"Secret Mechanism": *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and the Intermedial Uncanny in the Metropolitan Opera's Live in HD Series

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> I could imagine that it might be possible to enable figures to dance quite graciously by means of a secret mechanism within them. They also should dance with people and execute different movements so that a live dancer holds a wooden lady and swings her back and forth. Could you watch this for one minute without horror?
> —E. T. A. Hoffmann

Fascination with automatons and the elision of borders between the human and the mechanical is a hallmark of E. T. A. Hoffmann. Many of his tales take up the idea of a fantastical mechanism embedded within the not-quite-human; and while the Nutcracker may be the most famous of these characters, the tale of "The Sandman" from Hoffmann's collection *Die Nachstücke* (1816) offers an explicit exploration through the interrelations and consequences of intermingling the human and mechanical. The question of a graceful automaton striking horror into her spectators plays out through the circulation of "The Sandman," spe-

cifically as a source text for a stage play and eventually Offenbach's opera *Les Contes d'Hoffmann,* wherein the eponymous character is a fictional version of Hoffmann himself, who takes on the role of protagonist in four of his own stories. These include an episode based on "The Sandman," wherein a doll figure is mistaken for human with disastrous consequences. Watching with horror is one of the gothic delights in this opera, and that fascinating horror is proliferated in the spectator's experience through a twenty-first-century innovation in opera dissemination that parallels in many ways a "secret mechanism" that creates slippage between bodily and technological experiences: the Metropolitan Opera's Live in HD simulcast series. This phenomenon has launched debates about the value and ontology of "live" performance, and, by extension, ques-

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The epigraph comes from Horst Daemmrich, *The Shattered Self: E. T. A. Hoffmann's Tragic Vision* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), p. 73.

tions about what constitutes opera and how liveness may figure in its future.

Since the Met introduced its Live in HD cinema simulcast series in 2006, a multitude of moviegoers and opera patrons have sat in a local movie theater to watch a production that is simultaneously performed before an audience seated in New York's Lincoln Center. Many critics have applauded the Met for working to "disseminate their work in the 21st century using 21st century technology."[1] The C.E.O. of Canada's nationwide theater chain, Cineplex Odeon, claimed in 2008 that the broadcasts were "the next best thing to actually being there."[2] Enthusiasts have hailed a new dawn of opera, with the best and biggest productions made available at a reasonable price to patrons from all demographics, but critics have warned that the simulcasts may ruin "live" and local operatic productions. The *New York Times*'s Zachary Woolfe, for example, has recently argued that the simulcasts engender "the undoing of opera, an art form in which a present, active audience is fundamental."[3] The debates regarding the simulcast phenomena center around the consequences for opera companies; whether the simulcasts will bring new patrons through the doors of local opera companies or run those smaller companies out of business remains to be seen. The importance of audience experience is glossed in most commentaries on the simulcasts, and ultimately the impact on opera production will be decided by patrons who attend either live, simulcast, or both kinds of opera production. This article explores the mediatized experience of the simulcast operagoers and charts how the operatic and technological aspects of the production combine to create a new kind of viewer experience.

Many writers have been at pains to point out that technological innovations have always been at the fore in operatic production[4] and that "the theatre has always been virtual, a space of illusory immediacy."[5] Even when considering all theatrical spaces as fundamentally discrete from "reality" in ways that make virtuality a layered, rather than strictly technological term, there is something compelling and disturbing about the sphere of the Live in HD series, something that goes beyond the technological innovations that have altered and broadened the scope of operatic performance. The stakes are so high in considering the opera simulcast because it is entangled in the meaning of liveness, and the impact of media technology on performance, repetition, and reception, and therefore the cultural distinctions of opera itself. Is it still opera if it isn't performed entirely to a "bodily co-present" audience?[6] This article relies largely on Matthew Causey's excellent work on performance theorized through the lens of media technologies and his suggestion to conceive of theater "as a medium that overlaps and subsumes or is subsumed by other media including television, film, radio, print, and the computer-aided hypermedia, which will change, considerably, our definitions of the boundaries of the theater and the ontology of performance."[7] However, I relocate the object of con-

[1]Dominic McHugh, "Barbican Joins Met Opera HD Broadcasts Scheme," *MusicalCriticism.com* (24 December 2007), http://www.musicalcriticism.com/news/barbican-met-1207.shtml (accessed 12 October 2010).
[2]Ellis Jacob, quoted in Christopher Morris, "Digital Diva: Opera on Video," *Opera Quarterly* 26 (2010), 112.
[3]Zachary Woolfe, "The Screen Can't Hear When You Yell 'Bravo,'" *New York Times* (4 May 2012), p. AR1.

