

Operatic Geographies, Urban Identities

Abstracts

Pastoral Retreats: Playing at Arcadia in the 18th and 20th Centuries

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Operatic expression of and desire for the pre-lapsarian idyll was established with the origins of the genre, in part through concern for verisimilitude, in part as homage to earlier dramas. That it seems to have been maintained throughout the genre's history is perhaps peculiarly linked to opera's evolution as both an exclusive and an urban phenomenon. This paper will use examples from eighteenth- and twentieth-century Britain to explore the significance of this trope, and in particular the ways in which evocation of an Arcadian landscape relate to anxieties about opera's place in the urban environment.

In the eighteenth century the opera house rapidly became a civic institution. But even as opera was institutionalised, enfolded into the structures and functions of the city, the traditional operatic nostalgia for a lost pastoral world continued to be espoused in elaborate simulacra, both visual and aural. The tensions that such simulations generated between the natural and the theatrical were recognised and commented upon by contemporary critics, whose commentaries in turn reflected (and sometimes reflected upon) broader concerns about opera's role in nascent capitalist cities.

In twentieth- and twenty-first-century Britain, this desire for the pastoral seems to have achieved particular expression in the proliferation of 'country house' opera, whereby owners of stately 'piles' have reinvented the traditional largesse of opera's patrons, opening their gates to display their property's magnificence in summer opera seasons. Such is the popularity of this phenomenon that since Glyndebourne's first festival, 80 years ago, country-house opera companies have sprung up all over Britain, catering as much, it seems, to a perennial British interest in the trappings of class as to a love of music. Is it an accident that these deliberately exclusive and often conservative projects have flourished at the same time as the established London opera houses, supported by public funds, have opened their doors to more diverse audiences and more challenging stagings?

Building Presence: Opera House Projects in 18th-Century France

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This paper will chronicle and interpret architectural projects for opera houses in eighteenth-century France. Focusing on such projects as Labrière's, Cochin's and Boullée's, I propose to show how the increasingly marked rotundity of their planned buildings not only testified to new spectatorial expectations dictated by a new taste and new social dynamics, but also, and possibly primarily, how such rotund structures were intended to elicit a new experience of time, and how operatic space strove to convey a new sense of geographical presence.

London's Opera House in the Urban Landscape

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Many scholars (myself included) have tended to present the 1705 King's Theatre as part of a newly fashionable area, in the developing West End. But a closer examination of the development of London suggests that it was not 'newly fashionable'; Henry Jermyn, Earl of St. Albans, had been developing the area of St James's since the Restoration, and by the time of his death in 1684, the fabric of the area was virtually complete. By 1689, Blome's parish map shows that the area around the theatre was largely complete, as it remains to this day. It was not, then, a great gamble to have sited the King's Theatre in Haymarket; it placed the fashionable house for the luxury item of opera near the homes of those who could - and did - afford it.

One of its peculiarities was that the Opera House, like some other London theatres, originally had little or no front to the street. This was the product London's commercially minded developers and theatre promoters; after all, why use up valuable street frontage with the outside of the theatre, when this could be occupied by the shops of the booksellers, printers, tobacconists and tea-dealers? All logical, of course, but it did place the King's Theatre in a very different urban landscape to those opera houses occupied in most other cities, such as Metz - the Opéra-Théâtre de Metz Métropole (1732) - Bordeaux - the Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux (1780) - or Prague - the Estates Theatre (1783) - where the theatres were free standing buildings and all occupied prominent island sites.

This paper returns to London's Opera House, and re-examines its architectural history in the urban landscape, from its beginnings with no identifiable presence surrounded by shops, to its Regency form by John Nash, in a building surrounded by arcades.

Opera, Cosmopolitanism, and the Carnival Entertainment Package in Eighteenth-Century Turin

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Musicologists have long emphasized opera as eighteenth-century Italy's main carnival season activity. Yet in large, urban centers opera was one of many entertainment forms available to the public. Although some scholarship on opera seria (Feldman, Rice, Hertz, and others) focuses on its vital social function, opera audiences' engagement by means of diversions outside the opera house, and the relationship of that engagement process to broader cultural goals, merits deeper understanding.

