Singing corporeality: reinventing the vocalic body in postopera

Novak, J.

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Singing Corporeality: Reinventing the Vocalic Body in Postopera

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. D. C. van den Boom
ten overstaan van een door het college voor promoties
ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel
op donderdag 29 November 2012, te 12:00 uur

door

Jelena Novak

geboren te Belgrado, Joegoslavië
Promotiecommissie

Promotor: Prof. dr. R. de Groot

Overige Leden: Prof. dr. R. Leppert
          Prof. dr. S. A. F. van Maas
          Prof. dr. P. P. R. W. Pisters
          Prof. dr. K. E. Röttger
          Prof. dr. M. Šuvaković

Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
# List of Contents

## Introduction
- Focusing on Body Singing  
- The Vocalic Body and Ventriloquism  
- Reinventing the Vocalic Body (in Opera)  
- Defining Postopera: History of the Term  
- Reinventing the Vocalic Body (in Theory)  
- Outlining the Research  

## Chapter 1
- **Body-Voice Gap, Postopera and Body/Voice Theory**  
  - Opera and the Body-Voice Gap  
  - (Dis)Embodiment of Voice  
  - Re-voicing  
  - Defining Postopera: Opera after Drama  
  - Exemplifying Postopera  
  - Postopera vs. Post-Opera vs. Post-operatic  
  - Singing Body and Body/Voice Theory  
  - Barthes: The Grain of the Voice  
  - Body, Voice, Identity: Theoretical Insights  

## Part 1 - VOICES BEYOND CORPOREALITY: PERFORMING SINGING AS UPGRADING

### Chapter 2
- **Singing beyond the Body: Uniqueness, Intruder and Prosthesis**  
  - Vocal Uniqueness  
  - Music vs. Dramatic Text and Horror of Identity  
  - Gendered Singing  
  - The Intruder and Mimesis  
  - Prosthesis and Amputation  

### Chapter 3
- **Monstrous Singing: The Politics of Vocal Existence**  
  - Staging Cloning  
  - Dolly on the Postopera Stage  
  - Cloning Humans, Artificial Intelligence and Religion as an Ethical Corrective  
  - Dissecting Voice: Hearing the Monstrous Body  
  - Singing Machine  
  - Politics of the Monstrous Voice
Part 2 - THROWING THE VOICE, CATCHING THE BODY: OPERA, VENTRiloQUiSM AND DE-SYNCHRONIZATION

Chapter 4
Operatizing the Film: Body without Voice and Voice without Body 74
Operatizing the Film 77
Synchronization, Dubbing and Playback 80
The Knot of Tight Synchronization: The Roaring Voice between Man and Animal 82
Postopera as Ventriloquism 86

Chapter 5
Singing Letters, Multiplied Bodies and Dissociated Voice 90
Between Absence and Presence: Men and Women in Writing to Vermeer 92
Between Subject and Object: The Singing Voice and Triplicate characters 95
Music, Libretto, Body, Voice: De/Synchronization 97
Writing Women and Écriture Féminine 99
Mediation, Postopera and Close-up 104

Part 3 - SINGING GENDER (AS A PERFORMANCE)

Chapter 6
Voice and Gender Standing Apart 109
Towards the Postdramatic Condition of La Commedia (1): Multiplying Narratives 110
Towards the Postdramatic Condition of La Commedia (2): Deconstructing Characters 116
Towards the Postdramatic Condition of La Commedia (3): Mediating Stage Events 117
One Voice, Two Characters, Two Genders 121
Dante: Singing beyond Body 124

Chapter 7
Vocal Drag, Counter-Castrato and the Scandal of the Singing Body 128
A History of Being in Vocal Drag: From Voice of Authority to Gender Fiction 131
Living Backwards: Counter-Castrato 135
The Scandal of the Singing Body 137
Dystopia and Melancholy 140
Reinventing the Vocalic Body in Postopera: Conclusion 143
Acknowledgements 153
Summary in English 155
Summary in Dutch/Samenvatting 164
Bibliography 174
List of audio and video recordings 182
List of Scores 183
List of Figures
Figure 1 - Philip Glass, Robert Wilson, *Einstein on the Beach*; Helga Davis and Kate Moran perform in *Einstein on the Beach* in Ann Arbor, 2012
Figure 2 - Michel van der Aa, *One*, video still
Figure 3 – From *Three Tales*, video opera by Beryl Korot and Steve Reich. Image by Beryl Korot. Act 3, *Dolly*, robot Kismet
Figure 4 - From *Three Tales*, video opera by Beryl Korot and Steve Reich. Image by Beryl Korot. Act 3, *Dolly*, Adin Steinsaltz
Figure 5 - *La Belle et la Bête*, Belfast Festival at Queen’s, November 1998
Figure 6 - Jean Cocteau, *La Belle et la Bête*, armchair lion, film still
Figure 7 - Jean Cocteau, *La Belle et la Bête*, arm-shaped candle sticks, film still
Figure 8 - *La Belle et la Bête*, lego version by ‘barkingbartok’, film still
Figure 9 – Louis Andriessen, Peter Greenaway, *Writing to Vermeer*, Scene 4. 2
Figure 10 – Louis Andriessen, Peter Greenaway, *Writing to Vermeer*, Scene 3
Figure 11 - Louis Andriessen, Hal Hartley, *La Commedia*
Figure 12 - Cristina Zavalloni as Dante in *La Commedia* by Louis Andriessen and Hal Hartley
Figure 13 – Laurie Anderson, *Homeland*, CD/DVD cover, Laurie Anderson as Fenway Bergamot

The author gratefully acknowledges the permission granted to reproduce the copyright material in this study. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The author apologizes for any errors or omissions in the above list and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this study.
Introduction

The subject of this study is the operatic singing body and its reinvention in recent operatic works that I call postoperas. Both in opera studies and in the majority of operatic pieces the singing body is often taken for granted. My main argument is that the body-voice relationship establishes meanings produced by opera and that furthermore it becomes one of the major driving forces in recent opera. As such this relationship should be considered when opera is analyzed. I investigate the reinvention of the body – voice relationship in works by some of the most acclaimed and intriguing contemporary music theatre authors such as Michel van der Aa, Laurie Anderson, Louis Andriessen, Philip Glass, Peter Greenaway, Hal Hartley, Beryl Korot and Steve Reich. In their own way, pieces chosen for analysis raise questions and propose answers concerning the reinvention of the singing body in opera.

I discuss how the mutual relationship between body and voice (vocalic body) is reinvented (meaning: ‘invented again’, remade or redone) in recent operatic practice. The reinvention in question assumes the changes that came as the result of the impact of new media, a desynchronization between image and sound, or a redefinition of sex-gender-voice relationships in opera. I also examine the ways in which the relationship between the singing body and the voice is considered in theory. I refer to how a concept of the vocalic body is reinvented (meaning: ‘brought back into use again’).

---

1 The verb ‘reinvent’ has several meanings. According to the OED it means “to invent again” or “to adopt a new image or identity for oneself; to change one’s behavior in order to respond to a change in environment or react to opportunity”. Oxford English Dictionary Second Edition on CD-ROM (v.4.0.0.2). © Oxford University Press 2009. According to the Merriam-Webster Online dictionary, the verb ‘reinvent’ means: “to make as if for the first time something already invented; to remake or redo completely; to bring into use again”. See: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reinvent Accessed: April 1st, 2012.

2 During the course of the Introduction I discuss the history of the term postopera, and in Chapter 1 I explain and discuss this term’s meanings.


4 Steven Connor’s concept of the vocalic body points to a mutual relationship between body and voice. I discuss this concept further in a later part of the Introduction.
into use again’) in the context of opera studies. In that respect, this study strives to establish itself as
the reinvention of the singing body in opera theory.

By showing how the singing body constitutes opera’s meanings I intend to achieve four aims:

- extend the cultural analysis of opera to the singing body
- identify the theme of mutual interaction between the singing body and the voice in
  opera as a site in which different discourses are encoded
- enrich the field of opera studies with a body/voice theory
- define the concept of postopera, thus creating a theoretical context and common
  ‘scene’ for analyzed pieces

These four aims constitute at the same time a major contribution of this dissertation
towards opera studies.

**Focusing on Body Singing**

My interest in the subject was stimulated in 2003 when I attended a performance of Michel van der
Aa’s opera *One* (2002) with only one singer on the stage. Soprano Barbara Hannigan, looking
identical to her life-size two-dimensional video, confronts the representation of herself throughout
the piece: a projected singing body and a live singing body represent each other, and their mutual
representations are at the same time complementary and deconstructive. Despite the mimetic
relationship between a live performing body and its video double, the live and the projected images
were always clearly distinguishable. In the sphere of sound/music, however, it was sometimes
difficult to detect what was live singing and what was pre-recorded sound projected on stage. The
impossibility of clearly distinguishing the pre-recorded from the live voice makes the relationship
between the two fluctuating and dynamic, and the same goes for the relationship between the voice
and the body, since the conventional forms of their mutual representation change significantly. The
result is extremely virtuosic singing because the physical body ‘competes’ with the machine, whose
performance goes beyond the physical capabilities of a performing human body. That relationship
between body and machine creates a kind of vocal ‘alloy’ consisting of live and pre-recorded
components. Such a vocal result ‘outgrows’ the performing body: since the body singing live is not
sufficient to produce the vocal result that Van der Aa envisaged, the technologically enhanced voice
appears beyond the physical limits and capacity of the vocal apparatus of the singing body.

Two relations are questioned in *One* simultaneously: between the singing body and its voice,
and between the live performer and its projected double. The discrepancy between what is seen and
heard appeared significantly different from that usually experienced in Western conventional
operatic repertoire. The singer’s body produces a voice on stage in *One*, and the singing body is at
the same time determined by the voice in a virtuous overlapping of projected and live performed
sounds and images. A specific perception of the singing body is provoked, one that Steven Connor designates as the vocalic body: “(...) a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice”. The individual, expressive, self-reflexive body performs, while at the same time it is performed by the voice. One can be read as a strong critique of the common relationship between body and voice in conventional opera, where it often appears to be the ‘blind spot’, or pre-determined convention. By reinventing the body-voice relationship that constitutes the core of the opera as we know it, Van der Aa at the same time reinvents the opera and our understanding of it. As such, One is exemplary for both the subject of this study – reinventing a vocalic body – and for my own object of analysis which I define as a distinctive field: the postopera.

The Vocalic Body and Ventriloquism

The practice of reinventing the body-voice relationship in opera was introduced to me by One, and Connor’s concept of a vocalic body attracted my interest in theorizing that relationship. The concept of the vocalic body, or voice-body as Connor also designates it, interrogates the understanding of a relationship between body and voice. As is usually understood, the body produces the voice. The concept of the vocalic body emphasizes that their inversion is not only possible, but happens all the time. It emphasizes the reversibility of the mutual influences between body and voice: “The principle of the vocalic body is simple. Voices are produced by bodies, but can also themselves produce bodies”. I understand the vocalic body as a kind of mirror mechanism – the voice is projected by, but also on, the body and that projection, in this case vocal performance, immediately affects the identity and the presence of the body that produced it, by reflecting itself back to it.

Slavoj Žižek’s theorization of the body-voice relationship precedes Connor’s vocalic body concept. It exposes the problem of belonging between the voice and the body. Žižek questions the core of this relationship, describing its paradoxical mechanism: “The voice acquires a spectral autonomy, it never quite belongs to the body we see, so that even when we see a living person

6 I understand the self-reflexive body as the body on stage that shows consciousness of its function and also consciousness of how it represents itself. Susan Leigh Foster writes: “The reflexive choreography (...) assumes that the body will inevitably refer to other events, and because of this asks how those references are made. Whereas objectivist dance has laid bare the conventions governing representation to allow the body to speak its own language, reflexive choreography works with these same conventions to show the body’s capacity to both speak and be spoken through in many different languages.” See: Susan Leigh Foster, Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1986, p. 188. In the case of the self-reflexive body, ‘other events’ to which a body on stage refers are related to the performing body itself.
talking, there is always some degree of ventriloquism at work: it is as if the speaker’s own voice hollows him out and in a sense speaks ‘by itself’, through him”.

Another author whose writing on voice is a major contribution to the field of voice theory, Mladen Dolar, also identifies the gap that exists between the body and the voice in general:

(... the voice never sounds like the person emitting it, there is always a gap, a Verfremdung, a mismatch. There always seems to be ventriloquism at work, as if ventriloquism was the standard use of the voice that we overlook by mere habit (and overhear when the habit drops its guard a bit). The voice as an intruder is endowed with a spectral nature, with something both intimate and external – Lacan invented an excellent word for this, the extimate.

It is in disembodied voice and ventriloquism, the “(...) practice of making voices appear to issue from elsewhere than their source (...)”, that Connor finds this gap between body and voice that both Žižek and Dolar write about. According to Connor, “(...) the disturbing effect of ventriloquism may derive from its transcendence or disruption of seen space”. To me the effect of the ecstatic conventional operatic voice (for example in romantic operas) was precisely the one that disrupted the ‘seen space’ often containing the motionless body of the singer. “The ventriloquial voice asks in particular to be understood in terms of the relations between vision and hearing, a relation which it itself helps to disclose”, writes Connor. I believe that the same principle stands for the operatic voice too.

Through theorizing ventriloquism Connor arrives at the concept of a vocalic body. Due to a problematization of the body-voice relationship on which it is based, ventriloquism is of interest to my research on the relationship between body and voice in opera. Some kind of overlooking of perception of the body-voice gap, whilst insisting on its performance, is common to both ventriloquism and opera. In both ventriloquism and in opera we know where the voice comes from, but most often are implicitly asked to agree that we don’t. The act of the ventriloquist is usually based on the procedure of lending a human voice to the dummy, or puppet. In conventional operas, there is a similar procedure: we know where the voice comes from, and still it seems like the singer borrows the voice for his/her own body which, like a dummy, waits for the voice to vivify it.

---

11 Ibid., p. 15.
13 Under the term ‘problematize’ I consider questioning, stretching the borders, considering status and function.
‘borrowing effect’ is the result of a body-voice gap on which both opera and ventriloquism rely. I will elaborate on this gap further in Chapter 1.

**Reinventing the Vocalic Body (in Opera)**

In the pieces that I have chosen to analyze, the relationship between the singing body and the voice becomes a site for creative exploration where the boundaries of the opera world are stretched.  

The vocalic bodies of the singers in these pieces could be interpreted as theoretically meaningful statements, making the body-voice relationship a place of discursive density. The problem that persists throughout opera history is the ambivalent relationship between the music and the drama in opera. In the pieces I have chosen as theoretical objects, the body-voice relationship in opera comes into the foreground. New interpretations and interventions appear that strengthen opera’s move beyond its institutional borders. The relationship between voice and body is increasingly varied in these chosen operas, where interventions upon the body-voice relation open not only possibilities for expanding the borders of the opera world further, but also for what is considered body and voice in opera.


---

14 I use the term ‘opera world’ in analogy to the term ‘art world’ as introduced by Arthur Danto. According to Danto’s Institutional theory of art, the term ‘art world’ designates an institutional framework that gives legitimacy to the work of art. That framework includes art theory, the art market, the educational system, artists, works of art, art collectors, art professionals, directors of artistic institutions, the audience, etc. (See: Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: a Philosophy of Art*, Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 5). By analogy with the term art world, the term opera world that I use designates an institutional framework that gives legitimacy to the work of opera, and it includes the theory of opera, opera houses, opera administration, an educational system for musicians, dancers, librettists, directors, theorists, audience, production networks, publishing houses of scores, an industry of opera recordings, etc. Postopera makes up part of the ‘opera world’, together with conventional opera. A similar analogy is used concerning the term ‘music world’.

15 I understand the notion of a theoretical object according to how Mieke Bal refers to it via contributions to its definition by Giovanni Careri and Louis Marin. Bal explains a theoretical object as “(...) a term that holds a program of co-relativism, not between two historical moments but between theoretical thought and cultural artifact”. (Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 48). She also describes a theoretical object as a ‘thinking’ work of art (Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio*..., p. 117, footnote 15). She pays tribute to establishing this term to Careri, who, while writing about Bernini’s art, explains: (...) theory cannot do without history, nor can history do without theory. Theory and history are not rigid frames in which composto must find its place, but the theory and the history produced by the composto itself are the coordinates that it indissolubly creates (...). See: Giovanni Careri, *Bernini: Flight of Love, the Art of Devotion*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 7, footnote 9. The notion of a theoretical object, as I perceive it in this study, designates highly discursive works, and implies analysis in which the piece is read and discussed by theory, but at the same time the theory is illuminated by the piece itself, that is perceived, as it is, by a kind of discursive practice. The object and the theory are confronted, illuminated by each other, and read through each other.
*Homeland* (2007) by Laurie Anderson and *La Commedia* (2004-2008) by Louis Andriessen and Hal Hartley.¹⁶ Some of these works I have experienced in performance (*Writing to Vermeer*, *One*, *La Commedia*, *Homeland*) and others I have seen via DVD (*La Belle et la Bête*, *Three Tales*). For the analysis of almost all of them I have also relied on scores and audio and video recordings of opera performances.¹⁷

Concerning the coordinates in which these chosen pieces emerge, the temporal frame is between 1994 and 2008. The territory encompassed involves The Netherlands and The United States of America, since the composers of the operas depicted here are significant figures within the field of repetitive music established in the USA (Reich, Glass, Anderson), a musical language that received one of its most fruitful and productive responses in The Netherlands (Andriessen, Van der Aa). The social system discussed is that of late capitalism. The context of late capitalism is taken into account since it gives a framework to the pieces and permeates them. Following Ernest Mandel in his book “Late Capitalism”¹⁸ Fredric Jameson designates late capitalism as the last category in Mandel’s periodization (after market capitalism and the monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism): “(...) our own, wrongly called postindustrial, but what might better be termed multinational, capital”.¹⁹ For Jameson, synonyms for late capitalism are multinational capitalism and consumer capitalism.²⁰ Analyzing the implications of late capitalism in these chosen pieces is a complex task and could have been the subject of another dissertation. Thus, it was not my primary preoccupation in this study. At the same time, Jameson’s claim that “(...) every position on postmodernism in culture – whether apologia or stigmatization – is also at one and the same time, and necessarily, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today”²¹ was on my mind when focusing on the analyzed pieces.

The unconventional staging of these works affects developments in the body-voice relationship. In *One* the singer’s performance is deeply interwoven with a pre-recorded matrix of sounds and images. In the video-documentary opera *Three Tales* documentary footages are reworked and synchronized with pre-recorded and live-performed music and singing. Moreover, this work severely transforms stereotypes of operatic singing by inventing specific, electronically-enhanced procedures that reshape the vocal expression. *La Belle et la Bête* is an opera for ensemble

---

¹⁶ I list the names of directors (and in the case of Van der Aa in *Writing to Vermeer* the name of composer of electronic interludes) also as authors of the analyzed pieces since I believe their direction makes inseparable parts of discussed postoperas.

¹⁷ The only exception here is *Homeland*: there is no score for this piece.


²⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

²¹ Ibid., p. 3.
and film. The original film is projected while its soundtrack is silenced, and operatic music and singing are composed and synchronized with the pronunciation of the spoken dialogues of each film character. In *Writing to Vermeer* – a multimedia piece with live singing, video, extensive projections of the written texts and dance – all the singing bodies are feminine, and the principal characters are triplicated by dancing characters with the same costumes. The film opera *La Commedia* merges film projection, opera performance and video projections in complex ways. Playing with vocal travesty, the role of the poet Dante is played by a high female voice. In *Homeland* Laurie Anderson plays with a band on stage while using a harmonizer (pitch shifting device) to manipulate the gender of her voice. Although it exists on the edges of several fields – performance art, rock concert and music theatre – *Homeland* also intervenes in the opera world and questions it by referring to a man’s voice produced by a woman’s body (and vice versa) through operatic history.

I specifically chose these operas for analysis because they address the questions of the relationship between the singing body and the voice. The principle of the vocalic body becomes obvious in them in various ways. In *One and Three Tales* technological procedures used to produce detached, machine-like, even ‘monstrous’ vocal expression reflect back to the singing body and question its identity. In both *La Belle et la Bête* and *Writing to Vermeer* a purposely-obtained desynchronization between multiplied bodies that are assigned to a single voice problematizes their mutual ‘belonging’ to each other. Finally, in *La Commedia* and in *Homeland* the way the vocal representation of gender is projected onto the ‘wrong’ body confronts us with a break in the conventions of representation between body, voice and gender.

With this range of recent operas my intention is not to illustrate some examples of contemporary operas within late capitalism, nor to map current trends. These works are chosen because the vocalic body becomes increasingly problematic in them in various ways, reinterpreting in turn the institution and the world of opera. Moreover, for me these and similar pieces are an impulse for establishing the concept of postopera. With this concept I reply to a wide range of operatic practices that have appeared in Western musical theatre since the last quarter of the twentieth century, practices for which the use of the notion of opera becomes somewhat inadequate.

**Defining Postopera: History of the Term**

Since postopera is my object of analysis, and since I introduce postopera as a theoretical notion, it is necessary to at least provisionally position this notion in the Introduction. I will now explain how I came to this notion and why, and in Chapter 1 I will elaborate on its meanings further.
I first used the term postopera during my research project *Opera in the Age of Media*. This I did for two reasons, the first practical, and the second theoretical. The practical reason was that as a technical term, the notion of postopera facilitated the process of writing. I felt that the word opera was no longer adequate when I was writing about recent pieces by authors such are John Adams, Glass, Andriessen, Reich or Van der Aa. The term opera became somewhat old-fashioned and unfit to refer to all kinds of conceptual and media changes that those pieces demonstrated in comparison to conventional opera repertoire. I felt uneasy when qualifying those pieces as operas and that uneasiness made me constantly add some explanations when using the word opera for them, for example: non-conventional, contemporary, postmodern. I used these descriptions in order to distinguish conventional operatic repertoire from unconventional recent contemporary practices. However, those additions made me feel that my text was ‘stuttering’ each time I had to use the term opera. Something was wrong: my theoretical objects were asking to be defined more in accordance with their features, and I needed a practical solution for that problem.

The solution came with the notion of postopera inspired by the title used by Jeremy Tambling. It liberated my text from ‘stuttering’. It designated unconventional contemporary operatic pieces in which the relationship between music and drama is reinvented, and the impact of new media to the opera world is significant. The theoretical reason for which I used the term postopera was that as a theoretical concept it made me rethink recent opera in the light of Hans-Thies Lehmann’s concept of postdramatic theatre in order to situate it on a larger map of contemporary theatre practices.

