome, Joosten takes advantage of her adaptive quality and possibility to become a character placed somewhere between *femme fatale* and naïve victim. Salome's potential for representation is in many productions reduced only to Decadent imageries that seem to take precedence for their spectacular value, especially in the infamous Dance of the Seven Veils, and Salome's final outpouring to the disembodied head. Given the capacity of the libretto and of the music to suggest several aspects of her character at once, a director must decide which subtext to favor, or invent a more complex and equivocal portrait. Joosten cast Salome's character as a kind of clean slate, entirely aloof, reserved and cool, accented by her pure white costume.

The Dance of the Seven Veils: Mockery and Denial



Figure 1. *Salome Mocking Her Dance*

Herod and his guests are seated for dinner. Herod pleads relentlessly with Salome that she dances for him. She finally concedes, but only if in return, he promises her the head of John the Baptist. Strauss's brazen music for the dance begins with the familiar rendering of the "exotic" through rapid timpani strokes, tambourine colors, and oboe flourishes. Stemme's gestures mock the pan-exotic tinge of the music itself, as a mere Western reflection on the Orient. Although still loosely in choreography with the music, Stemme's movement does not anticipate the *event* that is the Dance of the Seven Veils. Instead, she thoughtlessly moves her arms in ridicule of the dance, pointing them angularly in either direction and above her head as if she were setting out to begin the ersatz Egyptian "sand dance," itself a kind of egregious gesture of pan-exoticism, seemingly poking fun at the music as

exotic signifier.²⁰ Thus, her movements mock deliberately both the music and the very act of the dance. After a few moments of Stemme’s decisive yet risible “dancing,” she throws her arms up with insouciance before sitting with an air of impassivity on the edge of the table, bringing the already-false dramatic momentum to a halt. (Figure 1.) The efficacy, and indeed humor in this moment is founded upon the set-up of a false beginning, and subsequent *denial* of the dance.

As the scene continues, Stemme slinks from the audience’s view underneath the banquet table to ostensibly “flirt” with the male guests seated for dinner (with the exception of Herod, whom she passes over completely). Moments later, Stemme’s arm emerges from beneath the table, holding in her hand an unexpected object: a videocassette tape.



Figure 2. *Salome Emerges With a VHS Tape*

Joosten’s dance scene occasions a deeper, self-referential reading of the opera. Once Salome accepts Herod’s bid to dance, Strauss’s lurid, rhythmically charged music begins. The dance is a crucially defining moment in any production of *Salome* because it is the ultimate moment of voyeurism, but more

²⁰The act “Wilson, Keppel, and Betty” performed a comic version of the Egyptian Sand Dance in music halls throughout the 1930s and 50s called “Do the Egyptian.” The long-running and popular routine was a parody on the way in which Egyptian figures were depicted.

than this, we expect movement to coordinate with music. Instead the spectacle of Salome dancing is replaced by another sort of spectacle: the projection of a home-movie which contains remnants of Salome's psychologically and emotionally abusive past. (Figure 3.) Salome inserts the VHS into a projector machine, and subsequently images of her as a child are displayed on a large screen with uncomfortably close views of her face, feet, and mouth. The camera lens (a gaze controlled of course by Herod), probe Salome as object. During this "performance," the soprano, Stemme remains on stage as the movie plays, seated to the far left in an armchair. The experience is not strictly one of viewing Salome, as a more traditional dance centered on the singer would occasion. If it is implied that Salome is contained within the confines of the mediatized dance, probed and recreated through the eyes of the male gaze, she is also externally embodied by the physical presence of Stemme.

Voyeurism characterizes this episode by means of a mirroring effect, refracting and thematizing *looking* amid the characters. But it is important to note that here voyeurism is treated as a motif, rather than as its dramatic content. It allows the audience to apprehend simultaneously a story of adolescent abuse, for which the video stands to reveal a past of hidden secrets and emotions, as well as the visual metaphor of voyeurism itself. Reversing the history of *Salome's* production and reception, Joosten discovers its potential for commentary through performance.

The stage setup extends this theme of voyeurism for the audience: we are able to observe not only Salome as a child on video and Salome as the adult

manipulator of the lustful gaze, but also Herod's embarrassment. Thus the stage set grants us a perspective from which we can look *in*, rather than simply gaze at, the action. And yet our involvement is more active than passive because we are confronted with dance as an interrogative, not as given dramatic content. Moreover, Joosten externalizes one of the main themes of the text, the dance, in the form of a VHS tape, which he then manipulates by placing into a video projection machine. Salome exhibits a mediated representation of the "dance" on the screen, which engenders an effect of *mise-en-abyme* by placing in lieu of the performance of Salome's dance a recording of the dance, which in turn captures and reifies the work's central concern: voyeurism.



Figure 3. *Watching Home Movies*

The effect of *looking in* is especially palpable since the banquet room is situated toward the front of the stage so to suggest a fourth wall coinciding with the vertical limit of the proscenium arch. The audience is situated beyond the "fourth wall." (Figure 4.) As the home movie plays on, disapproving reactions

from the guests soon reveal that the disturbing videos are in fact a part of Herod's secret fetish for the young Salome. Much to Herod's chagrin after having been exposed as a pedophile, he frantically rips down the cloth onto which the movie has been projected. Prompted by this, Salome suddenly grabs the video projection machine and twists it around so that the bright beam of light coming from the front of the projector directly faces the audience as if to project the movie onto the "invisible" fourth wall that we, as spectators, gaze through.



Figure 4. *Beyond the "Fourth Wall"*

At this moment the effect of the "fourth wall" is dispelled as the viewer finds his or herself watching as Herod tries to escape the awkward predicament in which Salome has placed him. He attempts to exit the banquet space, which has since been enclosed completely. Equally as uncomfortable is our positioning in this matter. Salome's arresting gesture of directing the beam of light at the audience is both a way to address the distance between spectator and stage, and a way to expose the complicit interaction between the two. The intense beam of light from the projector strikes the audience in an accusatory manner through a

symbolic turn of the gaze—a gaze that is traditionally unreciprocal—from spectacle to audience. (Figure 5.) This gesture, moreover, is one of indictment for the audience’s looking, and thus participation, in Salome’s subjugation. It is ironic then that it is Salome herself who subverts the gaze, as her very existence on stage is entirely bound up with complicit gazing.

Joosten’s treatment of the iconic Dance of the Seven Veils can be read not only as a creative solution to a problem of opera staging, but also as a full objectification of the dance through the ironic use of multimedia. First, the dance is referred to so that we are made aware of its position and function —because it is a *knowing* and purposeful reference. Counter to conventional expectations, the moment of the dance is betokened not by an invitation to watch Salome, or any anticipatory gesture toward dance-like action, but by the appearance of an object, a videocassette. Thus, the Dance of The Seven Veils, which in itself is a kind of ceremonial moment within the operatic canon, is rather unceremoniously popped into a VHS player.



Figure 5. *Returning of the Gaze*

Supplanting the bodily *presence* of the dance with a material object is a sardonic gesture as it is Salome who has always been object *par excellence*. She is the feminine spectacle upon whom countless audiences have cast their gaze. Stemme, as Salome, demands our look only in so far as she mocks the very dance typically used to entrap her character within the phallic power of Herod's gaze.

As a technology of inscription and reproduction, the nature of the VHS tape is itself one that presupposes repetition through *replay*. That Joosten uses the tape as a medium through which to reference and externalize the dance itself within the opera is all the more striking. This gesture critiques the way in which the dance is replayed, as it were, through the custom of performance. Here, a live dance is promised and then abruptly denied or deferred to a mediated one. Herod's desire is unveiled, and Salome's dance now lives on in an altered form, recorded on a tape, repeatable at will. The irony is that while Salome is physically framed and re-created on the screen, this is only a representation of the *real* Salome, for whom the video remains external. Salome participates in the viewing as a spectator herself, rather than as the sole object of the gaze.

Salome's deliberate mimicry of the dance forces us to *recognize* the dance through parody. Adorno similarly comments on the expectation of opera to dissimulate, "The closer opera gets to a parody of itself, the closer it is to its own particular element."²¹ At this point in the drama, dance is the medium through which one might acknowledge this "particular element" with which Adorno characterizes opera by virtue of its ability to entertain through a childlike

²¹ Theodor Adorno, "Bourgeois Opera," in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David Levin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 26.

“dissimulation.” Except here, the parody is advertent. The irony of the gesture disavows the pleasure to be had from seeing a “proper” live enactment of the Dance of the Seven Veils. The blatant self-reflexivity of Stemme’s gestures expose the inner workings of the spectacle of Salome’s dance through comic relief, and thus breaks down opera’s façade of illusion and dissimulation. As Bryan Gilliam has noted, dance and humor served as central elements to Strauss’ artistic and philosophical outlook at the turn of the twentieth century. Moreover, beginning with the tone poem *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, to the creation of his earliest operas, *Feuersnot* and *Salome*, and then to his later works like *Der Rosenkavalier*, Strauss was drawn by the gesture of the dance as an outlet for levity, or Nietzschean “iconoclastic laughter” in stark contrast to Wagnerian metaphysics. As Gilliam remarks “it is hard to think of a Strauss opera without a reference to dance.”²² Among the composer’s various usages of dance, however, none is more centered on the body than is *Salome*. More specifically, in Joosten’s production the “dance object” on video is projected onto the screen at precisely the point in the score when Strauss ostensibly makes reference to the Viennese waltz.²³ The strings enter on a long anacrusis in triple meter, and the waltz rhythm continues for a few measures before dissolving into what Lawrence Gilman refers to as the opera’s leitmotive of “Prophecy.”²⁴

²² Bryan Gilliam, “Strauss and the Sexual Body: the Erotics of Humor, Philosophy, and Ego-Assertion,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss*, (New York: Cambridge University Press), 269-279, p. 271

²³ Richard Strauss, *Salome* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1981), three bars before rehearsal L

²⁴ Lawrence Gilman, *Strauss’s “Salome”: A Guide To the Opera With Musical Illustrations*, (New York: John Lane Company, 1907), 68.

The invocation of waltz is unmistakable at this point in the score (Figure 6.) and musically reflects the way in which the dance has been referenced, and thereby externalized through the use of visual media within the grander representational framework of the opera.



Figure 6. *Invoking the Waltz*

“Salomes Tanz” is the only titled portion in the score, immediately setting it apart as a separate number—as a performance within a performance. The dance is an interpolation to the opera, the importance of which is reflected by the most pressing question on everyone’s mind in anticipation of any *Salome* production: “Will she take off the last veil?” How the director will handle Salome’s perennial and provocative dance is a question central to the drama, as the dance incites attention as an independent showpiece.

The nature of the dance as an independent spectacle is reflected historically as “variations” on the dance proliferated in excised form from the context of Strauss’s music drama throughout the early twentieth century. As evidenced by the vaudeville acts of the early 1900s, which featured dancers like Loie Fuller, Ida Rubinstein, and Maud Allen, renditions of Salome’s dance caught

on as a showpiece outside of the performance boundaries of Strauss' work. The dance went viral as a phenomenon known as "Salomania" spread throughout Europe and America.²⁵ As an outgrowth of the decadent fascination with the exotic and sexualized figure of Salome, the use of the dance as a form of spectacular entertainment consummated its status as a self-standing entity from an early date. The adaptation of *Salome* to early twentieth century vaudeville acts reflects her general presence in the artistic and cultural consciousness at the time, but more specifically, attests to the ubiquity of the dance, highlighting it as a separate performative text. An outgrowth of this explosive trend, for example, was Ida Rubinstein's appearance as *Cleopatra*, which stemmed from the vein of popularized Salome acts.²⁶ Moreover, the association of Salome with dance is deeply rooted in pictorial art, and her dance originates with her biblical character. While an iconographic history of Salome is too broad for my purposes here, I want to point out that the dance was swiftly popularized as a spectacle in the decade surrounding, and soon after the premiere of Strauss' opera.