Carnival entertainment in Turin was highly regulated, the Teatro Regio's administrative directors planning numerous activities (gambling, shopping, masked balls, marionette plays, acrobatic shows, wax figure exhibits, circuses with exotic animals, fireworks, and other spectacles), occurring before, during, and after the operas. Drawing on unexplored primary source material, in this paper I show that this complex of events, because of their carefully prescribed physical spaces, schedule, and finances, as well as their content, formed a tightly-constructed network of meanings both for the public and the sovereign. Turin's prescriptions for sociability were simulacra of cosmopolitanism, integral to the sovereign's quest for his city to gain status as a leading European capital. Turin's audiences experienced opera as part of a whole—a unified body of entertainment with a character inextricably linked to the space it occupied.

Southern French Regionalism and the Importance of the Outdoors

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In a prelude to an excoriating review of Hérold's *Zampa* in 1835, Hector Berlioz reminisced about where he had first heard it, as a Prix de Rome laureate in Italy. His point: his most profound musical experiences were not at the San Carlo or at La Scala, but in the ancient theatres of Pompeii and Rome, where the evening breeze, funnelled through the ancient architecture, sang to him with an expressiveness that not even the best operatic voices could equal. There is no empirical connection between Berlioz's experience and the fin-de-siècle tradition of mounting old and new opera in the ancient theatres and amphitheatres of the South of France; but the value-laden binarism of enclosed versus open theatrical spaces resonates nevertheless in the critical and compositional emphasis on open-air music, fusion of ancient and modern life, and (crucially) blue sky. From the re-booting of Gounod's *Mireille* in Arles in 1899 to the 'frescoes' of Déodat de Séverac's *Héliogabale* (Béziers, 1910) and indeed beyond, much of the operatic latinité of the South rested on the re-appropriation of these monuments as artistic crucibles with which Paris, despite all its theatres, could not compete.

The phenomenon was urban but not metropolitan, centered as it was on smaller towns such as Nîmes, Arles, or Béziers—where the amphitheatre was a new-build. Lyon, with its three Roman theatres, did not take part; neither did Toulouse, which provided the antithesis of the entire movement in the form of its Théâtre du Capitole—a hall whose name evoked ancient Rome but whose location within the very building of the town hall sealed its centralist identity. Yet the phenomenon was also rural, the health of its open-air character dependent on distance from the noise, stench and implicit corruption of big-city life. The nature of each amphitheatre as out of scale with its urban environment, and the locus classicus of the 1913 *Mireille*, performed amid the Provençal hills, each suggest this conclusion, as do frequent critical references among regionalists associated with these performances to post-impressionist artists such as Cézanne, for whom painting Provence, outdoors, defined his mature work.

'Come to the mirror!'
Phantoms of the Opera - Staging the City

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Brian Large's 1992 film of the Puccini-Sardou *Tosca: In the Settings and at the Times of 'Tosca'* represents an extreme form of homage to one of the earliest of twentieth-century operas to stage its urban location as a labyrinth of power and desire – and also (in Act I) 'operatic' theatrical events intended to move and mould the populace as an audience. The tendency to invoke their urban locatedness is an intriguing characteristic of a number of popular, early twentieth-century 'naturalistic' Austro-German operas. The extent and implications of that tendency will be considered in selected examples from Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* and Franz Schreker's *Der ferne Klang* and *Die Gezeichneten*. All such works appear to negotiate, more or less critically, questions about the proto-cinematic mass-mediation of artistic experience.

French Grand Opera: a Tale of Two Cities

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The genre of grand opera, exemplified by Auber's *La Muette de Portici*, emerged in Paris in the late 1820s: spectacular historical tableaux, peopled with massive choruses and revolutionary heroes, were brought to life with the latest instrument and staging technologies and an eclectic musical language. As powerful symbols – and expressions – of the nation's political and artistic confidence, grand operas attracted government support in terms of subsidy and licensing laws, and foreign composers flocked to Paris to create new works for Europe's most prestigious operatic stage.

