

### Literature Review 1: Live from the Met

Paul Heyer (2008) critically analyzes the digital presentation of the performing arts, specifically opera, through the lens of Medium Theory. In applying this particular theory, Heyer compares and contrasts the different means of production for presenting live performance on-screen and in-home.

Medium Theory, originated by Joshua Meyrowitz, is defined by Heyer as the consideration of characteristics unique to certain mediums (radio, television, film, etc.) that distinguish said medium on a physical, psychological and social level. Heyer specifically analyzes the properties of radio broadcasting, television, and “live cinema”—the recorded cinematic presentation of a live operatic performance, as defined by the Metropolitan Opera.

In addition to these mainstream mediums, Heyer introduces the concept of Digital Broadcast Cinema (DBC.) This idea provides a term for the broadcast of either live or recorded arts and entertainment productions presented in a narrative format. Heyer is specific in including ballet, opera, musicals and theatrical productions in his definition, and excluding concerts, sports, and newsworthy events as applicable content matter. Heyer applies Medium Theory analysis to his concept in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of broadcasting live cultural programming. When comparing and contrasting various media channels, the production, transmission and reception of the broadcasts are examined as the influenced properties of DBC.

Heyer is clear in identifying the medium’s ability to portray a particular narrative as one of these influenced properties. Anthropologist and early media theorist, Edmund Carpenter is quoted as saying, “film, radio, TV—are new languages. . . Each codifies reality differently.” A similar conflict that is thoroughly examined is the argument of how a live versus a recorded art is defined. For viewers, a recorded live production is clearly different than watching a movie. So, where is the line drawn? An element of this conflict is appropriate audience responses. Just how should an audience at home or in a theater react to a filmed live production? It is a very different thing to be viewing as a member in a live audience rather than on the other side of the screen.

These two concepts are applied throughout Heyer’s analyses of artistic productions presented in television and film. Considering previous expert perspectives of both of these mediums, one gains multiple views of recorded live performances. TV is exceptional in presenting smaller and more contemporary productions. Media academic John Ellis argues that, “Television favors the glance over the gaze.” This quote represents the argument favoring live cinema- or cinemagraphic recordings of live productions. A film of a full-length live production allows for epic storytelling, and facilitates the direct contact between the audience and the actor. Whereas elements of a fully-flushed live performance may be lost on short televised programming, live cinema allows for viewers to achieve a more comprehensive and nuanced version of the production.

Both channels allow for different approaches to DBC, and each come with their fair share of merits and critiques. Overall, this article is only the beginning of an exploration into broadcasted live artistic performance. Dated in 2008, it is only natural to wonder what the current state of broadcasted productions is, especially with the

COVID-19 pandemic. This event called for an immediate closure of live events and forced performing arts organizations to adapt to distanced programming. It is of high interest to examine more recent approaches to virtual programming, especially with the advent of digital streaming services. There is potential for the “high arts” like opera to become more accessible to the everyday person, right in their home. That is, if modern DBCs are done correctly.

One critique for this article is that it is based on qualitative research and theory. For further research into this concept, especially with the growth of digital broadcasting in the arts, data-driven information can help organizations such as the Metropolitan Opera meet the wants and needs of their distanced audiences. Quantitative data can also help these organizations make better choices in production and distribution of their broadcasts.

One final suggestion is that Heyer could have explored the potentials of post-production more in his conception of how DBC audiences receive these programs. On page five, he mentions how vital the quality of the production design elements are to both live and DBC audiences. But, most of the discussion is based on the production design of the live performance itself. Curiosity lends itself to pondering how to enhance the experience for distanced audiences through post-production. These audiences are getting a different version of a live performance, so how can the experience be enhanced for these viewers? Subtitles (or operatically, *supertitles*) have been in use prior to this article, but how has technology advanced in a way to complement these productions? Especially with the advent of augmented reality and videoconferencing technologies, such as Zoom. It would be interesting to examine how much DBCs have changed, especially in a post-pandemic world.

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Heyer, P. (2008). Live from the Met: Digital Broadcast Cinema, Medium Theory, and Opera for the Masses. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 33(4), 591–604.  
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