Musically, the dance taken as a separate entity from the narrative of Strauss' "music drama," has always been, and continues to be, one in which the aural and the visual are woven into the narrative. This is the dramaturgical decision director David McVicar took with his 2008 production of *Salome* for the Royal Opera House. McVicar exchanges the dance for a dream-sequence featuring an ostensibly pedophilic Herod and his virginal prey, Salome, waltzing across an ever-transforming stage scenery. McVicar's version integrates the dance

²⁵ Davina Caddy, "Variations on the Dance of the Seven Veils," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17 (2005): 37-58

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

into the narrative by using the dream space as a kind of tactic wherein the dance is incorporated seamlessly into the diegesis as a personal fantasy. In his 1996 staging of *Salome*, filmmaker Atom Egoyan supplants the live-action spectacle of the dance with a filmic projection. Salome's dress endlessly lengthens and transforms into a vast screen of fabric encompassing the entire stage space. In a gesture very similar to Joosten's rendering, the audience then watches the projection of a home movie displaying a young, innocent Salome. This decision to use film to represent the dance reflects a more recent trend to turn to other forms of media in staging the dance. In a review of Egoyan's famous production, David Levin comments, "What is the all-too-familiar music of Salome's dance today, if not film music?"²⁷

If we view the dance as a cultural relic insofar as it has traditionally conformed to an "outmoded" decadent or scandalous aesthetic, it is fitting that Joosten confines Salome's dance to a form of outmoded technology such as the video-cassette tape, a technological relic. Thus, the obsolescence of the tape underscores the dance as a kind of *bad object*, repellant and ineffectual, yet still worthy of fascination, both culturally and artistically. A relic of technological modernity symbolically represents the dance, an outmoded spectacle of artistic modernity that stands for the erotic power of the *femme fatale* and hallmark of the *fin-de-siecle* New Woman.²⁸ If the dance is associated with Decadent ideology,

²⁷ See David Levin, "Operatic School for Scandal, *Salome* by Richard Strauss: Atom Egoyan," *Performing Arts Journal* 19 (1997): 52-57.

²⁸ See, for example, Petra Dierkes-Thrun, *Salome's Modernity*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011) See also the chapter, "New Woman" in Karl Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992, p. 129-159.

embracing “degenerate” subject matters erotic and macabre, it is significant that the artistic movement is also connected to conflicting tensions of temporal stasis, retrogression, and progress. As David Weir has pointed out, if Decadence and its manifestations embodied an avant-garde spirit, it was nonetheless drained of all the futuristic energy of the avant-garde.²⁹ In this way, Joosten doubly enmeshes the dance—already a kind of relic—in an historically anachronistic undercurrent by inscribing it onto what today is considered an out-of-date form of media such as the VHS tape.

Final Scene: Enter the Phantom

Joosten’s production presents *Salome* as *opera*. The imaginary, fictional world on stage is used to reference the drama in a way that undermines our total immersion in it. In accordance with Brechtian theater theory, the breakage of this immersive link coincides with the creation of *Verfremdungseffekt*, the effect of distancing from the opera’s dramatic and emotional content. The production presents the opera as a seamless narrative, but also as a museum-like display of the work’s dramatic components (Salome’s subjugation, Herod’s blame, collective voyeurism, and the act of the dance itself). Rather than depicting a “shifting mosaic of perceptions,” the production is a kind of collage of representations because each component is so pronounced that at times, they do not seem to be in dialogue with one another, but rather starkly juxtaposed on stage. This idea is

Additionally, Walter Benjamin describes the Decadent, or Jugendstil style as an “attempt on the part of art to come to terms with technology”

²⁹David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 6.

potently and vividly illustrated just moments before the finale of Joosten's production when John the Baptist, now revenant, returns full-bodied, new and intact, to the stage.

Guided by general principles of artistic liberty for delivering operatic texts, one of the cruxes of modern staging and of *Regietheater* is a constant play between fulfilling and denying expectations. Richard Strauss's pithy description of *Salome* as "a scherzo with a fatal conclusion," quickly summarizes what has become the ultimate expectation of any staging: Salome's demise. However, in the most striking moment of Guy Joosten's production, Salome does not reach her "fatal conclusion" as expected. Instead her fate is rendered ambiguous. Joosten gives us a Salome who, after kissing the mouth of the disembodied head, sprawls back in her chair, fulfilled and in a state of ecstasy. The death scene is posited not as recompense for Salome's perverse obsession, but rather as a confrontation external to the diegesis by virtue of her resistance to adhere to textual form.

By means of this inconclusive gesture, the performance is marked as a disavowal of audience recognition as it ruptures the textual form in two unmistakable ways: Salome lives, John the Baptist returns. In his analysis of the 1981 staging by the Frankfurt Opera of Verdi's *Aida*, Samuel Weber suggests one way in which the very foundations of the site upon which opera takes place can be shaken through performance. Weber describes the scene in the second act of *Aida* wherein the character Radames digs up the wooden floorboards of the stage with a shovel. It is in this moment that the entire process of recognition through which we experience the operatic spectacle is broken down. Allowing that which is

representational (the character of Radames) to encroach on the *real* of the stage apparatus “undermines the foundations of representation by putting them into (the) play.”³⁰

As discussed above, a similar “displacing” takes place during Joosten’s Dance of the Seven Veils, in which the dance is replaced by a home movie which reveals Salome’s childhood abuse. Voyeurism, the very essence of the dance, is quite literally sucked into the projector and thrown out again, placed on the screen within the performance. Joosten undermines not the concrete foundations of the stage space, but similarly compromises the secured status of this space by exposing its components from *within*: The banquet scene is *represented* by being placed in a box with definitive boundaries, and the Dance is likewise concretely inscribed onto a VHS tape, which is then “put into (the) play.”

In the closing moments of the opera, Herod delivers the condemning imperative, “Man, töte dieses Weib!” after which Stemme, as Salome, remains precisely in the same place both in body and in mind. Seated at the end of the banquet table, she is still alive and there are no soldiers in sight with which to fulfill the promise of her murder. This refusal, and moreover, ineffectiveness of the libretto, to kill Salome turns the climactic event of her death on its head. Salome’s persistence to live is an act of violence against the textual source, and as such alters the perception of the audience for whom it is a custom to witness (like the dance) the *replaying* of Salome’s murder again and again through performance. Even if one considers her death to be symbolic, denoting a figural or

³⁰Samuel Weber, “Taking Place: Toward a Theater of Dislocation,” in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed., David Levin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 117.

spiritual death, and thereby more closely resembling Kramer's suggestion of this moment as a kind of *Liebestod* or spiritual transfiguration,³¹ this would still categorize it as a death in keeping with the finale's effect of consummation through repetition. However, through the disavowal of such a paradigmatic expectation, it is as if we are looking at Salome after an imagined death by virtue of the murder's failure to take place. We envision a murder in place of the one left absent.

Equally as jarring is the (re)entrance of John the Baptist within the closing moments of the opera. The prophet returns to the stage re-embodied, his entrance accompanied by the violent music we associate with the carrying out of Herod's lethal orders occasioning Salome's destruction. Here, the musical score with which Strauss "faithfully preserves Herod's attempt to blot Salome out," as Kramer suggests—the ascending chromatic outburst, high shrills in the woodwinds, and final driving utterances in the low brass—are reappropriated to instead punctuate the uncanny recurrence of the prophet. Salome, impervious to Herod's histrionics and Strauss's lethal music, whips her head around synchronously with the final driving figures of the orchestra, freezing as she aligns face-to-face with John the Baptist, now turned revenant. (See Figure 7.)

These closing moments reveal the degree to which meaning comes directly from the presence engendered in the "visuality" of the performance, rendering the textual unremarkable and altogether ineffective. Here, in addition to crumbling structures of expectation, the production also plays with language. The utterance, "Kill this woman!" ushers in the figure of John the Baptist, whose

³¹Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture*, 163.

murder typically relegates his representability to the partial object of his head, his corporeal qualities now *un*-representable albeit through Salome's own recount.³² By appearing once again onstage, he is now a figure displaced both temporally and narratively. This diegetic and psychological juncture gives rise to a temporal "phantom."



Figure 7. *A Phantom in the Opera*

John the Baptist marks a breach in the text through his return. However, his return is unique, as it does not give rise to same effect as the entrance of Mozart's Commendatore or the ghost of Banquo in Verdi's *Macbeth* since these

³² "Jochanaan, Jochanaa, you were beautiful, your body was an ivory column atop silver feet. Your body was a garden full of doves and silver lilies. Nothing in the world was as white as your body. Nothing in the world was as black as your hair. In the whole world, nothing so red as your mouth. Your voice was an incense holder and if I looked at you, I heard a mysterious music." (Translation my own.)

"Jochanaan, Jochanaan, du warst schön. Dein Leib war eine Elfenbeinsäule auf silbernen Füßen. Er war ein Garten voller Tauben in der Silberlilien Glanz. Nichts in der Welt war so weiß wie dein Leib. Nichts in der Welt war so schwarz wie dein Haar. In der ganzen Welt war nichts so rot wie dein Mund. Deine Stimme war ein Weihrauchgefäß, und wenn ich dich ansah, hörte ich geheimnisvolle Musik."

instances *anticipate* the gesture of re-presence. Resisting the similar category of “ghost” as a narrative device, the phantom of the prophet creates a tension that, rather than explained through the text, works against it. This phantom steps into a superdiegetic space because his return conspicuously displaces a *dramatis persona* whose purpose as a symbol in the form of a disembodied head has been entrenched as a cultural artifact, first in the history of art, and then of opera.

In this finale, the power of the visual over the textual is achieved through direct contradictions. The audience is challenged by transgressions of death in the return of the figures of Salome and John the Baptist, respectively. This confrontation suggests that there is an epistemological basis for the spectator witnessing a performance of *Salome*. Abbate famously analyzes a kind of epistemological breach in the musical score that takes place when Salome leans over the cistern in a breathless moment of desperate listening to *know* if the prophet has indeed been killed. Here, Abbate posits that a singularly “feminine” sonority, manifest through uncharacteristically high double bass notes, breaks Strauss’s hitherto male-gendered sonic frame.³³ Salome impatiently leans over the cistern asking why, if the prophet is dead, he did not scream in resistance; if she were confronted with death, she would surely yell and resist. Thus listening, for Salome, is a way of knowing. When she does not hear the shriek of pain she *expects*, she questions whether the prophet is alive or dead. Since Joosten allows for Salome and John the Baptist to persist, to live, he transforms the typical death

³³ Abbate, “Opera, or The Envoicing of Women,” in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 247-251.

scene through visual representation on stage, and thereby creates a visual breach with the tradition and the text of *Salome*.

When *Salome* is finished off, as is customary in a production faithful to the score and libretto, the object with which we identify is negated. There is satisfaction in her demise. Adorno posits that the institution of opera traditionally is founded upon identification and recognition, so much so that he bemoans the brand of uncritical, blind acceptance with which the public has come to relish in familiar works as a way toward cultural validation.³⁴ In discussing such claims, Samuel Weber suggests that today we continue this process of identification because the *object* toward which we relay our recognition of a work is not “the work” as such, but the *performance*. Our object of identification, according to Weber, is “no longer a represented figure—a hero or heroine, for instance—or a situation, but rather the representation itself, the spectacle as performance.”³⁵ But just what *is* the “object” of *Salome* with which we identify ourselves? True to a large extent in today’s contemporary arena of opera staging wherein the director’s retelling of a text replaces “the work,” this notion, in my view, is less tenable in relation to *Salome*. The object of recognition is a conflation of work and spectacle because so much of “the work” is constituted by spectacle. *Salome*’s dancing body and final monologue are spectacles produced by the work, itself. These moments are inscribed in the text. Therefore, claiming a definitive shift from *text* to *individualized spectacle* fails to define and contain the magnitude to which the heroine and her “situations” remain as sites, or *objects*, of identification. This

³⁴ Adorno, *Bourgeois Opera*, 41.

³⁵ Weber, “Taking Place,” 113.

identification is made all the more tangible due to the moments that incite voyeurism which surround *Salome*, solidifying the audience as subject and Salome as object. As Adorno has suggested, the consumption of opera is essentially an “exercise in recognition.” That, according to Weber, the “representation itself” is cause enough for recognition suggests there is a content (perhaps culled from years of performances) *inherent to* the representation that thus presupposes any and all (re)presentations. In other words, there are still patterns of representation that often behave like the “work itself” through which we are fulfilled of our desire to have something on stage with which to identify as spectators. Rather than “Aida, as beautiful as ever, Aida” it is “Shed the last veil, Salome!”