When these operas were translated and adapted for London – sometimes just months after the Paris premiere – they became part of a very different theatrical culture, in which opera occupied a much less clearly defined and regulated role (and attracted no government subsidy). On the one hand, works such as *La Muette* became tools in the commercial strategies of rival theatres: multiple adaptations of individual operas appeared rapidly across the city. But grand operas were also viewed in some quarters as a threat to the cultivation of native opera, and they became the focus of high-profile attempts both to challenge and to strengthen the city's theatrical licensing laws and promotion of opera.

This paper builds on the important archival work regarding grand opera in London by Gabriella Dideriksen and Christina Furhmann, and develops Homi Bhabha's notion of 'hybridization', which considers the emergence of new cultural forms from multiculturalism. It examines the relationship between the rapid 'naturalisation' of grand opera in London on the one hand and the insistence on its 'Frenchness' on the other, through the example of Auber's *Gustave III*. The opera was the means by which director Alfred Bunn achieved his 'Great Junction' of the two patent theatres – Covent Garden and Drury Lane – in 1833, asserting the importance of French opera in its own right, while also pointing diplomatically to its use as a means of employment for English singers, musicians, directors, designers, and demonstrating commercial and artistic sense in combining the two companies. While grand operas adapted for London have tended to be viewed as 'mutilations', evidence points to a much more fruitful exchange with Paris, and to grand opera's far-reaching impact on London theatrical culture.

Tom and Jerry and Don Giovanni; or, Operatic Geography in 1820s London

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Amanda Vickery has observed that 'Eighteenth-century historians can't get enough of pleasure gardens. They seem to crystallise the new and distinctive features of Georgian society and culture in one fabulous setting.' Nowhere is this more true than in the case of London's Spring Gardens at Vauxhall, which have been the subject of many studies addressing eighteenth-century fashion, politics, and performance. Yet these gardens survived well beyond the Georgian period, only closing in 1859 when the growth of the southern suburbs overshadowed their promise of rustic leisure, and rival attractions (notably the Crystal Palace, relocated to Sydenham Hill in 1854) forced the gardens' operators out of business. In this paper I pick up the story of Vauxhall pleasure at a point when the gardens were still associated with the eighteenth century but nevertheless retained a sense of novelty, even modernity. I do this by following in the footsteps of 'Jerry Hawthorn, esq., and his elegant friend, Corinthian Tom,' the central characters in Pierce Egan's illustrated series, *Life in London*. First published in 1821, the original adventures of Tom and Jerry were soon dramatized by William Moncrieff and proved such a success at the Adelphi Theatre that they were scarcely off the bill for the next two seasons. Among the various episodes in the pair's 'rambles and sprees through the Metropolis' were a visit to the Vauxhall Gardens (which Moncrieff would later manage in 1827) and a green room meeting at Drury Lane with the characters of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (which Moncrieff had earlier burlesqued as 'Giovanni in London' and 'Giovanni in the Country'). By bringing together the histories of a fictional friendship, a shape-shifting opera, and a glorified amusement park on the cheap side of the Thames, I aim to shed new light on the mobile geographies of 1820s London.

High-Rise Opera House: *La bohème* in Bern

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Between 2008 and 2010 the Swiss broadcaster Schweizer Fernsehen commissioned three site-specific opera productions for live television relay across Europe. Conceived as part of an outreach and audience development initiative, the productions each featured a full-length performance of a popular opera staged in a public location. The second of these, *La bohème im Hochhaus* (A high-rise *La bohème*, 2009), situated a performance of Puccini's opera in a housing project on the outskirts of Bern. Utilizing diverse locations within the complex—apartment interiors, a bus terminus, a local café—the production mobilized the latest technology to network remotely-situated performers and performance spaces via video feeds and wireless headsets.

My paper considers some of the social and ideological implications of the production and its engagement with space. What, I ask, does 'site-specific' mean in this context? How is the performance shaped by the particular spaces in which it plays out, and how, in turn, might it be understood to re-imagine or re-shape those spaces?

