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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Operatic Roots of Performativity: Bodies Decontextualised in Butler, Brecht and Busoni

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Abstract

It has long been claimed that opera can give expression to the uneasy relationship between the body and the voice. Operatic voices seem to exceed the capacity of the bodies that produce them in a way that conveys a sense of mechanisation or limited agency, inviting metaphorical comparisons to marionettes. Yet recent studies of gesture have suggested that bodies are not simply passively inscribed with meaning but that they also mediate the process of inscription. Investigating the implications of this claim for opera, this article discusses two recent essays by Judith Butler, in which she draws from Walter Benjamin's account of gesture in Brecht's epic theatre to argue for the performative power of incomplete or decontextualised bodily actions. It then traces this idea to a moment in epic theatre's own prehistory, focusing on Ferruccio Busoni's opera *Doktor Faust*. The article makes both a theoretical point and an historical claim: it highlights how bodies and words that are decontextualised can perform a critical function despite not enjoying the usual citational supports necessary for a speech act; and it argues that Busoni's *Doktor Faust* and his theory of opera were a part of the intellectual prehistory to Butler's conceptualisation of bodily performativity.

Keywords: Incomplete performance; Marionettes; Performativity; Epic theatre; Gesture; Busoni; Faust; Off-stage chorus

> The discovery (alienation) of conditions takes place through the interruption of happenings[1]

In 1908, Edward Gordon Craig published what was to become an infamous article in *The Mask*, titled 'The Actor and the Über-Marionette', in which he lamented the messiness of human bodies in stage performance: 'the body of man', he wrote provocatively, 'is *by nature* utterly useless as a material for an art'.[2] Craig called on theatre managers to 'do away with the actor', so that 'no longer would there be a living figure to confuse us into connecting actuality and art; no longer a living figure in which the weakness and tremors of the flesh were perceptible'.[3] Despite his provocative tone, Craig's polemic

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[1] Walter Benjamin, 'What is Epic Theater?', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), 147–54, at 150.

[2] Edward Gordon Craig, 'The Actor and the Über-Marionette', *The Mask: A Monthly Journal of the Art of the Theatre* 1/2 (1908), 3–15, at 5. Original emphasis.

[3] Craig, 'The Actor and the Über-Marionette', 11.

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carried forward a conception of art that was by that time fairly conventional for a certain brand of modernist artist, and loosely associated with a range of late nineteenth-century aestheticisms – namely, the critical (and at times ontological) claim that art is only art when it is different from life; it can only harness the critical power of the aesthetic when it asserts distance from the relentless flow of day-to-day experience.[4] Although this view was not necessarily oppositional to mimetic realism – which itself relied on practices of detachment – it was often mobilised against it, in support of forms of expression that explored pretense and artificiality, estrangement and defamiliarisation. Against the 'Life! Life! Life!' of the 'Realists', Craig drew from a lineage of thinking that attached aesthetic value to deathly and autumnal beauty, and attributed a type of ecstatic vitality to the inanimate – 'that mysterious, joyous, and superbly complete life which is called Death'.[5]

Following from this position, the body of an actor was too real, too life-like, too full of personality and hidden passions that would inevitably 'seize upon his limbs' in defiance of professional comportment, revealing themselves in minute, involuntary gestures such as the movement in the muscles of the face and vocal cords. According to Craig, these involuntary tells were a manifestation of the mind's inability fully to control the body, including the voice ('emotion cracks the voice of the actor. It sways his voice to join in the conspiracy against his mind'), and a reflection of the human desire to be free and not be made an instrument of the will of another, in this case the playwright or director ('the nature in man will fight for freedom, and will revolt against being made a slave or medium for the expression of another's thoughts').[6] Craig's response to this problem of the fact that the bodies and voices of human actors spoil the artistic character of theatre (and therefore also its critical potency), was to replace them with inanimate figures – 'descendant[s] of the stone images of the old Temples' – which he termed 'über-marionettes'.[7]

Whether or not Craig was calling for an actual replacement of actors with life-sized marionettes, or alternatively a particular form of dramatic stylisation involving masked actors and an emphasis on gesture, remains a matter of contention.[8] Yet Craig's vision of bodiless art was an intentional provocation to rethink the status of bodies on stage. This vision could hardly be further from the type of prestige accorded to bodily experience in contemporary theory today – such as claims associated with affect theory (including the notion that bodily sensation may offer a privileged site of pre-cognitive or unmediated experience); embodied cognition (which counters the mind-body split and advances an understanding of bodily sensation as a form of knowledge); or in a social theory of the body (predicated on the idea that cultural and historical norms are inscribed upon bodies). Indeed, a denial of the bodily or the corporeal can imply a range of other denials, including a denial of the epistemological role of passionate feeling and sympathetic identification, in favour of forms of knowledge that involve objectification; a denial of the irrational, the pre-cognitive, the 'drastic', the feminine, or the indigenous; or a denial of the importance of orality (as a metaphor for performance or event) in deference to the authority of the written word or other signifying 'texts'.

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[4] Indeed, Craig positioned his argument as an extension of the thought of Flaubert, Dante, George Sand, Ruskin and Pater, among others. And while he opened his article with a quotation that is often attributed to the Italian actress Eleonora Duse – 'to save the Theatre, the Theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague … They make art impossible' – this is in fact not a quotation but a paraphrase of what Arthur Symons recalled her saying, in his *Studies in Seven Arts* (London, 1906), 336, adding Symons' own polemical rejection of realist theatre to Craig's intellectual lineage.

[5] Craig, 'The Actor and the Über-Marionette', 9.

[6] Craig, 'The Actor and the Über-Marionette', 4–5.

[7] Craig, 'The Actor and the Über-Marionette', 39.

[8] For a summary of this debate and a description of the evidence see Patrick Le Boeuf, 'On the Nature of Edward Gordon Craig's Über-Marionette', *New Theatre Quarterly* 26/2 (2010), 102–14; and Thomas and Sally Leabhart, 'Edward Gordon Craig's Übermarionette and Étienne Decroux's "Actor Made of Wood"', *Mime Journal* 26 (2017), 34–42. Christopher Innes noted earlier that while Craig did experiment with large wooden figures, 'his argument was against the "actor", but not against the human performer per se' (Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig* (Cambridge, 1983), 123–6).

Likewise, in opera studies, the 'performative turn' has directed our focus toward the living presence of performing bodies on stage, emphasising opera's open-endedness and contingency in a way that has attained the status of virtue, against the maligned spectre of the sedimented 'work'.[9] Spinning out from these tendencies (and in some cases pitched against them) has been a concern to recover the constitutive role of the corporeal and material facets of opera, in order to counter the artform's tendency to disembody its voices, and to mystify its technological means of production.[10] For some, there is a sense in which opera has always been mechanical. The operatic voice seems to exceed the confines of the body that produces it, appearing to be directed by an external source, outside of the body. In constructivist terms, the uncanny nature of the operatic voice serves as a metonym for the problem of human agency, performing a split between what is said and the source of the saying that highlights the operation of, variously, the subconscious, or social conditioning, or governmentality, or mechanisation. In psychoanalytic terms, opera's uncanniness emblemises the alienation of the subject in language, and the difficulty of achieving an unmediated sense of ourselves.

There is a simultaneous terror and thrill conveyed by the double meanings created by operatic bodies: they appear as automata that are animated by unseen musical forces, in a similar manner perhaps to the mismatch between the voice and its source in the case of the gramophone, which – as Gumbrecht described – inspired 'both the fear of ghosts and the hope for eternal life'.[11] It is no surprise then that metaphors of mechanisation abound in opera and opera criticism, as well as the actual incorporation and thematisation of mechanical devices such as puppets, music boxes and other mechanisms of ventriloquism.[12] In this sense, the very tension between the messiness of human bodies – the same 'tremors of the flesh' that Craig bemoaned and that contemporary scholars have sought to recover – and the degree to which these messy bodies are able to be instrumentalised to the will of another, may be a constitutive element of performance.

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[9] Recent reflections on the 'performative turn' in opera studies are found in the special double issue of *Opera Quarterly* 35/1–2 (2019), guest-edited by Axel Englund. Particularly relevant to the current discussion is Englund's own contribution 'An Incomplete Life: *Lulu* and the Performance of Unfinishedness', 20–39; as well as the contributions of Arman Schwartz, 'Opera and Objecthood: Sedimentation, Spectatorship, and *Einstein on the Beach*', 40–62; and Christopher Morris, 'Casting Metal: Opera Studies after Humanism', 77–95.

[10] On recovering the physical properties of the voice in opera, see Michelle Duncan, 'The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body: Voice, Presence, Performativity', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16/3 (2004), 283–306; and beyond opera studies, see Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin, eds., *The Voice as Something More: Essays Toward Materiality* (Chicago, 2019), and Karmen MacKendrick, *The Matter of Voice: Sensual Soundings* (New York, 2016). For a brief history of the status of the voice within theory more generally, see Martha Feldman, 'The Interstitial Voice: An Opening', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68/3 (2015), 653–85, part of a colloquy entitled 'Why Voice Now?' which Feldman convened. There is a broad range of recent literature on both the technologies of operatic production (including the bodies, objects and spaces involved in production), as well as technological mediations and transmissions of opera performance (including opera on screen, in films and live-streamed events, and taking into account shifting roles of the audience in opera's production and consumption). These perspectives tend to draw variously from media theory, new materialism and posthumanist perspectives. See, for example, Gundula Kreuzer, *Curtain, Gong, Steam: Wagnerian Technologies of Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Oakland, CA, 2018); Karen Henson, ed., *Technology and the Diva: Sopranos, Opera, and Media from Romanticism to the Digital Age* (Cambridge, 2016); the special issue of Opera Quarterly guest edited by Melina Esse on 'Mediating Opera' 26/1 (2010) and other examples that will be explored below.

[11] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *In 1926: Living at the Edge of Time* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 113.

[12] A key text on this point is Carolyn Abbate's *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, 2003). Specific case studies include Marissa Fenley, 'When the Puppets Get Together: Looking Like a Subject in the Archers' *The Tales of Hoffmann*', *Opera Quarterly* 35 (2019), 276–96; Jelena Novak, *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body* (Farnham, 2015); Martin Nedbal, 'Live Marionettes and Divas on the Strings: *Die Zauberflöte*'s Interactions with Puppet Theater', *Opera Quarterly* 28 (2012), 20–36; Arman Schwartz, 'Mechanism and Tradition in Puccini's *Turandot*', *Opera Quarterly* 25 (2009): 28–50; and Alexandra Wilson, 'Modernism and the Machine Woman in Puccini's "Turandot"', *Music & Letters* 86 (2005), 432–51.