Such “parameters” of recognition hold power to determine the ways in which characters and events are portrayed by stage directors and scene designers, even in a post-individualistic and post-canonical world. I don’t mean to suggest merely that there are platonic ideals of operatic characters more “authentic” or “true” than any contemporary representation gives justice. Rather, I assert that that there is a holdover of representation, systemic and determinate to opera performance whereby so-called canonical figures remain to transcend the façade of vocal and productorial stardom as well as the infinite possibilities of displacement by way of *mise-en-scène*.

Perhaps rather than a shift in recognition from “the work” to the production, as Weber suggests, our capacity toward self-recognition now is founded upon the very guarantee of a certain paradigm of *disrecognition*. We—

that is, seasoned opera-goers and scholars of opera studies alike—find enjoyment and excitement in new, unsettling or incongruous productions, as Levin and Risi have suggested. For example, Sergio Morabito gives us a Don Giovanni uncharacteristically exculpated of all blame and freed of historical baggage as womanizer through his depiction of the seducer as a cool, modern-day psychiatrist set out to “heal” the neurotic Donna Elvira, and the rest of the cast.³⁶ This kind of disrecognition is a symptom of the postmodern. Even *in spite of* the post-individualized state of opera—within which the audience’s self-recognition relied on the microcosmic representation on stage of middle-class social and political hierarchies—contemporary *disrecognition* is not unrelated to the nostalgia Adorno says is characteristic of the identification of the individual “opera lover” to masterworks of the nineteenth century.³⁷ Indeed, even the most strident disrecognition begets a heightened sense of nostalgia for that which is absent and thus only retrospectively reflected upon, remembered or wished for during performance. For Adorno’s “opera lover,” a familiar tune, stage scenery, or foot-tapping cabaletta is equally as important as their participation in the grander socio-cultural ritual of opera-going, itself. However, today even so-called authentic or traditional stagings, while not radical, are nevertheless “new” since

³⁶ *Don Giovanni*. By Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte. Dir. Sergio Morabito. Perf. Netherland Chamber Orchestra. Cond. Ingo Metzmacher. Nederlands Opera, 2008.

³⁷ Theodor Adorno, “Opera,” in *The Sociology of New Music*, trans., E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury, 1976), 71-84.

ideas about tradition and history are themselves reflections of a modern, or postmodern sensibility, as Richard Taruskin has suggested.³⁸

Contemporary practice, then, of disrecognition allows for new and radical representations of visual forms on stage while still presupposing an ideal that *determines* figuration but does not obviously and determinately delineate their appearance of a character or situation. Disrecognition means a kind of cognitive dissonance between the audience and spectator that interferes with the standard relation of opera to its audience—of the interrelation between subject and object, the latter of which achieves self-identification through the medium of opera and its ability to render through live performance: a “process of identification, in which the alterity of the object as well as the extraterritoriality of the site in which such identification takes place are simultaneously affirmed and denied: affirmed, in order to permit the all-too-familiar to be idealized, and denied in order that the ideal remain accessible to self.”³⁹

Despite *Salome*'s newness, scandal, and, in many ways, severance from the foundations of nineteenth century opera, performances still defer to similarly inculcated and unspoken standards of representation and appearance: the “immutable, albeit silent and invisible text.” Strauss's opera is famous for its unceremonious breakage of many operatic traditions while still holding a solid place in the “canon” of regularly produced operas up to the present day, perhaps even more so than a contemporaneous, psychological one-act staged work with a female protagonist, such as Schoenberg's *Erwartung*. Indeed, the most defining

³⁸ Richard Taruskin, “The Pastness of the Present and the Present of the Past,” in *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)

³⁹Weber, “Taking Place,” 112.

elements of the opera run counter to past tradition: the free expression of female sexuality and embodiment of the New Woman after a century which restrained women's physical and intellectual expression, Strauss's unbounded musical rhetoric of highly dissonant, "Decadent" chromaticism and bitonality, as well as streamlined dramatic structure of a single act. Despite its place in the canon, *Salome*, in my view, is left in a liminal space before what came to be regarded as the "true" avant-garde (e.g., Berg, Webern) in which the tradition turns to a self-reflexive sensibility and disavowal of Romantic ideals of representation and musical tradition, but after a lineage of nineteenth-century traditions of musical structure and stage practice.⁴⁰

Despite *Salome*'s place in this historical "gap" between the romantic tradition of the nineteenth-century, and the modernist expressive decades of the early twentieth century, *Salome* is regarded as a "classic" in the "imaginary museum" of operatic works. Yet between the audience and the stage there has always been an obstacle that is precisely the condition of *Salome* as "an opera without an audience."⁴¹ That *Salome* is still the site for continual subject identification lies in the fact that her representation as object is founded upon a double alterity, both in terms of her display of femininity and exotic appearance.

⁴⁰ See Herbert Lindenberger, *Situating Opera: Period, Genre, Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 179-185. Lindenberger distinguishes between "hard" and "soft" modernism, categorizing Strauss's modernist work, *Salome*, as well as its oft-cited "sister work" under the former. As "hard" modernist works, they have in some sense been "forbidding or inaccessible" to audiences and their reception quick to provoke and scandalize. *Salome*, Lindenberger suggests, is not the ideal work for audiences looking to "enjoy themselves listening to hummable tunes." However, *Salome* has always been a success in spite, and because of its scandal, and its simultaneous resistance to fall under neither the "popular" and "accessible," nor the "true" avant garde, for its inability to transcend illusion, as Adorno suggests, constitutes the liminality of its historical position.

⁴¹ Adorno, "Opera," 74.

Thus when Salome withstands death, when she does not dance in the way we expect, and when the partial object of the head is *re-embodied*—occupying not only the physical space on stage upon which its representation is made possible, but the ontological and epistemological “space” of our receiving minds, as well—our way of *knowing* as spectators, the circuit which creates a kind of life line between the staged spectacle and viewers breaks down, or at the very least, elicits a moment of transcendence and of staged disillusion and disenchantment. This is *Salome*’s (and Salome’s) emancipation.

The suggestion of disillusion may seem ironic for a moment: Joosten’s production can be understood as using illusion to make visible that which is exclusively Salome’s own fantasy. On one level, the prophet’s reappearance is perhaps a projection of that which Salome once desired but could not obtain while the prophet was still alive. His represence could stand for a dramatization of Salome’s private hallucination. Justifying the phantom’s appearance in terms of psychological projections recalls Barinelli’s notion posited earlier that staging *Salome* is “visualizing a world whose externalities are never objectively defined.”

But I argue here that the effect of his represence objectively externalizes his character. The living body of the singer, Mark Delavan, is juxtaposed with that of his head as partial object. This effect of juxtaposition is made all the more real by the object’s likeness to the singer’s face. The bleeding head on the table in the foreground lends credence to the physical realness provoked by the figure of the prophet. The singer’s sheer presence on stage, re-embodied, defies the very physical absence that we expect. It is as if he enters from a place entirely outside

the representational realm understood to exist beneath the confines of the proscenium arch. The singer, symbolic of the real, literally walks into representational space when he finally enters into the closed-off banquet area, from which he has remained for the entirety of the performance. This intrusion is a transgression of the real into the representational, but also of the past entering and transgressing the present. At the same time, the figure of John the Baptist never left, but rather remained as a temporal holdover.

That both the bloodstained head as recognizable icon *and* his full body are pitted against one another within the same temporal space, framed by the same proscenium arch, results in a tension too great to be dismissed. This collision of sign (head) and signified (return of the body) causes a disturbance to the immersion experience of the spectacle. The iconic visual of the woman with disembodied head is disturbed as well. This pitting of reality against phantasm, *presence* with and against *absence*, in performance, effects not a purposefully inexplicit unreality—as Herod also acknowledges his return, shrieking in horror and running off at the site of the specter—but rather constitutes a “crisis of representation.” Such a crisis arises from the visual juxtaposition of both head and phantom in coexistence on stage.

The concept of the phantom elucidates what I claim is a “crisis of representation” in this unforgettable scene. In her discussion on the nature of the historical anachronism, Agacinsky propounds a theory which embraces that which is typically viewed as temporally “other” to a particular time and place, in the way an obsolete form of technology is perceived in a negative light by a contemporary

society which champions innovation and progress. For an artistic or cultural artifact to be perceived as an anachronism, that item in some manner must betray the notion of irreversibility implied by “vectorized” linear time and “run counter to modernity.” In this way, the relic is perceived as displaced within history. In the history of art, however, wherein relics and representations are the very substance of the medium, the anachronism is hardly reason for such contempt.

In many ways, the repetition of artistic content presented outside the epoch in which it was created is the very nature of opera. Works like *Aida* or *Don Giovanni* are presented again and again in various social contexts, creating the misconception of a state of permanence. However, Agacinsky posits that the anachronism is “precisely not the permanent: it is not what survives or lives on; it is what reappears in some way shifted forward or backward in time.”⁴² There are no better grounds upon which to reveal the fallacy of temporal permanence than the operatic stage. While it is evident that the whole of opera as a form of representation is anachronistic, her theory is particularly relevant for the present analysis of the prophet’s striking reappearance:

Thus more than something permanent, the anachronism is a relic, a paradoxical holdover, displaced, chronologically strange. It always has something to do with the ghost or phantom. All the phantom’s ambiguity, like our ambivalent relationship to it, comes from the way it is a return of the past as past or the dead as dead. Unlike the idea of simple conservation, it presupposes finitude and death, which it then transgresses.

⁴²Agacinsky, *Time Passing*, 107.

Within the closing moments of the drama the physical reappearance of the beheaded prophet is a dramaturgical impossibility. Or at least it should be so. Our comprehension of the narrative hinges on his beheading—not only because his death, and thus his removal from the figurative space of the stage stays true to Oscar Wilde’s textual source, or to the original biblical tale, but because the head plays such a large role in marking this moment, visually. Through this breach in representation, or *represence*, John the Baptist is rendered not as a ghost, because that would presuppose reappearance but in an altered, immaterial form, as “neither being nor non-being.”⁴³

Agacinsky suggests that painting has the power to render a person or figure present even in their absence, or after death.⁴⁴ But the kind of presence a painting or other visual media can render is not a realistic, effective illusion of the past, but rather retains the tension between a person or artifact true existence in the present, and at the same time, position in the past. In the *tableau vivant* of this final scene, it is not that John the Baptist appears illusory, but rather that he occupies a liminal space. The representational form of John the Baptist after death should be as the partial object of the head, or some mimetic variation thereof. But instead he is resurrected, both in the sense that the singer physically returns after his supposed death, and also *figurally*, as his representational figure returns to a time and place to which he does not belong. Thus, he is literally displaced, and this displacement renders him an anachronism.

⁴³ Ibid., 109

⁴⁴ Ibid.

John the Baptist's reappearance as phantom along with Salome's resistance to death and thus emancipation from her representational form challenges the often-cited idea that if the shields of Herod's army do not kill Salome, it is Strauss, armed with his violent, condemning final notes, who completes the deed.

Chapter Two

Maria's Veils, Salome's Machine: The Dance Scene in *Metropolis* and *Salome*

Introduction

This chapter looks at two famous topoi of modernist art and culture: The Dance of the Seven Veils from Strauss' *Salome*, and one of its least acknowledged descendants, the famous dance of the female robot from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. By traversing the genres of opera, art, dance, theater, and early cinema at the turn of the 20th century, I will show how Lang's dance sequence owes a great deal to conventions established by other dance scenes. *Salome* is taken as a point of departure in a survey of artistic innovations in modern dance which involved and embraced nascent technologies of reproduction. According to Andreas Huyssen's influential account, Maria's dance is but a display of male anxieties toward/about both female sexuality and the destructive potential of modern technology.⁴⁵ In his encompassing reading of the film's preoccupation with feminized technology, Huyssen notes how the dance scene establishes a coinciding of the camera lens with the male gaze, suggesting that the robot is constructed and subsequently animated by male vision throughout the film. Within this view, the desire to *show* is bound up with the desire to *see* the female body, and, in turn, the impulse to

⁴⁵ Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," in *New German Critique* 24/25 (1981): 221-237. See also Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," in *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986), 65-81.

look is synonymous with that of the male gaze. His argument, however, overshadows the more overtly theatrical elements of the dance scene.