In this study I re-introduce the notion of postopera for two reasons: 1) because I believe that it is productive and necessary to make a more profound comparison with the theoretical field of postdramatic theatre defined by Hans-Thies Lehmann in order to maintain the opposition between conventional ‘dramatic’ opera, and postdramatic operatic practices, and 2) because I understand the notion of postopera not only as postmodern opera, as was the case with the notion of ‘postoperatic’ introduced by Nicholas Till, but also as postdramatic opera, and those differences need

---

22 My MA thesis (University of Arts, Belgrade, 2003) was made into a book of the same name: *Opera u doba medija [Opera in the Age of Media]*, Novi Sad, Sremski Karlovci, Izdavačka knjižarnica Zorana Stojanovića, 2007.
clarification.25 As I will elaborate in more detail in Chapter 1, for Till postoperatic is a kind of synonym for postmodern opera. He does not connect postoperatic with Hans-Thies Lehmann’s concept of postdramatic theatre. As a point of differentiation I find Lehmann’s concept of great importance for understanding the changes that happened in a number of recent operas. Alluding to some emblematic theoretical foundations of opera studies – Opera and Drama by Richard Wagner,26 and Opera as Drama by Joseph Kerman,27 I will discuss what I call ‘Opera after Drama’ or ‘Opera beyond Drama’, postopera, that is opera which is postdramatic and postmodern at the same time.

**Reinventing the Vocalic Body (in Theory)**

Concerning the relationship between the singing body and the voice in opera in theoretical terms, not much has been written. Michelle Duncan gives a brief summary of how concepts of body and voice are treated in opera studies:

> While fields outside of musicology have begun to take a keen interest in the materiality and audibility of voice, opera studies has given the idea scant attention, as though voice were only a minor feature of the art form. Despite the central role of the singer’s body in the production of opera and the production of voice, opera studies persists in thinking of voice as extra-corporeal. (...) As for the body of the singer, opera studies has tended to ignore it altogether unless it possesses currency as the object of desire or of a fetish. And when this happens, both the body and voice of the singer become secondary to the affect or erotic desire of the spectator.28

And indeed, except in previously mentioned studies by Abbate, Brooks, Dame, Duncan and Grover-Friedlander, the singing body was an object for analysis and theorization in opera studies primarily in the context of obtaining vocal technique. Even the figure of the castrato singer, with its obvious ‘fleshly’ intervention upon the body for the sake of the singing voice, involved gender-related theorizations of operatic body-voice relationship only in recent texts.29

For both opera theory and practice, the singing body of opera often appears as the invisible within the visible and the inaudible within the audible. But it is neither invisible nor inaudible. Invisible and inaudible are the cultural mechanisms making the listening spectators overlook the

materiality of the singing body that performs opera before them.\textsuperscript{30} I dissect the singing body as an object of what Slavoj Žižek names “the naïve ideological consciousness”, set of rules, protocols, effects, strategies that are embedded in a reality in which they intervene, in what appears to be a quasi-intuitive way, due to the fact that they are not theorized.\textsuperscript{31} That dissection pulls out the singing body from its invisible/inaudible status, and shows how a singing body acts within the world of opera, what interventions it makes, and how it constitutes opera’s meanings.

It was theorizing on body, music and voice by three authors coming from different disciplines – Steven Connor (modern literature and theory), Richard Leppert (musicology, sociology of music, art history) and Peter Brooks (comparative literature, psychoanalysis) – that helped me to find the way to focus my theoretical interest on singing corporeality and induced its reading in the field of postopera. The writings by these authors served as a theoretical backdrop while formulating the thesis. Although only Brooks’ text is related to opera,\textsuperscript{32} I found both Leppert’s findings on the physicality of music-making,\textsuperscript{33} and Connor’s definition of the ‘vocalic body’ in connection to ventriloquism immensely helpful for an understanding of the body-voice relationship in postopera. Connor’s concept of vocalic body has previously been introduced. I will discuss Brooks’ theory in the next chapter while elaborating the notion of the gap between body and voice, and here I will briefly present how Leppert’s theory sheds light upon the subject of this study.

“Whatever else music is ‘about’, it is \textit{inevitably} about the body;” claims Leppert.\textsuperscript{34} He designates the connection between music and the body throughout Western history as “highly

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item Carolyn Abbate introduces the notion of a listening spectator, implying that it would be the spectator who is aware of his/her position as the listener, capable of comprehending the mutual influences between what is seen and what is heard at the same time on stage. See: Carolyn Abbate, “Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women”, in: Ruth A. Solie (ed.), \textit{Musicalogy and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship}, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1993, p. 251. I believe that defining this position of a listening spectator is of importance not only for opera, but for all performing arts, because it tends to theorize an (often neglected) sphere of the aural in connection to the visual. Thus, when referring to the recipients of the opera in my analysis I consider them to be the listening spectators.
\item According to Žižek, “The most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx’s Capital: ‘Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es’ (‘they do not know it, but they are doing it’). The very concept of ideology implies a kind of basic, constitutive naïveté: the misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it. That is why such a ‘naïve consciousness’ can be submitted to a critical-ideological procedure. The aim of this procedure is to lead the naïve ideological consciousness to a point at which it can recognize its own effective conditions, the social reality that it is distorting, and through this very act dissolve itself”. From: Slavoj Žižek, \textit{The Sublime Object of Ideology}, London, New York, Verso, 1989, pp. 28-30.
\item Ibid., p. xx.
\end{enumerate}
problematic and contradictory, the product of deep socio-cultural anxieties and antagonisms.” 35 He points to a contradiction that in his opinion makes the music-body connection troublesome, emphasizing the role of human sight in it: “(...) the slippage between the physical activity to produce musical sound and the abstract nature of what is produced creates a semiotic contradiction that is ultimately ‘resolved’ to a significant degree via the agency of human sight.” 36

Leppert insists on a corporeal dimension of music: “Music despite its phenomenological sonoric ethereality is an embodied practice, like dance and theater. That its visual – performative aspect is no less central to its meanings than are the visual components of those other performing arts is obvious in musical theater – opera, masque, and so forth (though this linkage is little discussed in musicological literature) – but the connection between sight and sound in other sorts of art music remains untheorized”. 37 I agree that the corporeal aspect of music is no less central to its meaning than the sound, and I argue for it in this study. However, I wonder how obvious music is as an embodied practice in musical theater, since the lack of vivid theoretical interest in the singing body of opera rather confirms that the singing body is mainly considered as a passive mediator than as an active material agent in the process of making meaning. For me, the singing body in opera is not self-explanatory. I perceive it as meaning production, and this study is an attempt to discuss and understand the meanings that the singing body produces in postopera.

The voice is embodied, and the embodiment of music Leppert writes about seems to be even more obvious in vocal than in instrumental music. “The body is real”, writes Leppert, “but its reality is produced, by cognition, as a representation. It is a product of multiple discourses constructed via body’s sensory capacities. We ‘know’ our bodies through the ‘Languages’ about and of the body.” 38 How we come to know the singing body in postopera is one of my concerns in this study. The critical procedure that introduces both the voice and the singing body as active material agents rather than as just transparent mediators reveals effects, meanings and powers of singing corporeality in postopera. Theorizing the materiality of the voice explores a discursive potential of the body-voice construct. Finally, it leads a ‘naïve ideological consciousness’ of the singing body to the point at which its effective conditions, signification strategies and political effects could and should be taken into account when attempting an analysis of opera.

Concerning the rest of the theoretical texts that form the theoretical map of this study, I refer to texts and concepts from different disciplines. Some of the texts belong to musicology and opera studies (Abbate, André, Dame, Duncan, Grover-Friedlander). Other texts originate from other

36 Ibid., p. xxi.
37 Ibid., p. xxi.
38 Ibid., p. xx.
disciplines like theatre studies (Lehmann, Kimbrough), theory of body (Kunst, Stone), theory of voice (Cavarero, Connor, Dolar, Felderer), film studies (Altman, Chion), feminist critique and gender studies (Cixous, Halberstam), philosophy (Agamben, Barthes, Nancy, Žižek). As will be elaborated in more detail in the next chapter, my theoretical concern is also the involvement of theories of the voice and body in discussions about the reinvention of the vocalic body in postopera. In each chapter I shall confront a different set of theoretical texts with theoretical objects I analyze, reading and understanding them through one another. Therefore, the theory of this study unfolds gradually through the text.

**Outlining the Research**

In Chapter 1, “Body-Voice Gap, Postopera and Theory of Voice”, my concern is first to locate the mismatch between body and voice that I call the gap. Relying on texts by Abbate, Brooks and Grover-Friedlander I suggest answers to what this concrete gap is that constitutes singing corporeality, what it looks like, where it is and how to imagine it in conventional operas. That specific relationship between body and voice reveals the core of opera’s representational mechanism. In order to locate this gap in postopera, in the second part of this chapter I proceed towards a more elaborate discussion of the notion of postopera. I take up the implications of Lehmann’s concept of postdramatic theatre and develop it in the opera world, while also discussing Till’s notion of the postoperatic, and the notion of the postdramatic condition. I bring into discussion Glass and Wilson’s *Einstein on the Beach* as a typical example of postopera. Finally, I map various theories of the voice and the body in order to examine the theoretical platform they form together in this study. With these three issues - body-voice gap, postopera and body/voice theory - I outline the theoretical map of this study. Confrontations between those three issues, and an intersection of them with opera studies whilst performing an analysis of postoperas will occur in subsequent chapters in various ways.

The rest of the study is composed of three parts. In each of them I illuminate two postoperas with a series of theoretical concepts. In Part 1 “Voices Beyond Corporeality: Performing Singing as Upgrading” I examine postoperas in which the reinvention of the body-voice relationship is ‘upgraded’ by the impact of technology. Part 2 “Throwing the Voice, Catching the Body: Opera, Ventriloquism and De-Synchronization” brings some theories to the problematization of a ventriloquism-like body-voice discord caused by a purposely-obtained de-synchronization. Finally, in

---

39 In computer technology an upgrade would mean improving to a higher standard and a more powerful system. Taken metaphorically, the concept of upgrading used in context of body-voice construct in postopera suggests a reinvention of the conventional relationship between a singing body and a sung voice. That reinvention often involves new media. Since the body-voice relationship is crucial for understanding the meanings formed on an opera stage, the reinvention of this relationship provokes an improvement, a reinvention, an upgrade of the opera genre in general.
Part 3 “Singing Gender (As a Performance)”, I analyze postoperas in which a reinvented relation between voice and body tackles the issue of gender as well, assuming some kind of vocal travesty.

Chapter 2 “Singing beyond the Body: Uniqueness, Intruder and Prosthesis” takes as its starting point the concept of vocal uniqueness by Adriana Cavarero and shows how this concept is problematized by the postopera One. I also discuss the concept of the intruder by Jean Luc Nancy to further illuminate a particular relationship between the singing body and the voice in One. Finally, I use the concept of prosthesis by Sandy Stone that elaborates upon the ways in which the scientist Steven Hawking’s speech device could be regarded as not only his physical, but also his ontological prosthesis, to consider the concept of prosthesis in connection to the singing body of Barbara Hannigan. The purpose is to show how an upgraded relationship between body and voice becomes a major semiotic generator of this piece, and how such a changed body-voice construct problematizes opera.

In Chapter 3, “Monstrous Singing: the Politics of Vocal Existence” my concern is with the action of the electronically transformed voice in constituting a cyborg entity as its generator. I confront Three Tales with the concept of restaging the monstrous body as developed by Bojana Kunst, a text about speaking machines by Brigitte Felderer and theorization of the politics of the voice by Mladen Dolar. Kunst’s text helps me to define the concept of the monstrous voice, Felderer’s sheds light on how the vocalic body in Three Tales could be seen as a speaking machine, and Dolar’s text enables me to examine the political potentials of a monstrous voice. The purpose is to reveal the power of a monstrous voice and its effects in this postopera where it appears to function as a critique of monstrosity.

In Chapter 4, “Operatizing the Film: Body without Voice and Voice without Body”, after discussing the practice of operatizing the film and the methodology of synchronization undertaken in La Belle et la Bête in the context of techniques of dubbing and playback, I explore some desynchronous relations between the presence of the body and the presence of the voice in this piece, and the implications that a reinvented body-voice construct produces. I read La Belle et la Bête through and alongside texts by Carolyn Abbate, Mladen Dolar, Steven Connor and Rick Altman. The purpose is to postulate a new model for the conceptualization of the body-voice relationship through an analogy with how Altman uses the concept of ventriloquism in film theory. The operatic music composed by Philip Glass is comparable to a ventriloquist who takes someone else’s ‘dummy’, in this case motion pictures by Jean Cocteau. I show how and why the process of de-synchronization between body and voice is the one from which this postopera emerges, and what consequences it brings to its status and function.
In Chapter 5, “Singing Letters, Multiplied Bodies and Dissociated Voice” I analyze the relationship between the singing body and the voice in *Writing to Vermeer* by examining how strategies of writing, staging, composing music and mediation interfere in the connection between bodies and voices on stage. I read Greenaway’s libretto against the backdrop of the concept of *écriture féminine* as defined by Hélène Cixous in order not only to reveal the simulation strategies that he uses when playing with this concept, but also to show how he questions it. Women from Vermeer’s paintings that appear as characters of the opera are envoiced, and I illuminate that strategy with the concept of envoicing the women in opera by Carolyn Abbate. The purpose of the chapter is to investigate how visually triplicate female characters that stay de-synchronized with one voice reinvent the vocalic body of this opera, and how that reinvention significantly contributes to interrogating the genre of opera and its relation to visual arts, postdramatic theatre and new media.

In Chapter 6, “Voice and Gender Standing Apart” my concern is vocal travesty in relation to the figure of the female singer, whose voice was simultaneously assigned to two roles – the male poet Dante (in the score), and the female journalist Dante (in the film). After discussing various strategies used in staging I analyze how *La Commedia’s* multiplied narratives, deconstructed characters and mediated stage events make an impact on the singing body. I illuminate the vocalic body of Dante with the concept of ‘unveiled voices’ by Joke Dame in order to examine how a body-voice-gender construct is reworked in this piece. The purpose is to examine how a reinvention of vocalic body includes vocal travesty.

Chapter 7, “Vocal Drag, Counter-Castrato and Scandal of the Singing Body” focuses on figure of Laurie Anderson’s male alter-ego Fenway Bergamot in *Homeland* in order to examine a body-voice-gender relationship there. Presenting a ‘history of vocal drag’ that spans through a large part of Anderson’s career contributes to understanding why and how she uses vocal drag in this piece. I make the figure of the castrato productive for a reading of the body-voice-gender relationship in *Homeland*. Finally, I illuminate the body-voice-gender relationship with Duncan’s theorizations of performativity of the voice based on a critique of Shoshana Felman and Judith Butler. Those theoretical concepts shed light on how the body affects the singing and speech act of Laurie Anderson, and how the gender is performed by the voice when vocal drag takes place. I aim to show how the representation of woman on stage as of one that does not have the voice of authority affects a body-voice-gender relationship, and which meanings that produces in context of this piece.
Chapter 1

Body-Voice Gap, Postopera and Body/Voice Theory

“(…) in opera the voice is oddly dematerialized, projected out of the body; it seems to exist in another dimension from the space-time of the stage and the social world it represents.”

The purpose of this chapter is to outline and theorize three issues of particular importance for the subject of this study: 1) the problem of ‘the gap’ between the singing body and the voice in opera; 2) the concept of postopera; and 3) theories of voice and body that productively illuminate the reinvention of the body-voice relationship in postopera. I discuss views of the body-voice gap in opera in texts by Carolyn Abbate, Peter Brooks and Michal Grover-Friedlander. Revealing the mismatch between the body and the voice as the core of opera’s representational mechanism enables me to observe my theoretical objects from that point of view in subsequent chapters.

Concerning the concept of postopera, I define it primarily in relation to the concept of postdramatic theatre by Hans-Thies Lehmann. I discuss it, however, both in relation to Tambling’s suggestions of what happened post opera, i.e. after opera (after the modernist opera project came to an end), and Till’s elaborations of postmodern opera and opera in the postmodern age in relation to notions of the post-operatic introduced by this author and his collaborator Kandis Cook. Finally, mapping the concepts from theories of the voice and the body relevant to the reinvention of the body-voice relationship in postopera enables me both to explore how those concepts work in the context of opera studies and how they illuminate the vocalic body in my later case studies.

The body-voice gap, postopera and theories of voice and body are discussed in all subsequent chapters: I analyze the de-synchronous relationship between the body and the voice in a

---

group of postoperas, and also use concepts from theories of the voice and theories of the body to illuminate reinventions of the vocalic body in my theoretical objects.

**Opera and the Body-Voice Gap**

Opera is usually intended to be viewed in performance, and there is something about its liveness that I would like to call the gap between the singing body and the voice.\(^{47}\) I introduce that gap in relation to conventional opera in order that interventions proposed by the recent unconventional works I later discuss may be better understood. While introducing it, I also discuss elaborations on the theme by Carolyn Abbate, Peter Brooks and Michal Grover-Friedlander. Abbate’s and Brook’s texts both investigate peculiarities of the conventional operatic representational mechanisms in connection with this gap. Grover-Friedlander herself uses the term gap while discussing the relationship between the singing body and the voice in the context of the hybridity between opera and film that is her main concern. I consider texts by these authors in order to suggest answers to the following questions: just what is this gap between singing body and voice? what does it look like? where is it located? how can we imagine it in relation to conventional operas (and their cinematic reworking, according to Grover-Friedlander).

A gap, in general, is “an unfilled space or interval; a blank or deficiency; a break in continuity, also, a disparity, inequality or imbalance; a break in deductive continuity”.\(^{48}\) When considered in the context of body and voice I detect a break, an imbalance; the gap occurs when what I see (the body) and what I hear (the voice) at the same time do not respect the usual forms of mutual representation. Those forms of representation could be explicitly defined by conventions (as in liturgical drama, for example), but they could also be implied by ‘silent’ laws of doxa, common belief, when they become a place regulated by ideology.

The art of ventriloquism is based on performing this gap between body and voice. In conventional opera, which often fetishises the voice and neglects its connection to the physical body on stage, the gap between an often immobile body and an over-expressive voice is similar to the one sought after in ventriloquism. “The sound of the voice in traditional opera has become rather detached and ‘out of body’ (...)”, write Salzman and Desi in confirmation of the ventriloquial gap between body and voice in opera.\(^{49}\) And Carolyn Abbate discusses what significantly contributes to creating that gap. She writes about the ‘deafness’ of operatic characters in conventional opera as a

---


specific feature of the form, as part of its peculiar illusion. She gets to the core of the gap between the singing body and the voice by explaining and untangling the specific representational mechanism of opera that makes singing characters ‘deny’ their singing. The singing body performs a role. However, that role appears unaware of its singing.

In opera, the characters pacing the stage often suffer from deafness; they do not hear the music that is the ambient fluid of their music-drowned world. This is one of the genre’s most fundamental illusions: we see before us something whose fantastic aspect is obvious, since the scenes we witness pass to music. At the same time, however, opera stages recognizably human situations, and these possess an inherent ‘realism’ that demands a special and complex understanding of the music we hear. We must generally assume, in short, that this music is not produced by or within the stage-world, but emanates from other loci as secret commentaries for our ears alone, and that characters are generally unaware that they are singing.

Opera creates a division between the liveness of the singing body and its awareness of its own singing. The voice comes from the ‘real’ live body, but that live singer, unlike a ventriloquist, does not exist in the symbolic order of the spectacle’s represented fiction. In ventriloquism one has a ventriloquist and a dummy. In opera, these two functions – the emitter of the voice and the transmitter of the voice – are explicitly divided, while coinciding in the same singing body. The singing body is of opera and in opera at the same time. When we see a singing body on the operatic stage we should be aware that we see the two bodies in one: the body of the singer and the body of the character that the singer plays, or represented and ‘real’ bodies, as Linda and Michael Hutcheon would call them. They share the same voice: the singer lends it to the character.

In opera, however, the character is not usually supposed to be aware of the singing. Connor’s observation, “to speak is always to hear myself speaking”, seems not to work for most operatic characters because they seem not to hear what they say (by singing) in the opera. And there the gap takes place; speaking (the dramatic text of the libretto) is represented by singing and singing reflects back to the body that should represent speaking. The gap thus created needs to be discussed in light of how the body is involved in the meanings produced on the operatic stage, rather than remaining shadowed by the voice, ‘pretending’ it’s not there, as was often the case in conventional opera.

---

51 Ibid.
53 Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck*, p. 5.
Conventional stage directions enhance the above-mentioned gap yet further: I often witnessed singers singing with an overtly expressive voice, standing still, covered with layers of makeup, costumes and wigs, while the puppet-like, ‘deaf’ body confirms this gap. In most cases singers are represented in “recognizably human situations”, situations in which they speak. There are exceptions to this, when sometimes operatic characters sing on stage, and their song is incorporated in the fiction – Carolyn Abbate calls this phenomenal music (when characters hear the music they produce on stage) and opposite to that is noumenal music (when characters are deaf to music they produce on stage). But the function of those exceptions was not to reinvent the body-voice relationship in opera. Those situations were rather in the function of the mimetic narrative of music as "(...) stage songs and the like portrayed within the drama as song which, as a result, the characters onstage are meant to hear as music (...)”.55

(Dis)Embodiment of Voice

Brooks’ view of the body-voice gap in opera relies on opera’s denial of realistic representation. He writes about “one of the apparent paradoxes of opera: the extremity, the hyperbole, with which it embodies voice (…)” and claims that both the “glory and also the embarrassment, of opera” are situated in the fact that “visual embodiment and voice coincide in the singer”.56 Brooks provides a picturesque example of a typical romantic operatic singing situation, almost anecdotally explaining why the type of gap between the body and the voice that usually occurs creates contradictory reactions:

Those who dislike opera do so precisely because they prefer singing voices to be disembodied, pure voice; they cannot accept a convention that, as we all know, can lead to a knob-kneed, fifty-year-old tenor condemned to wobble around the stage in Egyptian fighting gear, or a voluminous soprano made to represent a teenage virgin.57

The conclusion that Brooks draws about the operatic body-voice relation explains how the gap between body and voice in opera is one of its most intriguing features – if it is perceived as a ‘mistake’, then it results in a dislike of opera in general. On the other hand, it could be perceived as the glorious specificity of the opera, a precious ‘friction’ with which opera-lovers are seduced. That

57 Ibid.
'weird excess', as Brooks calls the body-voice operatic ‘situation’, according to him, results from different demands on body and voice while instrumentalizing dramatic representation:

The demand made on voice and body for dramatic representation are not the same, and the claim for their coincidence will very often demand a large dose of faith on the part of spectator/listener, a willingness to accept an as-if that would seem to be excluded from a genre that traditionally seeks, in its stage settings and effects, such a large measure of illusionism. Lovers of opera do of course accept that as-if. They do not close their eyes as the overage and overweight Radames launches into his adoration of Aida. On the contrary, they revel in the weird excess of the situation. They revel in a form that combines illusionism with clear impossibility, the height of artifice with the most natural of instruments, the human voice.58

Brooks’ observation about the different demands for dramatic representations of the voice and for the body alludes to an unsuccessful mimesis between a narrative and its operatic representation as the main cause for the ‘weird excess’ he mentions. However, one should be careful not to connect the mimesis only with the visual appearance of the characters. To simplify: even if Radames the actor/singer is young, and his appearance resembles the usual representation of the Egyptian inhabitants of the Old Kingdom, the gap between the singing body and the voice still persists. It also persists in postoperas, in which the demand for text’s representation by body and voice will be significantly different from how it was in conventional opera. Therefore the problem is more complex than the superficial discrepancy between operatic characters and the appearance of the singers that embody them.