[4]See Mark Schubin's lecture "The Fandom of the Opera: How a Four-Century-Old Art Form Helped Create the Modern Media World" (6 October 2011), cited in "Opera: The Early Adopter of the Media World" *NPR* (6 Nov. 2011), available from http://www.npr.org/2011/11/06/142018443/how-opera-helped-create-the-modern-media-world (accessed 14 April 2012). (A direct link to the lecture can be found here: http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=5339.) Further, Christopher Morris notes that "from its very origins, opera was deeply invested in the technologies of theater (stagecraft, lighting, acoustics) in the highly organized labour of theatrical and musical production." See his "Digital Diva," p. 117, n. 22.
[5]Matthew Causey, "The Screen Test of the Double: The Uncanny Performer in the Space of Technology," *Theatre Journal* 51 (1999), 383.
[6]I find Erika Fischer-Lichte's definition of performance as "the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators" a helpful way to describe certain kinds of theatrical situatedness, especially in contexts of discussing the virtual without relying on the loaded term "real" as its counterpart. Translated by and quoted in Morris, "The Digital Diva," p. 105; ("Die Oper als 'Prototyp des Theatralischen': Zur Reflexion des Aufführungsbegriffs in John Cages Europeras 1 & 2," in *Musiktheater heute: Internationales Symposion der Paul Sacher Stiftung Basel 2001*, ed. Hermann Danuser and Matthias Kassel [Mainz: Schott, 2003], p. 292.)
[7]Matthew Causey, "Screen Test of the Double," p. 394.

cern from the performer who, in Causey's work, "confronts her mediated other through the technologies of reproduction . . . a making material of split-subjectivity" to the experience of the audience along similar lines.[8] I argue that the HD series creates in its *audiences* a sense of doubling, of intellectual uncertainty, and strange recurrence within an experience of immediacy, and a sense of the familiar made alien: in other words, a sense of the uncanny. This exploration will focus on the means by which various aspects of doubling, the alienation of the familiar, and the troubling recurrence are produced in the audience through particularly mediatized practices.

The Intermedial Uncanny

The concept of the uncanny, circulated widely through Freud's influential essay of the same title, has been explored in various ways across the spectrum of humanistic studies. Literary scholars, particularly those working in nineteenth century and gothic genres, have focused on the relation of an individual to a troubling Other, either in fantastical or psychological slippage regarding reality.[9] Musicologists, too, have taken up the idea of the familiar rendered strange and frightening through repression and return to explore concepts of originality, intertextuality, and specific chord progressions in music.[10] This article is likewise concerned with the familiar rendered strange, especially as it is connected to the three elements of uncanniness that Freud lists as: "the phenomenon of the double, identification with someone or thing outside of the self, and the recur-

rence of that same thing."[11] Importantly, Freud himself acknowledges that the uncanny operates in the realm of the aesthetic as well as the psychological, and therefore the terror noted above can be an intrinsic and pleasurable aspect of audience engagement with uncanny works. Hoffmann's tale "The Sandman" figures prominently in Freud's essay, especially regarding the issues of sight and illusion. In the story, a young man's haunting and his descent into madness are rooted in his inability to repress the fantastical visions of his youth in his adulthood. The idea of uncanniness as an operational force in meaning-making through the experience of a familiar but uncomfortable recurrence translates clearly in the operatic version of the story, but it also operates on a phenomenological level for audiences of theater in general, where the illusory qualities of performance are rendered alien through the embodied enactment of corporeal actors.[12] The uncanny takes on a new kind of affect in the simulcasting of operatic performances because specific aspects of mediatization alter the ontology of performance and complicate the illusions of theatrical performance.

My understanding of intermediality is based, in large part, on essays in the Theatre and Intermediality Working Group's anthology *Intermediality in Theater and Performance.* In this volume intermediality is associated with "the blurring of generic boundaries, crossover and hybrid performances, intertextuality, immediacy, hypermediality and a self-conscious reflexivity that displays the devices of performance in performance."[13] The introduction to the volume builds on the work of Philip Auslander, and of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, invoking the ideas of immediacy (inviting a feeling of direct access to an object by the erasure of awareness regarding the medium through which that object is accessed) and

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[8]Ibid., p. 385.
[9]An example of literary scholarship that explores the uncanny is Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).
[10]Among a large body of literature on the uncanny in music, see Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Towards a Critical History* (Berkeley: University of California University Press, 2002), pp. 259–66; Michael Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 78–87; Richard Cohn, "Uncanny Resemblances: Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57 (2004), 285–324.