I claim that an alternative critical path can be traced in which the dance is not only about female objectification or the male projection of a techno-femme fatale, but also about a sort of audio-visual scopophilia. A contemporary figure such as dancer Loie Fuller for example, prompts us to revisit the concept of technology and recuperate it in its very significance as *techné*, that is art, or craft.⁴⁶ For Fuller dance was the embodiment of the technological. She was in fact considered a magnificent dancing apparatus herself, years before the onset of cultural anxieties about mechanical reproduction and about the deleterious effects of technology effected by the devastations of the First World War.

The aesthetic, musical, temporal, and audiovisual similarities between Salome's and Maria's dance scenes are undeniable to the point that it can be argued that the robot's dance in *Metropolis* wages its efficacy on a certain convention of dance scene, costume, mise-en-scène, and spectatorship, such as that of the Dance of the Seven Veils from Strauss's *Salome*. This critical path in turn reconceptualized Salome's Dance. While it may seem anachronistic to consider Strauss's opera in cinematic terms, I believe that Strauss's dance scene, which comprises roughly ten minutes of *voiceless* audiovisual spectacle, is, in this respect, an inscription of an audiovisual impulse within the larger operatic narrative. Moreover, Salome's cold, insouciance toward her dancing—movement

⁴⁶ Loie Fuller was an American modern dancer who became famous in European cities like Paris where she gained favor and praise for her innovative technique and expressive style, which featured the now-iconic use of large billows of fabric around her moving body.

enacted not for the expressive possibility of the dance in and of itself, but as a means only to obtain the head of John the Baptist—introduces the possibility of a technique of the body that goes beyond early nineteenth-century realist concerns. In other words, if Maria's dance represents technology embodied by a woman, then Salome's is, in turn, a woman embodying a kind of technology.

I extrapolate the concept of technology further, to suggest that we might also approach each dance formally, as self-contained interpolations, or closed systems, within their respective, broader narratives. In this way, we can approach each dance as assimilated within, but standing apart from, the diegesis in which it is embedded. However, more than this, each dance scene contains both the audience and spectacle as equally exhibited components within the scene. Each equally subjugated, and performed as both subject and object. *Salome's* "machine" is the dance scene itself, organized as a self-contained aesthetic object within which lies an interdependent relationship between Salome's dancing, the *staged* audience of Herod's court, and finally, the spectators. As we shall see, this organization similarly underlays the dramaturgical structure of Lang's filmic sequence, which uses frames of the dancing Maria to negotiate between the cinematic gaze (audience), and the gaze of the male guests as interrelated components within the scene. Therefore, Maria's dance is both a spectacle of technology by cinematic means, as well as a self-contained aesthetic object.

Ballet and the Technology of Expression

With the following summary account of salient technical developments in nineteenth-century ballet I want to foreground the vestiges of dance idiom that are still visible in the calculated motion of the dance of the robot Maria. As an aesthetically charged form of “mechanomorphism,” ballet technique can be seen to blur the lines between the human articulation of the mechanical, and dance as an aesthetic art which made bodies move like machines.

Already toward the end of the nineteenth century, the highly trained bodies of ballerinas were seen as humans analogous to machines built to produce beautiful results. In her book *Electric Salome*, Rhonda Garelick traces the trends and development of ballet technique in Europe leading up to turn of the century.⁴⁷ Originally ballet technique was systematized to allow for conformity of movement. This standardization of method, evidenced by the development of movements like the tiny, “walking” gestures of the *piqué* style, made bodies move with machine-like precision.⁴⁸ Moreover the increasingly vigorous use of legs and arms expanded the circumference of the performance space around the body. By the end of the century ballet used arm and leg movements to an unprecedented degree in order to fill the space surrounding the dancer. The movement of limbs outward amplified the spatial possibilities for a single body by surrounding the vertical axis of the torso in a “vortex of curves, segments of circles, arcs; [this

⁴⁷ Rhonda Garelick, *Electric Salome: Loie Fuller's Performance of Modernism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 34-139.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 136.

rigorous movement] projects the body of the dancer into magnificent parabola, curves and into a living spiral.”⁴⁹

Ballet also marked the convergence of the technical and sexual body through costuming. Garelick makes clear that ballet costumes were themselves suggestive, as “the billowing tutu served also as a device of sexual presentation, showcasing the legs and the erotically charged v-space between them.”⁵⁰

Additionally, part of the allure of a ballet performance was to witness the almost gossamer bodies move about on stage. The effects of the lighting and costume materials enhanced the spectacle of well-choreographed bodies, to “dissolve” the moving body in a beguiling mise-en-scene of light and shadow. To achieve this, “myriad tricks of lighting and machinery added to the mystery of the ballet stage. Flickering gaslights could appear to turn dancers into wispy silhouettes. Light shining upon the white muslin or tulle skirts intensified the effect.”⁵¹

As we will see with Maria’s dance, homologous lighting effects, coupled with an underlit area surrounding the stage space link the scene to nineteenth-century theater practice. In addition, Maria’s precise movements manifest the assimilation of the newly codified ballet techniques.

Modern dancer Loie Fuller both assimilated and departed from such precedents in ballet technique in her own unique performance style, which featured billowing locks of fabric shooting out from all directions of her

⁴⁹ André Levinson, *André Levinson on Dance: Writings from Paris in the Twenties*, ed. Joan Acocella and Lynn Garafola (Middleton, Ct: Wesleyan University Press, 1991): 46-47 (originally published in *Theatre Arts Monthly*, March 1925), quoted in Rhonda K. Garelick, *Electric Salome*, 134-35.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

indefatigably twirling body. Moreover, Fuller adopted the character of Salome to her own dance routine.

Beneath the Veils: Loie Fuller's Dance

Within the first decade of the twentieth century, Europe and America witnessed a phenomenon referred to as “Salomania.” Dance routines taking as their subject the salacious persona of the Judean princess pervaded the music hall and cabaret scenes as the craze caught on in major cities like Paris, London and New York.⁵² Headliners included the famous American, Loie Fuller, as well as Maud Allan, Ida Rubinstein, and others, all of whom danced their own reproductions of the spectacle Strauss made famous with his operatic rendition.⁵³ Quickly codified as a distinct form of entertainment by the New York Times, “Salomania” pervaded the nightlife of major cities. In 1907, Strauss’s *Salome* appeared on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera in its New York debut. The following year, a dance school was formed at the New York Theater specifically to train young woman the art of the exotic and tantalizing routine. Like a factory, the school churned out Salomes

⁵² For a study of London resonances of Salome’s dance as embodied by Maud Allen, see Judith Walkowitz, “The ‘Vision of Salome’: Cosmopolitan and Erotic Dancing in Central London, 1908-1918,” in *The American Historical Review* 108 (2003): 339. Salomania reached Vienna at a time during which Allen graced the city’s stages with her dancing routines, along with popular Dutch dancer, Mata Hari.

⁵³ See Davinia Caddy, “Variations on the Dance of the Seven Veils,” in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17 (2005): 37-58. Caddy highlights the impact of Salome’s dance on popular entertainment, and its power to hold a fascination decontextualized from the opera. The element of music, however, remained an integral part of the dance’s meaning. Composers such as Florent Schmitt wrote music for the routines of Maude Allen, and Ida Rubinstein, for example. Others danced to previously composed music by Rimsky-Korsakov.

at the rate of 150 dancers per month.⁵⁴ Indeed, Salome had gained mass appeal and, owing to her pervasiveness in modern popular culture, quickly became the subject of single film reels.⁵⁵

Predating this transatlantic craze for the Salome character—the so-called Salomania—which had at its climax around 1906, modern dancer Loie Fuller produced her own version of the Salome legend in 1895 at the *Comédie-Parisienne*. Twelve years later in 1907 she would bring her Salome routine to America.

Despite the fiasco of Fuller’s rendition of the biblical character, harshly criticized by contemporary commentators to the point of caricature, her personal take on Salome was a distinct milestone in the Salome canon. Her novel, avant-garde dance technique according to Garelick “arrived at a moment precisely ripe for Salome’s transition to the dance stage.”⁵⁶ Introducing Salome as a self-standing dancing spectacle in 1895, Loie Fuller positioned herself as well as the biblical heroine on course to popular fame through the medium of dance. Indeed, as Toni Bentley points out, “Salome was a modern dancer waiting to happen.”⁵⁷

Loie Fuller’s own style is closely related to the rigid dance techniques of the romantic ballet tradition, although she was noted for possessing a body

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

See also Udo Kultermann, “The Dance of the Seven Veils: Salome and Erotic Culture around 1900,” in *Artibus et Historiae* 27, (2006): 205.

⁵⁵ The connection between Salome and film is not new. Salome, owing to her pervasiveness in modern popular culture, within the burgeoning years of silent film, quickly became the subject of single film reels. See Mary Simonson, “American Adaptations and Re-Creations of the Female Body in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 11 (2007): 9-10.

⁵⁶ Garelick, *Electric Salome*, 93.

⁵⁷ Toni Bentley, *Sisters of Salome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 43-44.

antithetical to that of the tall, graceful, and svelte ballerina. Fuller's use of the body, though divergent from the exacting and precise technique of ballet, corresponded to the way in which ballet bodies were viewed as "machines for manufacturing beauty."⁵⁸ For Fuller, this translated into the pervasiveness of technology in her routines. Not only could dance mark the moving body as a site of meaning for woman, whose verbal expressivity was limited at the end of the nineteenth century, but as Fuller's spectacle shows, dance engendered a more complex relation of signifiers beyond that of the body alone, signifying on the musical, mechanical, "electric," and poetic levels.⁵⁹

One of Fuller's routines in particular illustrates the remarkable degree to which technology was both a servant to her productions, and the very object embodied by her dance, pointing toward her propensity for live avant-garde shows and for obtaining effects that were cinematic in nature. Her routine, *The Sandman*, based on the tale by E.T.A. Hoffman, features the striking figure of the mechanical doll, Olympia, with whom the poet character of Hoffman falls in love. Fuller did not explicitly cast herself in the role of the famous automaton, which would have looked forward with prescience to Lang's robot Maria. But, as McCarren suggests, her entire career embodied and was foddered by the generative force of a mechanical Olympia figure. She expressed her artistry through technique and effects far above and beyond other dancers, utilizing elaborate lighting and filmic projections. Uncannily similar to Lang's famous montage of disembodied eyes that glare upon the dancing robot (or of

⁵⁸ Garelick, *Electric Salome*,

⁵⁹ Felicia McCarren, "'The Symptomatic Act' circa 1900: Hysteria, Electricity, Dance," *Critical Inquiry*, 21 (1995): 758.

independent body parts in 1924 *Ballet Mechanique*), Fuller featured similarly detached body parts when she “tricked out her own production with floating eyeballs, colored lights, and other mechanized parts for the ‘stage-body.’”⁶⁰

The unique performance style of Fuller provoked a variety of responses from the Parisian artistic culture during the later half of the nineteenth century. Among these reactions is the idea that what lies on the surface of her dancing body, both in terms of external gesture and the material paraphernalia and costume used to accompany movement, is supported by a hidden framework that is the body itself. She redefined the role of the body in representing the act of dance, using her own self in a technologized manner, but as a covert apparatus hidden beneath billows of multicolored fabric.

The visible split between interior and exterior reminds of contemporary scientific discourse about the body, which was thought to manifest signs of ailment through outward gestures of illness and hysteria. Contemporary medical research of the psychophysiology of madness and hysteria by neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot reflected a desire to get *inside* the body to pinpoint the source of a malady. While a discussion on the associations of dance with contemporary psychophysiological studies of madness and illness would require a separate discussion outside the scope of this paper, it is worth mentioning for the fact that the method of the clinical study initiated a perusing of the body as if it were a

⁶⁰ See Felicia McCarren, *Dancing Machine: Choreographies of the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 143.

machine, to find the “cog” that was amiss.⁶¹ This medical brand of scopophilia was connected, albeit peripherally, to the conception of the art of dance as a highly mechanized, artificial form. The body itself was analogous to an apparatus. Felicia McCarren makes the connection between the clinic and the theater stage, arguing that both “required looking beyond the body’s signs into the mechanisms that produced them.”⁶²

While dance typically provoked intense looking at the moving body, the theatrical idiom of a dance like Loie Fuller’s provoked a different kind of viewing: a looking at what might lie “beyond the subject,” or at that which Stefan Mallarme described as the “armature” underneath the veils and coruscating beams of stage lights. Upon reflecting on Fuller’s performance style, which incorporated billowing fabrics on and around an indefatigably moving body, Mallarme observed how Fuller’s body served the great “industrial accomplishment” of her dancing.⁶³

Salome’s Dance: Painting, Tableau Vivant, Mass Entertainment

In one of the most cited acts of retelling of the Salome story, the main character of Karl Huysman’s *A rebours* (Against the Grain), Des Esseintes, endows the painterly Salome with movement. Observing Gustav Moreau’s famous painting of *Salomé*, Esseintes is prompted to write of the dancing princess:

⁶¹ For a study on the connections between the “looking beyond the subject” provoked by Loie Fuller, and the medical gaze of fin-de-siecle France, see McCarren’s “The Symptomatic Act,” in *Critical Inquiry* 21, 1995.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 750.