Re-voicing

The opera scholar and director Michal Grover-Friedlander has offered some intriguing views on the relationship between the operatic singing voice and the body concerning the body-voice gap. In her book Vocal Apparitions Grover-Friedlander looks at hybrid forms between conventional, mainly romantic, operatic repertoire and moving images that reveal “cinema’s attraction to the operatic voice”.59 She focuses on rather specific ‘operatic films’: “If a film is not driven by opera or does not wish, in its infatuation and obsession, to become operatic, if it does not risk its own ‘cinematicness’ in being so haunted by opera, it does not figure in its book”, she explains.60 She explores the relationship between opera and film in silent films that thematize opera, in filmed operas, and in the films where “cinema, in recalling the operatic, allows its voices to echo; it provides opera with a

58 Ibid.
60 Ibid., p. 1.
peculiar afterlife”. In those hybrid forms between opera and film Grover-Friedlander is intrigued by the relationship between the vocal and the visual. And her discussion of that relationship is primarily focused on the singing body and the voice. The fact that in selected examples the medium of opera is interlaced with the medium of film, and the body-voice relationship is reinvented by de/synchronization, makes Grover-Friedlander’s research of interest for my analysis of the reinvention of the vocalic body in postopera, where similar procedures are performed in a different context.

Grover-Friedlander herself uses the notion of the gap between body and voice when explaining her interest in films that “(...) deal with the gap between the life of the voice and that of the singer’s body, with operatic voices outlining the body that had once produced them, or with bodies longing for the voices they had once produced”. She is interested in how the directors Thorpe, Schmid, Fellini, and Zeffirelli “offer different solutions to the problem of representing the disembodied operatic voice” and she also discusses what she calls a “fundamental problem with the embodiment of the operatic voice, as though the mismatch between voice and body brings out haunting quality of that voice”. The questions she raises are similar to ones I discuss in this study: how the reinvented relationship between body and voice produces meanings and what can be read from this.

One of the conclusions that Grover-Friedlander draws is that “paradoxically, it might be in the attempt of another medium, such as cinema, to inherit the operatic realm that the uncanniness of the operatic voice becomes most manifest”. It is evident from Vocal Apparitions that hybrid forms between opera and cinema result in intriguing ramifications for the relationship between the singing body and the voice. Those ramifications, however, take place in the course of an appropriation of opera by other cultural practices. In the end I see them contributing primarily to the reinvention of the medium of film, and not so much the medium of opera. In contrast, the reinvention of the vocalic body in postopera reinvents the medium of opera and stays within the opera world, though undoubtedly stretching its borders. Thus I do not agree with Grover-Friedlander’s conclusion that the uncanniness of the operatic voice becomes most manifest in cinema, since the significant reinventions of the vocalic body that take place in postoperas, thematizing the gap between the singing body and the voice, manifestly show that reinventions of

---

61 Ibid., p. 11.
63 Ibid., p. 37.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
the vocalic body are prominent in the opera world, too. Moreover, it is precisely the reinvention of vocalic body that enables opera to problematize its status and function in the age of media.

Michal Grover-Friedlander also introduces the concept of re-voicing as “(...) the best general term for denoting the procedures involving discrepancies between voices and their images on screen”. 66 She elaborates upon post-synchronization, dubbing and playback, that “are aimed at concealing themselves in the final product, which presents a coherent human subject on screen”. 67 I understand re-voicing by analogy with the process of reinventing the vocalic body in this study. Grover-Friedlander writes that re-voicing techniques, re-attaching voices and bodies on screen “(...) reveal the unity of body and voice to be a ‘trick’ that can be tampered with, that can only be yearned for, even if this yearning, as Chion intimates, is one of the things ‘cinema is best at telling us about’”. 68 Commenting on different practices of post-synchronization and dubbing in Italian and American cinema Grover-Friedlander concludes that both of these cinematic traditions “(...) are responses to the same phenomenon: the disclosure of the represented human subject as a visual-acoustic trick”. 69 Here she arrives at questions which will be raised in the present study concerning the reinvention of the body-voice gap in postopera. I agree that the unity of body and voice might be seen as a mere ‘trick’, and that an impossible unity, or ‘impossible synchronization’, as I call it in case of La Commedia, is indeed present as an unrealizable aim in each of the pieces I analyze. This visual-acoustic trick, a fluctuating relationship that in opera is most often taken for granted, is actually the relationship between the body and the voice that is thematized in all the postoperas I have chosen as my theoretical objects.

Texts by Abbate, Brooks and Grover-Friedlander all tackle the problem of the body-voice gap and illuminate it from different perspectives. Abbate emphasizes the division between the liveness of the singing body and its awareness of its own singing, and the ‘deafness’ of operatic characters as to both the causes and the consequences of that division. Brooks writes about opera’s denial of realistic representation as of the result of different demands for dramatic representations of the voice and of the body that result in the disembodiment of the voice. Finally, Grover-Friedlander argues that re-voicing, the re-attaching of voices and bodies on screen, reveals that the unity of body and voice is only a ‘trick’.

My understanding of the body-voice gap in postopera leans on all these afore-mentioned texts. In all postoperas that I analyze the body-voice gap persists, and in each one of them it plays a significant role, since it is reworked in different ways, whether upgraded with the help of technology

67 Ibid., p. 52.
68 Ibid., p. 52.
69 Ibid., p. 53.
as will be shown in Part 1, deliberately deepened by over-emphasizing de-synchronizing ventriloquial features as discussed in Part 2, or ‘queered’ by performing a mismatch that depends on body-voice-gender de-synchronicities as explained in Part 3. This development of the body-voice relationship in postopera interferes with the traditionally turbulent operatic relationship between the music and the drama. That relationship resides in the shadow of the relationship between the singing body and the voice, at least in the postoperas that I have chosen to investigate. The postdramatic dimension of these pieces, as well as the impact of new media on the relationship between body and voice, promoted that significant change.

**Defining Postopera: Opera after Drama**

The impact of new media on operatic texts, redefining both materiality and the way of structuring their languages, is significant and it has made the body-voice relationship in opera increasingly problematic. Opera directors had great impact on these changes. Leading contemporary opera directors have come to opera from other fields, such as film (Greenaway, Hartley), architecture and the visual arts (Wilson), video (Korot), and theatre (Peter Sellars). For the first time in opera they share an equal authority with the composer, import representational procedures and technology that hitherto had not been common to the opera stage. “Diversion of the operatic into other media – most obviously film” is also present. All these circumstances created a suitable ‘climate’ for creating postopera, opera that is postmodern and postdramatic at the same time.

By way of his concept of postdramatic theatre Lehmann responded to a wide range of practices that had appeared in Western theatre since the last quarter of the twentieth century. Those practices are heterogeneous, but have some common characteristics. According to Lehmann, post-dramatic theatre works are those in which the primacy of the dramatic text has disappeared. It is theatre ‘after drama’: theatre as a standalone work of art and not theatre as the illustration of a dramatic text. Though post-dramatic theatre does not break with verbal text, it does break with its dramatic principles. While in dramatic theatre, text and plot are primary, in post-dramatic theatre all phenomena involved are given equal attention. When Lehmann theorizes the prefix ‘post’ in his concept of postdramatic theatre, he points above all to theatre ‘after drama’, theatre that is

---

*70 Under the notion of ‘text’ I understand “A group of entities used as signs, which are selected, arranged, and intended by an author in a certain context to convey a specific meaning to an audience.” Jorge J.E. Gracia, *Texts, Ontological Status, Identity, Author, Audience*, Albany, State University of NY Press, 1996, p. 9.


‘divorced’ from a history of being married to the dramatic principle. It is theatre in which the dramatic text could still be used, but in different ways, and with a different status.

By analogy with the observation that “dramatic theatre is theatre structured by drama”, I argue that conventional (dramatic) opera is structured by drama, too. A certain paradox is that even when music took over from the libretto as the dominant role in the opera, as was supposedly the case in Mozart’s operas, for example, opera was still structured by the dramatic principles of the libretto. Just as post-dramatic theatre is beyond drama, so too with postopera: the drama represented by the text of libretto is not given the primary position. The difference between dramatic theatre and post-dramatic theatre is “(...) in a different aesthetic logic underlying the constellation of elements that together make up the theatrical event”. A different aesthetic logic underlying the constellation of elements is what separates opera and postopera, too.

Throughout its history opera in general sought a balance between the predominance of music and the predominance of drama. The struggle between the sung text and the music dramaturgy was invariably the subject of operatic reforms. Often librettos were adaptations of already existing dramatic texts, and when originally written they maintained their dramatic structure. In this respect, most traditional operas could be provisionally named ‘dramatic operas’, by analogy with dramatic theatre. I am aware that ‘dramatic opera’ would not be the common choice of terminology in the context of opera studies, but I find it helpful in order to establish an analogy with what happens between theatre and drama in the context of postdramatic theatre. Postdramatic theatre comes after dramatic theatre, and I propose that, by analogy, postopera comes after (dramatic) opera.

In light of this, one might well ask why I do not use the term postdramatic opera instead of postopera. There are two reasons. The first relates to the fact that ‘dramatic opera’ would not be the common choice of terminology in opera studies (as already noted), and thus postdramatic opera might be supposed to refer to something that, in terms of terminology, was not common and thus

---


75 Ibid.

76 I would like to quote the common opera definition as a reminder of what a work needs to accomplish in order to be considered an opera. According to that definition, operas are “(...) musical dramatic works in which the actors sing some or all of their parts.” New Grove Dictionary of Music quoted according to: F. W. Sternfeld, “Definitions and Non-Definitions”, *The Birth of Opera*, Oxford, Claredon Press, 1993, p. 31. Since I consider postoperas as both postdramatic and postmodern works, the above-mentioned definition could be reworked as follows: “postoperas are musically postdramatic and postmodern works in which the actor sings some or all of its parts”.

77 For concise elaborations on operatic reforms throughout its development see: Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1988. Kerman writes about reforms carried out by Zeno and Metastasio, Gluck, Mozart, and Wagner, but he also mentions Debussy in this context despite the fact that this composer did not construct theories of operatic reform (p. 141-142).
might cause confusion. The second reason is that the postmodern condition of those operas, invoked by the prefix post, would remain unexplained by the term postdramatic. For Lehmann, postdramatic theatre is not necessarily postmodern:

> When the progression of a story with its internal logic no longer forms the centre, when composition is no longer experienced as an organizing quality but as an artificially imposed ‘manufacture’, as a mere sham of a logic of action that only serves clichés (something Adorno abhorred about the products of the ‘culture industry’), then theatre is confronted with the question of possibilities beyond drama, not necessarily beyond modernity.  

In contrast, the pieces I designate as postoperas are both postmodern and postdramatic. As Bleeker elaborates, “Lehmann wants to separate drama from both theatre and text in order to renegotiate the relationships between these three terms”. Bleeker also emphasizes that “the central opposition in Lehmann’ text is not drama versus theatre, but dramatic theatre versus postdramatic theatre”. Accordingly, the term postopera, as I understand it, reflects two sets of oppositions at the same time: between ‘dramatic’ opera and postdramatic opera, and between modern opera and postmodern opera.

**Exemplifying Postopera**

I take as a paradigmatic example of postopera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) by Philip Glass and Robert Wilson. This piece, almost five hours long, could be described as an archive of scenes that create associations with the life and work of the scientist Albert Einstein. There is no plot in *Einstein on the Beach* and there is no linear narration. The largest part of the libretto text consists of the names of numbers and solfège syllables that are repetitively sung by members of the choir throughout the piece. Only a few spoken texts were used, among them the non-narrative text written by Christopher Knowles. Due to Knowles’ neurological disorder, the logic of texts he wrote was built on an accumulation of words and variable repetitions of phrases. Also, there are no characters that sing, or characters that have a narrative function. The functions of music, dance or spoken/sung texts are not hierarchical, each layer (one might even say each art) takes equal position in this piece. Wilson’s dream-like tableaux that favor slow and subtle changes of the landscape suggest relations to concepts of time and space that have not been established in any previous opera. The figure of Albert Einstein is used in various situations in the piece. Paradoxically, the title character appears only as signifier – like a mute figure playing violin, not the character of the ‘story’.

---

80 Ibid.
as one might have expected had *Einstein on the Beach* been a conventional dramatic piece. *Einstein on the Beach* explicitly shows that opera is not necessarily an illustration of a dramatic text.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 1** - Philip Glass, Robert Wilson, *Einstein on the Beach*; Helga Davis and Kate Moran perform in *Einstein on the Beach* in Ann Arbor, 2012. Photo © Lucie Jansch

Exactly as in *Einstein*, in all the works I scrutinize as theoretical objects the search for unity between music and drama has been abandoned, the dramatic principle is deconstructed, and operatic texts (libretto, music, staging) are not in a strict hierarchical position; nor was there any intention that they should be so. All those pieces, however, have a dramatic text. In *One* it is a fragmentary monologue performed by a single singer who appears preoccupied with the horrors of identity. In *Three Tales* there are no conventional characters and no dialogues. What is present is a sung text extracted from documentary clips and fragments of the interviews of the scientists, journalists, religious experts and researchers invited to participate in the piece. Even when the libretto text used has a dramatic structure, as is in the case of *La Belle et la Bête*, the structure of the piece, based on synchronization, deconstructs the dramatic principle, since the emphasis is on the relationship between body and voice, and not music and text. In *Writing to Vermeer* the libretto consists of series of letters allegedly written by three women and addressed to the painter Johannes von Hessen.

---

81 To confirm how texts used in postoperas are dramatic texts I use an argument by Patrice Pavis: “(...) any ordinary text can become dramatic as soon as it is staged, so that the criterion for differentiation is not textual, but pragmatic. As soon as a text is uttered on stage, it is read within a framework that vests it with fictionality and differentiates it from ‘ordinary’ texts that claim to describe the ‘real’ world.” Thus, the fact that texts are performed on stage makes them dramatic texts. What makes postopera post-dramatic is that, by analogy with post-dramatic theatre, it is not structured by dramatic text, it is divorced from the principle of being ‘married’ to dramatic text. The dramatic text has the same importance as the rest of the texts in opera. The traditionally important relation between music and dramatic text in opera is not of primary importance anymore. Increasing importance is given to other elements on stage, including the relation between the body and the voice that I am interested in. See: Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1999, p. 120-121.
Vermeer. *La Commedia* brings excerpts from Dante’s *Comedy*, the Old Testament and poetry by Joost van den Vondel. Finally, *Homeland*’s libretto is based on Laurie Anderson’s fragmentary poetic texts that explore life in the contemporary United States of America through metaphors.

And indeed, those pieces are postdramatic. The poetic texts of *One* and *Homeland* are often fragmented and their parts are repeated, while the music does not follow the textual dramaturgy. In *Three Tales* the structure of the dramatic texts is fragmentary, and fragmented parts of the text are used by the composer to embed their melody in the music structure he composed using electronic devices as an aid. In *La Belle et la Bête* the situation regarding the relationship between the dramatic text and the structure of the piece is intriguing since the entire script of Cocteau’s film is used as libretto. Although the text serves as a kind of ‘spine’ of the piece since the music is synchronized to exactly the same text of the script, it is the relationship between the singing body, the moving image and the voice that primarily structures the piece. The music is synchronized with cinematic moving images, and the dynamics of those images and their relation with the sound is what determines the structure of this postopera. This is also the case with *Writing to Vermeer* where the composer emphasizes that what happens in the libretto is not illustrated by what happens in the music since music introduces the unspoken concerns and desires of the singing characters. Moreover, what happens on a stage inhabited by numerous triplicated figures often does not represent either what happens in the music, or what happens in the text of the letters. That is most explicitly shown in *La Commedia* since two synopses are offered for the piece – one for the music and libretto, and the other for the film that is incorporated in this film-opera.

I would like to clarify the meaning of another notion that is related to the concept of postdramatic theatre: the postdramatic condition. One of the issues of the performing arts journal *Maska* has the title “Postdramatic Condition”. This notion of the postdramatic condition, however,

---

82 According to Patrice Pavis, A) dramaturgy in the original and classical sense of the term is defined as “the art of composition of plays”. According to the same source, B) in Brechtian and post-Brechtian dramaturgy the notion of dramaturgy has been expanded to become: “1) simultaneously, the ideological and formal structure of the play 2) the specific link between form and content (...) 3) the all-encompassing work that produces the text staged, and is intended to produce a particular effect on the spectator”. Pavis also gives an explanation of what it means to analyze the dramaturgy of a performance: (...) is to describe its *Fabula* in three-dimensional reality, i.e. in its concrete performance, to specify the way in which an event is shown and narrated in theatre”. C) Pavis also explains the use of the term dramaturgy to refer to the work of a dramaturg: “Dramaturgy as the work done by a *dramaturg* consists of assembling textual and stage materials, bringing out complex meanings of the text by choosing a particular interpretation, and orienting the performance in the desired direction. In this case, dramaturgy refers to the set of aesthetic and ideological choices made by the directing team, from director to actor. (...)”. Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts and Analysis*, Toronto and Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 1998, p. 124-5. In this context I perceive dramaturgy as the dynamics between the form and content that structures the piece.

has not been explicitly defined there either. In this issue of *Maska*, the meaning of the notion of postdramatic condition is rather implied by different relationships to Lehmann’s concept of postdramatic theatre to which the issue pays homage. In some of the texts, disciplines other than theatre, such as dance and opera, are illuminated by the concept of postdramatic theatre. For example, Katja Pražnik writes about ‘postcontemporary dance’, dance practice in the context of postdramatic theatre, and I myself examine postdramatic theatre repercussions in the context of opera. Thus the postdramatic condition is the state of abandoning the conventional dramatic principle and its logic. I understand it as a condition not only of postdramatic theatre, but also of contemporary performing arts that use a dramatic text, such as opera and even dance.

**Postopera vs. Post-Opera vs. Post-operatic**

The term postopera also coincides with terminology used by Jeremy Tambling, and by Nicholas Till and Kandis Cook. Since the terms we use appear to be similar, but do not carry the same meanings, I will now elaborate upon the differences.

In his chapter “Post-Opera? After Brecht”, Tambling offers his perspective of Brecht’s work with Kurt Weill “and the critique of opera offered there”, paying particular attention to the work “Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny” (1930). Tambling only uses the term post-opera in the title of the chapter. He does not mention it in the text at all; nor does he develop it as a theoretical notion. “A familiar question about opera in 1920s was whether it could have a future. The issue was inseparable from the anxieties felt about the privileged nature of high art in contrast to American popular culture and kitsch; it was central to debates about modernism”, writes Tambling. Besides addressing the question of the future of the opera, Tambling also mentions the idea of ‘the end’ of the opera: “Brecht and Weill coincide with and mark the end of opera (and the need, therefore, to reinvent it), and its move to something more overtly popular in the musical”. Therefore, the term ‘post-opera’ from Tambling’s title should be read as an indication of what comes ‘after opera’ i.e.

---


88 Ibid., p. 229.

89 Ibid., p. 244.
after the modernist opera project came to its end, and Tambling’s text as an attempt of giving some theoretical coordinates in relation to that ‘afterlife’.

In contrast to Tambling’s metaphorical usage of the notion post-opera, Nicholas Till uses the adjectives post-operatic, post-operative, and also the term ‘condition of the post-operatic’ in a more theoretical way. In the Post-Operative Productions Company’s manifesto, he and Cook also refer to Brecht’s views on opera, and Adorno’s views in relation to the subject. Thus, I read Brecht’s and Adorno’s theories as theoretical departure points for Till and Cook. At the beginning of the manifesto, Till and Cook state: “We are concerned to develop a critical practice for music theatre and opera that acknowledges the condition of the post-operatic”. They explain that by ‘critical’ they acknowledge the Kantian sense of ‘critique’, “the method by which a discipline examines the grounds of its own possibility”.  

At the point when Till and Cook announce that a conventional dramatic narrative is problematic for them, they come close to Lehmann’s theory of postdramatic theatre, although they don’t refer to it directly:

That’s why we have a problem with conventional dramatic narrative - the representational kind. It’s based on redundancy again - everything is sucked into that wretched narrative explanation - everything has to be working to convey the story - each moment has to confirm the previous - there’s no space for exploring new perceptions or sensations, different relationships between things; there no space for layering, for reflection, for changing tack, for multiplicity. For things just to float.  

Answering the question as to whether they think that opera is dead and why they continue to work on it, Till and Cook respond: “We work through, around and against opera. But it’s true that opera remains to some extent a constant point of reference.” When asked to explain what post-operatic means for them, the two authors responded: “Well, the reference is also obviously to postmodernism - to the kind of anti-foundationalist thinking that’s been one of the most valuable aspects of post-modernist thinking. In theatre terms that means questioning the idea of the integrity of the original art-work (...).” They insist on postmodernity while presenting the strategy of Post-Operative Productions as “a multidisciplinary performance company that stretches opera on the

---

91 Ibid., p. 16.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
dissecting table to refigure its parts” 95 “(...) trying to anatomize the scattered entrails of opera, reading them as portents, signifiers of the ‘operatic’ within contemporary culture”. 96 They state that “(...) the company recognizes that opera today can only be ‘post-operatic’”. 97 And they read ‘post-operatic’ as “(...) the survival of the ‘operatic’ in postmodern culture as a figure for the contradictory values of the high and the kitsch, the primal and the camp, the pure and the hysterical, the grotesque and the sublime (...)”. 98

Answering the question about the death of opera, Till and Cook continue to talk about operas Don Giovanni and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, thus opening another perspective for the meaning of their notion of post-operatic. They allude to different ways in which opera has been appropriated in contemporary culture:

The Barber of Seville is not just a Rossini comedy now - it’s also an Italian car advertisement. Turandot is an international football event (...) Opera is used to signify a whole range of things in contemporary culture, and one can never restore some chaste pre-lapsarian purity to the works themselves. And as far as we’re concerned the post-life of opera in contemporary culture is something that’s way more interesting to investigate than most of the works in the repertory. 99

To conclude, Till and Cook’s notion of post-operatic designates both postmodern opera and opera in the age of postmodernism. Opera in the age of postmodernism refers also to conventional operatic repertoire and its various postmodern ‘readings’. Contrary to that, the notion of postopera that I plead for does not refer to conventional opera and its contemporary reworkings, but only to unconventional recently created pieces. Till and Cook do not clearly specify a postdramatic dimension to their post-operative productions, while I insist that what should be named postopera is postdramatic, and postmodern at the same time.