One telling spatial gesture interests me in particular: a thirty-second sequence created to promote and introduce the broadcast uses CGI to depict one of the high-rise buildings breaking free of its foundations and lifting into the air to the sounds of the climax of the Act I duet 'O soave fanciulla'. It is as though the very force of the music transformed the space and elevated its inhabitants, and it recalls an observation, in the commentary of the broadcast's 'making of' documentary, that the opera project had allowed the neighbourhood to transcend its 'ghetto' reputation and become a 'stage for high culture'. Teasing out the assumptions embedded in this claim, I reflect on the sometimes fraught and politically-charged encounter between opera and space evident in this project and in the broader recent trend towards high-profile site-specific productions.

Thomas Quinlan's 'All-Red' Opera Tours, 1912 and 1913

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This paper explores the global cultural ramifications of English entrepreneur Thomas Quinlan's travelling opera company's two extraordinary tours of 'Greater Britain', singing 'in English to English speaking peoples all the time, never leaving the red portions of the geographical map' (Sydney Morning Herald, 11 October 1913). The rhetoric surrounding the tours, used both by Quinlan (1881-1951) and the critics, revolves around two of the core beliefs of imperial patriotism: heroism and militarism. His tours are on a heroic, even herculean scale, he leads a small army, he manages his troops, he girdles the earth, his touring company is a military despatch, he is the 'Napoleonic Mr Quinlan' bringing opera in English to the outreaches of the Empire.

Quinlan was on a civilizing mission, although not necessarily a colonising one, despite his 'all-red' pathways. His travels had started in the English provinces and his desire to advance the general cause of grand opera among the English-speakers of the world included the English themselves; he hoped to 'hop over' to his 'American cousins' as well. His mission was also an educative one: 'In my opinion the method to follow in bringing about artistic progress is not simply to give the people what they want. I claim it a duty to show the public what they should want'. Quinlan's repertoire included many premieres for the countries he visited, including Charpentier's *Louise*, Debussy's *The Prodigal Son* and Wagner's *Ring*.

This paper will briefly survey all the countries visited by Quinlan—South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and Canada—but focus chiefly on Australia. He believed that Australia's isolation from European centres and lack of familiarity with much of the repertoire standard in Europe offered the potential for new audiences: 'I hope to find Australian audiences even more receptive of new music . . . than those of Europe'. I explore the impact of this geographical isolation on the reception of Quinlan's repertoire and also the Australian reaction to Quinlan's self-conscious promotion of his company as an export from and for the British Empire.

Gianni Schicchi and Tuscan Revivalism

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In 'Urbanism opposed by Dante', one of the longer (if less convincing) chapters in Domenico Venturini's 1927 book *Dante Alighieri e Benito Mussolini*, the author attempts to show how the attacks on Florence sprinkled throughout the *Divine Comedy* not only anticipate, but actually prophecy, Fascist cultural policy. Similar attempts to ventriloquize Dante were common in early twentieth-century Italy, from the wartime speeches of Gabriele D'Annunzio through the frenzied celebrations of the seven-hundredth anniversary of the poet's death in 1921. As was the case with Venturini, these acts of historical conjuring interacted in complex ways with anxieties about urbanization and fantasies of the redemptive magic of the Tuscan landscape. This paper attempts to locate the musical, poetic, and dramaturgical depiction of medieval Florence in Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* in such a context. Written during the darkest days of Italy's involvement in World War One, and premiered one month after the war's conclusion, Puccini's sentimental celebration of all things Tuscan may have been more pointed than is often assumed. But bellicosity is only part of the story. For *Gianni Schicchi* is also an opera that dwells on the moral and musical dangers of forcing the dead to speak.