⁶³ Stéphane Mallarmé, *Crayonné au théâtre*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mondor, 1945 Paris, 1984, p. 25, quoted in McCarren, 758.

[H]er breasts rise and fall, their nipples hardening under the friction of her whirling necklaces; the diamonds adhering to her moist skin glitter; her bracelets, her belts, her rings, flash and sparkle; on her triumphal gown [...] the breastplate of jewellery [sic], each of its links [...] bursts into flame, sending out sinuous, intersecting jets of fire, moving over the lusterless flesh [...]⁶⁴

In the 1920s, over a decade after the completion of the opera *Salome*, Strauss similarly looked to the same painting as a source of inspiration for his own choreographic rendering of the heroine's dance, desiring her to be like a moving image.⁶⁵ In the 1920s, over a decade after the composition of *Salome*, Strauss wrote detailed stage instructions that correspond to specific rehearsal numbers in the score. With his music for "Salomes Tanz" in mind, the specific instructions to the dancer are mapped precisely, beginning as follows: "3rd crotchet after [rehearsal] D, Salome takes off the first veil and adopts the pose shown in Moreau's picture of Salome printed on page twelve of *La Danse* by Vuillier."⁶⁶ It is fitting that at this moment, the flute line takes flight with the most animated figure since the outset of the dance proper, marked *hervortretend* (prominent,

⁶⁴ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *A rebours*, trans., Margaret Mauldin, (Oxford University Press, 1998), 45.

⁶⁵ Willi Shuh, "Zum Tanz der Salome," in *Straussiana aus vier Jahrzehnten*, Tutzing: Schneider, 1981. See also Derrick Puffet, et. al., *Cambridge Opera Handbooks: Richard Strauss: 'Salome'* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 165-167. Puffet additionally notes that Strauss's choreography "shows his willingness to involve himself in matters of design, costume, and choreography, matter that are customarily left to the director."

⁶⁶ See Gaston Vuillier, *La Danse* (Paris: Hachette Press, 1898), 12. Vuillier, known for his various publications on dance, was a French historian, journalist and writer. He also coauthored the volume *A History of Dance from the Earliest Ages to Our Own Times*, published by D. Appleton and Co. in 1898.

emerging).⁶⁷ In the bars preceding rehearsal D of Strauss's score, the music seems only to hover (Figure 8.), contained and limited by the repeated sinuous figures in the oboe, regulated by a steady pulse in the lower strings and percussion.⁶⁸ Thus, the music here anticipates audibly Salome's imminent, visual exhibition. As we will see, Gottfried Huppertz also uses music to render the moment of the robot's exhibition.



Figure 8. "Salome Sheds the First Veil"

Thus, Salome's dance in literature, painting and theater is replete with multiple intermedial echoes, all of which strive toward visual movement. A remark by Oscar Wilde's sums up well the fin de siècle conception of Salome as dancing icon: "Salome, having danced before the imaginations of European painters and sculptors for a thousand years, in the nineteenth century turned her beguilements to literature."⁶⁹ Aware of other versions by Huysmans, Flaubert, and Mallarmé, Wilde was however the first to specify a separate section entitled *The Dance of the Seven Veils*, drawing attention to the dance as a self-contained moment within the play. In addition, it was Wilde who first introduced Salome's most famous props: her veils. For modern culture at the turn of the century, these

⁶⁷ Richard Strauss, *Salome*, New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1981, originally published by Adolph Fürstner, Berlin, 1905, rehearsal D, mm. 43, p. 205.

⁶⁸ Davinia Caddy, "Variations on the Dance of the Seven Veils," in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17, p. 37-58, 2005. Caddy makes a similar point about the stasis of the opening music. She mentions that besides music by Strauss and the composer Florent Schmidt, incidental music from Rimsky-Korsakov's *Mlada* was also used by various dancers during the Salomania craze to denote anticipation before a "strip tease."

⁶⁹ Richard Ellman, *Oscar Wilde*, (New York: First Vintage Books Edition, Random House Inc., 1988), 339.

locks of fabric had transformative effects on the dance, which soon caught on through “endless manifestation[s] of music-hall entertainment.”⁷⁰

Unlike the peripheral attention Salome received in earlier literary versions of the biblical tale, such as Gustav Flaubert’s 1877 novel, *Herodias*, it was not until later in the century that Salome emerged as a primary cultural trope and popular character.⁷¹ Although it is true that versions of Salome and her dance thrived in French literary musings of the late nineteenth-century, culminating in Wilde’s fin-de-siècle creation, it was Strauss who first placed the dance on stage, accompanied by music that truly solidified its status as spectacle.

Moreover, it was Strauss who manufactured the first live representation of Salome’s dancing, which up to that point in time had been confined to painterly depictions and writing. By dramatizing the dance, Strauss also emancipated Salome’s dance from the enigmatic realm of the invisible of Wilde’s play. Wilde’s dedication of *Salomé* to Beardsley read, “For Aubrey: for the only artist who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is, and can see that invisible dance.”⁷² But Strauss changed all this. That which had up to now silently and invisibly entertained the Decadents as their private imaginary, now was allowed to erupt onto the stage for all to see.⁷³

⁷⁰ Kultermann, “The Dance of the Seven Veils,” 195.

⁷¹ Katherine Brown Downey, *Perverse Midrash: Oscar Wilde, André Gide, and Censorship of Biblical Drama* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 97. Gustav Flaubert, *Herodias*, Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004. Salome is merely a conduit in her mother’s plot driven by cruel and unwavering desire to obtain the head of John the Baptist.

⁷² *Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed., R. Hart-Davis, New York, 1962, p. 348, quoted in Udo Kulterman, 195.

⁷³ Upon hearing *Salome* in performance, Romain Rolland congratulated his friend, Richard Strauss, on his ability to create an art of great *effect* that appeals to a mass

In an early Strauss biography William Mann comments on the patent discrepancy of the dance in relation to the rest of the score, and attempt to explain it in terms of compositional process:

It will be remembered that Strauss, according to Alma Mahler, wrote the Dance after the rest of the opera was complete and the internal evidence of the scoring and textures supports her account. It is harder and more blatant in sound than the rest of the opera and the thematic references sometimes seem meaningless and automatic.⁷⁴

In this passage, Mann alludes to the way in which the dance music weakens the referential power of Strauss's leitmotifs. Their meaning within and across the narrative becomes destabilized and decontextualized when combined with the mimetic "dance motives."⁷⁵ Within the extradiegetic interpolation of the dance, then, the familiar leitmotifs that musically call to mind Salome, or John the Baptist, for example, are subsumed into the orchestration to serve the music's more incidental function as support of the dance, making the dance present in the

public: "[O]ne needs,—in order to please those thousands of people assembled together [...] one needs a truth and feelings which are, as it were, an average between all the multifarious truths and the varied feelings of all those beings. The passions and the characters must be subordinate to the dramatic effect *in abstracto*." [...] You are, I believe, at the present time, the only musician in Europe capable of exercising this sway over the masses in the theatre,—and not only in Germany,—but in all countries. That is no small matter." See Richard Strauss & Romain Rolland, *Correspondence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 85.

⁷⁴ William Mann, *Richard Strauss: A Critical Study of His Operas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 57-58.

⁷⁵ Willi Shuh posits that one of the advantages of Strauss composing the dance after the rest of the score to *Salome* was that the composer could then revisit his music to assimilate newly-composed dance figurations with his more narrative thematic material. See Willi Shuh, "Zum Tanz der Salome," in *Straussiana aus vier Jahrhunderten* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1981), 91-95.

theater and in our imaginations. Mann continues, and by extension, questions the status of the music in reference to the visual:

This [distinct quality of the dance music] may be remarked if one listens to the whole of the opera on the radio or on gramophone records. In the opera house there is always the visual diversion of the dance to keep the attention from wandering; and in the concert hall, as a separate orchestral [piece], the virtuoso music can be appreciated out of context.⁷⁶

His comment also points to the inherent audio-visual division between the dancing and the music. Thus, there is a “dance” created solely by the music that works in tandem with, but exists separately from the visual representation of dance onstage.⁷⁷ As I will show in a close reading of Maria’s dance scene, Gottfried Huppertz, who composed the orchestral score for *Metropolis*, similarly uses localized musical figurations incorporated with more ubiquitous thematic material. Through this tactic of enmeshing more dance-like musical language with grander leitmotifs, both composers create a sonic realm that moves between, so to speak, diegetic (narrative) and extradiegetic (non-narrative) space.

⁷⁶ Mann, *Richard Strauss*, p. 57-58.

⁷⁷ Film sound designer, Walter Murch similarly describes the relationship between sound and image as interrelated, but not redundant: “Image and sound are linked together in a dance [...] they do not always have to be clasping each other around the waist: they can go off and dance on their own, in a kind of ballet.” Frank Paine, “Sound Mixing and *Apocalypse Now*: An Interview with Walter Murch,” in *Film Sound*, Weis, Belton, eds., (Columbia University Press, 1985), 356.

Metropolis after Salome: Technology as Attraction

The resemblances between Salome's and Maria's dance, while more obvious in terms of mise-en-scene, costume and décor, is one that has until now been largely ignored. *Metropolis* has been interpreted in a number of ways: here privileging aesthetics and editing technique rather than representations of gender or modern anxieties about the encroaching threat of industrialization on society. Little attention has been devoted to the dance scene and as a consequence the female robot is interpreted strictly as a kind of techno-femme fatale, a figure of utter destruction. Such a reading is one-dimensional and too quickly dismisses the scene's particular import on aesthetic grounds. Andreas Huyssen has been the first to connect fears of female eroticism to the film's most impactful and vivid embodiment of technology, the robot Maria. In his analysis, Huyssen argues against the view held by scholar Paul Jensen that the film's scenes featuring the female robot, such as the striking "belly dance," were superfluous, "extraneous and inexplicable."⁷⁸ If indeed the scene detracts from the film's more productive narratives of the virtue of mechanical labor, I propose it is precisely the nonessential status of the dance that calls for analysis.

Huyssen contextualizes the dance within two distinct views of technology in Weimar cultural, the one propounded by *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity), and the more skeptical, fearful outlook of modern technology held by the Expressionists. But, as I have shown through the "magic" of Loie Fuller,

⁷⁸ Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine," 222. See also Paul M. Jensen, "Metropolis: The Film and the Book," in *Metropolis: A Film by Fritz Lang* (London: Lorrimer, 1973), 5-14.

entertainment bound up with technology and the feminine already signified on the mechanical and “electric” levels in the decades immediately prior to Lang’s 1927 blockbuster, engendering astonishment and at times poetic praise rather than fearful apprehension about the domination of machines over man, and their destructive power. Anton Kaes comments that, on the whole, *Metropolis* offered “a hallucinatory vision [of technology and man]” in what was the ultimate context for modern art in Germany after such a technological war.⁷⁹ While the grave impact of the war on cultural perceptions of technology remained well into the 1920s, bearing on artistic modernity as well, technology *as an attraction* was also present after the war years in the captivating medium of cinema.

Maria’s dance scene is a later iteration of Tom Gunning’s characterization of early film as a “cinema of attractions” implying early film’s ability of pure filmic movement to astonish and mesmerize even without “story-telling.”⁸⁰ The kind of cinema created by Georges Méliés and the Lumière brothers in the first decade of the twentieth century was, according to Gunning, “less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power.”⁸¹ While *Metropolis* premiered in 1927, however, Gunning also makes note that this brand of cinematic attraction did not disappear after its heyday in the years prior to 1907, but becomes rather, discernable in later avant-garde practices, and still exists as a component of narrative film. Rather than narrative depth, Gunning argues, it was the

⁷⁹ Anton Kaes, “Metropolis,” in *Weimar Cinema*, ed., Noah Isenberg, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 179.

