

## Contemporary Opera Staging, or Theatre of New Musicology:

### Rethinking of Lawrence Kramer's Musical Hermeneutics

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Contemporary opera staging is a new issue in musicology. In German-speaking countries, the controversial Regietheater (theatre of direction) has gained much interest among opera lovers and theorists. This type of staging allows the director to change original elements of the libretto in respect to geographical settings, chronological order and the characterizations of the figures and plots. Regietheater tends to be criticized as causing strained readings of an arrogant director with no respect for the concept of *Werktreue* (fidelity to the work). For those who support Regietheater, however, the demand for *Werktreue* is simply pointless because from the semiological point of view, opera consists not only of the libretto and the score, but also of the performance.

Contemporary opera staging can be compared with New Musicology in the 1990s. Both of them belong to academic-artistic practices. If the former is the performance of opera musicologically revisited, the latter is the subjective and rhetorical discourse about music produced by scholars. These two also try to put the meanings of musical works into motion. Though not musicians, directors are capable of reimagining an opera by their *mise-en-scène*. It is with the same purpose that New Musicologists describe a piece by their language which adds something new to that piece.

In other words, both contemporary opera staging and New Musicology have hermeneutic aspects. The Germanist Gerhard Neumann calls Regietheater as a window through which hidden and contradictory meanings contained in an opera should be understandable. Based on the similar idea, Lawrence Kramer, one of the leading New Musicologists, defines his musical hermeneutics in terms of "hermeneutic windows" (*Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900*, 1990). In conclusion, contemporary opera staging is a theatrical and more persuasive version of New Musicology in that we cannot distinguish the work from its interpretation in the theatre.