The revived focus on the body in recent theory often has an emancipatory character, issuing from the idea that bodies can perform resistance in ways that language cannot, because language is bound within a closely regulated symbolic system and is less able to occupy space. This has arisen, in part, from a decoupling of the voice (as a sonorous, bodily, material phenomenon) from language, proceeding from Roland Barthes' paradigmatic notion of the 'grain of the voice' and extending to claims that implicate practices of 'voicing' in strengthening the agency of marginalised groups.[13] The valorisation of the body's potential to enable political agency is latently positioned against an earlier discourse around bodily performativity in which bodies were considered vulnerable to cultural inscription. For example, in her work on movement and agency, Carrie Noland has criticised the work of Judith Butler from the late 1980s and early 1990s, for construing the body as wholly open to the impress of speech as social conditioning – vulnerable, in other words, to the performative force of linguistic 'speech acts' that were so notably theorised by J. L. Austin.[14] Against Butler's performativity, Noland argued that an awareness of enculturated bodily movements through 'somatic absorption' can in fact allow us to undertake willed gestural deviations that subvert processes of cultural inscription.[15] Noland sought to navigate between 'on the one hand a determinist, constructivist theory that depicts subjects as pliant material on which culture inscribes, and on the other a neo-vitalist approach that tends to exaggerate the subject's capacity to express and fashion itself'.[16] Yet in two more recent essays Butler provides an important clarification on this point.[17] Butler emphasises that there is a dual character to her account of performativity, in that it describes 'both the processes of being acted on, and the conditions and possibilities for acting', meaning that the possibility for deviations and resistances – through both body and language – are bound up with the same conditions that enable social norms to determine us in the first instance.[18]

The status of 'context' (encompassing the social conventions that enable an utterance to be performative) and the corollary potential of 'decontextualisation' (encompassing utterances and other acts that are not supported by these conditions) are key to this clarification. Butler notes that Austin's speech acts require a particular context and set of social conventions to take effect, but also that Derrida subsequently temporalised this idea, highlighting that these conventions are built up through repetition over time, and as such rely on 'citational chains'.[19] Butler investigates the critical potential of utterances that take place without citational supports, and extends this idea to bodily movement that is similarly unsupported by a set of social expectations. She imagines a type of action, which she terms 'stalled action' or 'incomplete performance', that thwarts being incorporated into a citational chain. This type of incomplete performance refuses to be perceived in relation to its causes or consequences; it refuses completion, being akin to a partial sentence that is quoted outside of its original context, in a way that evacuates its intelligibility.

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[13] For a useful summary of this line of argument see Martha Feldman and Judith T. Zeitlin, 'The Clamor of Voices', in *The Voice as Something More: Essays Toward Materiality* (Chicago, 2019), 3–36.

[14] J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA, 1975).

[15] Carrie Noland, *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 209. A similar call has been made in musicology for the 'material turn' to take better account of the feedback loop between body and mind, or what Watkins and Esse have called 'somatic introspection – the reciprocal exchange of signals between body and consciousness along internal pathways of perception and action' (Holly Watkins and Melina Esse, 'Down with Disembodiment: or, Musicology and the Material Turn', *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 19 (2015), 160–8, at 162).

[16] Noland, *Agency and Embodiment*, 8.

[17] Judith Butler, 'When Gesture Becomes Event', in *Inter Views in Performance Philosophy: Crossings and Conversations*, eds. Anna Street, Julien Alliot and Magnolia Pauker (London, 2017), 171–91; Judith Butler, 'Theatrical Machines', *differences* 26/3 (2015), 23–42.

[18] Butler, 'When Gesture Becomes Event', 177.

[19] Butler cites Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', trans. Alan Bass, in *Limited, Inc.*, ed. Gerald Graff (Evanston, 1977), 1–23.

Butler develops this idea from Walter Benjamin's writing on Bertolt Brecht's conception of gesture in epic theatre, which Benjamin describes as 'quotable gesture'. For Butler, this notion of gesture is akin to 'citation' in speech – a partial or decomposed speech act which refuses completion. She sees this in anti-constructivist terms, so that gesture can allegorise the 'decomposition of a speech act understood as the embodied expression of a definite will', opening the possibility for change:[20]

> In the best of circumstances, such disconcerting moments of citations – these incomplete performances – can bring to a halt what has become both very usual and utterly wrong, allegorizing the intervention into the mechanical reproduction of ideology that seeks to stop its potentially destructive force.[21]

While Butler's clarification here still sees her construing bodies in an allegorical relation to the operation of language (a move that Noland criticised in Butler's earlier work), she focuses on situations where utterances acquire force despite not being supported by the conditions that would make their meaning intelligible. With a framing around the relationship between performance and social embodiment in mind, Butler asks, 'What happens to action when its conditions of authorisation and support fall away? What form does action take when it is radically unsupported? And when it is effectively de-authorized?'[22] Her concern here is with understanding the pathways to political and social action for marginalised (i.e., unsupported, delegitimised) groups, which is in one way aligned with the material conception of voice decoupled from language, mentioned above. Yet Butler's decoupling of body and language is oriented specifically toward bodily movements that interrupt the assumed alignment of language, body and individual will, revealing the operation of citational supports by their very absence.

The notion of bodies acquiring critical force only when their movements are decontextualised may seem counter-intuitive in the context of opera studies. Yet the special status of bodies in opera – the operatic body's conflicted relationship with the 'voice object', as well as opera's preoccupation with themes of mechanisation, and its early investment in the expressive potential of gesture – seems curiously resonant with the potential of decontextualisation, or 'quotable gesture'. What follows will in part explore aspects of this resonance in the relationship between bodies, voice, language and music in opera. But more concretely, I aim to suggest that Butler's notion of 'incomplete performance' has a genealogical link to opera – indeed, to a particular stream of operatic theory, and even a particular opera: Ferruccio Busoni's *Doktor Faust*, composed between 1916 and 1924, but left unfinished at the time of the composer's death.[23]

Busoni's *Doktor Faust* is littered with decontextualised bodies in an explicit sense, detached from the function usually accorded to them: the opera includes partial and not-quite-there bodies such as ghostly apparitions animated by offstage voices (including the six servants of Lucifer, designated in the libretto as candle flames but represented in some contemporary productions by suspended bodies or body parts);[24] the straw body of Faust and the Duchess's deceased baby that Mephistophéles brings to the Wittenberg tavern and sets alight; the vanishing vision of Helen of Troy and her reappearance on a crucifix in place of Christ in the final scene; and the naked youth who symbolises the continuation of Faust's will after his own bodily death. But more significantly, these decontextualised bodies serve as an analogue for Busoni's theory of opera, which sought to separate music from generic function, and likewise music in opera from the strictures of narrative and drama. Busoni conceived of the possibility of what he called 'absolute' opera, or opera that is not opera ('Oper, die keine Oper ist'), as we shall see.[25] Indeed, Busoni held that music could be most 'absolute' in opera, contributing to the expression of the libretto yet completely detachable from it, like a suit of armour is detachable from a body:

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[20] Butler, 'When Gesture Becomes Event', 184.

[21] Butler, 'Theatrical Machines', 41.

[22] Butler, 'When Gesture Becomes Event', 181.

[23] The libretto was written by Busoni even earlier, in 1914–15, and Busoni wrote several musical sketch studies before embarking on the preparation of the opera score. The most recent detailed account of these preparatory sources is found in Marc-André Roberge, 'Extending the Reach of Ferruccio Busoni's *Doktor Faust*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Faust in Music*, eds. Lorna Fitzsimmons and Charlies McKnight (New York, 2019), 309–36.

> an opera score, whilst fitting the action, should show detached from it a complete musical picture; comparable to a suit of armour which, intended for the envelopment of human bodies, in itself exhibits a gratifying picture, a valuable work in material, form and artistic execution.[26]

In pursuing this vision of a music capable of being decontextualised, just as a suit of armour from a body, Busoni deployed strategies of estrangement and abridgement that became influential for Brecht's and his collaborator Kurt Weill's respective theories of *gestus.* These strategies were part of a broader interwar attempt to cultivate highly consolidated expressive modes, not only in music and theatre but also in literature and poetry.[27] A similar drive towards distillation drove Edward Gordon Craig's thinking on marionettes, as we have seen. Busoni likely knew of Craig's work, and was certainly invested in the work of Heinrich von Kleist and E. T. A. Hoffmann, for both of whom marionettes and automata were a distinctive preoccupation.[28] Yet far from valorising automata and seeking after a bodiless art in the manner of Craig and others, Busoni sought to emphasise the latent tension in performance between the instrumentalisation of bodies and their ability to assert themselves, forging a link between opera and epic theatre. His *Doktor Faust* includes a range of devices for estrangement that I will argue present an allegory of the uneasy relationship between the body, voice and language. These devices include the following.

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[24] See below for descriptions of recent productions in Munich and Zurich.

[25] Frank Hentschel, 'Ferruccio Busoni's *Doktor Faust*: Eine "Oper, die keine Oper" ist', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 62 (2005), 303–26.

[26] Ferruccio Busoni, 'The Oneness of Music and the Possibilities of Opera', in *The Essence of Music and Other Papers*, trans. Rosamond Ley (London, 1957), 1–16, at 4.

[27] These consolidated modes are not only a feature of neo-classicism but are also apparent in such tendencies as Ezra Pound's Vorticism and H. D.'s Imagism. Daniel Albright distinguishes Brecht's *gestus* from these trends in that Brecht focused on physical gesture and physicality, yet Albright also notes that 'Pound and Brecht both wanted to change the world through extremely distilled forms of expression' (Daniel Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts* (Chicago, 2000), 111). The relationship between literary and musical modes of distilled expression during the interwar period is discussed in Sarah Collins, *Lateness and Modernism: Untimely Ideas about Music, Literature and Politics in Interwar Britain* (Cambridge, 2019).

[28] Despite the clear resonance between many of their respective ideas about art, marionettes and aesthetics, there seems to have been only indirect interaction between Busoni and Craig. Della Couling suggested that Busoni owned a copy of Craig's book *On the Art of the Theatre* (1911), and that they may have come in contact given that 'Craig had lived in Berlin for a few months in 1907, and was living and working in Rome in 1916, when Busoni conducted his *Rondò*, and working on various projects involving marionettes' (Della Couling, *Ferruccio Busoni: 'A Musical Ishmael'* (Lanham, 2005), 296). The two men certainly had acquaintances in common, such as Ronald Stevenson, Isadora Duncan and Frederick Delius. Delius rented Craig's house for a time in December 1923 in Rapallo (Frederick Delius and Peter Warlock [Philip Heseltine], *Frederick Delius and Peter Warlock: A Friendship Revealed*, ed. Barry Smith (Oxford, 2000), 414).

(1) The use of a *Puppenspiel* aesthetic.
(2) The deployment of *Schlagwort* or textual ‘abridgement’.
(3) The use of an offstage chorus and theorisation of ‘acoustic perspective’.
(4) The discontinuous format of the opera, which draws attention to discrete situations rather than long-term causes and consequences (in contrast to tragic theatre).
(5) Busoni’s emphasis on creating a sense of spectatorship and pretence – through the magical theme of the opera, the framing device of the poet speaking directly to the audience, the representation of Faust as a spectator on his own unfolding fate, and the role of the offstage chorus as ‘dispassionate observer’ or ‘untragic hero’ in the Benjaminian sense.
(6) Busoni’s de-emphasis of empathy or sensation attached to the subject matter (against the dramatic theatre model of Aristotle, which again is part of Benjamin’s description of Brecht’s epic theatre).
(7) The way in which Busoni’s *Doktor Faust* is self-consciously positioned as an encapsulation of his theory of opera.

These devices of estrangement were not geared toward social transformation in the manner of Brecht’s own theatrical innovations (indeed Busoni explicitly distanced himself from day-to-day politics, for the most part), yet they were certainly a form of aestheticisation that was aimed at instigating cultural and spiritual renewal.[29] In other words, they were designed to act, as it were, in the world. And I will argue that they do so by allegorising bodily decontextualisation in a manner that speaks directly to the function of incomplete performance in recent discussions of performativity. I will suggest that we can follow a thread that leads backwards from Butler, through Walter Benjamin and Brecht, to Busoni – namely, from performativity, back through estrangement and epic theatre, to opera.