⁸⁰ Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde,” *Wide Angle* 8/3-4 1(986): 63-70. p. 64

⁸¹ Gunning, “Cinema of Attraction,” 64.

“harnessing of visibility” and blatant revealing of the very technological trappings of cinema that most allured audiences.

For a cinematic epic like *Metropolis*, Lang constructed narrative, such as the love story between the protagonist Freder and the human Maria, to confer a structure to the film. Narrative is also what situates the film as both modern allegory and popular story. However, traditional attention given to the narrative tends to eclipse the significance of what, in my view is the most purely aesthetic interpolation to the film. It is fruitful to consider the robot’s dance scene as an “attraction.” The scene is significant by virtue of its pure ability to *show* something. It proffers “exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption.”⁸² As both Huysen and Jensen note, the dance seems superfluous because it constitutes an interruption of the film’s narrative.⁸³ Although Huysen ultimately justifies the existence of the “vamp” as a “technological artifact upon which a specifically male view of destructive female sexuality has been project,” he makes this claim by analyzing the robot across the film as a whole.⁸⁴ Within this context, technology, embodied both in the dancer and the avant-garde technique of Lang’s montages, combine with the music to present a theatrical moment distinct from the overarching narrative. As with Loie Fuller’s brand of artifice, and indeed with Richard Strauss, who was seen as a great musical

⁸² Ibid., 65.

⁸³ Huysen, “The Vamp and the Machine,” 221. See Jensen, “Metropolis: The Film and the Book,” 13. See also Stephen Jenkins, “Lang: Fear and Desire,” in *Fritz Lang: The Image and the Look* (British Film Institute, 1981), 38-124. Jenkins gives specific critical attention to the dance scene, but only in so far as he makes the scenario out to be a performance of castration complex wherein the robot/vamp is symbol of the protagonist, Freder’s fear of castration.

⁸⁴ Huysen, 230.

technician and master of effects,⁸⁵ the combination of technique, and technology, were a powerful site of attraction—of an unbounded, mesmeric spectacle that drew the spectator in.

Likewise, Salome's dance is a segment of audiovisual spectacle which engenders the of same kind attraction famously described by Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault, which thrived on the allure of transforming still pictures into moving images.⁸⁶ Without the presence of the operatic human voice to intervene, Strauss animated Salome in a manner which extends beyond connotations of the operatic. His insistence on the work's status as *music drama* is fitting as the exhibitionist quality of the work is not driven primarily by the voice. Indeed, the absence of the voice from the dance scene silences the very vehicle which drove opera for centuries. Salome's Dance is akin to the "mute spectacle" of Fuller's dancing—dancing, which is a realization of Stephan Mallarme's ideal of "poetry without words."⁸⁷ Additionally, Strauss sought to achieve the same effect as the

⁸⁵ Adorno characterizes Strauss's musical modernity in terms of his willingness to allow for less global musical means to dictate larger musical structures, especially with regard to his compositions for the theater: "[For Strauss,] effect becomes the formal principle of composition itself, relativizing everything else; its outward orientation, for others, becomes its tacit a priori [...] The effect is totally calculated and thoroughly planned [...] His music is not merely for the theater, it is theater, applause included." Theodor Adorno, "Richard Strauss: Born June 11, 1864," in *Perspectives of New Music* 4, (1965): 14-32, p. 28.

⁸⁶ Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attraction," 63-70. See also Laurent Guido, "Rhythmic Bodies/Movies: Dance as Attraction in Early Film Culture," 139-157, and Andre Gaudreault, "From 'Primitive Cinema' to 'Kine-Attractography,'" in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 85-104.

⁸⁷ Roger Marx quoted in Erin Brannigan, *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 34.

earliest cinema to “make images seen” when he based his 1920s choreography for Salome’s Dance on Moreau’s painting.⁸⁸

As Gunning has pointed out, it was “precisely the exhibitionist quality of turn-of-the-century popular art that made it attractive to the avant-garde.”⁸⁹

Already glorified by fin-de-siècle artistic thought, the dancing princess, Salome, is perhaps the most infamously exhibitionist figure in the history of the arts, enhanced profoundly by Strauss’ operatic rendition, which was met with much commentary about the work’s teetering between the popular and the avant-garde, as well as between opera and staged music drama.⁹⁰

Gottfried Huppertz, composed the score music for *Metropolis*, to be performed by live orchestra at each exhibition.⁹¹ Huppertz, possibly influenced by Richard Strauss, featured recurring motives intended for the full-length version of the film. In Maria’s scene, in particular, we “see” and hear how the music interacts with the visual rhetoric to both accompany the visual event, and also to

⁸⁸ Kramer suggests that Salome’s monologue scene, in which she sings to the disembodied head, is like a tableau vivant, and that in relation to this staged “image,” the orchestra is the “musical model of the unseen gaze of the audience: the gaze as a fluid, all-embracing motion, later to be realized by the movie camera.” Kramer further proposes that the orchestra operates like a great machine for its ability to stretch out a moment of time, and “prolong a single image far beyond the capacities of nonmusical theater.” Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture*, 145.

⁸⁹ Gunning, “Cinema of Attraction,” 66.

⁹⁰ See Herbert Lindenberger, *Situating Opera: Period, Genre, Reception*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

⁹¹ The full-length version of Huppertz score is synchronized to the original Berlin release of *Metropolis*. The American version received drastic cuts, as the original two-and-a-half-hour screening time did not fit the standard exhibition schedule. A shorter version, cut by nearly one quarter of the original length, was thus released for American audiences. Giorgio Moroder, through commissions from current pop artists, re-scored the shorter American version in 1982, but it is the original Berlin film, recently restored and rereleased for which Huppertz score is synchronized. For a detailed history of the different versions Lang’s film, see Thomas Elsaesser, “A Ruin-in-Progress: Release Versions and Restorations,” in *Metropolis* (British Film Institute, 2000), 30-41.

make the very act of dance sonically present. Like Strauss's musical rendering of Salome's Dance, which integrates dance-like motives into a leitmotivic fabric, Huppertz score also integrates an overarching narrative logic based on leitmotifs, as well as the effect of diegetic music, that supports and regulates the intricate movements of Maria's dance.

This conception of Maria's dance scene as an "attraction," coupled with how the scene inscribes live *presence* in a reified spatio-temporal frame does not so much undo Huyssen's argument that the robot's dance represents a fear of technology and feminine sexuality in 1920s Weimar culture, as it offers a less fatalistic connotation: technology as an attraction. In this way, any political agenda implicit in the relationship between technology and "the masses" may be reinterpreted as the relation between a form of entertainment and its public. Both as an independent filmic object, and as a more theatrical moment within film bearing formal parallels with the Dance of the Seven Veils, we can view Lang's dance through the lens of both Fuller and Salome. Keeping Loie Fuller's technologized art, hypnotizing and innovative use of lighting in mind, I would like to turn now to Maria's dance scene. I will give particular attention to the way in which the imagetrack and music interact in an overdetermination of dance, both visually and sonically. Taking into account both Gottfried Huppertz orchestral score and Lang's editing as sources of meaning, in my view, demonstrates how the dance is contained and regulated as a complex theatrical event. In the following close reading, I will focus on the aspects of editing and music which frame the dancing spectacle. Like Salome's dance, in which she is framed by

Herod's court on stage, the audience of male guests within the scene is as important to the exhibition as is her dancing. Each dance is hinged upon a similar logic, or dramaturgical thread, which showcases the audience in as much as the performer.

In the next section I will examine this thread, so as to reveal its relation to other theatrical performances included in early films, like those in D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1915) and Marcel Herhier's *L'Inhumaine (The Inhuman Woman)*(1924). In all these instances it might be argued that the filmic apparatus captures and reconstructs all constituent parts of the event from the staged spectacle: both the enraptured audience the stage, and the negotiation of gazing and control between the two. Moreover I will concentrate on how the scene in *Metropolis* constructs and frames dance as a mode of entertainment embracing the moving body together with technological tricks recalling the routines of Loie Fuller. Additionally, in Maria's Dance, in particular, we "see" and hear how music interacts with the visual rhetoric to both accompany the visual event, and also make the very act of dance sonically present.

Maria's Dance: Theater on Screen

At this point in the film, the mad-scientist, C.W. Rotwang, has invited the owner of the great city of Metropolis, along with the elite citizens of the town, to a soiree, in order to showcase his most recent invention, a robot endowed with human appearance.

The scene begins with an aerial point of view over crowds of men dressed in tuxedos gathered in a large banquet room. Huppertz score features a listless B-flat minor accompaniment in triple meter with string swells, harp accents, and coiling saxophone semitone motives, reminiscent of the soundworld created by the oboe line and percussive ostinato at the onset of Strauss's score for Salome's dance. The music meanders, devoid of a strong sense of linear direction. Next, we cut to a medium shot. A small group of guests cease their discussion and draw their attention toward the left "offscreen" space. In the subsequent frame we see a large, decorative urn out of which smoke emits, pouring out through the crevices of its top. Another shot of the Rotwang and the owner of Metropolis, Joh Frederson, directing their attention "offscreen," denoting the gesture of *looking*. Rotwang fixes his gaze to the foreground and points his finger directing Frederson's gaze. In the return frame, the smoldering box slowly opens as if prompted by this very act of looking.



Figure 9. *Stills from Maria's Dance*

The brooding music, which underscores the preceding series of shots, combined with the mise-en-scene of the darkened room, imbues the scene with expectation and mystery. We do not yet know what is contained within the decorated box, but the unsubtle ways in which the object is framed through camera technique and lighting suggest that something special will soon be shown through imminent exhibition. A white statuesque figure emerges swiftly from the interior of the ornamented container.

Castanets are introduced to the soundtrack at the moment the box is shown for the first time, synchronized with the rhythm of the saxophone motives. Here, the music acts as a sonic representation of the invisible mechanisms opening the enormous lid of the cistern. This covert technology is rendered through the calculated ticks from the castanets in a steady unwavering rhythmic pattern.

As soon as the lid is fully opened, Maria's theme is heard in a lush string orchestration, abruptly replacing the steady cadence of the castanets and saxophone. Her theme, a longing melody, is characterized by intervallic leaps of a major 6th, ending with a semitone figure. This theme contrasts starkly with the brooding music heard before. However, the music modulates to the relative major, D-flat major, and that Huppertz included a semitone "tail" in the intervallic physiognomy of Maria's theme figures prominently as a point of convergence with the opening semi-tone motives. Soon, both merge in a mesh of signification between dance and leitmotifs. Additionally, Huppertz achieves this synthesis smoothly by exploiting the relative tonal capabilities of B-flat minor and D-major. In doing so, he renders ambiguous the very function of the music. Recalling the comment cited above by William Mann with regard to Strauss's music for Salome's Dance, Huppertz uses music to serve both the broader narrative, but also to provide the *effect* of diegetic music for the dance.

In his first essay on Strauss published by *Perspectives of New Music*, Adorno remarks that Strauss was willing to suspend, or breach symphonic unity for the sake of more contingent dramatic or programmatic ends, saying, "Strauss

was the first composer to adopt the gesture of the idealized big industrialist. He did not scrimp; his means are highly expendable.”⁹² Likewise, in his introduction to Berlioz’s *Treatise on Instrumentation*, Strauss distinguishes between what are essentially two conceptions of the function of music: the “dramatic” and “symphonic.” Strauss ultimately self-proclaims the embracement of both methods, the coloristic or representational, as well as more traditional symphonic procedures associated with Haydn and Mozart.⁹³ Additionally, Adorno posits that Strauss’s compositional technique not only mimics or represents his subject matter, but rather “confronts it as an independent entity. It prides itself on being equal to every situation within the composition,” and, commenting on Strauss’s musical treatment for *Salome*, how he “mistreats the musical form for the sake of dramatic effect.”⁹⁴

The music for Salome’s dance, then, is a microcosm of this system; his music both contains and renders his subject: the dance. In this respect, Huppertz’s music for Maria’s dance is “Straussian” in its symphonic and dramatic construction. Thus, Huppertz, a film composer in the German symphonic tradition, and for whom both Wagner and Strauss were ostensibly influences, is more akin to the Strauss, especially in the dance scene in which his music acts as incidental music to regulate the dance. Strauss was not “technical” in the same sense as Richard Wagner, who strived to create an immersive experience through his

⁹² Adorno, “Richard Strauss,” 14.