Singing Body and Body/Voice Theory

Aside from both operatic practice and theory, there has been a growing interest in theorizing the voice in its materiality and in its performative aspects during the past decade or more. Theorizations of the body are also multiplying. However, these two theoretical fields do not often confront each other directly in critical theory in general, and more rarely still in the context of theorizing opera. I see the potentiality of opera studies benefitting from developments in critical theories of the voice.

---

96 Ibid., p. 20.
97 Ibid., p. 15.
98 Ibid., p. 20.
and of the body and their possible mutual intersections. Thus, I decided to investigate how some recent (and some less recent, but prominent) theorizations of voice and body originating from different theoretical disciplines, could illuminate the relationship between body and voice in postoperas.

Theorizations of the politics, linguistics, and physics of the voice (Dolar\textsuperscript{100}), the concept of vocal uniqueness (Cavarero\textsuperscript{101}), the concept of the vocalic body (Connor), the concept of the acousmatic voice (Chion\textsuperscript{102}), the problematization of restaging the monstrous body (Kunst\textsuperscript{103}), theorizations about speaking mechanisms (Felderer\textsuperscript{104}), the corporeality of music-making (Leppert), the intrusion of the body (Jean-Luc Nancy\textsuperscript{105}), the concept of prosthesis (Stone\textsuperscript{106}), the politization of the difference between man and animal (Agamben\textsuperscript{107}), theorizations of the voice in film (Altman\textsuperscript{108}), the concept of envoicing women in opera (Abbate\textsuperscript{109}), theory of unveiled voices (Dame\textsuperscript{110}), performativity of the voice in opera (Duncan\textsuperscript{111}): all these are used in this study to illuminate how meaning is produced by reinventing the relationship between body and voice in postopera.

The shifts between these different theories from different disciplines are partly a reflection of the heterogeneity of the reinvention of the vocalic body in postopera that I am trying to bring into view. There is no single theoretical framework known to me that could deal with the various reinventions of the vocalic body I discuss in this study. Different modalities of the reinvention of the singing body require a different theoretical starting-point every time, taking into account the specificity of the object being analyzed. The separate theories are discussed more closely, then, in

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item Carolyn Abbate, “Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women”, in Ruth A. Solie (ed.), \textit{Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship}, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1993, pp. 221-258.
\end{thebibliography}
those chapters in which they ‘act’. Now I will attempt a brief overview of some of the theoretical insights that tackle the issue of the relationship between body and voice in general (not necessarily emphasizing the body-voice gap), and that act as a kind of ‘theoretical introduction’ to the different performances of theory that unfold in subsequent chapters.

**Barthes: The Grain of the Voice**

The concept of the grain of the voice by Roland Barthes, although not directly used in subsequent case studies to illuminate the body-voice relationship provided a theoretical impulse, revealing the potentiality of the meanings hidden in the body-voice relationship. Barthes quotes Denis Vasse in order to emphasize the different meanings embedded in the voice:

To listen to someone, to hear his voice, requires on the listener's part an attention open to the interspace of body and discourse and which contracts neither at the impression of the voice nor at the expression of the discourse. What such listening offers is precisely what the speaking subject does not say: the unconscious texture which associates his body-as-site with his discourse: an active texture which reactualizes, in the subject's speech, the totality of his history.\(^{112}\)

Barthes’s ‘grain of the voice’ set the compass reading for theories of the voice that take into account its materiality and corporeality.\(^{113}\) His theory established the theoretical foundation of the voice in French poststructuralist theory. It proved indispensable for later theorists interested in the voice and in its operatic, musical, political, linguistic, and physical implications.

Barthes defined the grain of the voice as:

(\(\ldots\)) the body in the singing voice, in the writing hand, in the performing limb\(^ {114}\), "(\(\ldots\)) not the breath but indeed that materiality of the body emerging from the troat\(^ {115}\), "the materiality of a body speaking its mother-tongue", "(\(\ldots\)) something which is directly the singer's body, brought by one and the same movement to your ear from the depths of the body's cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilage, (\(\ldots\)), as if a single skin lined the performer's inner flesh and the music he sings.\(^ {116}\)

(\(\ldots\)) the «grain» of the voice is not – or not only – its timbre; the *signifying* it affords cannot be better defined than by the *friction*

\(^{112}\) Quoted text is by Denis Vasse, in *The Responsibility of Forms*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, p. 255-256.


\(^{115}\) Ibid., p. 255.

\(^{116}\) Ibid., p. 270.
between music and something else, which is the language (and not the message at all).\textsuperscript{117}

Although Barthes was not primarily considering the voice in the context of the opera, the conceptual apparatus he developed in relation to the world of classical music makes it of interest for theorizing the operatic voice. He points to the fact that the singing body is audible within the sound realm of the singing voice, and that it not only transmits, but also produces, meanings.

Barthes claims that "Listening to the voice inaugurates the relation to the Other: the voice by which we recognize others (like writing on an envelope) indicates to us their way of being, their joy or their pain, their condition; it bears an image of their body and, beyond, a whole psychology (as when we speak of a warm voice, a white voice etc.)".\textsuperscript{118} He points to the corporeality of speech: "corporeality of speech, the voice is located at the articulation of body and discourse, and it is in this interspace that listening’s back-and-forth movement might be made".\textsuperscript{119} The subject unconsciously speaks about more than he would like to say, s/he shows "materiality that originates from the throat" – the \textit{Grain of the Voice}. Precisely in this materiality I recognize the ‘surplus of meaning’ that offers itself to an analysis that dismantles opera’s ‘naive ideological consciousness’, for which the singing body functioned for a long time as a ‘blind spot’.

\textbf{Body, Voice, Identity: Theoretical Insights}

I have already explained that theories by Connor, Brooks and Leppert were of considerable importance in focusing my theoretical attention on the reinvention of the singing body in postopera. The other theoretical concepts I have used helped me to reveal the meanings created within the mutual relationship between the body and the voice in postopera. The concepts I have depicted as the major theoretical ‘protagonists’ for discussion in the following chapters could be divided into three groups according to the issues they address. The first group comprises theories about voice (the voice in general, not just its role in music or opera). The second group comprises theories that discuss some curious cases in relation to the body and identity. The body that is being re-defined for various reasons (the monstrous body, the prosthetic body, the body with transplanted organs, the body as between man and animal) affects identity in various ways, and these mutual influences are discussed. Unlike the first and second groups of theories, the third group contains theories that are developed in opera studies and that discuss issues in relation to the singing body. I will now attempt to map some characteristics of the theories from the each group.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 273.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 255.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
1) Voice theory

I discuss several theoretical positions on the voice. They include Adriana Cavarero’s theory of vocal uniqueness which addresses this ever-present but rarely discussed characteristic of the human voice. I have also been influenced by Mladen Dolar’s writings about the politics, ethics, physics, metaphysics and linguistics of the voice, and especially his concept of the politics of the voice. Furthermore, two theorists from film studies – Michel Chion and Rick Altman - have made an outstanding contribution to theorizing the ventriloquial dimension of the voice in film. I use Chion’s concept of the acousmatic voice that theorizes the strategies and effects of a voice whose source is unknown. Altman’s thoughts on film soundtracks as modes of ventriloquism encouraged me to explore the ventriloquial aspects of postopera. Finally, I was intrigued by Brigitte Felderer’s text about speech mechanisms that on one hand offers an immensely interesting brief history of speaking automatons and their functions, and on the other hand explores the causes of the unsettling effects that the mechanized voice produces.

2) Theories of the Body and of Identity

Here I take into account several quite diverse theories that discuss issues of the body and identity. Theories by Stone, Nancy and Kunst are concerned with ‘upgraded’ bodies. In Stone’s theory that upgrade is prosthesis. Stone comes close to questions about the body, the voice and their ventriloquial relation when she discusses aspects of Steven Hawking’s speech device as a prosthetic mechanism. For Nancy the ‘upgrade’ is a heart transplant. This philosopher discusses how the identity of the body is changed due to the fact that its functionality is enabled by a ‘foreign’ organ. Finally, monstrous body that Kunst writes about is the body with an anomaly or difference (for example hermaphrodite bodies or representations of monstrous bodies by baroque mirror mechanisms). Kunst’s elaborations of how monstrous bodies, as ‘Others’, only serve to confirm ‘normal’ human identity refers to Agamben’s theory of man and animal that carries similar implications, and I use this theory too when discussing the status and function of man and animal.

3) Theories of Body and Voice in the Opera Studies

This group of theories comprises three texts from opera studies: a text about envoicing women in opera by Abbate that discusses how woman are heard and seen in conventional opera, and if they are to be perceived as subjects or objects in the process; a text that problematizes conventional roles between gender and the voice (unveiled voices) by Joke Dame, and a text about the performativity of the singing body by Michelle Duncan.

The common point in all these theories is that they problematize identity in various ways. And it is the identity of the singing body above all that is problematized, with various interventions taking place in the sphere of bodies and voices in all the postoperas I discuss. The identity of the
singing body crucially affects the postopera to which it belongs, and changes its ontology. Besides the theories I use as major theoretical ‘protagonists’ in the case studies, there are other approaches I refer to along the way. Among them are texts by composers and directors of the relevant postoperas, texts by musicologists dealing directly with the work in question, and various texts from opera studies, theatre studies, media studies, feminist criticism, philosophy and aesthetics. My position in relation to all these texts might be broadly described as relativist.

Since all the texts discuss different aspects of body, voice, identity and their mutual relations, their specific applications to my chosen case studies has been motivated by questions thematized by the works themselves. For example, the fact that in the postopera One the author himself insists on both the uniqueness and the multiplicity of the singing body and the voice, and goes on to imply that their mutual relationship is prosthetic and that different representations of the singer ‘intrude’ themselves, prompts a discussion of vocal uniqueness, of prosthesis, and of the concept of the Intruder. Cavarero’s theory of vocal uniqueness turns out to be a provocative theoretical counterpart for One, since One itself problematizes the concept of vocal and corporeal uniqueness, as well as the idea of intrusion. The theory of vocal uniqueness, in other words, helps us to understand what happens with the singer’s uniqueness in One, but One also interrogates Cavarero’s theory by confronting the voice with its own ‘image’, allowing that image in turn to become a constitutive part of the voice. The singing voice’s uniqueness is multiplied, it intrudes on the voice, and at the same time it makes its very existence possible. A similar logic and methodology can be found in the other chapters.

Why do I choose just these theories and not others as the tools for discussion? Because of all the texts, theories and concepts I engaged with during the research, those that I decided to include as my principal theoretical ‘protagonists’ all address the questions posed by my postoperas about the relationship between the singing body and the voice. I use these theories, and the postoperas themselves, to discuss how we hear voices and how we see bodies, but also how we see voices and how we hear bodies, and I use them further to ask what we can ‘read’ from body-voice relationships in postopera, and how those relationships, like our reading of them, is culturally conditioned.
Part 1 - VOICES BEYOND CORPOREALITY: PERFORMING SINGING AS UPGRADING
Chapter 2

Singing beyond the Body: Uniqueness, Intruder and Prosthesis

In part 1 I am concerned with how and why singing in some postoperas appears beyond the body that produces it and with what the meaning produced in such particular mutual agency between the singing body and the voice tells us about postopera, its status and function. In both postoperas I have chosen as theoretical objects – Michel van der Aa’s One and Steve Reich/Beryl Korot’s Three Tales – the voice that is heard is the result of connecting the forces of the body with technological interventions performed upon the voice and body. In One the main intervention comes in relation to live performance and the reproduced video with the same performer. The live singing body only partly produces the final vocal result, and that vocal result reflects itself back to the singing body and changes its identity. The prominent gap between the technologically upgraded voice and the ‘natural’ body as its primary source is reinvented. In Three Tales the voices are pre-recorded and transformed, brought to the sphere of the monstrous by procedures conducted by the composer. That change in terms of the relationship between the body and the voice in opera is in this piece put into connection with the change of the status of the human in the age of cloning.

In this chapter I will read One against the backdrop of several theoretical concepts: the concept of vocal uniqueness by Adriana Cavarero, the concept of the intruder by Jean-Luc Nancy and the concept of prosthesis and its performativity by Sandy Stone. Looking at One in the light of Cavarero’s concept of vocal uniqueness enables me to show how the concept of vocal uniqueness is tied to the concept of identity via the body, the voice and their mutual relation in postopera, but also how both concepts of identity and of vocal uniqueness could be destabilized by overemphasizing uniqueness, as happened in One, where uniqueness is deconstructed by its own multiplication. Nancy’s concept of the intruder allows a better understanding of destabilized identity, which in One intrudes into the performance. The concept of prosthesis by Stone interrogates one’s relation to one’s own extended body that affects identity. When the relation between the singing body and the voice is theorized through those concepts it becomes clear how singing corporeality is freighted with meaning. Although each voice has unique physical

---

120 The version of this chapter is published as: Jelena Novak, “Voices beyond corporeality: towards the prosthetic body in opera”, in Studies in Musical Theatre, Special issue 6.1, 2012, pp. 73-88.
characteristics, One puts that uniqueness under pressure as reproduced sounds intervene. The singing body (woman) is vocally manifested as the Other (cyborg).\textsuperscript{124}

**Vocal Uniqueness**
One of the central issues that occupies Adriana Cavarero in her book on the philosophy of vocal expression is the concept of uniqueness in the vocal sphere. Cavarero opens her book with reflections on Calvino’s story of an obsessive king whose world is built upon what he can hear and who governs his kingdom via sound, discovering that “‘the voice could be the equivalent of the hidden and most genuine part of the person’, a sort of invisible, but immediately perceptible, nucleus of uniqueness”.\textsuperscript{125} Cavarero writes that Calvino calls her attention to what she designates as the “vocal phenomenology of uniqueness”, and continues: “this is an ontology that concerns the incarnate singularity of every existence insofar as she or he manifests her- or himself vocally”.\textsuperscript{126}

What she underlines is her intention — along with Calvino — to make a transition from a world centred on images to a world centred on sounds, and above all, the sound of the human voice that enables a perception of a corporeality ‘from inside’:

It is worth underscoring again that this corporal root of uniqueness is also perceptible by sight – that is, by an aspect that is immediately visible to whomever looks at the other’s face. The sense of hearing that is privileged here by Calvino nonetheless transfers the perception of uniqueness from the corporal surface, from the face, to the internal body.\textsuperscript{127}

Cavarero critiques literary and philosophical studies that pay no attention to “the simple fact of the uniqueness of voices”\textsuperscript{128} and develops concepts introduced by Hannah Arendt, who suggests that “speech is first and foremost a privileged way in which the speaker actively, and therefore politically, distinguishes him - or herself to others”.\textsuperscript{129} She sees the philosophical tradition as one that ignores ‘uniqueness’ in general, not only but especially of the voice, and insists on the principle of uniqueness being connected to the ‘mechanics of spoken language’ (which could be described as a

\textsuperscript{124} The Other is “a term used widely within critical theory, predominantly in disciplines such as psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory. (...) It must, therefore be apparent that ‘other’ as concept will have a wide variety of applications. Although this is the case, it can be said that ‘other’ either as a human being or an inanimate object – exists in relationship to a subject from which it differs”. Lacan uses capitalized Other to designate “(...) the law, society, religion and other people encountered symbolically through their effects on me, the subject. (...) In this way, ‘I’, or ‘me’ (my identity), is possible only through the symbolic order.” In postcolonial theory the term “(...) refers, in essence, to the ‘other’ as produced by discursive practices”. Simon Malpas and Paul Wake (Eds.), *Routledge Companion to Critical Theory*, New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 235, 236. In this chapter I consider the woman as the Other of man, and the cyborg as the Other of human.
\textsuperscript{125} Cavarero, Op. Cit., p. 2.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., p. vii
sort of friction between the vocal and the linguistic): “Speech, understood as speech that emits from someone’s mouth, is not simply the verbal sphere of expression; it is also the point of tension between the uniqueness of the voice and the system of language”.

She goes further, ascribing uniqueness not only to the phenomenon of the voice but also to vocal emission, which involves the articulation of sounds: “That which is proper to the voice does not lie in pure sound but rather in the relational uniqueness of a vocal emission that, far from contradicting it, announces and brings to its destination the specifically human fact of speech”.

The voice, as a constituent part of identity, identifies a person in a similar way to the way a fingerprint does: its physical characteristics are inseparable from the body that produces it and to whom it ‘belongs’. Consequently, the body is perceived as unique because it is signified by an unrepeatable structure of the skin imprint (for example fingerprint) or frequencies of the vocal apparatus (voice), among other things. Those physical characteristics of the voice and of the skin uncompromisingly make one body different from others and become part of its identity. Cavarero’s concept of vocal uniqueness sheds light on the connection between a body and the voice that it produces. The concept of uniqueness is strongly connected to the concept of identity. A specific network of inconsistencies, desires, languages and norms makes each identity unique. This is also the case with the voice. It is unique not only because of its specific timbre but also because of the network of unique relations that it makes with the body producing it. Cavarero’s conclusion on the differences between voices, relying on Calvino’s claims, points to physical roots: “The voice, however, is always different from all other voices, even if the words are the same, as often happens in the case of a song. This difference, as Calvino underlines, has to do with the body”.

Putting an emphasis on the corporeality of the voice enables us to reveal the meanings that most often stay hidden.

The opus of composer Michel van der Aa is characterized by an intention to question identity and its uniqueness, constantly showing identity’s elusiveness and the multiple perspectives from which it could be perceived. This tendency already becomes apparent in the titles to some of his compositions—See Through (2000), One (2002), Second Self (2004), Imprint (2005), Mask (2006), After Life (2005-6)—all alluding to multiple perspectives that could be taken when looking at identity and the questionable uniqueness of identity itself. The search for identity in Van der Aa’s opus is emphasized by his questioning of the impact of new media on composition, his strategic choice of musical language and the economy of the expressive means used. In many of his compositions he

130 Ibid., p. 14.
132 Ibid., p. 3-4.
133 I understand the notion of economy as the manner in which something is ordered and managed.
emphasizes the juxtaposition of live performed sound and its recording in various ways. The piece *Here [In Circles]* (for soprano, cassette recorder and ensemble, 2002) could be considered as a study for the opera *One*, which in turn would later become a kind of predecessor of Van der Aa's second and more complex opera *After Life*.

Driven by the speeding up of the pace of daily life, events in the media and information society, Van der Aa finds the dramaturgy of *Here [In Circles]* in a constant acceleration and crescendo of sound events that are increasing their density. This involves the playful Rewinding of recorded sound on a tape recorder, and also a counterpointing of the live performance and fragments of music recorded at the same concert. Schizoid listening is one of the consequences; the perspective of the listener becomes multiple, fragmented and unstable. Manipulating the gap between the sound and its source, Van der Aa comes close to the concept of schizophrenia that deals with the disembodied voice (among other things): "We have split the sound from the maker of the sound. Sounds have been torn from their natural sockets and given an amplified and independent existence. Vocal sound, for instance, is no longer tied to a hole in the head but is free to issue from anywhere in the landscape."¹³⁴ That 'landscape' in the case of *One* is a performer's second self, her video and audio double.

Therefore subject, language, identity and voice come under threat as unique categories and even the notion of uniqueness is redefined in its multiplicity. The opera *One*, for which Van der Aa was both librettist and stage/video director, is a distilled example of the reinvention of the singing body in terms of voice, body, body-voice relation, musical language, and visual appearance. The soprano has an alter-ego in the video, with whom she performs duets while they interact and complete each other’s music and movement. For all the multiple regimes of representation that the performer is engaged with in the opera *One* it might even be termed a schizopera. Still, the way multiplicity is obtained is unique and lies in the illusion of a verbatim mirroring of the singing body by its own image. This multiplicity is derived from 'one' — one subject, one identity, one performer, one voice — by confronting it with its visual and vocal double. It shows that one exists only and simultaneously in opposition to the representation of oneself, and that inevitably ‘mirroring’ fundamentally jeopardizes oneness and its potentiality of uniqueness. The singing body appears as both subject and object of oneness and multiplicity. It produces its representation, but at the same time is produced by it; it is produced by the body, the voice and


¹³⁵ I understand mirroring as both reflecting the image/sound, and as mimesis, the imitation of the image/sound. The reflecting surface in this case would be the video screen which looks as a kind of mirror for the live performer, and it is also the screen on which mimetic representation of the singer appears.
their mutual agency. *One* bears out Connor’s concept of the vocalic body by making it performable in opera exactly as it is in his theory: the body produces the voice but is also produced by that voice.

In Michel van der Aa’s staging in 2003, *One* opens in total darkness. There are two white sheets on the stage. Behind one of them is Barbara Hannigan, who rhythmically repeats one tone while performing rhythmic patterns with a manual lamp that partially illuminates her face. First she sings ‘alone’, and when the electronic voice starts, it takes exactly the same pitch and timbre from the soloist and continues to reproduce it with its superior technical durability. At that point a vocal amputation is performed. The live voice is at some moments silenced, and its reproduction—a mimesis of the same voice, a vocal ‘prosthesis’—springs into action. They continue to interlace during the opera. The sound of the voice as a listener perceives it consists both of live and recorded components and deludes its corporeal origin. The final vocal product sounds compact, although it is actually fabricated from both live and recorded components, interlaced so virtuosically that the final result exceeds the performance possibilities of the human vocal apparatus. The instrumentality of the singing body is extended by technology.\(^{136}\)

\[\text{Figure 2 - Michel van der Aa, One, video still. Courtesy of the artist}\]

In the synopsis of *One* Michel van der Aa claims that the main theme of this opera is identity, and—I would add—identity’s multiplication:

\(^{136}\) Excerpts from the opera *One* can be seen at: [http://www.vanderaa.net/videoexcerpts-one](http://www.vanderaa.net/videoexcerpts-one), Accessed: October 3, 2011.
Five elderly women relate their elemental and existential stories; in each of them the main protagonist of the opera plays an important role. Gradually the nature of the relationship between her and the older women becomes apparent, while a moving portrait rises of a woman who has completely lost her own identity.¹³⁷

The only singer on stage is Barbara Hannigan. Five other anonymous women appear in the fragmented video footage of several interviews. There is a fragmentary narrative that leads us through the search and/or disintegration of self. That narrative is simple and the language and style used are commonplaces of horror fiction. It is not the subject of the narrative that initiates the problematization of the body-voice relation in this opera, although the subject probably induced the economy of language and media used. Rather than focusing on the subject of the narrative, I am interested in how a disintegration of identity has been displayed and performed by the economy of expressive, especially corporeal and vocal means used in One.