To say that performativity has ‘operatic roots’ in any direct sense is of course too ambitious a claim for an article of this size, not least because the presence of a stage and orchestral pit in opera is difficult to align with the link that Butler is trying to make between performance (including gender performance) and theatre (which, like gender performance, does not require a stage). Theatre is relevant to Butler’s interest in what is required for political action to take place because theatre operates within a set of conventions that create the conditions for its intelligibility, just like speech acts or gender performativity. Epic theatre, specifically, rejects the ‘picture-frame, peep-box, proscenium-frame stage’.[30] Benjamin attributed the stage and orchestral pit in opera to a moribund sense of ritualism which was receding from contemporary theatrical traditions, and advocated the ‘filling in of the orchestral pit’ – that ‘abyss which separates the players from the audience as it does the dead from the living’ – in preference for a conception of theatre ‘on a dais’.[31] One could perhaps make an argument along these lines for certain types of opera that take place in unconventional locations, but in fact I am pursuing a far more limited historical claim. I want to explore the way in which Busoni's *Doktor Faust* and his theory of opera are a part of an intellectual and aesthetic amalgam whose legacy ultimately informed Butler's clarifications about bodily performativity and incomplete performance in her most recent work. This claim is buttressed by biographical links between Busoni and Weill, intellectual links between Busoni and Brecht (Busoni's *Doktor Faust* has been described as employing 'Brechtian' procedures by Slavoj Žižek and others, as we will see) and interpretative sympathies between Busoni's thinking, Benjamin's account of Brecht's epic theatre, and Butler's recent work on gesture.

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[29] Details of Busoni’s political position with respect to ‘ideal socialism’ (*Idealsozialismus*) can be found in Tamara Levitz, *Teaching New Classicality: Ferruccio Busoni’s Master Class in Composition* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 80–2.

[30] Mordecai Gorelik, ‘An Epic Theatre Catechism’, in *Brecht Sourcebook*, eds. Henry Bial and Carol Martin (London, 2000), 29–34.

[31] Benjamin, ‘What is Epic Theater?’, 154.

Butler, Benjamin and epic theatre

We have seen that Butler has sought to clarify her account of performativity as encompassing the dual character of performance, namely that it describes 'both the process of being acted on, and the conditions and possibilities for acting'. Butler reads the body *into* Austin's speech act theory in two ways. First, Butler points out that the fact that we are susceptible to the effect of speech acts implies a certain 'corporeal vulnerability'.[32] And second, speech acts rely on performance, or 'social embodiment', for their effect, implying that the 'support' of social and institutional conventions are what lend them authority, legitimacy and meaning.[33] The 'supports' that make speech acts effective have their own history. This history gives the event of the speech act a temporal quality that sees it relying upon a 'citational chain', which as we have seen is a point that Butler attributes to Derrida. Yet these supports – these citational chains upon which the efficacy of any speech act relies – are also amenable to change, just as any act of categorisation or naming opens the possibility that deviations will arise that put pressure on those categories (a point that Butler attributes to Sedgwick).[34] Thus language and (bodily) performance are bound together to create the conditions for speech acts to take effect, *as well as* being mutually implicated in disruptions to those effects.

While for Austin, speech acts derive their power from their context, which provides their social or infrastructural 'supports', Derrida's notion that speech acts are citational allows Butler to explore the way in which utterances and gestures act when decontextualised or are lacking in these supports. In approaching this question, Butler turns to Walter Benjamin's writing on Brecht's epic theatre. In Benjamin's account, the stylised nature of epic theatre presents utterance as if it was being quoted, giving it an effect that is different from its contextualised effect, and making it seem as though it occurs without its usual structural supports.

> The where and when of a quotation is always, to some extent, lost when it emerges for the purpose of display; when the citation stands apart from its function, the everyday context is suspended, backgrounded, even lost, and so the quotation becomes a gesture, that is, a truncated form of action that has lost the context for its intelligibility.[35]

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[32] Butler, 'When Gesture Becomes Event', 178. This is especially the case with processes of naming around gender categories, which have been Butler's main concern of course, because of the centrality of the body in the medical and psychological literature on gender.

[33] Equally, speech acts rely on a body to generate them in written or verbal form, which Butler elsewhere describes as 'the embodied act of speech'. Butler, 'Theatrical Machines', 38.

[34] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Los Angeles, 1990).

[35] Butler, 'When Gesture Becomes Event', 182.

For Benjamin, gesture in epic theatre is decontextualised from the usual flow of events and thereby denaturalised.[36] Brecht's contribution, in Benjamin's account, is to counteract the audience's absorption so that there is a focus on the incomplete and unsupported, decontextualised gesture. The gesture itself is the event, and the focus is on immediacy of the gesture rather than on its consequence or outcome. 'Making gestures quotable' was, according to Benjamin, 'one of the substantial achievements of the epic theatre.'[37]

Butler aligns Benjamin's reading of gesture with Derrida's interest in the decontextualisation of language. She joins Derrida's concern with how language gathers force from its ability to live in new contexts and Benjamin's notion of gestural quotation: 'the distance from the original context is a precondition of quotability or citationality: there could be no citation without that distance, that break'.[38] For Derrida, it is not only speech acts that are necessarily decontextualised; decontextualisation is also a condition of literature. In an essay that Butler does not cite but which is instructive here in relation to her point, Derrida marvels at the way in which the phrase '*Pardon de ne pas vouloir dire*' – usually translated as 'Pardon for not meaning (to say)' – seems to resist contextualisation, remaining partial and quotable without giving away its referent or addressee, or its function. He writes:

> Imagine that we were to leave this utterance to its fate.
>
> Consent for a time at least to my abandoning it like that, alone, really exposed, aimless, wandering, erratic even: 'Pardon for not meaning (to say) …' Is this, such an utterance, a sentence? A phrase from a prayer? A request about which it is still too early, or already too late, to know whether it has simply been interrupted, whether it requires or excludes suspension points at the end? …
>
> 'Pardon for not meaning (to say) …' has now become a quotation.
> So the interpreter studies it.
> An archaeologist might well wonder if the phrase is complete:
> 'Pardon for not meaning (to say) …,' but what in fact? And to whom? Who to whom?
> There there is secrecy [*il y a là du secret*], and we sense that literature is taking over these words, without, for all that, appropriating them in order to fashion them to its own purpose.
> The average hermeneut can't know whether this request ever signified something in a real context. Was it addressed one day by someone to someone, by a real signatory to a determinate addressee?[39]

Chris Danta has noted how the phrase at issue here – Pardon for not meaning (to say) – has the character of a 'communication that paradoxically attempts to put an end to any future communication – that actively separates itself from its preceding context without at the same time establishing an alternative context of meaning that would enable further discourse'.[40] And quoting from Derrida's early essay 'Passions', Danta writes that the phrase in fact keeps a secret 'that is without content, without a content separable from its performative experience, from its performative tracing'.[41] It is this decontextualisation – this secrecy which forecloses any possibility of disclosure – that makes for a literary statement, according to Derrida. Butler latently sees similar attributes in Benjamin's account of gesture in Brecht's epic theatre: a 'truncated form of action that has lost the context for its intelligibility'.[42]

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[36] Benjamin, 'What is Epic Theater?', 151.

[37] Benjamin, 'What is Epic Theater?', 151.

[38] Butler, 'When Gesture Becomes Event', 182.

[39] Jacques Derrida, 'Literature in Secret: An Impossible Filiation', in *The Gift of Death, Second Edition, and Literature in Secret*, trans. David Wills (Chicago, 2008), 119–58, at 119–20. Original format. Previously published as 'Littérature au secret: une filiation impossible', in *Donner la mort* (Paris, 1999), 161–209.

[40] Chris Danta, 'Derrida and the Test of Secrecy', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 18/2 (2013), 61–75, at 62.

Just as, by these accounts, decontextualised bodies and language can interrupt the conditions that make speech acts effective, marionettes may be said to function likewise as bodies without citational supports. Marionettes are animated by voices and gestural volition that is not their own, giving them just the quotable quality that Benjamin valorises. Craig's vision of theatre without human bodies – a theatre of über-marionettes – would then become a theatre of pure gesture, though at the expense of holding in tension the dual character of performance.

Busoni's *Schlagwort* and Brecht's and Weill's *Gestus*

The critical potential of decontextualised bodies is a matter related to performance in general, yet the fact that it is grounded in an aesthetics associated with Brecht's epic theatre raises the question of its relationship with opera. Brecht's anti-Wagnerian views are well known, yet as Joy Calico has argued, Brecht's engagement with the work of Wagner, and with opera more broadly, was far more conflicted than is often acknowledged.[43] Brecht positioned himself against what he considered to be the 'narcotic effects' of Wagner's music, generalising these as the condition of opera as such, as well as railing against the propagation of social hierarchies within the institution of Opera. Yet Brecht also described a number of his own works as operas, and constructed part of his theatrical agenda as an exploration of 'anti-opera' alternatives. Brecht's ongoing rhetorical and formal negotiations with opera substantially shaped his theories of theatrical performance and audience perception which came to emblemise modernist theatre.[44]

Busoni, himself an anti-Wagnerian, played a role in this reconfiguration, not only because his attempts at operatic reform figured in the debates about the future of German opera in the 1920s, but also in a more specific way as a teacher of Kurt Weill in Berlin from 1921 to 1923, who went on to collaborate with Brecht from 1927.[45] Indeed, Calico goes so far as to write that 'Busoni, Weill, and Wagner constituted the operatic foundation of the epic theatre project. This is true regarding notions of both physical and musical gesture and the function of music in relationship to action on the stage.'[46] It is the title of Calico's second chapter, 'The Operatic Roots of Gestus', to which my own title refers, signalling an extension of her argument about the conflicted relationship between opera and epic theatre historically.[47]

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[41] Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, 1995), 24, quoted in Danta, 'Derrida and the Test of Secrecy', 62.

[42] Butler, 'When Gesture Becomes Event', 182.

[43] Joy Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* (Berkeley, 2008).

[44] Calico, *Brecht at the Opera,* 3–5. Calico notes how modernist theatre has been construed as growing out of an opposition to Wagner, making it an 'illegitimate child of opera', though in her book she advances a far more nuanced account of this relationship.

[45] More circumstantially, Brecht was known to have owned a copy of Busoni's earlier work *Entwurf einer neuen Äesthetik der Tonkunst* (1907, rev. 1916). Calico also links Brecht's *gestus* to contemporaneous ideas in movement and dance, such as the theories of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, which connected movement to self-transformation (Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, 45–9). It may be of note, in this context, that the interpretative dancer Maude Allen was a member of Busoni's circle, such that Busoni was certainly not unaware of notions of bodily performance.

[46] Calico, *Brecht at the Opera,* 48–9. In previous accounts of opera's influence on the development of epic theatre, the focus has primarily been on Brecht's shifting engagements with Wagner's works rather than Busoni's works directly (Hilda Meldrum Brown, *Leimotiv and Drama: Wagner, Brecht, and the Limits of 'Epic' Theatre* (Oxford,

Busoni's notion of *Schlagwort* – 'catchword' or 'abridgement' – is significant in this respect. *Schlagwort* referred to the device of paring down the libretto to the bare minimum, giving it a symbolic rather than a narrative or discursive function within an opera. This type of reduced or intensified expression provided further support for Busoni's aesthetics of artificiality by distancing itself from everyday language, thereby heightening the sense of stylised gesture. Busoni wrote that this abridged form of text 'serves to create a situation rather than to give the reasons for it logically',[48] expressing the purpose of *Schlagwort* in a manner not dissimilar to our discussion of 'incomplete performance' earlier, and predating Benjamin's assessment of Brecht's epic theatre in terms of 'suspense belong[ing] less to the outcome than to the individual events'.[49]

Busoni's *Schlagwort* became influential for Brecht's and Weill's respective conceptualisations of *gestus* in epic theatre, and indeed served a similar function to that later attributed to Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, or estrangement effect – namely the strategy whereby the actor makes the audience cognisant of the fact that they are watching an artful construction, by acknowledging the gaze of the audience.[50] They do this through *gests*, which Calico describes as 'stylized behaviors designed to reveal the socially constructed nature of human interaction', encapsulating 'Brecht's rejection of the bourgeois notion of split subjectivity'.[51] Kowalke has noted how this view, in Brecht's iteration, tended to favour a type of music that took an ironical position towards the text, whereas Weill held that the ironic or grotesque were not necessary components of *gestus*.[52] For Weill, music's role in theatre was not to 'create atmosphere, to underscore situations, and to accentuate the dramatic', as it had been in nineteenth-century opera, but rather to encapsulate the entire dramatic situation, forcing the singer into a 'definitive attitude which precludes every doubt and every misunderstanding concerning the relevant action'.[53] He drew an example of this from Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, highlighting how in Tamino's aria 'Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön', 'the attitude of the person who looks at a picture is completely fixed by the music'.[54] Weill's concept also differed from Brecht's in that he located *gestus* in the music rather than in the body of the performer, although Brecht shifted his emphasis toward the score and its realisation in the 'sounding body' during the mid-1930s

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1991); Vera Stegmann, 'Brecht Contra Wagner: The Evolution of the Epic Music Theatre', in *A Bertolt Brecht Reference Companion,* ed. Siegfried Mews (Westport, CT, 1997), 238–60).