⁹³ Hector Berlioz, and Richard Strauss. *Treatise on Instrumentation* (New York: Dover, 1991). For a discussion on the role of the leitmotiv and symphonic unity, see Derrick Puffet, “‘Salome’ As Music Drama,” in *Cambridge Opera Handbook: Richard Strauss Salome*, ed. Derrick Puffet (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 58-87.

⁹⁴ Theodor Adorno, “Richard Strauss: Part II,” *Perspectives of New Music* 4 (1966): 115.

music, exploiting the orchestra as a kind of machine. The orchestra, for Strauss (and Huppert) is still a kind of all-encompassing apparatus, but it function from an outside, exterior space.

In his essay, “Secret Languages: The Roots of Musical Modernism,” Robert Morgan makes clear that with the development of twentieth century musical modernism, chromaticism, and more “ornamental” figurations were characteristic of the “surface” of what had been deeper, symphonic structures, especially at the turn of the century, when music “threatened to become pure ornament.” As Morgan points out, what had been “a fixed and conventional conception of musical structure gave way to one that was variable, contingent, and contextual—dependent upon the specific attributes of the particular composition.”⁹⁵ Whereas in a Mozart opera from the eighteenth century, a dance might be portrayed through the playing of a menuet, for example, in Maria’s, and Salome’s dances, the way in which musical structure, toward the end of the nineteenth century, gradually made “space,” and was malleable to serve more localized purposes through “surface detail” is a likeness of both Strauss and Huppertz compositional processes.

To return to the dance scene, Maria emerges from within the cistern, as the lid, rather than return to its closed position, gradually dissolves into the background—an effect only filmic vocabulary can achieve—to reveal an ivory-white figure in long shimmering veil and headdress.

⁹⁵ Robert P. Morgan, “Secret Languages: The Roots of Musical Modernism,” *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1984): 452.

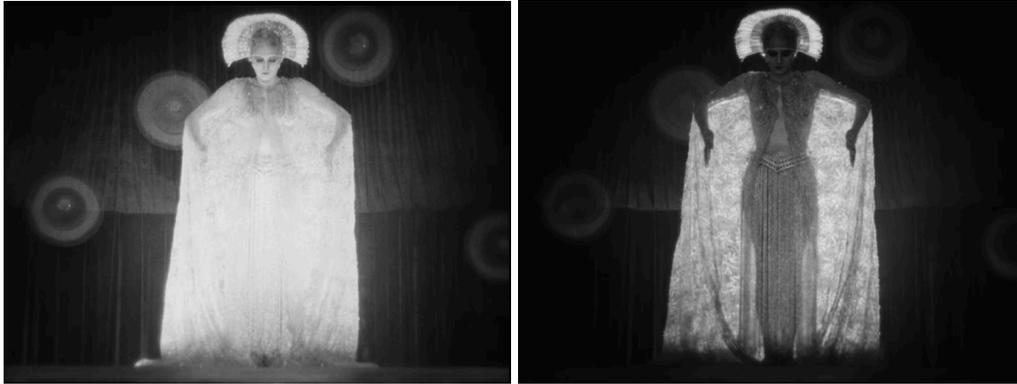


Figure 10. *Technology Hidden Beneath the Veils*

Here, the castanets clicking from the soundtrack acts as a regulating mechanism for Maria’s small, calculated movements. She slowly rotates her body, anchoring her weight on one leg to make almost imperceptible movements with her foot, recalling the “walking” or “pique” technique codified in the nineteenth century. Here, the regulating pulse established by the castanets is taken up by woodblock, intermingling with the saxophone motives. As Maria’s shimmering figure makes a full rotation, her theme accelerates to fuse with the texture of the orchestration.

Maria’s figure is abruptly backlit so as to reveal the opacity of the veil to be transparent, the material of which now outlines the contour of her scantily clad body (Figure 10). The lighting effect exposes the inner “mechanism” of the female robot—as dancer. Her hips and arms synonymous with the cogs of a machine, or more poetic “armature” underneath the façade of the veil.

As the sequence progresses, Maria spins rapidly, causing the thin threads of fabric from her skirt shooting out from all sides, framing her hips and legs while in motion (Figure 11). Interspersed with frames of men looking, each shot

returns to Maria. Strikingly calling to mind Loie Fuller's dance, the fabric of her veil that once covered her figure, now adds volume to the contours and gestures of her body (Figure 12). The material serves as added substance onto which the dance music clings, like Fuller, Salome and her seven veils, the body is not the only site of the dance, but the body here is shown and "heard" in relation to the surface of the veils. Furthermore, the interpolated shots of Maria's movements act as an interfacing platform, or focal point between the cinematic gaze, the perspective of the male guests, and the all-encompassing music.



Figure 11. *Maria in a Vortex of Curves*

Narrative as *Effect*

Lang's technique of creating narrative relies on the juxtaposition of what are in essence discrete self-contained frames. His shots of objects, rather than create a linear series, force the spectator to accept that one frame of leering guests is assigned to the following shot of the robot's container. In this dance scene, the meaning of the shots are determinate only as an *after* effect. That is, narrative—here as the relationship between the woman who emerges from a box, and the sea of men around her—is itself an effect. If one were to detect precisely, however, how the robot Maria is incorporated into this sequence, I suggest it is a complex interpolation between the shots of men gazing, more reliant on the *eventness* of the dance itself than a systematic, and ulterior framing of the female figure. As feminist film theory has shown, the way in which women are portrayed on screen has much to do with the “how” and the “effect” of such framing.⁹⁶ If we are to take the theory put forth by Andreas Huyssen that Maria is indeed re-created through the eyes of the male spectators, then Rotwang's crowd of guests and the dancing Maria are connected merely through a direct, causal relation. However, “the gaze” here is not unidirectional as the look of the dinner guests is foregrounded and exposed in as much as Maria is painstakingly and cinematically framed as “the object.” Despite being the creation by the film's mad scientist,

⁹⁶ Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 137. Citing Claire Johnston's seminal essay, “Women's Cinema as *Counter Cinema*,” Hayward recapitulates on the importance of this study to understanding how females were represented on screen through framing, lighting, dress, etc. This involved reading the iconography of the image itself. While Johnston's theory applies to narrative, and classical Hollywood cinema in the decades after the era of Weimar cinema, it is worth noting how the “effect” of Maria's representation is at once a result of female framing, as well as a result of the “how” of lighting and staging effects associated with nineteenth and early twentieth-century theater conventions.

Rotwang, in this scene the female robot possesses subjective agency. The editing displays her power to enthrall the large audience for whom she dances. Michel Cowan suggests the threatening fragmentation of eyes to be less a sign of a voyeuristic and controlling gaze than as a loss of control, of the audience's subjugation to the mesmeric power of the performer.⁹⁷ Through the film's rendering of dance, which showcases both the audience's reaction and the performer as source of attention, the robot reverses the typical object-subject relation. The entire scenario is a closed event, aesthetically crafted to subjugate the viewer, and highlight the prowess of the performer.



Figure 12. *Maria Invoking Loie Fuller*

The erotic power of the female dancer is not contained as a result of a causal relationship between controlling male vision and Maria's body. Rather, Lang's editing creates the *effect* of female framing as but one repercussion of the way in which the scene's sense of continuity is broadly constructed out of single

⁹⁷ Michael Cowan, "The Heart Machine: 'Rhythm' and Body in Weimar Film and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*," *Modernism/Modernity* 14 (2007), 242. Cowan connects the men's transfixion on Maria to a contemporaneous idea of *Schaulust*, a kind of "visual pleasure" gained from viewing a picture on screen.

frames. Rapid cross-cuts and montages expose the technological means of the cinematic apparatus through unconcealed filmic language. Female framing is not a result of ulterior continuity editing like in classical Hollywood cinema, where the presence of the camera lens is “hidden,” as it were, through codes in how to logically move from one frame to the next. With Lang’s characteristic filmic logic, which creates continuity out of discontinuity, the result is quite literally the “effect” of the containment of Maria’s erotic power.

Therefore, the male gaze is framed equally as an a prominent component of the scene, or “part-object” captured through Lang’s lens. In line with early film and Lang’s own technique of editing, the sequence is discontinuous in order to *recreate* continuity.⁹⁸ In some of the return frames, which show men looking, the angles of their gaze within a single frame are not in line with the subsequent shot of the oversized, decorative box. The effect is one that mirrors and externalizes the men looking. This, coupled with the less deliberate framing of the female, as suggested above, give rise to a single entity within which lies a symbiotic relationship between the dancer and the gazing men. The *look* of the spectator is “staged” or exposed in as much as the dancer so that the event as a whole contains as a temporally and spatially demarcated aesthetic object, a reflexive relationship between the viewer and the viewed.

In addition to the cross cuts of men looking, Maria’s illuminated face is set against the background of a dark curtains with large spherical objects that seem to float around her as visual counterpoint to the circular lid of her container

⁹⁸ Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis*, p. 39-40. See also Raymond Bellour, “On Fritz Lang,” in Stephen Jenkins, ed., *Fritz Lang, the Image and the Look* (London: British Film Institute, 1981), 26-37.

(Figure 9). The various shots of the men in tuxedos, which spatially “frame” the image of the box, denote *looking*, but also mirror aesthetically the globular objects behind Maria’s body. Though the *look*—multiplied by the excess of men in the room—and the decorative urn, oversized and steaming with potentiality, both are subjects and objects, both equally exhibited.

The entire scene is constructed through the relationship of stage to audience. Even the disembodied eyes, a montage which itself exhibited the most advanced and innovative cinematic capabilities of the time, denote *looking* in abstraction. They also connote the power of the performer Michel Cowan suggests that the staring men, the shots of which eventually distill into a montage of disembodied eyes, are not necessarily threatening or voyeuristic as one might surmise.⁹⁹ Rather than a device to control the dancer, the fragmented, wide eyes represent a loss of control of the audience as a sign of their surrender to the mesmeric power of the dancer.

Moreover, an effort to recreate cinematically live theater informs Lang’s sequence. Marcel Herbie’s 1924 film, *L’Inhumaine*, or *The Inhuman Woman*, for instance, similarly relates performer and audience. Herbie’s treatment of the theater scene on screen serves as evidence that Lang’s construction, while stylistically novel, takes its cues from a visual dialogue between showcasing the audience in relation to the performing subject. Through similar filmic devices the concert of the soprano Claire Lescot is framed by aerial shots of the audience which denote looking. Although the sequence from *L’inhumaine* depicts a less

⁹⁹ Cowan, “The Heart Machine,” 242.

aggressively voyeuristic audience, the narrative logic of the editing is the same.¹⁰⁰ Although less vexing and perhaps deliberately more “avant-garde” than Lang’s sequence, Herbiere’s film establishes the same kind of viewing. Unlike later sound films and classic Hollywood cinema, which tended to rely on less pliable codes for continuity editing, earlier film could experiment with how to communicate on screen the perception of spectator positioned in relation to a particular event or situation. In both Maria’s dance and Claire Lescot’s concert the formal aspects regulate and frame the theatrical event—as film *qua* theater. In each scene, theater is inscribed within film. This treatment, considered in terms of intermediality, is a kind of performative ekphrasis. The filmic mode renders the magic and *presence* of a live dancer within the “brackets” of cinema, but, as film, it can never accomplish the same experience as live theater; film can only recreate, or retell such an experience.¹⁰¹ The rendering of “liveness” of the dance through mediation of the camera maintains yet dissolves the dissonance between that which is film and that which is theater.

¹⁰⁰ Michel Chion distinguishes between “external” and “internal” logic wherein an external logic does not hide the conspicuous interventions of discontinuity and rupture through images. In both films, the camera’s presence is made known through “ruptures” in continuity such as a shot of an intimate bedroom followed by that of a busy city street. See Chion, *Film, A Sound Art*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 479.

¹⁰¹ In his work, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality*, Werner Wolf considers the complex overlapping of different media such as film and opera, categorizing the relationship of two distinct media as either constituting an “overt” and “covert” correlation. If, in a single artistic entity, two media are involved but one appears as dominant, or “covers,” so to speak, the characteristic aspects of the other media, this is a case of “covert,” or “indirect intermediality.” In this scene, film is the dominant media, however it contains the so-called non-dominant media of theater, so that the latter is present ‘within’ the first. Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in Theory and History of Intermediality*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 39-40.