Doubling is a distinctive procedure that is used both in the vocal and visual images of Barbara Hannigan. Although doubling by its logic negates uniqueness – what is multiplied can’t be unique – in the case of One doubling is used in the process of creating unique features of both vocal and visual sides of the piece. The vocal product of this opera would not be so unique if it had not been combined from live singing and a technologically doubled voice. This also applies to the visuals. The image of Hannigan in One would not be so unique if her live performance had not been doubled by her visual and vocal double. Paradoxically, the way uniqueness is generated in One requires doubling procedures. It appears as if the main goal of textual economy of this opera (relying on visual, musical and verbal texts and their interactions) is to show how uniqueness can be created.

While the illusion of uniqueness is created by virtuoso mimesis on stage, it becomes clear that uniqueness is impossible. Although performer and recording are composed to look like one entity and to represent uniqueness, the economy of uniqueness and the management of its production and distribution show that uniqueness is not sustainable. The parallel to the relation between the original and the mimetic could be drawn in the relation between the simulacrum and the real. The more real the simulacrum appears the more unreal it is. The more homogeneous the live and recorded appearance and the voice of Barbara Hannigan appear in One, the more they show the impossibility of being unique. Uniqueness is molecularized in mutually mimicking particles of live performance and video and audio projection. Those particles are divisions of a whole, and they act as intruders to each other.

Music vs. Dramatic Text and Horror of Identity

The libretto of *One* consists of five short parts. It is written in the first person of unidentified gender, and it starts by posing the question “Could I define this space?” The same question is repeated at the beginning of Part V, followed by a triple answer:

Could I define this space?
It is like all others
like all the others
like all the others. I’m staring into
the clearest mirror.
I am
one.  

If the space in question is like all the others, it is unidentifiable, since it does not differ, and therefore it does not exist as a different entity. Similarly, the last phrase appears as the person persuades him/herself in front of “the clearest mirror” (which provides a hyper-real image) that s/he is the one, or only one, and not more than one. The rest of the libretto, between those two questions, initial and conclusive, appears as an attempt to question identity by fragments of events, questions, doubts, fears, intentions, and feelings. The frame in which the language symbolically operates is the frame of horror fiction. There is a number of gruesome and frightening details, descriptions establishing an unsettling atmosphere:

Untamable waves of
darkness breaching porous black
rocks
(…)
While trees turn
wet with night, bones become
branches.
(…)
Eerie feelings of
recurrence.
(…)
Choking
Drowning.
(…)

I argue that the meaning of the libretto text is not crucial for this postopera. One obvious ‘technical’ reason for this is that part of the text’s meaning is not detectable while it is performed, since many words become incomprehensible when sung at high pitches. This applies even more for the distracted, intensive and hysterical dramaturgy of *One*. The libretto uses stereotypes of horror

---

139 Ibid.
fiction (cobwebs, drowning, darkness, pain, hazy woods). It is the economy of the text’s performance, however, that creates the horror of existence in the process of losing identity. The repetition of words, scream-like movements, the splitting of the performance between the singer and her recorded double, themes of pain, the ‘fracturing’ of the performer whose performance is based on division and multiplication, and mysterious elements in the video (an old dark castle, candle lights, dungeon-like corridors, the crackling of branches etc.) all add to the hysterical economy of the performance.

The relationship between the music and the dramatic text is one of the defining ruptures of opera in general. Differences between the dramatic structures of music and the libretto, the challenge of perceiving them both simultaneously and to an equal extent, the latent struggle for predominance between the two, the representational systems of music and the dramatic text, and the different expectations of spectators/listeners have all contributed to a number of operatic reforms in the course of opera history. In some cases, as with Gluck and Wagner, composers not only composed a new type of opera but also wrote elaborate theoretical texts in which they pleaded for changes to take place and proposed how those changes could be enacted. In other cases, theories were not developed in detail. For example, Mozart’s famous dictum that “in an opera the poetry must definitely be the obedient daughter of the music” has remained influential, even if he never fully explained this approach in theoretical writing.

In One, music affects the intelligibility of the text, as if the text only existed to be fragmented, repeated, and made incomprehensible by being performed. The relationship between music and text becomes less important than the relationship between the live and the mediated that deconstruct each other. Moreover, this relationship is being influenced by the relationship between body and voice that assumes the foreground. At some point in Part IV, Van der Aa gives a description of the relationship between the body and voice of the person whose ‘I’ is trying to be established by the text of the libretto:

My own body
solemn in the water subject
to these irregular
black
forms. The only thing
I could have said

140 Gluck manifestly pleaded for reform of the opera in his Preface to the published score of opera Alceste (1767) and Wagner in his book Opera and Drama originally published in 1851. See: Richard Wagner, Opera and Drama (trans. W. Ashton Ellis), Lincoln, NE, University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

died
before it reached an ear.\footnote{Michel van der Aa, “One libretto”, in One DVD booklet, Disquiet Music, DQM 03, 2011.}

The text thus speaks of the uneasiness in the relationship between body and voice that becomes both visible and audible in the opera.

**Gendered Singing**

The gender of the first person in the text is not identifiable from the libretto. But the fact that the score of *One* is written for a female singer genders the text. That brings another dimension to the performativity of the text and the postopera. Those previously described features of the text that use elements of horror fiction supported by a hysterical economy of performance could also be seen as symptomatic of female hysteria. There is a long tradition of representing female madness and hysteria in opera, and opera was and still is composed mostly by male composers. Although distanced from the operatic tradition in general, *One* could also be regarded as indebted to it. From that perspective, the singing body of *One* becomes the body of the Other (woman) on which the identity of the Other is projected. However, the projection of the Other literally becomes divided and projected within itself by dividing one performer between her physicality and the projected image. The singing voice suffers an analogous division. The recorded voice is mirrored in both the live and the projected body and the same happens with the live voice. In other words, following Connor’s theory, the vocalic body of *One* becomes a rhizome-like structure of bodies and voices, both live and recorded.\footnote{Michel van der Aa, “One Libretto”, in One DVD booklet, Disquiet Music, DQM 03, 2011.}

Van der Aa refers to the suppressed voice in fragments of the libretto: “The only thing I could have said died before it reached an ear”.\footnote{I understand and use the notion of rhizome according to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. It is a different non-hierarchical organizational structure from the structure of a tree. In a rhizome, every point is in connection with all other points. See: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (trans. Brian Massumi), London and New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 23.} That inability to function is opposed by the system of representation established in the piece to make the body-voice, subject-other, text-music relations functional. Hysteria as mental disorder is often manifested by the lack of control over acts and emotions, caused by anxiety and internally repressed conflicts. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, however, hysteria is considered more as a structural principle than as a set of symptoms.\footnote{Whatever type of hysteria we are dealing with, the underlying economy of hysterical desire remains fundamentally the same, and this sameness can be ascertained only on the basis of structural traits deeper indications that point to a specific structure. (…) therapeutic intervention will be effective only if it succeeds in deactivating the neurotic economy of desire, that is, if it goes beyond symptoms to refer to the structural level”. See: Joël Dor, *Clinical Lacan*, New York, Other Press, 1998, p. 76.} By analogy, the hysterical economy of expressive means in *One* could be seen as symptomatic of the suppressed voice and the identity of the Other that emerge through the singing body.
Cavarero writes of the ‘devocalization of logos’ and the position of “the voice [...that] disturbs philosophy”.\(^\text{146}\) That is, the philosophy ruled by the ‘metaphysician’, as she calls the rigid philosopher’s figure, in whose world language is “bound first of all to conform to thought, to correspond to it and to reflect its order”.\(^\text{147}\) The ‘metaphysician’ is also “proud of his desensitized visions”, and is “the dearest of the deaf”.\(^\text{148}\) In that ‘deaf’ tradition, as Cavarero calls it, she points to the fact that the task of singing is typically assigned to women rather than men:

Song is more suited for the woman than for the man, above all because it is up to her to represent the sphere of the body as opposed to the more important realm of the spirit. Symptomatically, the symbolic patriarchal order that identifies the masculine with reason and the feminine with the body is precisely an order that privileges the semantic with respect to the vocal. In other words, even the androcentric tradition knows that the voice comes from ‘the vibration of a throat of flesh’ and, precisely because it knows this, it catalogs the voice with the body. This voice becomes secondary, ephemeral, and inessential – reserved for women. Feminized from the start, the vocal aspect of speech and, furthermore, of song appear together as antagonistic elements in a rational, masculine sphere that centers itself, instead, on the semantic. To put it formulaically: woman sings, man thinks.\(^\text{149}\)

Cavarero problematizes gender stereotypes, and furthermore involves this problematization with the world of opera: “The contrast between the feminine principle of the vocal and the masculine principle of the semantic is, however, only one of the ways in which sexual difference interferes with the world of opera”.\(^\text{150}\) Cavarero points to the fact that “there are (...) formalized norms that regard the vocal register of the two sexes. By fixing the four principal voices of song, these norms assign the role of the soprano and the contralto to the feminine voice, and the tenor and basso to the masculine voice. The natural phenomenon of the sexual difference \([\text{sessuazione}]\) of the voice thus comes to organize the rules of opera”.\(^\text{151}\)

Although One could be said to confirm Cavarero’s formula “woman sings, man thinks” – female performer sings what male composer thought/wrote – it also problematizes the status of the female and of feminine singing in opera. By insisting on the presence of a woman performer, her body and her voice as primary elements of the opera, Van der Aa also manages to reconfigure the performer-composer relationship, since the singer appears as the subject of singing and “(...) stands before us having wrested the composing voice away from the librettist and composer who wrote the

\(^{147}\) Ibid.
\(^{148}\) Ibid.
\(^{149}\) Ibid., p. 6.
\(^{150}\) Ibid., p. 128.
\(^{151}\) Ibid., p. 128-129.
Although Van der Aa conceived the piece, its intermediality and virtuosic features make it close to a piece of performance art. If *One* is a projection and an embodiment of The Other, that Other takes a central, and not a marginal position in the opera. The Other intrudes in what used to be the dominant mode of discourse, and that intrusion becomes constitutive and central both for intruder and intruded.

**The Intruder and Mimesis**

Discussing the complex corporeal transformation experienced after receiving a heart transplant, Jean-Luc Nancy explains how an ‘intruder’, a stranger’s organ in his body, deconstructed his sense of ‘self’. Nancy sets out to resolve questions related to the impossibility of untangling the organic, symbolic and imaginary within this new situation confronted by his body and his sense of identity. A new heart symbolically functions as a prosthesis in the philosopher’s organism. Nancy asks himself: “How do we become a representation of ourselves?” He emphasizes that identity is a construct that could be modified by involving body extensions within the ‘unity’ of organism. A similar functionality is thematized by *One*.

Several questions posed by Nancy deal with the issue of how the construction of his identity was affected by this new set of relations. “A personal contingency intersects with a contingency in the history of technology. [When […]] ‘I’ depend on a series of technical possibilities.” He theorizes upon the borders of his own body and organism, raises consciousness of the relationship between the inside and the outside of the body, and acknowledges decisions that had to be made in order to continue life: “Life which does not occupy any particular organ but which cannot exist without organs. A life that not only survives but which lives on its own behalf under a triple influence: that of the decision, that of the organ and those of the aftermath of the transplant.”

He develops a set of complex relations to the intruder, the stranger’s organ donated to him, that enabled his body to survive. He feels uncomfortable that someone else’s organ is in his body despite the fact that the organ enables his life. “In me there is an intruder and I become a stranger to myself. (…) But becoming a stranger to myself does not bring me closer to the intruder”. Nancy reports that relating to oneself becomes a problem: “The intruder exposes me excessively – it extrudes me, it exports me, it expropriates me. I become like an android out of science fiction, one

---

154 Ibid., p. 244.
155 Ibid., p. 246.
156 Ibid., p. 247.
of the living dead”. The intrusion of the transplanted organ that enables life makes Nancy reconsider his identity both from ‘inside’ and ‘outside’: “The intruder is myself and man himself. No one other than him, who continues to alter, at one time refined and exhausted, stripped naked and over-equipped, an intruder both in the world and in himself, a disturbing impulse of strangeness, an attempt at an excrent infinity”.

The live and the recorded components of One could be theorized through Nancy’s concept of intrusion. One of many meanings evoked in One concerns its only performer, Barbara Hannigan. In the performance, Hannigan resembled her own appearance in the video as closely as possible – the hairstyle was the same, the dress was the same, and at that point the character in the video and Barbara Hannigan in real life were also of approximately the same age. Even today, ten years after the work was made, I assume that it would already be possible to notice the changes both of the voice and of the body of the singer. Unlike the relation between stopped and running time in the case of Dorian Gray, the video of One remains young, while the live performer/author is getting older. If the recording was the intruder for the live performing singer, now it could appear that the singer becomes an intruder for the video performance. The video would always be a reminder of how virtuosic Hannigan was, and what a virtuosic voice she had. Over time, her own life intrudes on a representation of her former self that increasingly recedes from the present. The opera One appears as ‘stolen time’, a ‘frozen life’ of Barbara Hannigan, and that dimension of the piece is brought to our attention by the mimesis of the live and the reproduced, and by the fact that mimesis is only possible if the person who is represented in the video is also performing the piece live.

In terms of Nancy’s concept of the intruder, the live component of the piece, and the reproduced video act to each other as the intruder that Nancy described. A transplanted organ supports the functionality of a new body, but at the same time intrudes the identity of a subject and his body. A similar procedure happens in One. The ‘life’, the ‘organism’, the system of this piece is enabled by an interaction of what is live and reproduced in mimetic relation. At the same time, the reproduced enables the system of this work, but also deconstructs the identity of the performer’s uniqueness. Moreover, the reproduced voice of the performer appears as having a prosthetic relation to the body singing live.

---

157 Ibid., p. 248.
158 Idem.
Prosthesis and Amputation

Prosthesis is not simply a bodily extension, but also an extension of a person’s will and instrumentality, Stone claims. One is an example of an extension of a performer’s, composer’s, and also a listener’s/viewer’s will and perception. The economy of musical and visual language, built upon the principles of extending the live through representation, but also the intrusion of the mediated into the live, and the intrusion of the live into the mediated, serves as an example of extended instrumentality.

In the process of relating the performer’s body to its artificial extension, the perception both of the performer and the listener/viewer is significantly changed. The following passage illustrates the process of redefining both the body-voice-machine relation on stage, and the conventional perception of it. It could easily apply to similar processes in One.

If you haven’t seen scientist Steven Hawking give a talk, let me give you a quick background. Hawking has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, which makes it virtually impossible for him to move anything more than his fingers, or to speak. A friendly computer engineer put together a nice little system for him, a program that displays a menu of words, a storage buffer and a Votrax allophone generator – i.e. an artificial speech device. He selects words and phrases, the word processor stores them until he forms a paragraph, and the Votrax says it. Or he calls up a prepared file, and the Votrax says that. (...) And there is Hawking, sitting, as he always does, in his wheelchair, utterly motionless, except for his fingers on the joystick of the laptop (...) Exactly, where, I say to myself, is Hawking? (...) Who is it doing the talking up there on stage?

In an important sense, Hawking doesn’t stop being Hawking at the edge of his visible body. There is the obvious physical Hawking, vividly outlined by the way our social conditioning teaches us to see a person as a person. But a serious part of Hawking extends into the box on his lap. In mirror image, a serious part of that silicon and plastic assemblage in his lap extends into him as well (...) not to mention the invisible ways, displaced in time and space, in which discourses of medical technology and their physical accretions already permeate him and us. No box, no discourse; in the absence of the prosthetic, Hawking’s intellect becomes a tree falling in the forest with nobody around to hear it. On the other hand, with the box his voice is auditory and simultaneously electric, in a radically different way from that of a person speaking into a microphone.

Where does he stop? Where are his edges? The issues his person and his communication prosthesis raise are boundary debates, borderland/frontera questions.

161 Ibid., p. 395.
What we are presumed to perceive as Hawking’s voice is sound electronically generated by the machine. Hawking is physically disabled by disease, his body appears as almost completely silent and motionless. The voice that is assigned to him is disembodied. It is generated and performed by a machine. Hawking only chooses the words that are going to be said by that voice. I wonder if what is heard could be called a voice at all when there are no conventional frictions between language and body there. However, the fact that the representation of Hawking’s body is related to the machine makes the body involved, although not vocally. “Voice is sound formed in or emitted from the human larynx in speaking, singing, or other utterance”, as one of the most common definitions of voice puts it. While the first part of this definition denies Hawking’s speech device the possibility of producing voice, ‘the utterance’ from the second part of it opens up the possibility of recognizing as voice the sound that is not produced by a body but that is caused by a body. The presence of the body at ‘the stage of language’ further supports the vocal credibility of electronically generated sound. That sound could be perceived as vocal prosthesis.

Philosopher David Wills sees the concept of prosthesis to be inseparably linked to the concept of amputation: “(...) no amputation is performed without the forethought of a workable prosthesis”. I wonder if it is possible to amputate one’s voice. That is what happens with Hannigan’s voice in One. Her voice is at the same time amputated (from the live performing body) and ‘upgraded’, and that ‘upgrade’ is a symbolic prosthesis. In this case the ‘old system’ that is upgraded would designate the relation between body and voice in conventional singing, and a ‘new system’ would be the complex entanglement between voice, body and new media in which the performer appears to become a kind of cyborg. And the cyborg – a cybernetic organism, an organism that has enhanced abilities due to technology – is an attempt to ‘upgrade’ the human.

Cyborgs – persons and systems whose functioning is aided by, or dependent upon, a mechanical or electronic device – or cyborg-like entities are used in some contemporary music languages. Performers’ human bodies appear as insufficient, and are upgraded with devices that substitute for, or supplement, a part of the body, or a part of perception. Pieces by Steve Reich such as Triple Quartet (1998) and Cello Counterpoint (2003) open up a network of prosthetic tasks for performers. The relationship between the body of the performer and the instrument is connected with projected pre-recorded sound. For example, Triple Quartet is a three-movement work for three string quartets. Quartets two and three are pre-recorded and the players play live the first quartet along with the tape. This situation, although it may have some similarities with the experience of ensemble playing, is different, since the performer is supposed to play with the pre-recorded

structure of sounds and with fellow performers at the same time. The musical medium becomes complex containing both live and pre-recorded components.

The co-existence of Hannigan’s disembodied, recorded voice and the ‘real’ live-performed vocal part creates the dramaturgy of this opera. The reproduction of music played with its live performance gives a new perspective to possibilities of operatic representation. The paradox “wherein the more perfectly the machine is able to represent the human, the more thoroughly is the human removed”\(^{164}\) becomes in effect one of the central motors of the piece. Both visually and aurally, the dramaturgy is based on the relation between the performer and the visual/audio projection, and that relation extends the singer’s performance. The projection becomes a symbolic prosthetic device that enables the upgrade of the performer’s virtuosic abilities.

The music of *One* is tense and dissonant. The vocal part contains a lot of ‘leaps’ that make it technically demanding for a singer to perform. The singing part is stretched to extremes both with ‘leaps’ and hocketing between the performer and the projected sound.\(^{165}\) Hocketing between the live and the projected produces an unusual effect; while hearing the music, I also listen to the live or the projected as a separate kind of music. The music of *One* is not narrative, although it carries a narrative text. It functions as a Deleuzian *desiring machine* by constantly producing a need to be heard in relation to another music.\(^{166}\) ‘Another music’ in this case is *One*’s own part, a projected hocketing of vocal and electronic. The expectations about listening to this music also change, both for the one who performs it and the one who listens. This music makes me listen primarily to the relationship between the performer and the projected sound, as (de)synchronization between live and performed components becomes more important than the live performance part itself.

Watching/listening to singer Barbara Hannigan perform in *One*, the viewer/listener could wonder where the performer’s body stops and where its boundaries are. Performer’s bodies are shown functioning along with instruments/machines that act as their artificial extensions, and this relation is problematized in the context of the music and music theatre world. The function

---


\(^{165}\) In music, hocketing is considered to be rhythmic linear technique used as contrapuntal device. Its origins are in medieval vocal music. Hocketing enables a single melody to be shared between two or more voices such that alternately one voice sounds while the other rests. Contemporary revival of this technique could be found in emblematic piece *Hoketus* (1976) by Louis Andriessen.

\(^{166}\) Opposing the Freudian concept of the unconscious as a representation, Deleuze and Guattari propose a productive, machine-like model: ‘The unconscious does not speak, it engineers. It is not expressive, or representative, but productive. A symbol is nothing other than a social machine that functions as a desiring-machine, a desiring-machine that functions within the social machine, an investment of the social machine by desire’, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Œdipus*, (trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane), London and New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 197.
performer-instrument is considered almost as an organism in itself and becomes cybernetic. In the world of replicating its own realities, the notion of the one, the only, the unique is obsolete. The opera ends with a meeting between the ‘real’ Hannigan and a video of a woman resembling Hannigan simulated to be around fifty years older. Two flows of time end up together. The use of technology, and the mechanical, almost hysterical, virtuosity are deeply integrated into this postopera. The ease of bridging the gaps between the machine and the human in virtuosic performance, the ‘natural’ appearance of a highly engineered situation is a remarkable contribution to questioning of the relationship between body and voice in context of new media and their influence to the opera world.

In *One* the relationship between the singing body and the voice becomes a field for investigating new potentials in the opera world. The reproduced intrudes on the live and vice versa. Together they enable the system of the piece to work, but also deconstruct the performer’s uniqueness. The voice appears as amputated and prostheted at the same time. Whether it is a necessity of the medium of music, a device in changing the institutional context of performance, or the core concept of the piece, the prosthetic strategy enables new contextualizations of opera through body-voice relations. Prosthesis is an extension of instrumentality, and that extension could also be seen as an intrusion into the ‘natural’ body and the voice. The relationship between music and text stays in the shadow of the relationship between the body and the voice. The ‘performance art’ quality of the piece makes it look as if the compositional power has been transferred from composer to performer. New perspectives are opened up that develop the vocalic body with technology as a prosthetic instrument.