[47] For an account of some additional influences on Brecht's shifting formulation of *gestus*, including performers such as the comedian Karl Valentin, and actors Peter Lorre, Carola Neher and Charlie Chaplin, see Carl Weber, 'Brecht's Concept of *Gestus* and the American Performance Tradition', in *Brecht Sourcebook*, 41–6, at 42 (originally published in *Gestus* 2/3 (1986), 179–85), which also discusses the influence of film and American theatre on Brecht.

[48] Busoni, 'The Oneness of Music and the Possibilities of Opera', 13.

[49] Benjamin, 'What is Epic Theater?', 148–9.

[50] Bertolt Brecht, 'On Chinese Acting' (1936), trans. Eric Bentley, *The Tulane Drama Review* 6 (1961), 130–6, at 130.

[51] Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, 44.

[52] Kim H. Kowalke, 'Singing Brecht vs. Brecht Singing: Performance in Theory and Practice', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5/1 (1993), 55–78, at 67.

[53] Kurt Weill, '*Gestus* in Music', in *Brecht Sourcebook*, trans. Erich Albrecht, 57–60, at 58. The article was originally published in 1961. Daniel Albright defined *gestus* as a 'whole story (gest) contracted into a moment' (Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, 101).

[54] Weill, '*Gestus* in Music', 58. This fixedness is achieved through rhythm, determining the accent of the text and syllables in a way that preclude alternative interpretation (Albright, *Untwisting the Serpent*, 113).

as a response to the conditions of exile and his inability to guide his performers personally.[55] Despite these shifting iterations of the concept, the broader role of *gestus* in engendering a sense of estrangement through a manifest pretence was similar for both Brecht and Weill, and the explanation given upon the first use of the term, in the 'Notes' to the final libretto of *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930), gives a clear sense of its aim: 'The intention was that a certain unreality, irrationality, and lack of seriousness should be introduced at the right moment, and so strike with a double meaning.'[56]

Busoni was committed to communicating manifest pretence in opera. As described by Edward Dent (his biographer and also his close friend), Busoni 'had no wish to deny or disguise the artificiality of opera', which is why he tended toward forms that referenced the magical, the supernatural and the artificial, including marionettes and puppets.[57] Busoni wrote:

> The sung word will always remain a convention on the stage, and a hindrance to any semblance of truth; to overcome this deadlock with any success a plot would have to be made in which the singers act what is incredible, fictitious, and improbable from the very start, so that one impossibility supports the other and both become possible and acceptable … opera should take possession of the supernatural or unnatural as its only proper sphere of representation and feeling and should create a pretence world in such a way that life is reflected in either a magic or a comic mirror, presenting consciously that which is not to be found in real life.[58]

Busoni's interest in creating a manifest sense of pretence was predicated on his notion of *Junge Klassizität*, which worked against the pull of empathy and the sensuous in art that he believed made audiences confuse art for life.[59] It was informed by his idealisation of Mozart during the first decades of the twentieth century, and in particular his adoration of *Die Zauberflöte.* These sympathies were part of a broader 'Mozart Renaissance' in 1920s Germany, which has been construed as a reaction against the conventions of nineteenth-century prose realism by 'modernist aesthetics'.[60] Yet devices that sustain an overt distinction between what is being presented on stage and the authorial voice that has constructed the presentation – similar to the 'double meaning' just described – were also features of prose realism, and indeed Rose Rosengard Subotnik construed the nineteenth-century re-conceptualisation of *Die Zauberflöte* as indicative of the same shift away from Enlightenment universals and toward novelistic realism.[61] In any case, the actual presence of puppets in Mozart's opera (such as the serpent), as well as the tradition of puppet-opera performance versions of the work, further complicate any easy alignment between Busoni's idealisation of marionettes and Mozart, on the one hand,

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[55] Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, 44.

[56] Quoted in Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, 47. Kowalke gives a slightly different account of the first use of the term (Kowalke, 'Singing Brecht vs. Brecht Singing', 65, n. 39).

[57] Edward Dent, 'Busoni's *Doctor Faust*', in *Edward J. Dent: Selected Essays*, ed. Hugh Taylor (Cambridge, 1979), 118–32, at 122.

[58] Ferruccio Busoni, 'The Future of Opera', in *The Essence of Music* (London, 1957), 39–40.

[59] Ferruccio Busoni, 'Young Classicism [letter to Paul Bekker, January 1920]', in *The Essence of Music* (London, 1957), 19–22, at 21. The letter to Paul Bekker in which Busoni articulated his ideas in this respect was later published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 7 February 1920, and then reprinted in the Busoni number of *Anbruch*, 1921.

[60] Edmund J. Goehring, *Coming to Terms with our Musical Past: An Essay on Mozart and Modernist Aesthetics* (Rochester, 2018).

[61] Rose Rosengard Subotnik, 'Whose *Magic Flute*? Intimations of Reality at the Gates of the Enlightenment', *19th-Century Music* 15 (1991), 132–50.

and separate versions of these idealisations elsewhere in interwar modernism, on the other.[62]

Equally, a few composers who were contemporary to Busoni were likewise fascinated with mechanical and puppet-like figures in a way that is often interpreted as conveying concerns about human agency in light of the modern phenomena of mass warfare and mechanical reproduction. Busoni's interest in artificiality certainly partook of this tendency, as well as capitalising on the way in which puppet-theatre traditions inherently skirt the line between entertaining spectacle and political or philosophical comment. Yet Busoni's engagement with puppet-play versions of the Faust story was an expression neither of disenchantment nor of nihilism.[63] Once again Busoni remained distinctive in this regard. As Weill describes,

> After the revolution in Germany we young musicians also were filled with new ideals, swollen with new hopes. But we could not shape the new that we longed for; we could not find the form for our content. We burst the fetters, but we could not begin anything with the acquired freedom. We stepped upon new shores and forgot to look back. Thus, through the years of seclusion from the outside we underwent a spasm of excess which lay on the breast like a nightmare and yet which we loved because it made us free. Then Busoni came to Berlin. We praised him because we believed him to have achieved the goal that we were striving for.[64]

Bodiless desire and the 'puppet parentage' of Busoni's *Doktor Faust*

The historical link between the ideas of Busoni, Weill and Brecht, coupled with Butler's reliance on Walter Benjamin's reading of Brecht, invites us to consider in what way Busoni's work can illuminate Butler's notion of 'incomplete performance' in her recent work. To this end, Busoni's opera *Doktor Faust* becomes especially relevant, not only because it is generally held to be an expression of Busoni's operatic reform agenda, but also because the subject matter and its treatment provide a striking allegorisation of music's mediation between the corporeal and linguistic registers of signification in opera, as well as the type of willed incompleteness that Butler uses to link gesture in theatre to ideas about social embodiment and political action.

In 1911, Busoni consulted Gabriele D'Annunzio about his idea of writing a libretto about Leonardo da Vinci (the 'Italian Faust'). According to Busoni's account of the conversation, the poet dissuaded him from the idea due to da Vinci's 'merciless clarifying light', which rendered him unsuitable for poetic representation. D'Annunzio described da Vinci as 'a skeleton with a torch put in the place of a head … a fleshless, heartless skeleton'.[65] This description need not have dissuaded Busoni; indeed, his own musical Faust of nearly a decade later was fleshless by design, and in an account of the concert-style presentation of Busoni's *Doktor Faust* in London's Festival Hall in late 1959, with Fischer-Dieskau in the title role, the critic Andrew Porter described 'the puppet-plot jerks' of the figures, and that 'there is no characterisation'.[66] It was in fact not uncommon for Busoni's music more generally to be described as austere and lacking in human warmth.[67]

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[62] Martin Nedbal, 'Live Marionettes and Divas on the Strings: *Die Zauberflöte*'s Interactions with Puppet Theater'; Hayley Fenn, 'Highly Strung Vocalities: Marionette Opera, Sound Technologies, and the Poetics of Synchronization', paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, University of Rochester, NY, 2017.

[63] Alexandra Wilson has noted for example how 'in Italy, the disparate theatrical experiments of the 1910s and 1920s shared a common aesthetic aim: to demonstrate that dramatic "realism" was in fact an illusion, and that the artificial puppet was the only "sincere" theatrical protagonist. Thus, unlike Podrecca, the avant-garde did not use puppets to mimic humans; rather the artificiality of the marionette was its very authenticity.' Wilson discusses the contemporaneous work of Edward Gordon Craig and his theory of the 'über-marionette', yet also makes a link with the machinist orientation of the Italian Futurists – a movement from which Busoni explicitly distanced himself (Wilson, 'Modernism and the Machine Women in Puccini's "Turandot"', *Music & Letters* 86/3 (2005), 432–451, at 440).

[64] Kurt Weill, 'Busoni and Modern Music', in *Kurt Weill in Europe*, ed. and trans. Kim H. Kowalke (Ann Arbor, 1979), 461–3, at 462. Originally published as 'Busoni und die neue Musik', *Die neue Weg* 54 (16 October 1925), 282–3. See also two other essays by Weill on Busoni in the volume: 'Busoni's Faust and the Renewal of Operatic Form' (1925), 468–72, and 'Ferruccio Busoni: For his Sixtieth Birthday' (1926), 476–7, as well as Weill's essay on 'Zeitoper' (1928), 482–5.

In addition to da Vinci, Busoni had apparently also given serious consideration to basing an opera on the life of Cagliostro, Zoroaster, Ahasuerus (the Wandering Jew), Merlin or Don Juan, all of whom he viewed as vehicles for conveying similar ideas in operatic form.[68] Busoni was interested in positioning his protagonist not as either a heroic figure or a rebel, but rather as a figure who at once glimpsed the possibility of attaining immanent experience and was barred from that experience by the very awareness of its possibility. The spoken verse prologue to *Doktor Faust* explains that after considering Don Juan as a potential protagonist, Busoni decided that this figure was too internally complete and committed to his quest to evoke the requisite internal conflict.[69] Busoni had been too daunted by Mozart's model to take on the topic of Don Juan.[70] This is significant in that Goethe's *Faust* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni* are bound together – as what David Wellbery has described as the two great 'modern myths' – by their protagonists' refusal to be judged by, or to submit to, external systems of measuring value.[71] Just as Don Giovanni protests his final descent, Goethe's Faust refuses redemption, both remaining unwaveringly committed to the absolute value of their Earthly projects.

Busoni's Faust is a far more uncertain and incomplete figure, and in understanding this uncertainty and incompleteness in the context of these paradigmatic examples – works that would have been close to hand as he wrote the libretto – it is telling that Busoni did not identify with either of these hermeneutically significant dramatic moments, desiring instead a more conflicted intervention by the stone guest than in Mozart/da Ponte's version of the story of Don Juan, and eschewing Goethe's version of Faust. Busoni preferred the sixteenth-century puppet play versions to Goethe's rendering, as these were more fragmentary and episodic in nature, conforming to his vision of opera as manifest pretence. Busoni was also likely exposed to the versions of the Faust story made popular by Christopher Marlowe (Edward Dent gave Busoni a copy of this text as a gift in 1912), which had also been a influential source for Goethe.[72]

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[65] Ferruccio Busoni, 'The Score of *Doktor Faust*', in *The Essence of Music* (London, 1957), 70–6, at 70.