[11]Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. James Strachey, trans. Alix Strachey, vol. XVII (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 234.
[12]Causey, "Screen Test of the Double," p. 384.
[13]Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt, *Intermediality in Theater and Performance* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 11.

hypermediacy (aspects that deliberately call attention to the medium through the explicit invocation of its boundaries) as key elements in intermediality.[14] Intermediality is not necessarily contemporaneous with technological intervention, however: Freda Chapple suggests in her own contribution to the volume that opera itself is an occasion for intermediality, as the "singing actor performs in-between the medium of the music and the medium of theater."[15] Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt cite being "in-between" as a fundamental precept in experiences of intermediality, arguing that the multiple perspectives of intermediality "foreground the making of meaning by the receivers of the performance."[16] This situation aligns neatly with the Live in HD audience: between a sense of being copresent and distant, of being extremely close to but not quite *there*. The many arenas of liminality at play in the Live in HD series pose questions about the consequences for the art form, and how to understand those consequences through this emergent opera-viewing experience.

I see the concepts presented in discussions on intermediality as conjoined in the viewership available through the Live in HD simulcasts, wherein the uncanny slippages between the imaginary and reality in the world of theater and performance are layered with the alienating and yet familiar sense of watching that performance digitally and simultaneously with other viewing publics spread across a multitude of movie theaters. The opera performance occurs at the same time in many different theaters through a camera lens that allows the mediated audience closer visual access to, but ultimately more physical distance from, the performance. In addition, the work of the performance presents itself in ways that are unavoidable for the mediatized audiences and entirely absent from the bodily copresent patrons at Lincoln Center. Of particular interest to me are the hypermediated effects of the simulcast; an alienating immediacy made possible through the choice of camera shots during the performance; and finally the sense of mechanical reproduction inscribed on the simulcast.

In light of its source texts and the particular attention I pay to the issues of the mechanical in relation to the bodily experience, it is fitting to take as my particular focus the 2009 production of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann:* an opera based in part on the very texts that Freud used to develop his psychoanalytic definition of the uncanny, invested in the disintegration of individual personality[17] through multiple characters performed by one actor, as well as horrors of robotic and mechanical reproducibility standing in for and challenging the human. Through a reading of act I (the "Olympia" act),[18] this article explores how certain forms of doubling, slippage between mechanical and organic bodies, and the spectatorial gaze are presented through both *mise-en-scène* and the intermedial to form an emergent audience situation that draws the pleasure of the performance in a way entirely discrete from but still dependent on traditionally held understandings of the audience in operatic performance. Susan Bennett locates audience experience in the dual realm of "expectations of a performance" and the "fictional stage world," and within the oscillations among performance, fictive, and mediatized experience for the HD spectators I see a particular kind of audience experience that I call the *intermedial uncanny*.[19]

[14]Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, intro. to *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 3–15. Notably, Auslander claims that there is no clear, ontological distinction between the live and mediatized, but that the differences should be explored as "historical and contingent" (p. 8).
[15]Freda Chapple, "Digital Opera: Intermediality, Remediation and Education," in *Intermediality in Theater and Performance* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 81.
[16]Chapple and Kattenbelt, *Intermediality,* p. 20.

[17]Mary Dibbern notes Hoffmann's fascination with the popular concept of the "disintegration of personality," wherein a subject can be separated into discrete egos. *The Tales of Hoffmann: A Performance Guide* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002), p. 167.
[18]The acts of *Hoffmann* have been reordered and renumbered frequently throughout the work's history, in some cases the prologue being counted as the first act, and the "Giulietta" and "Antonia" episodes being switched. For this article I follow the system used by the Met's web player in naming "act I" as the episode concerning Olympia.
[19]Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 2.

Les Contes d'Hoffmann embodies within its text, musical organization, and performance history aspects of fractured authorship, in addition to narrative and spectatorial doubling that makes it a perfect exemplar for intermedial uncanniness in its Live in HD dissemination. The opera's libretto is based on a play by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, which brought together four of Hoffmann's short stories through the addition of the eponymous character, whose struggles in love threaten and inspire his writing.[20] Jacques Offenbach worked with Barbier in translating the stage play into an *opéra-fantastique,* but the composer died before the work was finished; and, although fellow composer Ernest Guiraud completed the work shortly after Offenbach's death, the opera itself has been frequently reordered and revised since its premiere in 1881. Bartlett Sher's 2009 Metropolitan Opera production opens with the prologue "Luther's Tavern" and follows with the three episodes featuring Olympia, Antonia, and Giulietta respectively. Importantly, although the eponymous character promises in the prologue a retelling of his adventures in love, in each of the three acts he performs himself as the doomed lover, rather than narrating it from outside, creating within the story itself a doubling of Hoffmann as both the character of the tales and the narrator ostensibly in charge of each episode (although clearly it is the Muse/Nicklaus figure who comments and attempts to guide Hoffmann's actions).