In the case of *One*, the voice appears as embodied and disembodied at the same time. The division of both the singing body and the sung voice between the live singing and the video makes the vocalic body of *One* rather complex. Using technologically enhanced procedures, Van der Aa makes the singing voice appear beyond the body that produces it. At the same time he also makes

---

Cybernetics is a theory about dynamic systems of control and communication between the organic world and machines. The theory was developed after World War Two by Norbert Wiener as an interdisciplinary science, connecting information theory, semiotics, electronics, linguistics, computer sciences, biology, psychology and sociology. The cybernetic aesthetics of Abraham Moles proposed theoretical models that can represent the following: the ‘machinic’ viewer (an artificial listener or viewer who chooses between different phenomena on the basis of the theory of perception); the amplifier of complexity (the machine as an amplifier of intelligence within the developing idea of the artist in the process of creating the work); the simulation of artistic creation and the creation machine based on successive integration (a simulation of the compositional process based on the analyses of other historical works). See: Claudia Giannetti, “Cybernetic Aesthetics and Communication”, in *Aesthetics of the Digital*, http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/themes/aesthetics_of_the_digital/cybernetic_aesthetics/8/, Accessed: June 6, 2012.
the body-voice relationship go beyond Cavarero’s theorizations about the uniqueness of the voice. What becomes unique is, paradoxically, the multiplication of uniqueness. The virtuosity of the voice, enabled by mimetic procedures of the recorded voice, reconfigures the singing body. The projected voice enhances the instrumentality of the body while intruding into its identity at the same time. But that enhancement does not dissolve the ‘natural’ connection between body and voice, it only upgrades it. In other words, all the vocal sounds we hear in One do not suggest a posthuman body, “the fully technologized successor species to organic Homo Sapiens”, \(^{168}\) but only an extension of the human in form of prosthesis. Thus, the body-voice relationship, implying multiplicity, virtuosity, extension, and mobility, changes opera’s ontology.

Chapter 3

Monstrous Singing: The Politics of Vocal Existence

“Today monsters remind us of the exclusion of the human from life, of life that is more and more being divided from humanity (...).”

Bojana Kunst

„Every creature has a song – the song of the dogs – and the song of the doves – the song of the fly – the song of the fox. What do they say?“

Adin Steinsaltz

In this chapter my concern is with how singing appears monstrous as a result of existing beyond the body that produces it, with the politics of the monstrous voice and with the consequences this has for the opera. As in One, Steve Reich/Beryl Korot’s video documentary opera Three Tales intersperses technological devices with the performer’s singing corporeality. The actual voice that is heard is the result of the human voice joining forces with technological interventions performed upon it. I argue that the specific vocal expression produced could be named a ‘monstrous voice’, a voice that is non-human, that deviates from ‘the natural’, and that has the sound appearance of a monster.

I shall analyse the body – voice relationship in Three Tales, paying specific attention to the novel techniques of ‘dissecting the voice’ that Steve Reich introduces. The emphasis is particularly on Act 3: Dolly, which raises a number of issues regarding cloning, artificial intelligence and defining what is human, whilst using these novel techniques for singing. I use several theoretical texts in analyzing Three Tales: Bojana Kunst’s “Restaging the Monstrous”, Mladen Dolar’s theories on the

---


171 Words by Adin Steinsaltz, from Steve Reich and Beryl Korot’s libretto of Three Tales. “Adin Steinsaltz is internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of the century. Time magazine called him a ‘once-in-a-millenium scholar’. He has almost completed translating the entire Babylonian Talmud into modern Hebrew as well as English, French and Russian. He has been resident scholar at Yale, and at the Institute for Advanced study at Princeton. He fulfills a unique role as a bridge between those who are religious and those who are not”. Quoted according to: Steve Reich/Beryl Korot, Three Tales, Libretto, http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html. Accessed: April 15, 2012.

172 Three Tales is scored for pre-recorded tape and ensemble consisted of two sopranos, three tenors, string quartet, two pianos and four percussion players. According to the composer’s note in the score: “All voices and instruments, with possible exception of drums, are amplified”. Three Tales, full score, Boosey and Hawkes, Hindenburg instrumentation.

politics and linguistics of the voice,\textsuperscript{174} and Brigitte Felderer’s text on speaking machines.\textsuperscript{175} Kunst’s text is about the status of the monstrous body and its political and theatrical productivity based on a division within the human, and the constant production of the norm of what human is and is not. I use this text to develop the monstrous voice concept and to show how the singing body in \textit{Three Tales} is vocally manifested as a monster. Dolar’s theory helps me to locate the political dimension of the monstrous voice. Felderer’s text brings the historical examination of speaking mechanisms, and together with Connor’s elaborations of disembodied voice, I use it to examine the uneasiness produced by monstrous voices in \textit{Three Tales}.

In both of their video-documentary operas - \textit{The Cave} (1993) and \textit{Three Tales} - Steve Reich and Beryl Korot are occupied with subjects connected with the global distribution of power, whether through religion or technology. The subject matter of this postopera is the media-technology-political events that marked the last century: the explosion of the zeppelin, \textit{Hindenburg}, in New Jersey in 1937 announcing the approach of World War II (Act I \textit{Hindenburg}); the atomic explosions from 1946–52 on the Bikini islands during the Cold War (Act II \textit{Bikini}); and the cloning of the sheep Dolly in Scotland in 1997, which symbolizes technology entering the body and modifying life itself (Act III \textit{Dolly}). These events are freighted with political connotations. Reich and Korot comment on the extreme development and usage of technology during the 20th century and criticize western contemporary society over ethical issues.

However, \textit{Three Tales} itself is created with high technology reshaping the opera world, since its visuals and its music are generated by means of complex digital procedures. Asked if they see any contradiction in using sophisticated audio and video technology to question the role of technology in \textit{Three Tales} and if this piece is advising us to turn away from technology, Reich responds negatively to both questions:

\begin{quote}
If you want to know, for example, about a certain kind of car or a certain kind of medical procedure, you go to someone who can tell you what is good about them and what is not so good. You don’t take advice from someone who knows nothing about them and has no experience with them. This piece needed artists who had some experience with technology so they could reflect on it and find some inner resonance. What we are doing, reflecting our own experiences and religious outlook, is presenting events of a tragic or ambiguous nature and then in \textit{Dolly} letting the audience see and hear important scientists themselves in an unusual context of musical
\end{quote}


theatre. The audience draws its own conclusions about the character and intent of these scientists and one religious figure.\textsuperscript{176}

Emphasizing his long-lasting interest in the impact of media on the social and cultural environment in which we live, Reich underlines (in the same conversation) “that double-edged sword of the gains and losses of each new technology that we incorporate into our lives is one of the subtexts to \textit{Three Tales}”.\textsuperscript{177} The subtext Reich mentions becomes particularly obvious when singing voices are transformed to sound monstrous, and that monstrosity, emphasizing losses over gains, produces an unsettling effect.

Techniques of changing and deforming the vocal sphere in \textit{Three Tales} coincide with the artists’ implicit critique of producing the monstrous, or ‘deviating’ the human as a clone, robot, or machine. Technologically modified voices indicate that “hybrid connections between nature and culture force us to rethink the borders between different regimes of representation (like science, politics and art)”\textsuperscript{178} \textit{Three Tales} deals with intersections and interrogations of science, technology, and politics. It is a polemical case study for discussing the issue of rethinking the human that also manifests itself through body-voice relations in this postopera.

\textbf{Staging Cloning}

I will here first introduce the subjects Reich and Korot are occupied with in Act 3 \textit{Dolly}. The apparent story about Dolly the sheep, the first cloned mammal, functions as a kind of 'overture' to the ethical issues of cloning, and provides a perspective for considering the issue of cloning human beings. Interview fragments putting forward the views of religious experts are juxtaposed with those of leading scientists in the field of cloning and artificial intelligence. Reich and Korot's criticism over the power-related use of technology is present, and can be read 'between the lines' through the construction of the montage of interview fragments and the musical and operatic context in which the materials are incorporated. I also read it through the monstrous voices featured in the piece.

In an interview, Reich comments upon the words of Adin Steinsaltz used in the libretto, referring to the fact that „Adam was too hasty“. There, he makes an analogy with contemporary civilisation being too hasty in relation to technology. Using an example from Zohar, Reich suggests that there might be different contexts which would make the same experience (technological or religious) right or wrong:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{178} Bojana Kunst, Op. Cit., p. 216.
\end{itemize}
The idea that Adam was too hasty comes from the Zohar, the central book of Jewish mysticism. The Torah makes no mention of which fruit Adam and Eve ate. The apple is never mentioned anywhere in the tradition. The Talmud suggests three possibilities; a fig, a grape or wheat. The fig has clear sexual implications, the grape leads to wine that can alter consciousness and wheat is the cornerstone of agriculture which made possible cities and eventually all our other technologies. Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day and the Zohar says they ate the fruit just two hours before sundown when the Sabbath begins. If they had waited they would have been able to bless the Sabbath with wine, then bread and then enjoy marital relations that are particularly encouraged on the Sabbath. The forbidden fruit would have been permitted when the context was right.\footnote{\cite{David Allenby, 2002}}

With this Reich also implicitly suggests that religious norms might serve as an ethical corrective for challenges in relation to new technology.

**Dolly on the Postopera Stage**

Unprecedented for the world of opera, the last Act of *Three Tales* examines cloning and the ethical issues of using technology upon the body. Here is how Act 3 *Dolly* is described by the composer: “The third tale, Dolly, will briefly show footage, text and interview comments about the cloning of an adult sheep in Scotland in 1997. It will then deal extensively with the idea of the human body as a machine, genetic engineering, technological evolution and robotics.”\footnote{\cite{Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, 2002}} The explorations of rethinking the human, questioning the limits and boundaries of the human body and how the body could be defined are represented. The body and the possibility to clone it, or to upgrade it become a metaphor of political power, and the use and abuse of that power is Reich’s and Korot’s critical concern.

The subdivisions of *Dolly* have the titles: *Cloning, Dolly, Human Body Machine, Darwin, Interlude, Robots/Cyborgs/Immortality*. Korot further explains their decision to pick up the subject: “(...) in contrast to the first two acts, ‘Dolly’ is looking within, to ourselves, to the impact of technology on our own physical bodies. And it symbolized the whole range of issues now brought about by technology to impact our bodies, not only by manipulating the basic blueprint of that body, but by actually bringing technology into our bodies.”\footnote{\cite{David Allenby, 2002}}

Here is the libretto fragment explaining the process of cloning Dolly:

\footnote{\cite{David Allenby, 2002, Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, 2002, David Allenby, 2002}}
Ruth Deech \(^{182}\) – The process is as follows
Deech – The process is as
Richard Dawkins \(^{183}\) – They removed the nucleus from an egg.
Dawkins – No genes in it at all
Deech – Take out, that DNA
James Watson \(^{184}\) – DNA is the script – DNA is script for life.

2 Sopranos: The process is as follows
Dawkins – They put in all the genes – from another cell
Deech – Which can come from the skin, the hair, anywhere you like.
Gina Kolata \(^{185}\) – They took a frozen, frozen udder cell. From a sheep that was dead
Dawkins – We, and all other animals, are machines created by our genes.
Dawkins: machines, machines, are machines (looped)
Kolata – frozen udder cell \(^{186}\)
Deech – You pop it into your enucleated egg
Deech – You then fertilize it – with a little electric shock.
Deech – It starts growing.
2 Sopranos: It starts growing
Deech – Hasn’t happened with humans, but it happened with Dolly \(^{187}\)

The words that the scientists utter seem to emphasize only the technical side of the cloning. We rather see them overwhelmed by the miraculous procedure of cloning than preoccupied with ethical issues regarding cloning, at least in the interview fragments that Reich and Korot present in Three Tales. I argue that the description of the cloning procedure and the ease with which scientists talk about it reveal them as not concerned with the consequences that cloning brings to the further

\(^{182}\) “Ruth Deech is Chair of the U.K. Human Fertilization & Embryology Authority which oversees embryo research and assisted reproduction and advises the government on related issues such as cloning. She is a Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, a trustee of the Rhodes Scholarship Trust and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine”. Quoted according to: Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, “Three Tales, Libretto”, http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html, Accessed: August 15, 2011.

\(^{183}\) “Richard Dawkins is the first Charles Simonyi Professor of Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University. His bestselling books include The Selfish Gene, The Blind Watchmaker and River out of Eden. He has won the 1987 Royal Society of Literature Award, the 1990 Michael Faraday Award, the 1994 Nakayama Award for Human Science and the 1997 International Cosmos Prize”. Quoted according to: Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, “Three Tales, Libretto”, http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html, Accessed: August 15, 2011.

\(^{184}\) “James D. Watson along with Francis Crick and Maurice Wilkins received the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1962 for their work discovering the structure of DNA. He is the author of The Double Helix and the ground breaking textbook The Molecular Biology of the Gene. He is currently President of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, New York and was the first Director of the National Center for Human Genome Research”. Quoted according to: Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, “Three Tales, Libretto”, http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html, Accessed: August 15, 2011.

\(^{185}\) “Gina Kolata has been writing about science for the New York Times for over a decade. She originally broke the story of Dolly in America and is the author of Clone - the road to Dolly and the path ahead. She has a degree in microbiology and has studied molecular biology at MIT at the graduate level. She has taught writing at Princeton University”. Quoted according to: Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, “Three Tales, Libretto”, http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html, Accessed: August 15, 2007.

\(^{186}\) Double spaced letters in this case designate that the words are reproduced by technique of slow motion sound that Reich developed. More about this technique in further text.

development of life on Earth. Unlike the scientists, the robot Kismet that was developed in the MIT laboratories that opens and (with synthesized voice) closes the act, remembers the origins of human life as outlined in Genesis. “And placed them in the Garden of Eden, to serve it and to keep it”, sings Kismet. All modifications and ‘monsterizations’ of human life that scientists talk about through this act, as well as the story of the Hindenburg airship catastrophe and the Bikini islands atomic tests that are the subjects of the first two acts, suggest that the ‘Garden of Eden’ Kismet sings about may not have been kept properly.

The possibility to design the genetic structure of the body, to produce the clone, is a scientific experiment with far-reaching cultural consequences. The fact that cloning allows the multiplication of chosen genetic material introduces the body and life to the age of their technological reproduction. The possibility to interfere with the reproduction processes and genetic structure is intensified with the possibility of the infinite genetic multiplication of the desired specimens. The birth of the first successfully cloned mammal – the sheep Dolly – opened a new era, “the age of biological control,” of producing genetically identical organisms. That raised questions about the ethics of man-made life, made an “intensification of the politics of reproduction,” showed “how scientific knowledge comes to be embodied,” and appeared as a “newly-viable form of genetic capital”. The structure of the inner universe of the body is questioned: “If Dolly were a sentence, we would need a new syntax to parse her, because her counterfactual existence troubles existing grammars of species, breed, property, and sex”. Through discussing the cloning of Dolly, Reich and Korot arrive at subjects involving the possibilities of intervening in the human body and cloning the human.

Cloning Humans, Artificial Intelligence and Religion as an Ethical Corrective

Even more unusual for the opera world than singing about cloning Dolly the sheep, Reich and Korot decided to feature some of the leading figures of science and religion as ‘protagonists’, and to expose their standpoints over the issue: “While Hindenburg uses only one 'cameo' interview from the present to comment on the past and Bikini uses none, Dolly is filled with interview fragments from members of the scientific and religious communities”. The interviewees are Richard Dawkins,

---

189 Ibid., p. 131.
190 Ibid., p. 120.
191 Ibid., p. 121.
192 Ibid., p. 120.
James D. Watson, Sherry Turkle, Kewin Warwick, Rodney Brooks, Marvin Minsky, Steven Pinker, Bill Joy, Jaron Lanier, and Adin Steinsaltz among others.

The author's criticism of the cloning confronts the pragmatic views of scientists and the spiritual views of religious experts. Religious experts talk here about the ethical issues raised by the cloning. While *Hindenburg* and *Bikini* feature archive documentary video material reworked by Korot, alongside which singing is performed, the video of *Dolly* features mainly talking heads of scientists and religious experts. Conversations with them were videotaped specifically for *Three Tales*. Reich intervenes in their speeches, reworking their vocal expressions and making them vocalists of postopera.

The intention to underline the possibilities of intervening in the 'natural' is present both in the libretto and in the realm of monstrous voices produced by the man-machine system. There is a necessity to upgrade the 'obsolete' body, and to make it more accessible and available, mobile,

---


195 “Kevin Warwick is Professor of Cybernetics at the University of Reading in the U.K. He attracted considerable attention recently when he had a small computer implant surgically put into his arm and is planning further bodily implants. He is at the forefront of those who would like to merge themselves with technology to become the first cyborgs”. Quoted according to: Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, “*Three Tales, Libretto*, [http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html](http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html), Accessed: August 15, 2011.

196 “Rodney Brooks is Director of the MIT Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, and is the Fujitsu Professor of Computer Science. His research is concerned with both the engineering of intelligent robots and with understanding human intelligence through building humanoid robots. He books include *Cambrian Intelligence* (1999) and *Flesh and Machines* published in 2002”. Quoted according to: Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, “*Three Tales, Libretto*, [http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html](http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html), Accessed: August 15, 2011.

197 “Marvin Minsky is Toshiba Professor of Media Arts and Sciences, and Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, at MIT. His research has led to both theoretical and practical advances in artificial intelligence and placed his imprint upon the entire field. He is the author of *The Society of Mind*. Since the early 1950s, he has worked on using computational ideas to characterize human psychological processes, as well as working to endow machines with intelligence”. Quoted according to: Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, “*Three Tales, Libretto*, [http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html](http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html), Accessed: August 15, 2011.

198 “Bill Joy is co-founder and Chief Scientist of Sun Microsystems. He is co-author of *The Java Language Specification* and principal designer of Berkeley Unix (BSD), the first ‘open source’ operating system. In 1997, President Clinton appointed him Co-Chairman of the Presidential Information Technology Advisory Committee. His article in Wired, ‘*Why the Future Doesn’t Need Us*’, produced a huge response and he is now at work on a book expanding this subject”. Quoted according to: Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, “*Three Tales, Libretto*, [http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html](http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html), Accessed: August 15, 2011.

199 “Jaron Lanier coined the term 'Virtual Reality'. He co-developed the first glove device for virtual world interaction and the first virtual reality applications in surgical simulation. He is a visiting artist at the Interactive Telecommunications Program of the Tisch School of the Arts, at New York University, and a visiting scholar at the Columbia University Computer Science Department”. Quoted according to: Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, “*Three Tales, Libretto*, [http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html](http://www.stevereich.com/threetales_lib.html), Accessed: August 15, 2011.

200 Previous footnotes contain quotations of short biographies of the interviewed persons. They are at the same time evidences of how Reich and Korot perceive the interviewees. Those short biographies are in this case poetical portraits to some extent as well.
digital. The significant impact of technology on corporeality is implied by the libretto, and the following fragments illustrate it:

Ray Kurzweil: Technology is a continuation of evolution
Kurzweil: we can create things
Kurzweil: far faster than biological evolution
Kurzweil: can create something more intelligent than ourselves
Kurzweil: intelligent machines.
Kurzweil: machines, machines, intelligent, ‘telligent machines (looped)\(^{201}\)
(...) Kurzweil: If I scan your brain, download that information, I’ll have a little you, right here in my personal computer."
Kewin Warwick: The human body is extremely limited. I would love to upgrade myself, (...) Marvin Minsky: You go and buy this module at the mind store, have it connected to your brain and then you do four or five part counterpoint; (...)\(^{202}\)

Moreover, Act 3 opens and closes with the robot Kismet, who is capable of talking and performing simple gestures. The appearance of the robot at the same time denies the human body and imitates it, becoming its humanoid robot.

Figure 3 – From *Three Tales*, video opera by Beryl Korot and Steve Reich. Image by Beryl Korot. Act 3, *Dolly*, robot Kismet


\(^{202}\) Ibid.
It is important to be aware of the religious perspective that artists present. For example, Reich and Korot always use the inscription of the word God as „G-d” in the projected written text of the libretto. This transcription may be seen as an insistence on the holiness attached to God’s name. From the point of view of religion, the question of the power to create a human being as a clone is problematical. This power, taken from the metaphysical world of religion to the pragmatic world of science, is what concerns Reich and Korot ethically and politically. The words of the biophysicist and philosopher Henri Atlan from the libretto appear as a possible response by Reich and Korot to these issues:

**Henri Atlan:** The Prophet Jeremiah

**Atlan:** decided

**Atlan:** to build

**Atlan:** an artificial man

**Atlan:** he was perfect

**Atlan:** was able to talk

**Atlan:** immediately he talked to Jeremiah

**Atlan:** and he ask him

**Atlan:** “What did you do?”

**Atlan:** “Well, look, I have succeeded”

**Atlan:** Say, “No, no no, is not good.”

**Atlan:** “From now on

**Atlan:** when people will meet other people in the street

**Atlan:** they will not know

**Atlan:** whether you made them

**Atlan:** or G-d made them”

**Atlan:** “Undo – me”

**Atlan:** So that’s what Jeremiah did.

Reich is explicit about the power to create human life in his comments on the issues elaborated in *Dolly*: „What’s interesting are the potentially useful and the undoubtedly terrifying genetic possibilities floating around now. For instance: are we going to continue to sexually reproduce or are we going to go to the baby store? This seems to be on the way. Would you like to live forever?” He is obviously suspicious about developments concerning ‘human machines’ and genetic engeneering.

Although the sheep Dolly physically appears to be an animal similar to other animals of the same species, the knowledge about its genetic structure reveals her ‘monstrosity’. Its ‘artificiality’ arouses fear. And the main cause of that fear could be the inability to predict how the artificial might

---

203 God’s name in Hebrew is supposed to be written in particular way and with particular respect. Choosing to write ‘G-d’ instead of ‘God’ in English might be seen as a way to show respect towards that tradition. Also, Hebrew script specifies the consonants, and not the vowels.


behave, and how it would be possible to control it. Writing on the human and the inhuman, Agamben underlines the potentiality of power issues that arise: “(...) it is not so much a matter of asking which of the two machines (or of the two variants of the same machine) is better or more effective – or, rather, less lethal and bloody - as it is of understanding how they work so that we might, eventually, be able to stop them.”\(^{206}\) Reich and Korot imply that Dolly is a kind of monster but it becomes obvious that their main concern is the prospect of cloning the human.

The monstrosity of distorted voices in *Three Tales* underlines the subjects of the libretto of *Dolly*. I read the way vocal expression and body-voice relationship are treated in *Three Tales* as expressions of the authors' concern about, and critique of, the monstrous perspective of the scientific development of cloning-related issues. I perceive distorted voices in *Three Tales* as Reich's representation of how the monstrous human, the clone, might sound. In what follows I will discuss the notion of the monstrous and its restaging, according to Bojana Kunst. That notion, as defined by Kunst, allows me to develop the monstrous voice concept.

**Dissecting Voice: Hearing the Monstrous Body**

Kunst explores the “generative potential of the monstrous” that is “being subjected to contemporary economic and political power”\(^{207}\). Monstrous is other than human, and a symptom of rethinking the human. “The monstrous becomes the ‘ever present possibility to destroy the natural order of authority’ not because it is some externalized other which has to be swept into the arms of regulating order, but because it is the constant production of otherness in the very human being, so that the human can recognize and define itself.”\(^{208}\) The political preoccupation with the monstrous is its domestication, “evidence of which can be found in the ways in which the other (animal, slave, machine, woman, etc.) is continuously humanized to reflect back the face of ‘our’ own (white, western and male) humanity”\(^{209}\).