Delirious hopes: Napoleonic Milan and the Rise of Modern Italian Operatic Criticism

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This paper explores the relationship between politics, society and culture in Napoleonic Milan (1796-1814) on the one hand, and opera reviews published in the city's periodical press at the time on the other. This relationship is worth discussing for two reasons: first, Milan under French rule constituted the earliest, embryonic instance of the modern city in Italy; second, it was there that, for the first time in Italy, operatic criticism shifted from an undivided focus on the performance, mostly treated as a social occasion, to a prominent concern for the work being performed, which became the object of lengthy critical scrutiny. I focus specifically on the function of the periodical press as a crucial link between the discourse of opera and that of the city, exploring the complex ways in which Milanese society, culture and ideology, especially as represented in the city's newspapers, are connected to the epoch-making shift from performance to work in the opera reviews published there.

The Operatic Geographies of the Novel in Eighteenth-Century France

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The eighteenth-century French novel regularly incorporates references to theatrical and operatic performance, to the opera house as a vibrant and troubling element of the cultural geography of Paris, and to the sensual and spatial effects that music and spectacle offered to its protagonists. In particular, the eighteenth-century novel becomes a site of tension between urban spaces and their sometimes troubling modernity, on the one hand, and an idyllic pastoral or village existence to which writers often opposed them, on the other. The novel gave meaning to, and extolled or passed judgment on urbanity through a variety of means. My presentation aims to trace the urban or pastoral spaces associated with music, spectacle, and opera in selected French novels from the period (the abbé de Prévost's *Manon Lescault*, Jean-François de Bastide's *La Petite maison*, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Lettre à d'Alembert*, for example), to come to a better understanding of how literary works explored cultural geography in eighteenth-century France.

Opera, Exhibition Space, and the Public Imagination

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In the early twentieth century, critical theorist Walter Benjamin developed a pioneering analysis of buildings as constellations of historical forces and contemporary perceptions that unfold in space. Although Benjamin did not address opera directly, his ideas might help us understand how opera has tried to reshape or renew its cultural identity over the past half century. Benjamin thought of the city as an exhibition space (*Austellungsraum*) a new kind of theatrical stage prefigured in the urban environment that interlaces historical experience and theatricality.

The cultural geography of contemporary opera is shaped by a dialectical relationship between the loss of constituencies inside the auditoria and the proliferation of new opera houses in urban centres. New buildings in Copenhagen (Larsen), Miami (Pelli), Valencia, (Calatrava), Dublin (Libeskind), Dallas (Foster) have departed from the nineteenth-century model of the cultural monument and have inserted visually stimulating architecture into smaller cities as well as metropolises. These projects often emerge with the explicit goal of raising the city's profile but need to create a narrative, a visual scenography, in order to establish the opera's physical place and cultural significance in the modern city. While princes in the sixteenth century built their opera houses inside palazzo blocks and the emerging nation state could exhibit them as cultural monuments (Berlin State Opera and Garnier Opera) along major avenues and squares in the nineteenth century, the stakeholders of modern cities must fit opera houses into a spatial network defined by sophisticated capitalist practices and technological innovations.

In his imaginative and authoritative treatment of New York's urban development in his book *Delirious New York*, architect Rem Koolhaas pointed out that the modern city block is the central dramaturgical and theatrical site, a convenient staging unit for enacting fantasies, public policies, and expressing dreams, as well as 'invisible archeology' that contains 'layers of its past occupancies'. The Met's frantic search for a new building beginning in the 1920s turned into what Koolhaas labeled an 'architectural odyssey' as a plan for the 'new opera wander[ed] across the [New York] grid in a quest for an appropriate location'. The Met's desire for a traditional cultural monument clashed with this grid of islands and set in relief the lack of a theatrical narrative and cultural identity congenial with New York City's development.