Although all the episodes of *Hoffmann* take up themes of doubling and uncanniness, act I is specifically concerned with what Freud calls the "intellectual uncertainty" of mistaking a robot for a human.[21] Whereas in the opera, the "Olympia" episode is less dark than in Hoffmann's tale (most obviously because the Nathanael/Hoffmann character has survived to tell it), both versions explore the dangers of this automatonic uncertainty and the terror of losing control over one's sight. The episode centers on the automaton Olympia, with whom Hoffmann falls in love after purchasing and donning a pair of special glasses. Both the Olympia of the tale and that of the opera are exceedingly beautiful but identifiable as mechanical through jerky movements, and, in the opera, explicit mechanical actions. Sher's production takes the mechanical discomfort further by dressing Olympia very clearly as a doll, in a hot pink tutu, which differs from productions in which Olympia's dress aligns her more closely with other humans on stage. Olympia's failures to function as a human are highlighted in the staging by a wind-up action that starts the doll, and her frequent and humorous hitches in performance (most notably slapping Hoffmann in the face as she abruptly turns ninety degrees toward the gathered crowd at Dr. Spalanzani's house). All of these elements highlight E. T. A. Hoffmann's own fascination and discomfort with the interposition of the human and the mechanical, in this instance the particular intersection of the mechanical and mystical effects of the special glasses through which Olympia appears human. The intellectual uncertainty in Hoffmann's tale is in turn staged operatically through Offenbach and Barbier, and then remediated in twenty-first-century machinations through the intersection of human performance and digital transmission for the HD movie-theater viewer.

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[20]The prologue uses "Der goldene Topf" (The Golden Vase); the Olympia narrative uses "Der Sandmann" (The Sandman); Antonia's narrative uses "Rat Krespel" (Councillor Krespel), and Giulietta's narrative uses "Die Geschicte von verlornen Spiegelbilde" (The Story of the Lost Reflection), found within the larger "Die Abenteuer der Sylvester-Nacht" (The Night of New Year's Eve). Dibbern, *The Tales of Hoffmann,* pp.167–225. Dibbern's performance guide includes a detailed section on the literary sources for *Hoffmann,* and I have relied on her work in this article.

[21]Freud, "The Uncanny," p. 230. Although Freud rejects the automaton/real dichotomy as centrally important to his theories regarding sight and castration, he continues to return to the idea of intellectual uncertainty throughout his article, particularly in concluding that uncanny effects are often rooted in the slippage between reality and the imagination, as was also noted by Cohn ("Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age," p. 289).

The imperfection of the mystical mechanics that run the Olympia doll highlights the boundaries between her humanlike actions and robotic body. Likewise, the seams of the technology that delivers the opera to the movie house is evident throughout act I, at times heightening the humor of the episode through close-up shots and the creation of particular viewer relationships to the stage. The dominant function of hypermediacy is the enforced recognition of the edges of a particular media,[22] and the border of the human/mechanical interrelation is performed by the failures of Olympia's human imitation, which is then reinforced through the mediating activity of the Live in HD camera crew. As is often the case during these simulcasts, the camera shots usually employed during the *Hoffmann* simulcast are close-ups, or three-quarters shots during solo or ensemble performances. Different angles and zoom shots are used, but the wide angle is rarely exercised; and when it does appear, it most often punctuates a particular staging or *mise-en-scène* choice of interest. One such instance occurs just prior to Olympia's aria "Les Oiseaux dans la charmille," wherein Dr. Spalanzani's guests open parasols with large eyes painted on the outside, creating a visual spectacle that both surprises the audience and directs a sense of the gaze back toward it (plate 1). Although the eyes on the parasols are immobile, the parasols are twirled to create the image of both a hypnotic effect and a vision becoming, quite literally, blurred. The viewer's gaze is reflected back by the stage, invoking a sense of uncanniness: the sense of seeing oneself see oneself. This division of the gaze highlights the opera's concern with sight, and the mediatized gaze reinforces the theme of troubled vision.

The text sung at the "eyeball parasol" moment invokes the issue of sight, as the chorus commands Hoffmann "to look" at the beautiful eyes of Olympia, which stare in Kathleen Kim's performance blankly out at the audience in an echo of the parasols.[23] This moment creates a sense of doubling, both textually and intermedially. It presents an intertextual relation to "The Sandman," wherein the eye salesman, Dr. Coppélius, displays his glasses on a table and creates an ocular (and supernatural) spectacle: "he continued to produce more and more spectacles from his pockets until the table began to gleam and flash all over. Thousands of eyes were looking and blinking convulsively, and staring up at Nathanael; he could not avert his eyes from the table."[24] Additionally, audience members witnessing the spinning parasols are positioned as Nathanael/Hoffmann figures, dazzled by the sight of the "myriad eyes" but also discomfited by the reversal of the spectatorial gaze and therefore the doubling of themselves as a different kind of participant in the performance. Identification with the mistaken spectator of Nathanael/Hoffmann highlights a narrative gesture toward uncertainty on stage, but audiences are reminded of not only their own implication in the pleasures of horror at Hoffmann's mistaken sight but also their own mediatized experience because the specific camera shot has telegraphed the importance of the moment.