[66] Andrew Porter, 'Busoni's Faust', *Financial Times* (London, 16 November 1959), 4.

[67] For example, Wilfrid Mellers, 'The Problem of Busoni', *Music & Letters* 18/2 (1937), 240–7.

[68] Busoni, 'The Score of *Doktor Faust*', 70.

[69] 'als Einheit steht er da, ein Mann und echt, / sein Wagmut steigt ins Ungeheuerliche, / und tausend Künste weiht er – dem Geschlecht' (Ferruccio Busoni, *Doktor Faust*, supplemented and edited by Philipp Jarnach, piano reduction by Egon Petri and Michael von Zadora (Wiesbaden, 1926), 12). This passage was translated by Busoni's friend and biographer Edward Dent as follows: 'he stands complete in every part / Courage fantastic in his bosom glows, / and woman he pursues with ruthless art'. Dent's translation of the libretto was for an English-language production of the opera (possibly the Queen's Hall production in March 1937, under Adrian Boult). Dent's translation was printed in the programme booklet, but was later published together with a reprint of the vocal score in 1950 by Sadler's Wells. The same English translation appeared in the liner notes of the Deutsche Grammophon recording featuring Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in the title role in 1970. All English translations of the libretto text that appear in what follows draw from Dent's decidedly artful translation, a scanned copy of which has been uploaded for general use by Laureto Rodoni at www.rodoni.ch/busoni/faustinglese/faustenglish1.html. As Roberge notes, there are ten known translations of the opera, three in Italian, three in French, two in English, one in Swedish and one in Dutch (Roberge, 'Extending the Reach of Ferruccio Busoni's *Doktor Faust*', 314).

[70] Busoni, 'The Score of *Doktor Faust*', 70–1.

[71] David Wellbery, 'Who is Faust?', keynote address, University of Chicago Humanities Day, 24 October 2009.

Even at the first mention of 'Faust' in Busoni's diary, on 16 October 1910, in the same entry he mentions the traditional Austrian puppet-theatre character Casperle: 'Faust – Casperle! singularly moved by the three students. That is how the new work ought to be made!'[73] And again in 1914 in his diary entry of 21 December, when the project was substantially further developed, in a passage where he conceives of the structure of the opera as a whole for the first time ('suddenly everything came together like a vision'), he noted, 'Query, Casperle – *Intermezzi* in front of the curtain, without music, or not?'[74] Busoni's abiding interest in puppet-theatre traditions can be seen in his opera *Arlecchino* (1917), which was explicitly modelled on *commedia dell'arte*;[75] and in *Turandot*, which he based on Gozzi's version of the narrative rather than on Schiller's. Busoni believed that Schiller's text failed to convey adequately the fantastical nature of the story, whereas Gozzi's masked figures 'throw a bridge from the Venetian public into the fictitious Orient of the stage and in this way destroy the illusion that what is going on is real life'.[76] In addition, despite living in Berlin for much of his life and being very much a part of its artistic circles, he intended to 'win back for an imaginary stage a play that had been thoroughly Germanised by Schiller and Weber'.[77] According to Busoni, it was the expression of 'human sentiment' rather than 'human affairs' 'that was the proper preserve of the artistic sphere, and evoking the impression of the puppet-play enabled the requisite unreality to approach these more fundamental driving forces'.[78]

The puppet-play origins of Busoni's thinking about the Faust legend are key to understanding the way the opera allegorises the partial nature of bodies within it. This feature is indicated at the outset: after a short orchestral prelude, the opera opens with a rhyming verse prologue, spoken without accompaniment in front of a black curtain in direct address to the audience ('Der Dichter an die Zuschauer'), as per his earlier note on Casperle. In this prologue (which, according to Beaumont, was the only addition Busoni made to the libretto during his nine months in America),[79] the character of the 'poet' marks out the specific aesthetic function that artificiality plays in the opera:

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[72] For more on the sources that informed Busoni's engagement with the Faust legend, see Erinn Knyt, '"A History of Man and His Desire": Ferruccio Busoni and Faust', *19th-Century Music* 41 (2017), 151–79. For a study of how the stock comic figures of Casperle and others influenced Goethe's own thinking about Faust, see Jane Curran, 'Hanswurst, Kasperle, Pickelhäring and Faust', in *International Faust Studies: Adaptation, Reception, Translation*, ed. Lorna Fitzsimmons (London, 2008), 36–54.

[73] Quoted in Edward J. Dent, *Ferruccio Busoni: A Biography* (London, 1974), 293.

[74] Dent, *Busoni*, 295. Indeed it was only in 1918 that Busoni revised his idea to use Casperle, as we can see from his directions to Gisella Selden-Goth, who was arranging a public reading of the libretto of Busoni's *Doktor Faust* in 1920: 'by allotting Mephisto the role of night-watchman, I eliminated Casperle (he plays this part in the puppet play), whom I had originally envisaged' (Ferruccio Busoni, letter to Gisella Selden-Goth, 14 May 1920, quoted in Nancy Otis Chamness, 'In a Different Voice: The Libretto as Literature, *Doktor Faust* by Ferruccio Busoni', PhD diss., Indiana University, 1993, 46).

[75] Ferruccio Busoni, '*Arlecchino*'s Evolution', in *The Essence of Music* (London, 1957), 61–3, at 62; Antony Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer* (Bloomington, 1985), 221–5.

[76] Ferruccio Busoni, 'The *Turandot* Music', in *The Essence of Music*, 60–1, at 61.

[77] Nicholas Tarling, *Orientalism and the Operatic World* (Maryland, 2015), 242. The biographical implications of this sentiment for Busoni's identity as German, Italian, or cosmopolitan, variously, are explored in Sarah Collins, 'What is Cosmopolitan?: Busoni and Other Germans', *Musical Quarterly* 99 (2017), 201–29.

[78] Busoni, 'Young Classicism', 22.

> As in a mirror seen, life's gestures pass
> Across the stage, but false and counterfeit;
> For all that's real 'tis a distorting-glass
> But as a magic mirror, right and meet.
> True values it destroys, but justice does
> To those which claim the privilege of deceit;
> Thus realism to ridicule is brought;
> What's only play compels your serious thought.
>
> Such plays of unreality require
> The help of Music, for she stands remote
> From all that's common; she can wake desire
> That's bodiless; in air her voices float.
> So I bethought me who might best inspire
> My muse with magic and mysterious note;
> For, good or evil, blest or damn'd to Hell,
> None other could attract me half as well …
>
> A third [possible figure] remains: No meaner hero he,
> But one that every secret would find out;
> Grounded in magic and astrology,
> Nay more the prey of philosophical doubt.
> A lord of intellect he strives to be,
> Yet is by every passion toss'd about;
> To solve life's riddle, he sets out to drain
> The cup of all experience – all in vain.
>
> His end is horror, but his name remains;
> The Chronicle into a legend growing,
> Poetry decks it with immortal strains
> (How oft rehash'd and garnish'd, there's no knowing),
> Until a real existence he sustains,
> Hands unperceiv'd life to his limbs bestowing;
> Faust as a puppet-play still holds the stage,
> Enrapturing and startling each new age …
>
> Yet though I seek to tell the tale anew,
> Its puppet parentage is plain to view.[80]

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[79] Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 317. See also Marc-André Roberge, 'Ferruccio Busoni in the United States', *American Music* 13 (1995), 295–332.

[80] As translated by Edward Dent: see fn. 69 above. In the 1926 Breitkopf & Härtel edition, the text appears as follows: Die Bühne zeigt vom Leben die Gebärde, / Unechtheit steht auf ihrer Stirn geprägt; / auf daß sie nicht zum Spiegel-Zerrbild werde, / als Zauberspiegel wirk' sie schön und echt; / gebt zu, daß sie das Wahre nur entwerte, / dem Unglaubhaften wird sie erst gerecht: / und wenn ihr sie, als Wirklichkeit, belachtet, / zwingt sie zum Ernst, als reines Spiel betrachtet.

In dieser Form allein ruft sie nach Tönen, / Musik steht dem Gemeinen abgewandt; / ihr Körper ist die Luft, ihr Klingen Sehnen, / sie schwebt … Das Wunder ist ihr Heimatland. / Drum hielt ich Umschau unter allen jenen,

Here Busoni situates the role of music in his opera with respect to what he calls 'desire that's bodiless': 'ihr Körper ist die Luft, ihr Klingen Sehnen, sie schwebt'. In its bodilessness music can float or hover in air, but of course it is ultimately bound to Earth by the living bodies – the throats and the limbs – of the performers required for the music to sound.

Busoni's handling of the interplay between these conflicting aspects of operatic performance in *Doktor Faust* was shaped by the fact that his aesthetic thinking found expression in a theory of opera. Indeed, one of his major essays on opera, 'The Oneness of Music and the Possibilities of Opera' (1921), was written in conjunction with his explanatory note on *Doktor Faust* ('Preface to The Score of *Doktor Faust*', 1922), which is one of the reasons why *Doktor Faust* is so often seen as an expression of his late thinking on aesthetics. Busoni's conception of music's 'oneness' involved the claim that the most enduring music was not bound by its function, instrumentation or even its genre. These constricting elements were part of the divisibility and earthly boundedness of music, according to Busoni, related only to music's material manifestation rather than its essence. Music's essence, instead, lays in its 'content' (namely its 'invention' and 'atmosphere') and its 'quality' (or 'shape'). Opera was most well-suited to highlighting music's oneness, according to Busoni, because its music would be free from descriptive requirements or formal strictures or expectations of genre. Counter-intuitively, he believed that music could be most 'absolute' in opera, like a suit of armour is detachable from a body, as mentioned earlier. Music's capacity to float, bodiless, in air, was not then an indicator of its ineffability, but rather of its steely, armour-like and unchanging hardness, set against the soft, individuated, organic bodies on stage, as well as the voices, the drama and the libretto of the opera.

Despite the direct references to the puppet-play origins of *Doktor Faust*, there has been surprisingly little discussion of how its 'puppet parentage' might be manifest in Busoni's opera, and what purpose this aesthetic was meant to serve in the context of Busoni's thinking. Much of the analysis of the piece has focused on questioning the appropriateness of Jarnach's completion of Busoni's unfinished score, and of Beaumont's alternative approach (and more recently Larry Sitsky's completion). Indeed, Beaumont cast aside the 'poet's opening address to the audience' as something that 'belongs today in the programme book' and 'is not essential to the unfolding of the drama'.[81] Others have

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/ die mit dem Wunder wirkten, Hand in Hand: / Ob gut, ob böse, ob verdammt, ob selig, / sie ziehn mich an mit Macht unwiderstehlich …

Der dritte meiner Reih' ist nicht geringer, / ein trotz'ger Geist, ein Einzelner, auch er: / ein Tiefbelesener, ein Höllenzwinger, / vieldeutiger zumal, und sonst auch mehr, / ein schwacher Mensch und doch ein starker Ringer, / den Zweifel tragen hin und wieder her: / Herr des Gedankens, Diener dem Instinkt, / dem das Erschöpfen keine Lösung bringt.

Das End' ist Schrecken, doch sein Name steht, / die Chronik hält ihn, artet in Legende, / die Dichtung folgt Unsterblichkeit umweht,/und des Nachbildens, Schmückens ist kein Ende; / als lebensähnlich die Gestalt ersteht, täuschend bewegt durch unsichtbare Hände: / das Puppenspiel vom Faust zieht durch die Zeiten, / Ergriffenheit und Staunen zu bereiten …

So stellt mein Spiel sich wohl lebendig dar, / doch bleibt sein Puppenursprung offenbar.