In this way, Lang's sequence quotes conventional signifiers of theater while still retaining the language of film, as the primary medium. For instance, only film can relay the simultaneous temporalities of the protagonist Freder interspersed with the dancing robot at Rotwang's soiree through cross cutting. Though, on the other hand, the "theatrical" is seen through the dual purpose of decorative box from which the robot emerges. This object doubles as a stage upon which the action takes place. However, the dance also "takes place" on a more figural stage, delimited on the one side by the male audience's disembodied eyes and, on the other, by the orb-like objects behind Maria. As the fixed entity in the sequence, the oversized, decorative box is the platform around which everything relates as the site of attraction. The urn not only to contains the dance, is also the site of a "performance within a performance."

To return to Strauss's dance scene, the Dance of the Seven Veils functions in the same manner, connecting the two scenes formally.¹⁰² Salome's audience—Herod, Herodias, the court and banquet guests around her—are equally constituent parts of what is essentially a self-contained "attraction" interpolated within the diegesis of the music drama. I would also extrapolate further this idea of embedded performances to say that Maria's dance scene, by and large, is essentially Lang using film as a platform upon which to *perform* theater.

The "performance within a performance" aspect of both Maria's and Salome's dances also confines each dance scene temporally. Although his idea of the embedded performance generally pertains to sound film, Michel Chion

¹⁰² So, too, does Joosten's production described in Chapter One illustrate this same effect, when Salome replays the videocassette within the opera.

discusses a similar effect of *mise-en-abyme* wherein a movie scene contains a film screening, show, or theater performance. Such an embedded performance, according to Chion, “creates a ‘real time’ reference, a temporal frame, that of a performance, a temporality that unfolds according to its own rhythm, independent of the constraints of filmic narration.”¹⁰³ Additionally, this referencing of a brief event within one longer and more sustained “bring[s] the film closer to a live performance.” The reference to live theater that constitutes Lang’s dance sequence subsumes one event within another, but the tension between theater and the filmic apparatus still remains. Superimposed over this visual dissonance, or simultaneity of logics, is the aural. The music acts as mediator to confer continuity. Music, moreover, takes hold from an exterior sonic realm, containing the action from the outside. The music of Strauss and Huppertz delimits a presupposed temporality that is ephemeral, marked by short-lived dance motives.

¹⁰³ Michel Chion, *Film, A Sound Art*, trans. Claudia Gorbman, Columbia, 2009, p. 274

Epilogue: Toward A Disrecognition of the Musical Score

This side-by-side critique of two of the most famous dances of artistic and technological modernity can lead to further discussions. In Chapter One I conduct a close reading on a specific operatic text. However, in the process I also problematize contemporary opera stage practice by suggesting that the heightened tension between “tradition” and “radical” stagings—between the reified concept of the text and the mutability of live performance is not enough to truly elucidate how operatic texts are regularly perpetuated on stage as relics. Going forward, I see broader applications for opera studies. In *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord writes:

The two sides of the end of culture—in all aspects of knowledge as well as in all the aspects of perceptible representations—exist in a unified manner in what used to be art in the most general sense. In the case of knowledge, the accumulation of branches of fragmentary knowledge, which becomes unusable because the *approval* of existing conditions must finally *renounce knowledge of itself*, confronts the theory of praxis which alone holds the truth of them all since it alone holds the secret of their use. In the case of representations, the critical self-destruction of society’s former *common language* confronts its artificial recomposition in the commodity spectacle, the illusory representation of the non-lived.¹⁰⁴

The stage space is a site for entertainment, but it is also a site for edification and of *knowing*. Every performance, and thus exercise in repetition of representation through the “practice” of performance, contributes to an accrued body of societal knowledge and expectations.

¹⁰⁴ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983), 185.

I also hope to have dispelled the traditional subject-object relationship that has been used as a tool to analyze innumerable female performing subjects. The larger narrative of female subjugation by way of the male gaze, while a valid and productive discourse, is here not enough. Moreover, its one-dimensional logic has largely eclipsed another approach. The representation of Salome and Maria are constructed through a multifarious network of signifiers, all of which come into play through the relic of dance.

Through a critical analysis in Chapter One of a single performance, I elucidated how one trend in approach can similarly color our entire apperception of future (re)presentations. But the subject of *Salome* in this discussion can be replaced by virtually any operatic texts. It is my contention that today, it is not enough that opera productions are radical or unorthodox; they should also actively interrogate with operatic texts in performance and, in turn, participate directly with the audience so that forms of representation are not taken for granted.

My discussion was largely grounded in the visual aesthetics of representation, but the suggestion that opera is an anachronistic medium is also a political endeavor, as ossification of representation on stage is ultimately a sign of endurance of past social, artistic, and political hierarchies and ideologies. In this way, it can continually subjugate, as with *Salome*. Both *Salome* and Maria have been studied only as subsumed components in larger dialogues of meanings with regard to Salome as the poster woman of the Decadence movement, and with Maria, the embodiment of contentions toward technology after World War I. It is not that these dialogues exist that is problematic, but rather that their forms lag

behind the technique whereby they are represented,¹⁰⁵ and have contributed in an almost tangible manner to all future (re)presentations.

* * *

Through an analysis of Guy Joosten's *Salome*, I gave particular attention to the way in which what we *see* on stage can incite in us a sensation of disrecognition about a familiar work. However, this critical path could be followed further. What role does the musical score play in such a process of disrecognition? It would seem it arises not only from the way radical visuals profoundly shape our apperception of a performance, but also from the possibilities the music presents. By virtue of the multifarious nature of opera as a medium, critical study encourages input from a wide audience and broad range of scholars from across disciplines and fields. As Levin has suggested, the use of new media such as film projections in operatic performances contributes to the "unsettling" of many works today. But what if the potential of stage directors to reinvent a text relied not only on that which they could manipulate on stage in terms of scenery and costume, but also on the ways in which they manipulate the score to sonically destabilize the comfortable experience of listening to a beloved work? What if directors and conductors did not hesitate to radically reconceptualize the very object that has been regarded as most sacred to opera: the music? From a musicological perspective, it seems there is still a great deal of resistance from directors, conductors, and audiences, alike, to lay hands on the score, an artistic and sociocultural relic. Indeed, even today the score and its

¹⁰⁵ Agacinsky, *Time Passing*, 116.

realization through performance retain a unique aura (vis-à-vis Walter Benjamin's famous assessment) that renders the music itself unassailable to the kind of meddling in the name of artistic liberty directors so often take with the *mis-en-scène*.

In this way, we can invoke once again Agacinsky's discussion of the anachronism. Opera behaves anachronistically by virtue of its multiple returns in the theater. Contemporary re-imaginings have indeed taken opera to new arenas—even blurring the lines between what is the stage and the audience by tampering with the very space whereby the performance is made possible, as with Willy Decker's *Moses and Aaron*, a performance which literally parts a sea of spectators to reveal a “stage” beneath them. It seems even the most iconoclastic movers and shakers of the opera world are willing to tamper with every aspect of performance to a far greater degree than they are ready to change the music, which is still expected to play on as if produced from the patterns of fixed grooves on a record. Musically, opera is still a very tenacious and conservative genre. Perhaps the reality of opera today is less a result of scores of “masterworks” truly withstanding time by virtue of absolute aesthetic merit or vestigial notions of authorial intent than it is the case that we, as artistic, consumerist, and academic communities participate collectively in perpetuating the music's sameness in realization through performance. The holistic experience of opera is indeed one of a false, make-believe, and alternative reality presented on stage and thus of a *musica ficta*. However, there is no greater *musica ficta* or realm of representational than the score itself.

As long as music remains the last taboo aspect of opera, performances will serve as relics. The stubborn “presence of an immutable, albeit silent and invisible text” may just be the music itself, although not quite silent—in fact, brazen and violent as is the case with *Salome*. For as long as the “music itself” has an impact on our collective apperception of performances, and thus predetermines our spectatorial expectations, there is indeed still a gap between the so-called radicalness of what is on stage, and what is heard in the pit. In this sense, opera is truly audiovisual.

Is it possible, then, to reformat the music? Are we willing to unsettle the musical score so as to reinvent every aspect of operatic performance? And in doing so, to reformat the very sonic technology by which we perceive that which is presented visually on stage? If the *Salome* I analyze above was portrayed as “fresh faced, rather than sultry,” can we say the same about the music? Or, does indeed Strauss’s score have the ultimate say as Susan McClary has provocatively asserted?¹⁰⁶

The project of musical disrecognition that I suggest might involve, for example, playing portions of the score through the distorting filter of portable speakers, or, less radically, such a project may encourage taking a second look at that which is already “hidden” within its staves. For instance, Strauss’s “murderously” driving utterances from the orchestral pit that seem to kill off *Salome* regardless of what takes place on stage are, in a sense, on the “wrong”

¹⁰⁶ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

sonority of C-natural for a work primarily in C-sharp. When underscoring the striking return of John the Baptist as phantom in Joosten's production, this aspect of the score, if articulated more timidly, or played instead at a pianissimo dynamic may uncover the subtle inconclusiveness of Strauss's allegedly definitive "fatal conclusion." Achieving such an unprecedented interpretation would require an interrogation of the score that would almost violently play upon the knowledge of the audience—a kind of Artaudian act of "violence" to the score. Herbert Lindenberger has attempted to define a postmodern opera. He comes to a similar point of arrival as that of Levin in that postmodern opera would not consist of writing new works, but the "re-creation of familiar old operas by iconoclastic directors who challenge a conservative opera public by giving these works unexpected settings and often a new social message to boot."¹⁰⁷ Maybe "re-creating" the score is the final step to realizing a postmodern approach to opera.

Unlike the robot Maria in *Metropolis*, whose representation is literally fixed through the prerecorded sounds of Huppertz score synchronized with the imagerack, it is possible for Salome (both the work and the character) to be "freed" through such an approach founded upon an extreme realization of the music. Maria's performance is inscribed onto film reels, or otherwise digitized on DVD or other forms of reproduction. But we might ask ourselves if the operatic "soundtrack" does not impend on the visual of the performances in the same way that music does in film. Kramer suggests the opposite, positing rather that music is the biggest variable of performance: "music's visual tolerance stems from the

¹⁰⁷ Lindenberger, *Situating Opera*, 191. See also Lindenberger, "From Opera to Postmodernity: On Genre, Style, Institutions," *Genre* 20 (1987): 259-284.

semantic malleability or plasticity accorded to it as part of its very definition qua music. The music thus easily accommodates itself to a wide variety of visual representations...operatic realization is a visual alternative linked to a body of music that is fixed in form but not in meaning.”¹⁰⁸ He contrasts this idea with that of film, where the image takes precedence over the music in the background. However, I have revealed how the music of *Metropolis* can indeed shape to a profound degree Maria’s persona, and our experience of her dance.

I would argue that if, in fact, the score is the most “accommodating” participant in the total operatic experience, then directors do not take full advantage of the music’s hermeneutical possibilities. Along these lines, if the music carries so much hermeneutical ammunition and if Joosten’s *Salome* is “fresh faced rather than sultry,” does the music betray the visual, further framing the work as a true relic for its inability to change through historical time, and in the “real-time” of performance? Does the music in fact remain to exude “sickness,” to signify “decadence”?

Maybe *Salome*, along with any number of operatic works that have been (re)presented *ad infinitum* will never fully be emancipated until unsettling the score is no longer taboo. Perhaps opera performances too often share the same reality as that put forth by Derek Puffett in relation to Strauss’s *Salome*: that the score is “the one stable element [of the opera] among so many unstable ones.”¹⁰⁹ Only once the score is destabilized (to the point of disrecognition) can opera

¹⁰⁸ Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture*, 169.

¹⁰⁹ Puffett, *Richard Strauss Salome*, 65.

transgress or at least come to terms with its anachronistic form without literally being rewritten. Or will nostalgia for that “ideal performance” resulting from the summation of a number of previous performances take hold and “inhabit [our] imagination[s] to condition perception itself,” forcing us retrospectively to recall Salome’s striptease?¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Agacinsky, *Time Passing*, 121.

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