The director of the simulcast, Gary Halverson, mediates the work of the production's stage director, and the viewer is therefore witness to a doubled production—of the opera on stage and of the simulcast produced of that work while it is occurring.[25] The Live in HD audience is subject to the layered direction of Sher and Halverson, and an awareness of that renders both the familiarity of the moviegoing experience and the operatic spectatorship strange, reminding audiences that they themselves are dependent on an ocular device, and that their

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[22]Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation,* pp. 33–34.

[23]Dibbern, *The Tales of Hoffmann,* p. 58.
[24]E. T. A. Hoffmann, "The Sandman," in *Weird Tales: A Translation from the German,* trans. J. T. Bealby (New York: Scrivener, 1923), p. 197.
[25]The simulcast credits twenty-seven Live in HD production staff, not including the "Backstage at the Met" segments with Deborah Voigt, which have a separate director and crew. Jacques Offenbach, *Les Contes d'Hoffmann,* The Metropolitan Opera (19 December 2009), available at http://www.metoperafamily.org/ondemand/players/subscription/index.aspx?upc=811357013175&loggedin=yes (accessed 15 October 2011).

Plate 1: *Les Contes d'Hoffmann,* act I, directed by Bartlett Sher. Conducted by James Levine.
Set design by Michael Yeargen and costume design by Catherine Zuber.
Performers Joseph Calleja and Kathleen Kim. Metropolitan Opera (2009).
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own sight is rendered mechanically through the simulcast technology.

Perhaps the most disconcerting experience relating to the media of the Live in HD series is the doubling of the audience communities themselves. The eyeball parasols may interpellate both the Lincoln Center audiences and the movie theater patrons as participants in the production, but they are discrete physically, if not chronologically. Spectators of the Live in HD simulcasts are therefore invited to consider the "inter-action between performance and perception"[26] in explicitly mediated ways, because audiences in the movie theaters are also audiences for the actions of the audience seated *in* Lincoln Center, and although they are never seen in house, they are heard to clap, laugh, and sigh, participating in the spectacle presented to the Live in HD viewer.[27] Through hypermediality the simulcast reminds the viewer of the media through which the opera is presented, and this presence of multiple audiences is a palpable doubling of the self—at once part of and yet separate from each other.

[26]Chapple and Kattenbelt, introduction to *Intermediality,* p. 21.

[27]Interested viewers are encouraged to watch closely the conclusion to Kim's performance of "Les Oiseaux," wherein the onstage audience of Dr. Spalanzani's guests clap for Olympia, stop clapping, and then begin again to accord with the extended applause that the Lincoln Center crowd offers to Kim.

Philip Auslander understands immediacy as a sense of being "on the scene," while for Bolter and Grusin the term is linked to the desire to erase the boundaries around media; while these frameworks operate along similar lines to explain a sense of the viewer's relationship to a media experience or object, the meaning is not entirely the same.[28] The direct access described by Auslander is a valuable aspect of simulcasts for many viewers, and I will use his understanding in the reading that follows. Live in HD viewers experience a camera-mediated intimacy with the performers on stage that extends beyond the close-up to reorganize the sense of the performance entirely around the performing body at work. This intimate encounter can in some cases be too close to maintain a connection to the operatic work as a whole, as the visual spectacle of the performing singer becomes an alienating gesture that relocates the Live in HD viewer away from the theater and into a more intimate, immediate sphere of spectatorship. The clearest example of this occurs in act I of this *Hoffmann* simulcast during the performance of Olympia's aria "Les Oiseaux dans la charmille."

Jean Parrison describes Olympia's aria as "a parody of *bel canto,* stiff like a robot, and with an idiotic text."[29] The staging likewise embodies aspects of the robotic and ridiculous in soprano Kathleen Kim's excellent performance. She totters around the stage, staring blankly in whatever direction her head is facing, and performs as one might expect to see from a singing robot. But the camera pans in too closely to sustain the theatrical illusion. As she performs the cadenza near the end of the aria, the camera zooms ever closer, closer than the traditional three-quarter shot, until Kim's mouth dominates the screen (plate 2). The intermediation of Kim at this moment negotiates not only between the music and the story, stage and theater audience, but also the mechanical character and organic body at work. This is made

explicit through the lens of the camera and consequent widescreen display. The Live in HD viewer sees Kim's vocal technique in extreme close-up, and her vibrato, visible through the movement in her tongue, dominates the sphere of reception as both a visual and auditory event. The simulcast viewer, through the extreme immediacy of the shot, becomes a double witness to the body at play (Olympia's humorous doll-like movements) and at also at work (Kim's vocal technique writ large on the movie theater screen).