[81] Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 329. One reviewer of a production of Beaumont's alternative completion of *Doktor Faust* by the English National Opera in London in 1986 noted how the 'Poet's address to the audience' had been omitted, and claimed that 'no production of Faust can claim completeness' without it, calling it 'an essential part of the conception' (Calum MacDonald, 'First Performances: *Doktor Faust*', *Tempo* 158 (1986), 42–55). In a related observation that again places Beaumont's conception at odds with Busoni's written intentions regarding the separation of art and politics, MacDonald noted how 'in search of a parochial "contemporary significance", [this production] substituted for the timelessness of Busoni's archetypal medievalism all the tired old visual and ideological clichés about pre-Nazi Germany. So profound was the effect of dissociation that it almost – but not

emphasised the Goethean inflections of the libretto over and above the *Puppenspiel* influence.[82]

In his biography of the composer, Edward Dent grappled uneasily with the implications of Busoni's references to puppets in relation to *Doktor Faust*, concluding that a certain stiffness and abstraction in the opera suited its eternal themes by distancing the action from everyday life:

> It is difficult to define in words what constitutes the puppet-play style – in what way a play for puppets must be planned and written differently from a play for living actors, and in what particular qualities the puppet-play is, or may be, more grimly moving than an ordinary play. Busoni cannot possibly have intended his *Doctor Faust* to be actually performed by puppets … But it has something of the puppet-play in its remoteness from everyday sentiment and sentimentality; the figures of the drama say and do only what is necessary and no more – they have no need and no chance to elaborate their parts with all those 'subtle touches' that on the commercial stage do so much to enhance the private personality of the actor or actress and thereby appeal to the affections rather than to the intellect of the spectators. The result of this restriction is that *Doctor Faust* may seem lacking in what we might call humanity; but the more nearly it approaches to the manner of the puppet-show, the more it gains in austerity and dignity.[83]

Dent also noted how the original production included a dimly lit backing curtain painted with a 'puppet-theatre like an enlarged Punch-and-Judy-box', and that various characters emerged from trap doors throughout the opera, giving it an inhuman quality by emphasising the presence of theatrical mechanisms.

A number of contemporary productions of Busoni's *Doktor Faust* pay tribute to these intentions, though still without the opening lines from the 'poet' figure – the 'Casperle'-esque figure who clearly stands outside the action and represents an unrecognised key device in Busoni's project of distancing. Nevertheless, a production that ran from September through to November 2006 at the Zurich Opera House, with Thomas Hampson as Faust and Gregory Kunde as Mephistophéles, did include *commedia*-inspired costumes and a masked onstage chorus exhibiting highly stylised gestural techniques. In this production, the six spirits that are magically roused by Faust in the Second Prologue were represented by dismembered or decontextualised body parts that were animated by offstage voices. The Zurich production included spirits represented, respectively, by a classical bust, a totem stack of three helmets, an object made up of three mannequin legs attached together at the buttocks, punctured with pin-points of light, and one of three red ram's heads with glowing eyes (the final representing Mephistophéles before he appears in human form). And in the production that was staged at the Munich Opera Festival in 2008 under the direction of Nicolaus Brieger (performed in the incomplete state that Busoni left it at the time of his death) the spirits were forewarned by nude statue-like bodies hanging from above the stage by their ankles (Figure 1).

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quite – reduced this score of aching beauty and embodied metaphysicality to the level of background music for a pantomime staged by our familiar household devils of Fascism, transvestism, and nuclear *Angst*. Some of the audience will have received a very strange idea of Busoni's intentions' (53).

[82] Roy Pascal, 'Four Fausts: From W. S. Gilbert to Ferruccio Busoni', *German Life and Letters* 10/4 (1957), 263–74.

[83] Dent, *Busoni*, 297.

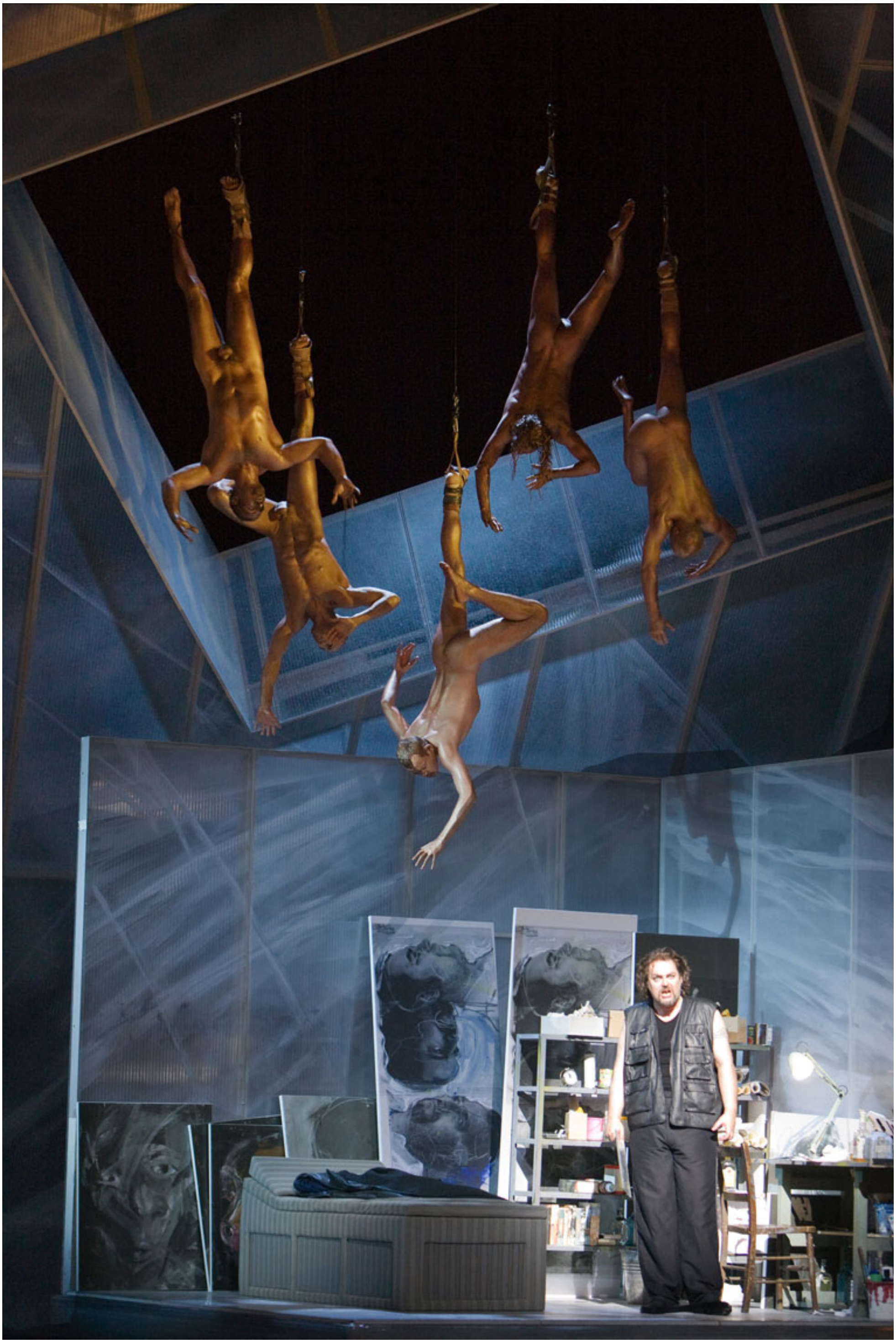

Figure 1. Doktor Faust (Wolfgang Koch), Munich Opera Festival, 2008. © Wilfried Hösl. (Colour online)

Operatic bodies as marionettes, and the undead

Busoni's choice of Faust as a subject, and his choice of the puppet-play as an aesthetic and formal model, present us with an allegory not only of music's uneasy role within the operatic medium (speaking to Busoni's own notion of the 'oneness of music') but also of the status of bodies more generally, in the manner of 'incomplete performance'. This is important for our discussion of Busoni, because tracing the operatic roots of Butler's performativity in Busoni's theory of opera and *Doktor Faust* entails just this type of displacement. Where Butler makes incomplete gesture an allegory for the decomposition of the speech act, a similar mode of willed incompletion might be attributable to opera that leans into the latent fracture between voice (text), bodies (including singing bodies, or the bodily voice) and music. This transposition of concerns about the status of bodies to the status of music in opera has an ongoing legacy. For example, Carolyn Abbate's paradigmatic reading of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* in her 2001 book *In Search of Opera* calls attention to the way in which music withholds any reconciliation between the flighty, ungraspable aspects of musical expression and the very real, material – indeed what she describes as deathly – mechanics of performance.[84]

Slavoj Žižek's reading of Busoni's *Doktor Faust* shares with Abbate's reading of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* the view that it is music that is most able to betray the way in which freedom is undergirded by mechanisation.[85] For Žižek, Busoni's Faust is a Papageno-like figure who succumbs mechanistically to his drives – for wine and food and women, pursuing an inevitable unfolding of natural events. Like a marionette, this figure does not labour under self-awareness. He is always desiring, but his desires are never satiated because they are directed at mere place-holders for something else (in Žižek's account, this is Lacan's *objet petit a*). This compulsive desiring (what Freud described as the 'death drive') is for Žižek like the blind force of the faceless broomstick character in Walt Disney's 'A Sorcerer's Apprentice', who keeps on filling the water reservoir even though it is already filled, to the point of walking tendentiously through the uprising water in order to continue his task. The marionette, in Žižek's rendering, is undead – not living, but not *not* living either. As a result of it being driven by a single hand outside of itself, the marionette has a grace and weightlessness of one guided by an 'impersonal passion', yet without life, freedom, spontaneity or substance. The marionette is completely determined, which – as Žižek points out – is akin to Kant's description of the hypothetical condition of man if he were to have access to the elusive 'thing in itself':

> instead of the conflict which now the moral disposition has to wage with inclinations and in which, after some defeats, moral strength of mind may be gradually won, God and eternity in their awful majesty would stand unceasingly before our eyes ... The conduct of man, so long as his nature remained as it is now, would be changed into mere mechanism, where, as in a puppet show, everything would gesticulate well but no life would be found in the figures.[86]

The marionette offers the spectre of a world where there is no need for a sense of moral duty, moral conflict or decision, melancholy or hope, because conduct in this world would conform with the inevitable law of natural things, a mechanistic unfolding. The hypothetical man who gains access to the noumenal realm is living, but without life; experiencing, but without substance. Žižek likens this state to a that of marionette. The marionette appears to have a weightlessness and an overabundance of life because its life is not contextualised through the usual indices of meaning inscribed on the human body, or attached to human gestures. The reading of the mechanistic necessity of the marionette is conceived by Žižek, via Lacan, as a monstrous thing: a

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[84] Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, 2003); see Chapter 2.

[85] Slavoj Žižek, 'C Major or E Flat Minor? No, Thanks! Busoni's *Faust-Allegorie*', *Musicological Annual* 45/2 (2009), 17–32. This essay seems to have originated in Žižek's opening lecture for the Munich Opera Festival (26 June 2008), ahead of the production of *Doktor Faust* that was performed two days later at the Festival Premiere.

[86] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (New York, 1956), 152–3, quoted in Žižek, 'C Major or E Flat Minor?', 20.