The political dimension of the monstrous is intriguing: “Politically, monstrous bodies serve the purpose of demonstrating what is and is not ‘human’.”\(^{210}\) Kunst claims that “The monstrous becomes a public object because it has a special function in the sphere of politics: its role is connected to establishing the political division between the human and non-human, where domestication, civilization and culturalization of the monstrous will play a decisive role.”\(^{211}\) Domestication, civilization and culturalization of the monstrous may also affect this division between human and monstrous. Kunst claims that “The monstrous can therefore be understood to be a

---


\(^{208}\) Ibid., p. 215.

\(^{209}\) Idem.

\(^{210}\) Ibid., p. 214.

\(^{211}\) Idem.
consequence of a political/ontological apparatus of separation which may disclose to us the difference between human and non-human.”

In relation to this, Agamben concludes that “Homo sapiens, is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human.”

According to Kunst, the human carries monstrosity as a constituent part it embodies a division between the human and the monstrous: “The caesura inside the human turns out to be visible. The monstrous shows us that the caesura is not between the human and the outside, but is always internal and shifting: human is constitutively inhuman.” Kunst, however, does not mention a monstrous voice. Perhaps as a result of representations of the monstrous in popular culture – often abundant with terrifying voices and sounds – it is hard to imagine the silent monster. If the division within the human turns out to be visible, it is also, and sometimes primarily, audible. The voice produces an identity, and human identity is problematized when the monstrous voice is heard emerging from the human body. The monstrous voice contains inhuman impurity, the terrifying friction of inhuman noise. The internal caesura within the human that Kunst is writing about is manifested by the monstrous voice, too.

There are two novel procedures that are applied to the voices in *Three Tales*. Reich invented them during the ‘sixties, but they became technically possible only recently. One of them is slow motion sound, where the succession of sound events is elongated but the pitch of the voice stays the same. “The basic idea was to take a tape loop, probably of speech, and ever so gradually slow it down to enormous length without lowering its pitch”. Reich explains his preoccupation with slow motion sound as a largely abstract interest in dissecting the medium of tape, in comparison to film tape: „The roots of this idea date from 1963 when I first became interested in experimental films, and began looking at film as analog to tape. Extreme slow motion seemed particularly interesting, since it allowed one to see minute details that were normally impossible to observe“. The other procedure is equivalent to the process of making film stills. Sound is ‘stopped’ and the last syllable lasts considerably longer than would be appropriate for the conventional pronunciation of the word in question. It is the sound equivalent of a film freeze frame, in that a single vowel or consonant is extended for a long time, leaving a kind of audible vapor trail behind each speaker that becomes

---

212 Idem.
216 Ibid., p. 28.
part of the overall harmony.\textsuperscript{218} Both procedures would not be possible without the aid of technology.

These two procedures are combined on a pre-recorded tape with different ways of singing and speaking, both live and pre-recorded, and also with different appearances of written accompanying text that is featured on the video.\textsuperscript{219} Slow motion sound is mainly featured in the first two acts, while in Dolly, and once in Bikini, the procedure with freeze frame sound is mostly used.\textsuperscript{220} The procedures of 'slow motion sound' and 'freeze frame sound' could also be considered as a kind of dissection of the voice. Dissection according to Bleeker is “(...) to take apart, to analyze, and to examine how (...) ‘just looking’ is produced”.\textsuperscript{221} Dissection could be taken as the general procedure Reich applies to the voices, too. The voice has been taken apart, molecularized by a 'slow motioning' or 'freezing' of its recording. We hear its 'molecules' (sound particles) slow down and the intonations change. We also hear the breathing sounds that are impossible to hear while listening to speech of normal speed.

The voice was also analyzed in terms of its connection with the intonation of the enunciated text, meticulously engraving those intonations in both the vocal and instrumental part of the music. The connection between dissection and the monstrosity of the voice lies in the technological means used. Dissecting a voice means perceiving it from a different perspective that enables its molecularization. If it had been possible to literally dissect the voice together with its respective body, I would assume the sound would be similar to the distorted voices in \textit{Three Tales}.

\textsuperscript{219} The way Reich generates the melodic materials of \textit{Three Tales} is closely connected to the melody and rhythm of the text used. His groundbreaking works \textit{Come Out} (1966) and \textit{It's Gonna Rain} (1965) were based on the usage of phasing compositional technique to the recorded vocal units. With \textit{Different Trains} (1988) for string quartet and tape, Reich developed this technique further. Fragmented melodies played by the strings were extracted from the melody of the spoken words pre-recorded on the tape that is heard simultaneously with live performance. In the video documentary opera \textit{Cave} (1994), he used this procedure for the first time in a piece of musical theatre, and with \textit{Three Tales} the technique was developed in complex relations between the speech, speech melody, singing, projected words and projected images.
\textsuperscript{221} Maaike Bleeker, \textit{The Locus of Looking, Dissecting Visuality in the Theatre}, Academisch Proefschrift, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2002, p. 16.
Behind the singers on the stage of this postopera is the video projection. The singers’ role in the dramaturgy of the scenic events is marginalized since they do not represent any character in the ‘story’ - they are just emitters of the voice. Apart from the live singing of three tenors and two sopranos, there are vocal manifestations that are close to singing in their expressivity, but are derived from speech, and intensified with various effects.²²² Those voices are able to perform beyond the possibilities of the body they originate from. The collision of live singing and the technologically manipulated voice, in this case, creates a result that reflects the division within the human discussed by Kunst.

Commenting upon the museums which contained mechanisms of optical distortion common during the Baroque period, Kunst concludes about their purpose: “They were mechanisms for recognition: only when the spectator can see himself as (for example) an animal, can he really define

²²² I have registered eleven different ways of how voices appear in Three Tales: 1) Voices of three tenors singing a capella, without instrumental accompaniment or pre-recorded sound, without any technological interventions to the voices; 2) Voices of three tenors singing live with the pre-recorded sound of instrumental accompaniment; 3) Voices singing the text with an instrumental accompaniment, with the text projected on the screen as in karaoke; 4) Instrumental melody extracted from the sound of a spoken text, the words of which are projected simultaneously on the screen as in karaoke, following the rhythm of the speech of the text; 5) Voice speaking, projected from an archive recording, with no accompaniment or other interventions (American soldier in Bikini); 6) Artificial voice singing without an accompaniment (robot Kismet, Act 3); 7) Voices of scientists speaking over instrumental music, without interventions to the voices (Act 3); 8) Voices of scientists over an instrumental accompaniment, with interventions to the voices (repetitions, freeze frame sound, slow motion sound); 9) Voices of scientists over instrumental drones, with subtitles of the text projected on screen (Henri Atlan appearance in Act 3); 10) Voices speaking over the instrumental accompaniment and vocal accompaniment (Dawkins, towards the end of Act 3); 11) Voice speaking over another voice speaking (both with repetitive interventions) over an instrumental accompaniment (with Cynthia Breazeal and Marvin Minsky, towards the end of Act 3).
what he is". Three Tales appears as a kind of ‘museum’ that contains mechanisms for vocal distortion. Although the listener/spectator cannot hear him/herself there, as the spectator was able to see/hear him/herself in the case of visual distortion that Kunst describes, s/he hears how distorted the human voice sounds. Those distorted voices evoke monstrous bodies as their generators. Thus, Three Tales is a symbolic machine displaying what is and is not human and maybe also what human should not be.

Singing Machine
While looking into the relationship between body and voice as one that restages the monstrous, I was intrigued by the possibility of illuminating Reich’s intention to ‘monsterize’ the voice in Three Tales with insights about speaking machines by Brigitte Felderer. I am interested in the similarity between the effects of the voice that does not come (or only partly comes) from the human body in those two cases.

Since the late 18th century there were several attempts to construct speaking machines, automatons, that would be able to imitate human speech. Felderer offers an overview of the work of those authors who achieved significant results in the field. Mathematician Leonhard Euler (1707-1783) in his 1761 letter to a German princess contemplates the possibilities of constructing a speaking mechanism. Mathematician Christian Gottlieb Kratzenstein (1723-1795) was a physicist and anatomist who won the prize with equipment able to produce and differentiate vowel sounds. The apparatus included ‘(...) separate and distinctly shaped pipe for each vowel: the form of these pipes was modelled on the respective position and cross-section of the oral cavity as it produced the individual sounds.” The position of the pipes somewhat imitated the structure of vocal apparatus.

Another scientist researching in the field was Christoph Friedrich Hellwag (1754-1835), the physician, theologian and naturalist who „was working on a model to explain the mechanism of human speech.”

The best known was Wolfgang von Kempelen’s (1734-1804) speaking machine, whose construction began in 1769. As a finalized product, this mechanism resembled some kind of musical instrument that produced the desired sounds according to movements of the instrumentalists’ fingers: „This machine should perhaps be thought of as musical rather than a mechanical device, since it relied upon the skilled application of the hands and fingers of its operator to produce the rather rudimentary sounds it did”. Along with the machine, Kempelen also wrote a treatise

---

225 Ibid., p. 160.
226 Steven Connor, Dumbstruck, p. 351.
addressed to the general public which might generate interest in producing a human voice that does not originate from the human body.

Interestingly, the purposes of all the above-mentioned machines and mechanisms were quite different:

Euler imagined that his future speaking machine would be used within the political public sphere. Kratzenstein’s vowel machine provided a first step toward an explanatory model of the functioning of the human organs of speech. For Hellwag, such an apparatus represented an input-output construction which would have allowed the production of the sounds of speech (if these had been translated into precise operating instructions) anywhere and at any time – independent from the body of a native speaker. (...) Kempelen, however, wanted to use his speaking machine to teach the deaf to speak and to assist those with difficulties in pronunciation (...).

Two aspects of the use of speaking machines are particularly interesting: 1) the political aspect and 2) the uneasiness that is caused by the gap existing between the human-like voice and mechanical device. I can see a similarity between the effect those machines produced and the effect that electronically transformed singing voices in Three Tales produce.

I am intrigued by the particular reactions to mechanical voices:

You will not believe, my dear friend, the peculiar sensation that overcame us upon our first hearing a human voice and human language which did not appear to come from a human mouth. We looked at each other mutely, in shock, and confessed to each other afterwards that at first a shiver had run down our spines.

I am interested in what produces that shiver. Reich describes a similar effect when he talks about the deformation of the vocal sphere in Three Tales. When he describes Act 1 – Hindenburg, he explains the structure where three tenors sing live in an augmentation canon on the words „It could not have been a technical matter“, the words of the German ambassador to the New York Times when the Zeppelin exploded. Reich is particularly interested in the aspect of vowel sounds when they are slowed down, as he discovered that they actually are glissandi, sliding up or down. In ‘normal’ speech, that glissando is not detectable. The voice of Herb Morrison, radio announcer, joins the three tenors, and is gradually slowed down. Reich makes an interesting comment in the context of the monstrosity of the voice, explaining the aforementioned shivering: „(...) Morrison’s manic voice is enormously slowed down, you hear these glissandi, in the vowels sort of smearing against the

---

tonally stable voices of the tenors. The effect, when coupled with images of the explosion in slow motion, is definitely unsettling”.

That unsettling effect needs an explanation. And the explanation, I believe, is what, according to Connor, makes the „temptation to attribute personality to it [the voice] irresistible.”

When the voice appears as monstrous, the representation of the monstrous body it evokes produces an unsettling effect. Connor also mentions in relation to automatic speaking mechanisms that „none of these talking machines had made much attempt to look like talking heads”. On the other hand, as Connor also writes in connection with the case of one of the speaking mechanism’s experiments „What is disturbing, perhaps, is the very obviousness of the mechanism, in which appearance is heightened into apparition. (...) The voice that is squeezed out through the dead materials of the mechanism becomes the voice of the mechanism’s protest against animation, the voice of its resistance to voice”.

The freeze framed and slow motioned voices of Three Tales sound unsettling and monstrous, yet at the same time they are the voices of Reich’s protest against monsterization. There is no apparent political dimension in what those voices say or sing about. But there is the politicality of Three Tales and the voices in it. I am interested in the monstrous voices of Three Tales as an aspect that ‘speaks’ about this piece’s orientation, positioning and effect in the public sphere of society. In that light, I perceive monstrous voices in Three Tales as a critique of monsterization whether that monsterization is read from cloning, fascism (Hindenburg) or violent atomic tests (Bikini). In order to see what the further strategies and tactics of monstrous voices are I will discuss Three Tales in the light of the concept of the politics of the voice by Mladen Dolar.

---

230 Steven Connor, Dumbstruck, p. 351.
231 Ibid.
232 Steven Connor, Dumbstruck, p. 355.
233 Evoking concepts of philosopher Jacques Rancière, theatre scholar Ana Vujanović discusses the difference between politicality and politics of the art work. According to Vujanović, politicality is the aspect of artistic work, discourse, art work or project that refers to its orientation, positioning and effect in the public sphere of the society. It addresses society’s structure, distribution of power, ideological discourses, subjects that constitute it, or are excluded from it. Vujanović claims that politicality is inevitable aspect of any art work that exists in public sphere of society; she designates as political art specific artistic activity that brings interests for political questions. Ana Vujanović, “Politicality of Art: Police and Politics, Strategies and Tactics”, Deschooled Knowledge – Summer school, lecture manuscript, Herceg Novi, 09.08.2010.
Politics of the Monstrous Voice

The political dimension of *Three Tales* is divided between the political activism of its narratives (the sphere of political art) and the effects produced by sung voices, written texts and documentary images (the sphere of politicality). The fact that political issues emphasizing sovereign power like the Hindenburg and the Bikini atomic tests are brought to the opera stage initiates a discussion of how those events are represented in opera, and in particular how they are sung about.

Mladen Dolar starts the discussion on the politics of the voice with the claim that “(...) the very institution of the political depends on a certain division of the voice, a division within the voice, its partition.” He finds the political force of the voice in its division between meaning and sounding. The division Dolar mentions is between phone and logos: the mere voice and speech as intelligible voice. The dichotomy between phone and logos Dolar brings into connection with the biopolitical “opposition between two forms of life: zoe and bios” explaining that “Zoe is naked life, bare life, life reduced to animality; bios is life in the community, in the polis, political life.” In connection with the relation between the voice and speech, Dolar elaborates, recalling Agamben, that there is no such simple externality: the basic structure, the topology of the political, for Agamben, is that of an “inclusive exclusion” of naked life “(...) just as the voice is not simply an element external to speech, but persists at its core, making it possible and constantly haunting it by the impossibility of symbolizing it”.

Whether elaborating issues of the linguistics or the politics of the voice, Dolar discusses the dualistic principle upon which the voice is built. Evoking an anecdote about Italian soldiers who, on hearing an order, disobey it, neglecting to hear its meaning because they are fascinated by the beauty of the voice, Dolar emphasizes two main functions of the voice: “the voice as the vehicle of meaning and the voice as the source of aesthetic admiration”, and theorizes about the third one, ‘the object voice’. He states that the voice stands on the axis of our social bonds; he investigates the progression from voice to meaning. In opera in general, I argue, the division between the two main functions of the voice, as Dolar sees them, becomes evident, since the act of singing enlarges the gap between the meaning of the sung text and the melody assigned to that text. The meaning of the text often becomes incomprehensible due to the high pitches. Even when the comprehensibility

---

235 Ibid., p. 106.
236 Idem.
237 Ibid., p. 4.
238 Ibid., p. 16.
of the words is preserved, however, asking the written/spoken text to be sung is to maintain the gap between the meaning of the text and the corporeality of the sound that stands behind it.

In both of those previously mentioned functions of the voice (vehicle of meaning, and source of aesthetic admiration), Dolar sees a lack of understanding of the voice: if there is only interest in the meaning of the words the voice conveys, then the physical dimension of the voice is ignored. On the other hand, the aesthetization of the voice turns it into something of a fetish. Thus, Dolar focuses on the object voice. He defines it by showing what it is not: “(...) there is no meaning that could be assigned to it (...), it does not have the function of a signifier, since it presents precisely a nonsignifying reminder, something resisting the signifying operations (...) this remnant has nothing to do with some irreducible individuality of the voice, the personal surplus over the standard mold. (...) Nor is it reducible to what Barthes has called ‘the grain of the voice’ (...).” 239 Dolar finds the embodiment of the concept of the object voice in aphonia, a hysterical symptom that shows one loosing control over the voice, producing enforced silence “(...) the silence that, all the more, makes the object voice appear, maybe in its pure form (...).” 240 The object voice, as I understand it from Dolar’s writings, is corporeality structured into the language.

Back to Dolar’s claim that the very institution of the political depends on a certain division of the voice, a division or partition within the voice, I note that the way voices appear in *Three Tales* favours a triple division:

- between ‘natural’ and ‘artificial’ voices (freeze framed and slow motioned voices);
- between live-performed and projected voices;
- between the meaning of the text the voice carries and the sounding of the voice (voices we hear singing the text that is often doubled by the written texts on the screen);

*Three Tales* appears as an archive of different relations between the body, the voice, singing, speaking, writing and also the visuality of the text. When speech is used, it is often enhanced by instrumental support, melodizing its words in the rhythm of speech. In light of Dolar’s theory, I will now discuss the division between the meaning of the voice and the sounding of the voice in *Three Tales*, emphasized by doubling the singing with a written text on the screen that is projected following the rhythm of music, rather as in karaoke.

What follows is the excerpt from the libretto at the beginning of Act 1, *Hindenburg*. The words from the libretto text are ‘drummed out’, typed rhythmically on the screen while drums accompany them in the rhythm of the words’ pronunciation.

---

240 Ibid., p. 15.

3 tenors: It could not have been a technical matter

Headline: Dr. Hans Luther, the German Ambassador, said the disaster must not cause the world to loose faith in dirigibles and that it could not have been a technical matter.\(^{241}\)

When the three tenors part starts, the words they sing are also typed on the screen in the rhythm of singing. There is a doubling of the spoken/sung text by the written text being placed on the screen. This distinctive procedure is used throughout Three Tales. The doubling is often ‘drummed out’ in the rhythm of the text’s pronunciation as in karaoke, but sometimes it also appears as a static text or text collage on the screen. This doubling of the sung text with its written inscription emphasizes the division between the phonetic and the semantic. By writing out the text, its meaning appears more distant from how the text sounds than would be the case if it were only sung. The meaning of the text is emphasized by its written form, while the sung text insists on its phonetic dimension. While I hear the voice, I read the text to catch up with the meaning.

Dolar writes that: "(...) the voice appears as the link which ties the signifier to the body"\(^{242}\) and that “the first obvious quality of the voice is that it fades away the moment it is produced” which makes the body both its birth and death place at the same time.\(^{243}\) If this is true, then 'karaoking' the text to the sung voice could be interpreted as an attempt to emphasize the meaning of the sung text, but also to prolong, to intensify the duration of the ‘life of the voice’. Having in mind that the sound of the voice is constantly problematized by pre-recorded interventions, the written text appears to recall what is undone by freeze-frame and slow motion sound procedures. The voice appears between its fetish and semantic functions that are both problematized: the voice sounds monstrous, and the meaning of the text does not need to be inferred from the voice, since most often it can be simultaneously read from the screen. The technologically enhanced singing body is heard through this fissure between sound of the voice and the meaning of the text it carries, and the effect the deformed voice brings is unsettling.

---

I perceive the monstrosity of the voices performed through procedures of slow motion sound and freeze frame sound in this postopera as a critique of the monstrosity that authors find in


\(^{243}\) Ibid.
taking the power to create life from God and giving it to science. The unsettling effect those distorted voices of postopera produce is similar to the effect that some of the speaking mechanisms produced before, such as Connor and Felderer wrote about. To hear a voice that is not produced by the human body is a situation that provokes questions. Through monsterization of the voices the intelligibility of the words is corrupted. The monstrous voice produces a shivering effect, and that effect appears as a critique of monstrosity. The meaning of the distorted text could be easily followed from the projected text on the screen. The division between the sounding of this text and its meaning is emphasized, and the politicality of the voice, its ability to intervene into the public sphere, is performed.

By commenting on the political distribution of power, Reich and Korot question if it is at all possible in today’s world for the artist to act as a political individual, and if so, what should the strategies and effects of that activism be. The video-documentary opera *Three Tales* raises questions about political activism in opera. They make their operatic work a field for expressing their acts as political individuals. What is expressed by the text of the libretto is the resistance to the governing platforms of political power and the disagreement of the artists with some conditions, effects and strategies of Western civilization. If Reich and Korot’s comments about the political distribution of power were sung by traditional operatic voices, the effect would have been much different, and not adversely critical, I dare to suggest. Using the monstrous singing voice is what gives their critique its sharp edge. If, according to Steinsaltz’s words used in the libretto, every creature does indeed have a song, or a voice to sing with, Reich and Korot warn us how terrible the voice of artificial humanity may sound. Vocally performing the horror of artificial life, hearing it through non-human, deformed human voice, is what makes their critique poignant, memorable, and effective in influencing the public sphere and the distribution of power within it.

As I showed in Part 1, in both *One* and *Three Tales* the vocalic body has been reinvented. In both of them the voices appear beyond the body that produces them, and the singing reveals the body that has been upgraded by technology. In *One* the effect of such a reinvented mismatch is at the same time an enhancement of performing abilities and a denial of the performer’s uniqueness. *One* demonstrates a fascination with prosthetic relations and with the ways they improve the performativity of the human body and the voice in their mutual relationship. In *Three Tales*, however, the fascination is negative, and the way the body-voice relationship is reinvented I read as an artist’s warning that humanity in incapable of adequately responding to the power challenges that technology brings. A monstrous voice enables this postopera to function as a critique of monstrosity, which the authors see in power-related usage of technology, especially in cloning and genetic engineering.
Part 2 - THROWING THE VOICE, CATCHING THE BODY: OPERA, VENTRiloQUIsm AND DE-SYNCHRONIZATION
Chapter 4

Operatizing the Film: Body without Voice and Voice without Body

In part 2 I am interested in the ventriloquial relationship between bodies and voices that appears as the result of purposely obtained de-synchronization. My theoretical objects are two postoperas in which de-synchronization between what is seen and what is heard on stage plays a central role: *La Belle et la Bête* by Philip Glass and *Writing to Vermeer* by Louis Andriessen, Peter Greenaway, Saskia Boddeke, and Michel van der Aa. In both of those pieces several bodies refer to a single singing voice simultaneously. In *La Belle et la Bête* the live singing voice ‘belongs’ at the same time both to live singers on stage and projected film characters. In *Writing to Vermeer* triplicated acting characters on stage ‘share’ the same voice. A similar situation happens to the live singing body and its simultaneous video projection in Scene 2, when the character of Saskia first appears, singing live and video-projected at the same time.