Immediacy here becomes a means by which the boundaries of viewership are reframed, not only in terms of the theatrical audience situation but also in terms of a mediatized, or filmlike audience. The performance technique required to produce operatic singing works against the familiarity of an intimate close-up, because the unavoidable engagement with the singer's tongue means that the operatic story is subsumed in the work of its performance, and the position encountered is therefore to the simulcast rather than the operatic work being disseminated through it. Melina Esse suggests that "televisual immediacy" is replacing the "Romantic distance" that forms traditional audience exigency in operatic performance, and in the case of extreme close-ups, these exigencies overlay each other and situate the audience between various sets of expectations.[30] Herein lies a central tension of the intermedial experience of the simulcasts: the viewer experiences herself as an audience in multiple registers, responding to a confluence of performance elements that render the operatic experience, as well as the specific work, both close to and strangely alien from other operatic experiences or expectations. Although a Live in HD viewer may not actually doubt, as does Freud's example of uncanny identification, "which his self is," the layered identification of audience situation is in many ways unavoidable.[31]

The Live in HD viewers are able to see what bodily copresent audiences cannot: in this case a series of backstage, stage management and

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[28]Lenox R. Lohr, quoted in Auslander, *Liveness,* p. 16; Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, pp. 22–23.
[29]Quoted in Dibbern, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, p. 61.

[30]Melina Esse, "Don't Look Now: Opera, Liveness, and the Televisual," *Opera Quarterly* 26 (2010), 82, 93.
[31]Freud, "The Uncanny," p. 234.

Plate 2: *Les Contes d'Hoffmann,* act I, directed by Bartlett Sher. Conducted by James Levine. Set design by Michael Yeargen and costume design by Catherine Zuber. Performer Kathleen Kim. Metropolitan Opera (2009). Accessed through metoperafamily.org. All rights reserved.

pit shots interspersed with a series of interviews by simulcast host, soprano Deborah Voigt. The Live in HD series have played with this aspect of the performance, combining different sorts of backstage shots, interviews, and panning to create a sense that the HD camera, and therefore its mediated audience, moves through the house to visit the different scenes of work that combine to create the onstage spectacle. In the simulcast of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann,* for example, the first segment is in fact a performance of being backstage before the curtain goes up, as chorus members lounge on stage in full costume while Voigt moves across the set, introducing the work. This "Backstage at the Met" segment is a familiar effect for many kinds of production and entertainment television but is new in many ways to the world of opera. Christopher Morris observes that this "apparent insider knowledge is surely part of the voyeuristic appeal of backstage access," and the resituating of the Live in HD audiences as a kind of "all-access" audience certainly highlights a sense of privilege, rather than lack,

inherent in the mediatized viewership.[32] In addition to seeing shots of the stage manager calling places for the show, Maestro Levine taking up the baton, and the backstage interviews, the simulcast viewer is able to see them as they occur in so-called real time to such an extreme that we are still able to hear the applause from the Lincoln Center audience as the tenor Joseph Calleja comes backstage, Gatorade bottle in hand, for his intermission interview. This direct and immediate access to the work of the production operates along Auslander's description, wherein the mediatized proximity creates a new sort of relationship between viewer and performance. However, this also works as a hypermedial effect wherein familiarity with television genres will bring into focus the layered perspectives offered to the Live in HD audience.

Viewers familiar with professional sportscasts may experience an odd sense of familiar-

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[32]Morris, "Digital Diva," p. 103.