> weird organ which is magically autonomized, surviving without a body whose organ it should have been … It is indivisible, indestructible, and immortal – more precisely, undead in the sense this term has in horror fiction; not the sublime spiritual immortality, but the obscene immortality of the 'living dead' who, after every annihilation, re-compose themselves and clumsily go on. It does not exist, it insists; an entity of pure semblance, a multiplicity of appearances which seem to envelop a central void – its status is purely fantasmatic.[87]

This organ is uncanny because it does not strive for immortality – there is no melancholy in its realisation of a goal unachieved; rather it is simply driven by blind necessity, implicated in a mechanistic unfolding. What saves Busoni's Faust character from becoming this mechanistic figure is also the source of his downfall – namely his drive to experience all there is to experience, acting as a spectator on the totality of human life, rather than as someone bound up in experience like Mozart's Don Giovanni. In other words, it is Faust's self-consciousness that makes him different from the puppet-like natural man Papageno, and indeed Faust disregards the offers of the first five spirits on the basis that they are limited to the mere capacities of nature, accepting instead the offer of the sixth spirit, Mephistophéles, who offers him the swiftness of human thought. Žižek sees this conflict between Faust's desire to be unselfconscious (and therefore mechanistic) and his distanced stance, as being held in balance by the actual absence of music in certain parts of the opera, because it was left unfinished by Busoni.

The spectre of a mechanistic Papageno – joyous in his natural state and absence of self-consciousness yet without freedom, doubt or reason – constructed by both Abbate and Žižek, calls to mind the very type of unthinking enthralment that Busoni was using the puppet aesthetic and other devices of estrangement to avoid, as we shall see. Busoni sought a breaking away from the sensuous impact of affect in order to recover a sense of freedom. Yet Busoni's Faust desires to be both puppet and puppet-master. In his pact with Mephistophéles, Faust desires all-knowing comprehension, all the experience of the world, but also to be aware of those experiences – to live these experiences at a distance (unlike Don Giovanni, who as David Wellbery notes, lives immanently in the present, with his conquests recalled not by him in retrospect but documented by a third party).[88] Busoni draws from the Goethean tradition of conceiving Faust as not at home in the world – for example by making gratuitous references to various characters' national affiliations in the opera – yet Faust is not at home in the world additionally because he lives as a spectator on his own life, despite his desire for first-hand, unmediated experience. This Faustian condition of spectatorship is what Wellbery attributes to art as such: art is always too late, always of the past, one step removed from immanent experience, giving it a ghostly (deathly) and ungraspable (ineffable) quality.

While Wellbery sees art as ghostly and by nature mournful because it is of the past and cannot be experienced in the present (namely it is already dead the moment it is created), Žižek construes art, in his discussion of Busoni's opera, as like seeing a newly constructed building as a simply a future set of ruins. In this same way, Faust's awareness of his ultimate fate makes Busoni's opera melancholy rather than tragic, an allegory rather than a symbol:

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[87] Žižek, 'C Major or E Flat Minor?', 26.

[88] Wellbery, 'Who is Faust?'.

> Busoni's *Faust* is an allegory in which the ongoing triumphs are already accompanied by the shadow of the final defeat. If Goethe's *Faust* is an optimistic tragedy, Busoni's is a melancholic *Trauerspiel* in which the highest act, the only successful one, is to fully accept one's failure. A puppet is a figure of such melancholy.[89]

For our purposes, the point to be highlighted here is the notion that Faust's incompleteness – his inability to live immanently – allows him to avoid the monstrous, undead state of mechanisation. Likewise, incomplete gestures are not merely tragic parts waiting to be made whole, in the manner of Goethe's optimistic tragedy. They are not awaiting completion, rather they revel in their incomplete status and thereby escape the cycle of desire.

The alignment of marionettes with natural man seems at first counter-intuitive, given the modernist tradition of conceiving of marionettes in terms of the instrumentalisation of human endeavour under industrial and technologised conditions, discussed above. This type of manoeuvre is characteristic of Žižek's work, and is designed to further his ongoing psychoanalytical project by reminding us that when we seek after a sense of completeness and self-understanding – a sense of ourselves as coherent subjects – we are bound to merely replicate the various forms of mediation that are the source of our alienation, especially in relation to language. Brian Kane has noted how Žižek's preoccupation on this point sees him participating in a longer history of valorising the separation of the seen from the heard, specifically the separation between language as inscription and the purely sonorous aspect of enunciation.[90] Kane points out that while psychoanalysis rejects phenomenology's assumption of the possibility of an internal voice that exists beyond signification – as pure presence and differentiated from writing and speech (which he views as Husserl's response to the detachment of the voice from source by the invention of the phonograph) – it still retains a commitment to the possibility of glimpsing a pre-inscribed self. This glimpse comes from the psychoanalytic method, which prizes the sonority of continuous, stream-of-consciousness vocal enunciation over meaning or prescriptive commands. In psychoanalysis the analyst is positioned behind the analysand and out of sight, separating the analyst's voice from its visually verifiable source. At the final stage of treatment, the analyst remains a potential source of prescriptive speech, yet he does not speak, because the analysand has become their own analyst, and it is in this combination of potential voice and its withdrawal that there is a 'fleeting presence of a subject'.[91] The idea that the silent presence of the analyst can itself suggest the power of sonorousness has ethical and political implications. It evokes, on the one hand, moral behaviour that is driven by a sense of duty (in obedience to 'His Master's Voice'), and on the other hand, political action driven by a sense of agency and responsibility, brought about by the 'suspended sentence … demanding continuation, a sentence to be completed by the subject, by his or her moral decision, by the act'.[92] The extent to which this demand is fulfilled – in Butler's terms, when incomplete gesture is completed as action – determines the extent to which we can remain between the fully automatised Papageno and the melancholic Faust who remains barred from the pleasures of immediate experience by his own self-consciousness, his own spectatorship.

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[89] Žižek, 'C Major or E Flat Minor?', 19.

[90] Brian Kane, *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 2014), 186.

[91] Kane, *Sound Unseen*, 214.

[92] Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 98–9, quoted in Kane, *Sound Unseen*, 214.

Interruption and the untragic hero: Busoni's offstage chorus

In Busoni's *Doktor Faust*, the title character is not the only spectator of the story of his own ruin. The offstage chorus in the opera recalls what Benjamin described as the 'untragic hero' of Brecht's epic theatre: namely, a 'nonparticipating third party as a dispassionate observer or "thinker"', which Benjamin saw as the defining feature of the genre – 'in the Brechtian sense as the perfect showcase of its dialectics'. The function here is once again one of estrangement, an elimination of the 'Aristotelian catharsis, the purging of the emotions through empathy with the stirring fate of the hero'.[93]

In the first half of the opera, the offstage chorus serves two main functions. First, they serve as spectators on the main drama, murmuring comments or utterances of frustration; at times urging Faust onwards in his desire for genius and at other times cautioning him against proceeding further, though rarely addressing him directly and rarely affecting his decisions. Another function of the offstage chorus is to evoke a realm of quotidian action outside the main drama – action which is ordinary and disconnected from the supernatural happenings of Faust's story, but which is made relevant to it by uncanny juxtaposition. The evocation of everyday activity off stage serves to thwart immersion in Faust's diabolical dilemma, and indeed draws him away distractedly from his focus on securing a deal with Mephistophéles.

These two functions of the offstage chorus are best exemplified in the Second Prologue, when Faust conjures the six spirits (the chorus serves a rather different function in the final scene of the opera). The 'Chorus *(under the stage, invisible)*'[94] can be heard when Faust is calling for Lucifer to come forth. At first their role seems to be the collective spirits of the underworld, and they ask Faust 'Art Resolv'd?' ('Du beharrst?'), but almost immediately they become merely interested spectators, playing no active part in the drama. As the six spirits arrive, they sing excitedly 'They come now, they come now!', and provide murmuring repetitions of the main voices on stage:

Fifth Voice: Look on me, Megaeros!
Chorus: Look on him Megaeros!
Fifth Voice: Swift am I as tempest.
Chorus: His name is Megaeros, Swift as the storm and tempest.
Faust: That's something better, yet not sufficing. Storm, I will blow thee out. Discharge thee! (*the fifth flame goes out*)
Chorus (*far away*): Ugh!
Faust: Silence! One more there is left.[95]

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[93] Benjamin, 'What is Epic Theater?', 149–50.

[94] The offstage chorus is also spatially quite diverse and specific – for example, stage directions call for them to be variously 'far below', 'above' and 'far in the distance', and 'in the church', creating a perception of a realm of both supernatural and quotidian activity off stage.

[95] Fünfte Stimme: Schaue hier, Megäros,
Chor: Schaue hier, Megäros,
Fünfte Stimme: Wie der Sturm behende.
Chor: Hier schaue Megäros,
Faust: Das klingt nach Etwas, doch es erschöpft nicht, / ich blase, Sturm, dich aus: / verwehe. (*Die fünfte Flamme erlischt*)
Chor (*hinter der Bühne recht entfernt*) (*höhnend*): Üh!
Faust: Schweiget! (*er tritt aus dem Kreise*); / Ein einzelner blieb.

Very soon after this, the offstage chorus shift to their role toward evoking quotidian offstage action, which in this scene – set as it is on 'Easter eve' – involves a choir offering Easter prayers. They take up this function at the crucial dramatic moment when Faust's fate becomes clear:

Faust: Go, go, go! No more can I endure thee.
Mephistophéles: (*folds his arms and waits*) Thou'lt learn to do so.
Chorus (*invisible*): Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, Creatoreum coeli et terrae,
Visibilium omnium et invisibilium.[96]

Then just at the moment when Faust is presented with the contract by Mephistophéles, he is suddenly distracted by the offstage voices, causing him to break off from the intense interaction and reflect upon the terrible mistake that he is about to make:

Faust: What wilt thou more of me?
Mephistophéles: A written contract; With your own blood you sign it, in red and white.
Faust: Let me read it.
Mephistophéles: There!
Three female solo voices (*invisible, distant and from above*): Credo in unum Deum.
Faust: My will is broken and my pride is humbled.
Unfortunate Faust, the work of Hell's begun.[97]

The chorus are present throughout this crucial scene of the contract signing, always drawing Faust back to the occurrences outside his window, with Easter prayers reminding him of his childhood, and emblemising the innocence of quotidian enjoyments which he is about to forego for the promise of total comprehension (but which, by the end of the opera, offers his only redemption in the form of his own child):[98]

Chorus: Et resurrexit secundum Scripturam
Tertia die et ascendit in coelum,
Sedet ad dexteram Patris.

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[96] Faust: Fort, fort, fort! Ich kann, ich kann dich nicht ertragen!
Mephistophéles (*kreuzt die Arme, abwartend*): Du mußt es lernen.
Chor: Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, / creatoreum coeli et terrae visibilium omnium et invisibilium.

[97] Faust: Was verlangst du noch?
Mephistophéles: Ein kurzes Schreiben, mit deinem Blut / gezeichnet, rot auf weiß.
Faust: So gib her.
Mephistophéles: Brav.
Chor (*Hinter der Bühne, von Weitem, und von oben her vernehmbar*): Credo in unum Deum.
Faust: Wo ist mein Wille, wo mein Stolz geblieben! / Unseliger Faust, das Höllenwerk begann.

[98] Many have read an autobiographical allusion into the setting of this scene on Easter eve, as Busoni himself was born on Easter day (1 April 1866), though this setting also reflects his engagement with Goethe's version of the Faust legend.

Faust: 'Tis Easter Day! And there go good folk to the minster. Day of my childhood!
Mephistophéles: Turn away from all this mumbling.[99]

The offstage chorus evoke for Faust a youthful belief in firm foundations and possibility, making him hesitate in signing the contract and underscoring the inevitable tragedy to come. The location of the voices are key, as Busoni sought to create a 'horizon of sound, an acoustic perspective' through which an unseen activity off stage would be revealed.[100] In keeping with Busoni's derision of descriptive music, however, offstage action was not to be indicated directly by musical means, but rather suggested by the way in which the music *positioned* the unseen action in a particular perspective – a perspective that was often decisively different from that of a conventional narrative association between music and words.