In my paper, I address the site dramaturgy of three paradigmatic buildings and locations for opera houses: aside from New York's Metropolitan Opera, I examine the Paris' Bastille Opera, and Dallas' Winspear Opera. Focusing on the insertion of opera buildings into the block structures of these diverse cities, I argue that these buildings have become scenographic models of cultural identity. Unable to find a location in the existing block system, the Met (designed by Wallace Harrison and completed in 1966) became a paradigmatic urban renewal project that replaced an entire neighborhood to fit the opera into the developing urban landscape. In contrast, the Bastille opera emerged as one piece of Francois Mitterand's Grands Travaux spread throughout Paris in 1989. Built at one of Paris's most emblematic locations, the Place de la Bastille, its architect Carlos Ott faced the task of recovering an image of the former prison towers at a place socially and artistically linked to the aristocracy. This site arrangement, for which Palladio's Teatro Olimpico provided the paradigm, is defined by plazas with radiating streets that themselves originated in set designs and perspective painting. Finally, the Dallas Opera (2009), designed by Norman Foster, is located in the Dallas Arts District, one of the densest accumulations of architectural projects in the world. The building stands near the Nasher Sculpture Center (Renzo Piano), the Dallas Art Museum (Edward Barnes), the Symphony Hall (I.M.Pei), and the Dallas Theater Center (Rem Koolhaas). Each building is staged on its own block at the outskirts of downtown Dallas. In this context, the opera is constructed both as art work on display in an art exhibition and part of a movie set that travellers or audience members' traverse.

As Paris, New York, and Dallas represent different stages of urban development, the exploration of selected site dramaturgies offers the beginning of a historical trajectory for a cultural geography of opera. This paper attempts, in Benjamin's spirit, to rescue and redeem opera as a genre through its attention to its architectural container and site dramaturgy. If it is true, as Theodor Adorno suggested in his essay on bourgeois opera, that opera's massive artistic means and strategies (popular myths, visualized scenarios, large orchestras, large chorus) prefigured many practices of the culture industry, one might argue that contemporary cities have enlisted architects to turn those massive effects inside out in an effort to create large-scale narratives for and in the contemporary city. In this sense, opera architecture and site dramaturgy become plots enacted in the exhibition space of the public imagination.

L'italiana in Calcutta

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In this paper, I will use the visit of a small Italian operatic troupe to Calcutta in 1833-1837 as a way to consider the meanings of operatic performance in the Indian capital, and also to explore the wider question of how such performances contributed to a developing idea of 'global opera', transmitted through a network of newspaper reports written about such tours. The singers who arrived in Calcutta in late 1833 came directly from a summer season giving operas—mainly by Rossini—to the European traders in Macao, and before that had performed with varying success around the ports of South America. In Calcutta, their performances at the Chowringhee Theatre were described by some as providing a cultural space in which rich British and Indian merchants could come together in shared appreciation of the seductively universal appeal of Italian opera. The reality was, predictably enough, far more complex, and this paper will seek to set the tour within various contexts—of colonial Calcuttan society, of the troupe's transcontinental peregrinations, of the tension between opera as purveyor of both civilization and exoticism, and of the influential European discourse about Rossini's music spreading effortlessly around the globe.

Verdi's *Otello*: on the Threshold

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Following its debut at La Scala in February 1887, Verdi's *Otello* moved in multiple directions, both across Italy and internationally. Accompanying it on its travels was a strict set of guidelines—that potent instrument of late-nineteenth-century operatic standardization, a *disposizione scenica*. Among countless other details, the *disposizione* specified that, in the absence of a full organ, the low semitone cluster at the opera's opening should be played in all future (re)productions by specially-installed organ pipes, powered by hand-cranked bellows. Yet this cluster, masked as it is by a famously noisy orchestral storm, is usually perceived only six minutes into the opera, when the tempest calms and the drone lifts. In other words, its presence becomes marked only at the moment of its sudden absence. My paper proposes to excavate this technologically produced sonic lack in three principal ways. First will come an outline of the tone cluster's recreation in *Otello*'s revivals during the late nineteenth century, both in Italy and abroad. Secondly, I will strive to locate the sound event within a European discourse on psychoacoustics, one in which thresholds of perception were crucially at stake, and in which moments of falling into, and emerging from, silence were investigated scientifically in attempts to define the sensorial capacities and attentive limits of modern 'listeners'. Finally, I will address the event politically, as a materialization of silence that not only imagined a particular kind of theatrical space, but also helped delimit the social boundaries between that space and its outside: the noisy urban environment in which it was customarily performed.