ity while watching the backstage segments of the simulcasts. Soprano Kathleen Kim, after the "Olympia" episode, is still breathing heavily from the exertions of performance while she speaks with Voigt about the challenges of this role and her upcoming engagements with the Met. The ability to observe the performer in such close quarters, so immediately after and during the performance itself, demarks a sense of intimacy that necessarily highlights the differences between "being there" and being closer than really there, through virtual visual access. The radically altered sphere of hyperaccess reinforces a sense of borders between the bodily copresent audience and the Live in HD viewer, presenting an uncanny instance of elision between the imaginary play world and the real-time physical efforts required to produce it. What this also highlights is a move from a viewership understood in traditionally operatic terms to one more closely related to the world of television and sportscasting, wherein the commentary, interviews, and close-ups provide an experience that is both more in-depth and packaged than the "live" experience (although Auslander would argue that there is no such thing as unmediated liveness). Familiar televisual practices recur in the mediatized operatic audience, rendering strange a sense of privileged viewing that also disturbs the sense of connectivity to the bodily co-present operagoing audience and leaving the Live in HD audience with the sense of fracture through the multiple perspectives on show, feeling perhaps implicated in the shifts among cultural and generic expectations in which operatic works traditionally circulate. Distance and immediacy are conflicting arenas of the HD viewership experience, suggesting that perhaps the traditionally held privilege of being in the opera house is in some ways troubled by a new form of operatic distribution.

Split Subjectivity and Mechanical Reproduction

The "Olympia" act is concerned not only with the question of slippage between organic bodies and the automaton, but also with the material consequences of that confusion. The libretto renders this problem through Coppélius's

concern for a share in the profits that will "rain down" on Dr. Spalanzani when he successfully sells Olympia in marriage to Hoffmann, thus situating Olympia as a replaceable commodity.[33] Perhaps more explicit, however, is her visual objectification in Sher's production: Olympia almost always appears on stage surrounded by identically dressed doll figures. Without the benefit of extremely close shots, audiences in Lincoln Center find it more difficult to distinguish which of the dolls is Hoffmann's love. Thus, the troubling recurrence of the uncanny is staged as a reproduction of bodies on the stage. Further, the unsettling recurrence and revisiting of the doll bodies is refracted intermedially to the Live in HD viewer, who sees in high definition what the theater audience may imagine as they choose: that the dolls are in fact live, unique bodies onstage at the Lincoln Center. The high-definition experience therefore shifts the possibility for theatrical illusion and creates a fundamentally different viewer experience in terms of engagement with the fantastical elements of the "Olympia" episode. Intriguingly, the viewership is made possible by a series of machines situated throughout Lincoln Center, some of which are operated by remote control and therefore, in mechanical terms, like automatons. Meike Wagner notes that intermediality "shapes and produces theatrical bodies" and that the spectator is negotiated as an "embodied perceiver [through] concepts of materiality."[34] In the HD viewer's experience, the materiality of the stage performance is conflated with the mechanized gaze of the camera, and consequently all the theatrical bodies—fictional characters, performers, audience members—are resituated somewhere between embodied performance/reception and its mediation through various and sometimes fantastical technologies.

Tensions regarding the slippage between mechanical objects and humans are most prevalent (both theatrically and intermedially) at the act's conclusion, wherein Olympia's failure to

[33]Dibbern, The Tales of Hoffmann, p. 54.
[34]Meike Wagner, "Of Other Bodies: The Intermedial Gaze in Theatre," in Intermediality in Theater and Performance, p. 125.

Plate 3: *Les Contes d'Hoffmann,* act I finale, directed by Bartlett Sher.
Conducted by James Levine. Set design by Michael Yeargen and costume design by Catherine
Zuber. Performers Joseph Calleja, Alan Held, and Mark Schowalter. Metropolitan Opera (2009).
Accessed through metoperafamily.org.

work well increases, and she totters around the stage after a dance sequence during which human pairs are replaced by men dancing with Olympia dolls. The productive tensions between the live performance and automatonic illusions are dispelled in the camera close-ups, because while a bodily copresent audience member sees the stage as a whole, for the Live in HD viewer the mechanical movements of the performers are counteracted by their individual facial features and unique movements presented through three-quarter shots. The illusion of the human performer as mechanical automaton is therefore inverted, and the audiences become automated themselves through their lack of visual agency and the robotic cameras that mediate their gaze. Following the dance sequence, Olympia totters offstage, a crash is heard, and it is revealed that Coppélius, the eye and glasses maker who has been cheated by Dr. Spalanzani, has destroyed the doll in revenge. Dr. Spalanzani carries Olympia's disembodied leg back on stage, and Hoffmann discovers that he has been in love with a doll (plate 3), exclaiming "A Robot!" in horror. From the Live in HD view it is immediately apparent that the leg is a prop (a rather humorous, rubbery one at that), and thus the brief instant of delightful horror—that the leg is Kim's as well as Olympia's—is quickly dispelled by the visual information provided in the simulcast, as opposed to the sustained theatrical illusion made possible by distance and lighting effects. The in-betweenness of Kim's performance—between human and doll, singer and actor—is less a theatrical thrill and more of an intermediated uncanny, wherein the Live in HD audience becomes aware of itself as discrete from the theater audience, more aware of the props and performance through the immediacy of the camera, and at times painfully aware of the fracturing of not only the doll on stage but also the illusory qualities of theater when mediated in high definition. Further, the delightful horror is located in the sense of being one of many identical mediatized audiences spread out across

hundreds of local movie theaters and experiencing, together yet separately, the same performance.