Faust eventually recovers from this momentary distraction, and as the church bells begin to chime and the choir continues to sing, he proclaims ('despairingly'):

Faust: There is no compassion, There is no salvation, No retribution,
There is no Heaven and there is no Hell,
Beyond there's nothing!
Mephistophéles: Bravo, bravo! You are a man of progress;
You now are moving in the right direction!
(*Faust signs the paper*)[101]

Just as Faust falls unconscious after the signing of the contract, the chorus sings 'Pax!', and even when Mephistophéles gloatingly intones 'My prisoner!', the chorus merely sings an equivocal 'Alleluia', as the bells ring out. There is clearly still a sense of hope at the end of this damning scene, and over Faust's motionless body the rays of early morning sun begin to creep through the window, as a new day begins. The ringing of the Easter bells during the signing of the pact was a crucial element in Busoni's conception of the opera.[102] His use of the offstage chorus in this scene enhances the striking disjunction between the signing of the pact, which initiates Faust's downfall, and the themes of renewal and youth that the Easter choir evoke, including by the connection with Faust's (and Busoni's) own childhood. Similar to the cognitive disjunction achieved by the creation of a wider 'acoustical perspective' in *Doktor Faust*, the poignant incompatibility of the offstage chorus with the central drama has the effect of unsettling the conventional associations of the Faust narrative.

In highlighting the function of the offstage voices in Busoni's *Doktor Faust*, it may be significant that one of his most 'treasured scores', in addition to Mozart's *Die*

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[99] Faust: Ostertag! Da ziehen die Guten zum Münster – Tag meiner Kindheit!
Mephistophéles: Kehr dich nicht an das Gesäusel.

[100] Busoni, 'The Score of *Doktor Faust*', 75.

[101] Faust: Es gibt kein Erbarmen, es gibt keine Seligkeit, / keine Vergeltung, den Himmel nicht und nicht / die Höllenschrecken: den Jenseits trotz' ich!
Mephistophéles: Tüchtig, tüchtig! das nenn' ich fortgeschritten: / nun seid Ihr eben auf der rechten Fährte!
(*Faust zitternd, indem er das unterschriebene Blatt Mephistopheles entgegenstreckt*)

[102] Beaumont notes how 'one December evening in 1914, while looking for his Leonardo sketches, Busoni's Faust plan suddenly crystallised. He noted in his diary: "Everything came together like a vision. Five movements. Monologue about studies falls out. Assumed that Gretchen episode is all over. During the pact Easter bells ring!"' (Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 316).

Zauberflöte, was Wagner's *Parsifal*.[103] As surprising as the connection may seem, given Busoni's (and Brecht's) views on Wagner's limitations (i.e., the tendency of his music to overwhelm the listener, and the later Wagner's emphasis on internal action), Busoni's treatment of the offstage chorus in *Doktor Faust* as largely independent from the central narrative, and free from playing either a direct or descriptive role in the action, is not altogether removed from Wagner's treatment of the treble choristers in *Parsifal*, in contrast to his treatment of the knights' chorus. Ryan Minor has drawn a link between the treatment of the treble chorus and the function of the archetypal chorus of Greek tragedy, noting

> Their invisible, androgynous voice differs drastically from the human knights on stage … their recitation of religious dogma during the communion rite and their repetition of the phrase 'Selig im Glauben' at the end of the act, after all the characters have left the stage, have little effect on the drama's participants. Yet it seems unlikely that their utterances are directed towards the stage at all, but rather to the audience. The voices from the temple dome function somewhat like the chorus in Greek tragedy, supplying background information to the audience (the doctrine behind communion) or reflecting on the message of the drama (the homily sung at the end of the act).[104]

Minor finds precedent for the idea behind the function of the invisible dome chorus and the knights chorus, respectively, in the writings of Schiller, who divided the use of the chorus in terms of 'passion' (whereby the chorus becomes an active human character) and 'reflection' (allowing it to 'cleanse the tragic poem by detaching reflection from action').[105] Despite Busoni's disparagement of Schiller's version of *Turandot* in favour of Gozzi's version, Schiller's account of the reflective chorus seems strongly aligned with Busoni's views on the function of artificiality and pretence in maintaining the distinction between art and life, via the evocation of a 'puppet play':

> By keeping the parts separate and entering between the passions with its calming meditation, the chorus gives us back our freedom, which would be lost in the storm of affects.[106]

Here the function of the reflective chorus, and perhaps Busoni's offstage chorus too, is to disrupt the audience's unthinking identification with the characters, and to engender a critical reflection on the nature of the real, or the nature of the given, 'openly and honestly declaring war on naturalism in art'.[107]

Schiller's and Wagner's respective wars on naturalism were aimed toward quite different ends from those of the wartime Busoni, of course. Wagner's innovation in his Bayreuth theatre of concealing the orchestra, and his quip about the possibility of an invisible theatre where the bodies of the singers are also obscured, has been viewed as emblematic of the late nineteenth-century transcendentalisation of the medium – involving the shift in operatic aesthetics away from the conventions of melodrama (including from the close synchronisation of music and bodily gesture).[108] Indeed, the concealment of singers' and speakers' bodies for religious, metaphysical or ethical effect has a far longer history.[109] The liturgical nature of the offstage chorus in Busoni's *Doktor Faust* (when performing its function as the choir of the Easter service) might readily invite a similar reading, with the bodiless angelic voices emerging to caution Faust against the pact. Yet the effect is instead one of interruption and indeed de-sublimation: the chorus reminds the audience that Faust is merely a player in a constructed fantasy, and in fact Faust's ultimate release only comes when he accepts the limitations of ordinary life and ceases to reach after total intellectual comprehension, acknowledging that man can merely 'do what good he can'.

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[103] Beaumont, *Busoni the Composer*, 31.

[104] Ryan Minor, 'Wagner's Last Chorus: Consecrating space and spectatorship in *Parsifal*', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17/1 (2005), 1–36, at 9.

[105] Schiller, 'Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie', quoted in Minor, 'Wagner's Last Chorus', 10.

[106] Schiller, 'Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie', quoted in Minor, 'Wagner's Last Chorus', 11.

[107] Schiller, 'Über den Gebrauch des Chors in der Tragödie', quoted in Minor, 'Wagner's Last Chorus', 11.

[108] Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley, 2004), especially 164–7.

Incomplete performance

As we have seen, disembodied voices and uncannily animated objects in Busoni's *Doktor Faust* do not serve to universalise the narrative or render it mythic, as in earlier examples. Rather, they are wilfully caught between being inside and outside of Faust's predicament, like Derrida's phrase 'Pardon for not meaning (to say),' which holds out the promise of communication while also refusing to be made to signify or be co-opted into the purpose of its context. These phenomena perform a resistance against the lure of completion. Formally too, Busoni's *Doktor Faust* moved away from the 'organic dramatic unity' of Goethe's depiction, back to '*parataxis*, to the succession of *tableaux vivants*' of *Puppenspiele*, as Žižek points out.[110] And characterologically, while Goethe's Faust allows us to contemplate the possibility of the character's redemption, Busoni's Faust acknowledges that he is doomed from the outset but he nonetheless plays out his part. Like a marionette, or Žižek's undead, Faust's actions are life-like and purposeful yet lacking in a real sense of volition; he is always haunted by an awareness of his future ruin. However, Faust is also not fully determined: the depiction is melancholy rather than tragic, in the sense that the character's incompleteness, his dual condition of spectatorship and participation within the events, is his central feature.

In Busoni's final opera, Faust dies an un-extraordinary death in an urban street, and Mephistophéles appears as an unconcerned night-watchman who comes across his body, commenting in a spoken, rather than sung, voice: 'This man, methinks, has come to some bad end,'[111] followed by the concluding stage direction, 'He picks up the body, throws it over his shoulder and carries it away.'[112] In this final gesture, Faust's death is made to seem part of the mundane course of things, effectively unmasking the fantastical appearance of the conjurer's epic trials, and nonchalantly overriding the artificiality of the narrative. Here singing turns to speech, mirroring the process of unveiling that Benjamin describes in Brecht's epic theatre, that 'at the proper moment [the actor] should insist on portraying a man who reflects about his part',[113] and once again emblemising the decomposition of any natural alignment between the (singing) body and (spoken) language. As Žižek notes, when

> singers stop singing and start to perform like actors: we are confronted with mere words, deprived of their libidinal substance provided by music. What we hear are

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[109] See Kane, *Sound Unseen*, which charts the long history of the 'acousmatic' voice.

[110] Žižek, 'C Major or E Flat Minor?', 19.

[111] 'Sollte Dieser Mann verunglücktesein?' An alternative translation is 'Should this man have been met with misfortune?'

[112] This stage direction only appears in Dent's translation. There is no such stage direction in the published 1926 score with the German libretto.

[113] Benjamin, 'What is Epic Theater?', 153.

> effectively *dead words* – words which we fully understand, but which nonetheless lack the proper subjective resonance.[114]

The powerful effect of this unusual final gesture in *Doktor Faust* is only convincing because the offstage chorus had throughout the opera been signalling the continuation of life outside of Faust's fantastical drama. Jarnach's closing bars are disproportionately tragic in this sense, whereas Beaumont's alternative score, which some read as providing an optimistic close emphasising redemption, could also be read an effective gesture of de-sublimation. In either case, the double meaning of the opera is not reconciled, not even by Faust's apparent redemption or continuation in the form of the naked youth, because this final apparition is, like the offstage chorus, an element that is demonstrably external to the main events on stage. The naked child, as Busoni described it, 'transcend[s] the framework of the play'.[115]

In *Doktor Faust*, music and its absence serve the function of undermining the apparent universality of the themes or any sense of a natural identification between the music, bodies and words of the opera, initiating a cool reflectiveness in the viewer who has been made wary of the persuasive powers of sensational emotions. This effect is mirrored by Faust's own realisation of the damaging effects of seeking universal knowledge. Busoni relies on the effect of artificially and pretence afforded by the fantastical theme only so as to bring to mind the very real dangers of totalising or abstracted ideas:

> I have spent my life during a time in which the musical world was dominated, spiritually by Beethoven and practically by Wagner … We abandoned, little by little unknowingly, the domain of music, in order to resort to Philosophy: we lost our joy in pure art and became saturated with 'profundity'.[116]

Here Busoni refers to the view that music's ineffability is dragged down to earth when it is put to the service of conveying specific ideas, or made to perform foreclosure. In other words, Busoni prefers to conceive of music in opera as holding in abeyance any sense of foreclosure – akin to a gesture without citational supports. It does not describe a situation of withdrawal but rather what Butler calls 'incomplete performance', which was of course what the unfinished composition of this opera came to be upon Busoni's death.[117] Aside from the interpretative temptation of this biographical accident, a more useful observation might be that the opera is not oppositional in the manner usually attributed to practices of estrangement, but rather it is willingly unfulfilled. It is a performed incompleteness; a performed absence. Like Butler's account of gesture as a decomposed speech act, it is both a 'sign of critical capacity' as well as conveying 'grief for what decomposes as we compose, and for what is no longer possible, and for the loss of those traditional supports – and tradition itself – that cannot be restored'.[118]

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[114] Žižek, 'C Major or E Flat Minor?', 30. Original emphasis.

[115] Ferruccio Busoni, letter to Gisella Selden-Goth, 14 May 1920, quoted in Chamness, 'In a Different Voice', 46.

[116] Ferruccio Busoni, 'Gedanken zu einer "Neuen Klassizität"', *Musica Viva* (October 1936), 27, quoted in Scott Messing, *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept Through the Schoenberg/Stravinsky Polemic* (Ann Arbor, 1988), 65. Messing notes that this essay was first drafted in May 1919, and was published in German, English, French and Italian (168, n. 21).

[117] It may be worth noting that Brecht viewed his own work as an open and ongoing process rather than a series of completed texts, and as Calico notes 'it is possible to situate Brecht's entire oeuvre within a general aesthetic framework of incompletion' (Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, 11).

[118] Butler, 'Theatrical Machines', 41.

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