Sher's production highlights the breakdown of the mechanical by restating its reproducibility. During the finale of the Olympia act, the other Olympia-dolls, last seen dancing with their human partners, are carried out and piled into a heap centerstage. Here, the human bodies are treated as mechanical and replaceable, discarded as one might any out-of-date technology. This scene considers not only the misidentification of Olympia as human but also, I would argue, a sense of our own unease with the increasing intimacy North American culture has with its various machines. The choice to heap actual bodies, rather than props, at the end of the act illuminates an enduring fascination for humans regarding their technological innovations, which extends to the sense of wonder and horror that has resulted from the Live in HD series. It is neither a recording nor a production unto itself, but something in-between, and the sense of unsettled ontology performed so brilliantly onstage is doubled by the mediating effects of the camera's gaze and the audience's consequent repositioning. The Live in HD audience is not so much revisited by the intermedial uncanny, as it in fact forms another kind of replaceable body, both because the HD audiences have no direct impact on the stage performance and because they can be located simultaneously in any location capable of screening the simulcast.

To conclude, the camera and screen of the Live in HD series act in a manner similar to the fantastical ocular device of such importance in Offenbach, Barbier, and Hoffmann's work. act I centers on Hoffmann's troubled perception, accentuated by his willful donning of special glasses purchased from Coppélius. In Sher's production, they are, quite literally, rose-colored, and through them Hoffmann sees Olympia as a living woman. The glasses act as the intermediary of the supernatural, as a "secret mechanism," albeit one with a price. The libretto's "Eyes Trio" has Coppélius repeating the phrase "buy from me my eyes,"[35] and the

source text states explicitly that the glasses have in fact taken their wearers' eyes and rendered them as an exchangeable object to be relocated in further automatonic creation.[36] Intriguingly, Mary Dibbern's translation labels the ocular devices as "opera glasses," which contributes neatly to my reading of the cameras and screen of the Live in HD simulcasts as mechanical devices that change the possibilities for opera viewership in ways that both delight and disconcert its audiences. We too access our spectacle through the mediating devices available to us, enabling us to see differently, to access operatic performance in a new way. Live in HD audiences have subscribed to a kind of mechanical sight that both heightens and limits perceptive capacity. We are made aware of an audience position that doubles other spectators, but we may find pleasure in that doubling. Expectations of opera are troubled by the Live in HD simulcasts because they operate in-between various media exigencies and position their audiences likewise. The challenge of these mechanisms to traditional operatic and theatrical copresence are palpable, and I have attempted to read the audience experience through the intermedial uncanny as a means of taking the simulcast on its own terms, rather than attempting to evaluate it *as* opera or *as* television and film, because it is all and none of these alone. The sense of being situated so variously in-between is impossible to situate explicitly in either time or space, and that is the power of the HD simulcast's "secret mechanism." The intermediality of the Live in HD audience experience provides a pleasurable unsettling that I believe is based specifically in a lack of fixity: I see the constantly shifting relationships to various elements of the performance and its simulcast as precisely what offers an emergent audience experience.

Abstract.

The Metropolitan Opera's Live in HD series has sparked interdisciplinary interest in understanding

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[35]Dibbern, *The Tales of Hoffmann,* p. 152.

[36]The 1923 translation includes a speech from Spalanzani explaining that Coppélius has "stolen [his] best automaton" and tells Nathanael that Coppélius has "stolen your eyes" while showing him a pair of bloody eyes on the floor. Hoffmann, "The Sandman," p. 198.

opera in twenty-first-century contexts. This article posits that the Live in HD series creates an intermedial experience for its viewers, one that forms new relationships between operatic performance and audiences through the ongoing intersections of production elements (story, text, music, *mise-en-scène,* performers) and media-specific concerns (spectatorial gaze, hypermediacy, immediacy, reproducibility, liveness). A reading of the act I from the 2009 Metropolitan Opera simulcast of Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* engages the shifting relations regarding the human and the technological as presented to the Live in HD viewer from the vantage point of on, back, beside, in front of, and yet completely discrete from the Lincoln Center stage.

The mediated and mediatized relationships engendered by this constant resituating of the audience create a sense of the familiar rendered strange, of being somehow out of place in one's relation to the stage. Media and performance theory are employed in concert with Freud's influential work on the uncanny to describe this as the "intermedial uncanny": an important aspect of this emergent audience experience. Keywords: opera, media, intermediality, uncanny, Live in HD, Metropolitan Opera, Hoffmann, audience