Philip Glass’s opera for ensemble and film *La Belle et la Bête* was composed for his own Ensemble alongside Jean Cocteau’s film of the same title (1946), which itself is based upon Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont’s 18th-century fairy tale. The film in this situation resembles a ventriloquist’s dummy: muted, all sound from the film removed (including the music originally composed by Georges Auric), but with a sound whose source is elsewhere – synchronised through the singers and the live playing of the Philip Glass Ensemble. Glass synchronises the singing voice and instrumental music to the film image of the speaking body, and he achieves an unusual operatic result that relies on the logic of synchronization and its multiple embodiments, between what is seen and what is heard, opera and film, live and reproduced, human and animal. It is not in the singing style that a significant change is marked in Glass’s piece compared with, for example, French neoclassic operas; what has changed is the status of the vocalic body and its function in the opera. It reveals a new methodology in the creation of an operatic work that might expose the voice as a replaceable object, reinventable, and possibly ‘transplantable’ to another body.

---


245 *La Belle et la Bête* is the second part of the operatic trilogy that Glass made using Jean Cocteau’s movies, a trilogy in which he is concerned with the relationship between opera and film. It includes: *Orphée*, “a chamber opera in two acts for ensemble and soloists” (1993) and *Les Enfants Terribles*, “a dance opera for soloists, ensemble and dancers” (1996).
My investigation of how the reinvention of the singing body has been done in this case and what its consequences might be will rely on the body–voice relationship purposely obtained through (de)synchronization. I will show that the body-voice relationship is central to this as it reworks the opera and its world. The (de)synchronization of the singing body and the voice in this case indexes the power of this opera to examine representational mechanisms of both film and opera, while using them to change its own status and economy.
I will first show what it means to operatize the film, to reveal the concept and procedures on which *La Belle et la Bête* is based and which affect the body–voice relationship.\(^{246}\) This will be followed by a discussion of synchronization in relation to dubbing and playback: I focus on questions on the looseness of synchronization between the operatic singing bodies and their (dis)embodied voices in this case, and the ventriloquial dimension that exists between them. I explore (de)synchronous relations between the presence of the body and of the voice in *La Belle et la Bête*, and the implications that a reinvented body-voice construct produces. I also demonstrate, with the help of Giorgio Agamben’s theory, how the relationship between man and animal embodied in the Beast is represented vocally, and that despite all the efforts to synchronise image and sound the gap between the body and the voice remains.\(^{247}\) I discuss this gap in opera in the context of ventriloquism. I use Michel Chion’s theory of the acousmatic voice to show how estrangement of the voice that appears to come from elsewhere than its apparent source produces meaning, and questions opera’s potential to use other media and their mechanisms of representation.\(^{248}\) Finally, I postulate a new model for the conceptualization of the body-voice relationship in this piece through analogy to how Rick Altman uses the concept of ventriloquism in film theory: the operatic music composed by Philip Glass is a ventriloquist who takes someone else’s ‘dummy’ (moving images of Cocteau’s film in this case).\(^{249}\) Glass’s music is attached to Cocteau’s film in synchronization to create the illusion that the singing is produced by the characters of silent film.

Before proceeding to the analysis, here is the plot of this fairy tale. A merchant father has three daughters, of whom the two elder are mean, but the youngest one, La Belle, is beautiful and lovable. On a journey home the father gets lost in the woods, enters the enchanted Beast’s castle, and picks up a rose for La Belle there; however, the rose belongs to the Beast who becomes enraged when he discovers that the flower is missing. The father is set free, but under the condition that one of his daughters will come to take his place, as a sacrifice in his stead. It follows that La Belle arrives at the enchanted castle, first horrified by, but gradually falling in love with the Beast. Her love saves him from his curse, the spells which have trapped him in beastly form, allowing him to be transformed back into a prince; and as often happens in fairytales, they continue to live happily ever after.

\(^{246}\) I understand the term ‘operatized’ in analogy to the term filmed. The opera could be filmed, made into the medium of film. In analogy, the film, or the painting could be ‘operatized’ - made into the medium of opera.


Operatizing the Film

There have been many examples of filmed operas, where the film has been based upon the story of an already existing opera, and with the existing operatic music. Normally after the film has been shot and edited, music and singing are synchronised to it. So, there is a ‘new’ film to which ‘old’ music is attached. The reverse of this, making an opera of a film, is presented by La Belle et la Bête. The procedure of operatizing a film goes in the opposite direction to filming operas. In this case Glass took an extant film and composed new operatic music for it. Although at first sight the final result of these two procedures might look similar – in both cases we see moving images synchronised with music and singing – there are striking differences, since moving images that are being made to match the sound (filmed operas) carry different meanings from the inverse, where sound has been made to match the image (operatized film). I would even claim that filmed operas primarily question the medium of film and its ability to explore different relationships between sound and image, while operatized film rather belongs to the world of opera and its reinvention. Glass himself underlines that La Belle is the piece of music theatre:

There are moments when Beauty is on the screen and our [the Ensemble’s] Beauty is looking up at her, and I could almost cry. Then there’s the scene where the Beast is dying and our Beast is singing, and the two of them together make you realize that this is a music-theater experience, not just a film. There will never be a film of the final, synchronized version of this production. There already is a soundtrack to the original film by Georges Auric, whereas mine is a music-theater work with a film. And I think that the counterpoint between performer and image is wonderful.

In relation to this work, Kramer’s comment that “whereas the movies subsume the vocal under the visual, opera does the reverse”, becomes irrelevant. The vocal and visual elements in La Belle et la Bête do not exist in a relationship of subordination; rather they co-exist in a synchronicity of audiovisual ‘polyphony’.

Glass synchronised the sung text to the unchanged original dialogues (in French) that the silent actors in the film enunciate. Here is how he explains his procedure:

I took the film and put a time code on it, timed every line in it, wrote down the libretto (which is not the same as the published one, since

---

250 Some famous examples of filmed operas are: W.A. Mozart’s Magic Flute (1975) directed by Ingmar Bergman; Bizet’s Carmen (1984) directed by Francesco Rossi; and Verdi’s Otello (1986) and Mascagni’s Cavaleria Rusticana (1982) directed by Franko Zeffirelli.


I wanted the words that were in the film), I timed every word, I placed it mathematically in the score (...) and then when I got done, Michael Riesman and I recorded it and put it up against the film and discovered it wasn’t accurate enough. So we began using computers to move the vocal line around until it synched with the lips, and then I had to rewrite the music in order to achieve a better synchronization. Then Michael had to teach it all to the singers and they had to learn to do it live. 253

Glass describes how he ‘transplanted’ his operatic music to Cocteau’s film, and that ‘transplantation’ is heavily reliant on a synchronization process. The frequency of occurrence and the speed of dialogue to be synchronised seems to be crucial for successful operatizing in the manner that Glass deployed: dialogue should not be too frequent nor rapid, because that can make synchronization of music and singing to the filmic images hard to achieve. Since the velocity of speech in general is often higher than the velocity of singing, it might easily make singing too quick to perform, and perhaps grotesque at the same time. For these reasons, it is difficult to imagine that many films could be operatized in this way.

Glass might have chosen this particular movie for his ‘experiment’ since it already has operatic potential, as Joe reflected: “(...) it has little dialogue. Moreover, Cocteau’s dialogue is stylized rather than naturalistic without much simultaneous talking by more than one character. This is an advantage for an operatic adaptation in terms of the clarity of the text”. 254 The enunciation time of the spoken dialogue, especially between the principal characters, seems closer in their rapidity to the enunciation time of singing than to that of speech, allowing the composer to bridge the gap between the sung and spoken body more easily. Moreover, this fairy-tale film resembles conventional opera productions in the slow movements of the actors and the puppet-like appearance of the characters, especially both Beauty and the Beast, who are heavily made-up, with wigs and voluminous costumes. Finally, the plot of La Belle et la Bête is widely known, an archetype that enables the audience to follow it easily, even if does not understand the sung words, which can often be the case in opera.

This piece exists in two modalities: 1) when it is performed live, and 2) when it is played from DVD. When it is performed live by the ensemble and singers (from here I will designate this version of the piece as the ‘live synchronised version’), Cocteau’s film is projected onto a screen forming the backdrop of the stage, while onstage the score is simultaneously performed by the singers and the ensemble. Operatic characters lend their musical identity to their cinematic ‘doubles’

and film characters share the text of the words they enunciate with opera characters. The singers’ ‘non-mimetic’ bodies, bodies “that do not point to anything beyond themselves”, are on stage just to produce the voice that is to be synchronised with the film. Each voice sings simultaneously as an operatic and cinematic character.

The postopera La Belle et la Bête, however, is not necessarily meant to be experienced live. Viewed via DVD format, the live performance of vocal soloists and instrumental ensemble is absent and the singing voices have been synchronised with the film in the studio. The synchronization is in this case recorded and permanent (from here I designate this version of the opera as ‘invariantly synchronised’). In both modalities the synchronization is loose, but what differs is the method of synchronization. This second modality of the work functions also as a film/sound inscription reproduced in an operatic context, an operatic spectacle that can be endlessly repeated outside the specific institutions of opera. In this case there is no live performance, but still this modality is not reducible to just a recording of the opera. It resembles the filmed opera, but it differs significantly from it as well. The liveness of the operatic experience, and the social rituals of visiting the opera house, are excluded by this version.

The situation created by Glass in La Belle et la Bête produces an unusual ‘visible’ acousmêtre. Writing on the implications of the voice in film, Chion specifies the term acousmatic as being “said of a sound that is heard without its cause or source being seen.” Chion also claims that “(...) it turns out that the mute, the body without a voice, displays many attributes of his counterpart, the voice without body, the acousmatic voice, the voice of one we do not see.” Although the process of synchronization is stressed in La Belle et la Bête, especially through loose synchronization, the position of the voice insists on ‘becoming acousmatic’. In this case, when considering the Cocteau film characters, the acousmatic voice becomes paradoxically, to paraphrase Chion, ‘the voice of one we do not hear’. When watching/listening to this opera from a DVD recording, the situation is a bit different. In this invariantly synchronised version, a voice without

256 According to Chion, acousmêtre is the one that produces acousmatic sound, the sound whose origin is unknown. Michel Chion, The Voice in Cinema, New York, Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 21.
257 The acousmatic voice is another concept that deals with the relation of voice-body gap. It is defined as “a voice in search of an origin, in search of a body”, a voice without a visible source, according to. Mladen Dolar, A Voice and Nothing More, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, MIT Press, 2006, p. 60. The term acousmatic was first introduced by French composer Pierre Schaeffer, and later used by composer and theorist Michel Chion. Underlining that Chion “compares the de-acousmatisation to striptease” (Mladen Dolar, A Voice and Nothing More, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, The MIT Press, 2006, p. 68), Dolar comes to the conclusion that “there is no such thing as de-acousmatisation” because “the source of the voice can never be seen, it stems from an undisclosed and structurally concealed interior, it cannot possibly match that we can see” (Dolar, 2006, p. 70).
visible origin is attached to the body of the movie character, and the acousmatic dimension of the voice is multiplied. At the same time it is a voice of one I cannot hear (a movie character) and I cannot see (a recorded singer/performer); and, paradoxically, I can still hear (recorded singers) and see (movie characters) but without their bodies and voices, respectively.

By placing Cocteau’s film on the opera stage, and reinventing the relationship between body and voice in this piece, Glass problematizes both film and opera. The merging of the two media, in the case of both filmed opera and operatized film, presents technical and representational difficulties. In *La Belle et la Bête* it is exactly those difficulties that might be seen as the basic conceptual motors of the piece. These difficulties are diffracted through the key aspect of the piece - synchronization - which is crucial for both the concept of this piece and its realization. In what follows I will elaborate the ways in which this procedure takes place, and how it influences the relationship between body and voice.

**Synchronization, Dubbing and Playback**

In *La Belle et la Bête* not only is the voice synchronised to lip movements, but also the voice which belongs to a visible person singing live is synchronised with a speaking film character. One voice points to two bodies at the same time, and this ‘game’ is a remarkable feature of the piece. In the tradition of dubbing film actors, if the voice of a person other than that of the original actor is used, that whole person becomes contained in his or her voice. This is also the case in the invariently synchronised version of *La Belle et la Bête*. In the live synchronised version, the process of synchronization is executed live and is thus variable.

A loose type of synchronization is present in both these versions of *La Belle et la Bête*; however, the absence of an image of the singing body is accentuated in the invariently synchronised version. This constructed symbiosis of images of the speaking body and the singing voice highlights the distanced, dream-like atmosphere of Cocteau’s film. Michel Chion explains the intentions of the synchronization process: “It allows us by reading a speaker’s lips to verify whether the articulation of the words heard accords with the movement of the mouth”.259 Chion points to the core of its function in terms of representational procedure: “We take this temporal co-incidence of words and lips as sort of guarantee that we’re in the real world, where hearing a sound usually coincides with seeing its source (...)

259 Ibid., p. 128.
260 Ibid., p. 128-129.
The loose synchronization that is inevitable in this process reminds us that we are not in the ‘real’ world, but in the fictitious world of opera, and such performed singing has a certain distancing effect that John Richardson suggests challenges the norms of mainstream cinema:

Audiences in the Northern Europe and America typically have low tolerance for loose synchronisation. Instances that diverge from the norm of tight synchronisation are perceived as either unacceptably poor quality or in some way challenging the norms of mainstream cinema. An example of the latter is the approach of spaghetti Western director Sergio Leone, in which slightly dis-synchronous overdubbing of the actors’ voices is employed as a kind of distancing effect.  

The same could be said of Glass’s approach in this piece, although here the looseness of the synchronization points to the composer’s engagement with an existing historical artefact and its audiovisual transformation.

In case of La Belle et la Bête loose synchronization challenges the norms of conventional opera, but also evokes certain procedures based on synchronization such as dubbing and playback. The body-voice relation here problematizes both the tradition of dubbing and the tradition of playback. Chion highlights the differences between body-voice relations in these two procedures:

In dubbing someone is hiding in order to stick his voice onto a body that has already acted for the camera. In playback there is someone before us whose entire effort is to attach his face and body to the voice we hear. We’re witnessing a performance whose risks and failures become inscribed on the film. No emotion arises from dubbing as such. Since its work is unseen it produces only indirect effects, although they’re occasionally beautiful. Playback is a source of a direct, even physical emotion. (...) Playback marshals the image in the effort to embody.

The procedure used in La Belle et la Bête is neither dubbing, nor playback. As in dubbing, there is a body that has already acted for the camera, but that body has had its own voice removed from the film; but if one of the intentions of dubbing is to help movie characters to appear more realistic, more comprehensible, then this procedure in Glass’ opera sits at the opposite end of the spectrum. The time that could be called ‘speaking time’ becomes ‘singing time’; the speaking voice is erased and to its empty space/time, the singing voice is attached; the singing voice is attributed to the speaking body, and this formalises the division of body and voice in La Belle et la Bête.

---

262 John Richardson, “Resisting the sublime: strategies of convergence and divergence in Glass’s La Belle et la Bête”, conference paper from the First International Conference on Minimalism in Music, University of Wales, Bangor, 2007, manuscript.
Comprehending *La Belle et la Bête* through the playback technique, where there is a recorded voice and miming body on stage, the situation is more complex, and to some extent reverses expectation. There is a ‘recorded body’ and a voice that tries to attach to it. In the case of the invariantly synchronised version of *La Belle et la Bête*, both the body and the voice are recorded, and still there is the effect of loose synchronization since it is impossible to perfectly synchronize the singing voice and the image of the talking body. Even if this could be done perfectly in terms of temporal measurement, in terms of expression it would be unlikely to fit – the image of the speaking body does not match the singing voice and vice versa.

The process of synchronization that constantly happens between bodies and voices in film only creates the illusion of ‘wholeness’ between image and sound and/or the desire to obtain it. Creating the illusion of wholeness, synchronization actually creates a gap, and here it maintains it between bodies and voices, human and animal, images and sounds, live and projected, opera and film.

**The Knot of Tight Synchronization: The Roaring Voice between Man and Animal**

The looseness of synchronization that appears to be at the core of assembling the piece is replaced by tight synchronization only at one point in the opera – the moment when the diegetic sound of the roar from the original film appears. This moment appears to be significant both in showing how Glass might treat diegetic sounds, “sounds that issue from a source within the filmic narrative”, and also to show how it is possible to mark the vocal difference between human and animal in the opera. When the father gets lost in the woods he finds the Beast’s castle, enters it and falls asleep. He is awakened from a sleep by the terrible sound of the roar suggesting that the Beast is there. Although at that moment the Beast is not yet visible, his voice proves his presence. The Beast first appears as the monstrous sound/voice, and at the same time the eye of the camera shows the lion head curved in the armchair on which the father sits.

---

Only few minutes later is the spectator allowed to see the image of the Beast – when a monstrous and at the same time puppet-like creature appears for the first time, outside of his castle, reprehending the Father for stealing his rose. The relationship between man and animal in La Belle et la Bête evokes the theory of Giorgio Agamben, and thus I will first read aspects of the plot of the opera against the backdrop of Agamben’s theory to show how the division between man and animal exists on several levels in La Belle et la Bête: in the plot itself, on the level of the voices (voice – roar), and on the level of the music, through contrast in musical materials.

One of Agamben’s assumptions is that “in our culture, the decisive political conflict, which governs every other conflict, is that between the animality and the humanity of man”. He sees homo sapiens as “machine or device for producing the recognition of the human” and proposes that this caesura, the fluctuating border between human and animal, is rather within the human, than outside. The animal is a constitutive part of the human. Agamben investigates how the distinction between man and animal has been produced, and this has been reflected in different fields of culture.

The La Belle et la Bête story/film invokes human-animal relationships, the dynamics of the plot deriving from differences between the human and her world (Beauty), and the monster/animal and its castle domain (The Beast). Beauty is profoundly scared by the Beast’s enchanted world when she gets there. She does not know its laws, and therefore at first appears powerless, but as she

---

becomes acquainted with that world, she becomes the key for its recognition back to the world of the human. In the film, the most obvious difference between the ‘real’ world and the castle is that common objects in the Beast’s domain, for example, candlesticks, are anthropomorphic. They have the shape of human body parts, and act in human ways, but are not human. “Man has to recognize itself to become human” writes Agamben.267 The mechanism of recognition in La Belle et la Bête lies in the power of Beauty to see The Beast as human, and not as an animal.

The axis of the plot is based on this conflict between the animality and humanity of man. In the film, Beauty several times secretly witnesses habits that reveal the Beast’s animal nature: drinking the water from the spring, killing the deer and sucking its blood, and making roaring noises. The Beast, who is represented as a kind of animal/monster, is a former man who is put under a spell which makes him animal-like, non-man until a human (a woman) manages to remove the spell through her love. To love appears in this case to be recognised as human: The Beast will recognise himself as a man only when someone else recognises him as such. The humanisation of animal and animalisation of man about which Agamben writes is, in Cocteau’s film, emphasised by the fact that the Beast, Avenant (Beauty’s boyfriend in the human world), and the Prince (who appears only at the end as a kind of super-human) are played by the same actor. The same happens in Glass’s score in which he gives the same voice to the three characters.

267 Ibid.
The Beast’s castle shows relations between animals and humans that are different from those in the human world. The animal rules, but both the Beast and ‘the inhabitants’ of his castle are anthropomorphic; they are ‘within’ the human domain. Those anthropomorphic creatures demonstrate synchronization between the human and the non-human, and the anthropomorphic beast/monster demonstrates this too. Agamben argues that language is often offered as the locus of distinction between the human and the animal; however, the Beast talks as human, and in Glass’s version sings with a human voice, but he still is not human.

The division between human and animal is also portrayed by musical language. The Beast’s domain is represented by chromaticism and the whole-tone scale. The ambivalent, animal, inhuman, enchanted world is represented here by the whole-tone scale, which Glass uses to invoke its long history in picturing sorcerers, enchanted worlds, and mysterious happenings and personae – in short, the ‘unreal’.

When we first see the Beast, we do so in E major and C major - we hear E major triads ringing on the top, followed by C major triads below - and when you put them together you have the whole tone scale and an augmented triad. If you analyze the augmented triad out into its parts, you have two harmonies a major third apart that give you one of the more distant key relationships. Within the world of tonality we’re taking two of the more distant relationships and unifying them in a whole tone scale. The reason my music for La Belle sounds different from Debussy, I think, is because of my way of going through the augmented triad to what I think are its sources. For Debussy, tonality was redefined by music free from traditional root movement.268

The intriguing moment in relation to the man-animal construct arises through the voice of the Beast, interpreted through a male voice, the voice of the same actor/singer that sings the roles of Avenant and the Prince. One interesting exception to this pattern of giving the male voice to the Beast appears in the opera, with a connection to the diegetic sounds of the film. As Joe comments, diegetic sounds are interestingly used in Cocteau’s movie:

Diegetic noises also differentiate the real world scenes from those of the magical domain: the former are filled with diegetic noises for the details of the visuals, while diegetic noises are almost entirely avoided in the scenes at the Beast’s domain.269

When Glass decided to remove the existing soundtrack of the movie, diegetic sound left the soundtrack, too; however, the unique roar of the Beast from the film was kept in Glass’s opera, and it unexpectedly shows a sound rupture between human and inhuman sound. The monstrous is here

restaged from film to opera, from speaking to singing, and the roaring voice is kept as a proof of the non-human, animal, monster within the human.

Michel Chion describes synchresis as the “(...) spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time in film”. \(^{270}\) He previously elaborates about the punch sound as an emblematic knot of synchronization, as “(...) the audiovisual point toward which everything converges and out of which all radiates”. \(^{271}\) When the diegetic roar of the Beast appears in the opera, it functions as a kind of ‘punch’ that changes the co-ordinates of the meaning system. It shows the contrast between the roar of the animal and the human voice. Chion notices that “in general, loose synch gives a less naturalistic, more readily poetic effect, and a very tight synch stretches the audiovisual canvas more (...)”. \(^{272}\) This roar appears in tight synch, and as diegetic sound, in contrast to the loose synchronization and composed sound for the rest of the opera. It is the only moment in the opera where the monstrous voice is attributed to the Beast. It could be said that the whole audiovisual dramaturgy of opera converges to this point and radiates from it, a point that unveils the non-voice of the monster. And if indeed sound film could be considered as ventriloquism, \(^{273}\) this roar scene would be the point where the dummy (moving image) in that process gets different ventriloquist (one who provides sound and/or voice) – from operatic music and singing to the sound of the roar.

A certain degree of ‘ventriloquism’ is maintained between bodies and voices, no matter how tight or loose synchronization might be. This is confirmed both by the loose synchronization through the prism of dubbing and playback, and by the tight synchronization in the case of roaring sound. In what follows I will discuss how the methodology of ventriloquism works within *La Belle et la Bête*.

**Postopera as Ventriloquism**

Rick Altman undermines the conventional view that “(...) the sound track in classical narrative films is by and large redundant”. \(^{274}\) Instead, he postulates a new model for the conceptualisation of sound-image relationships in the cinema that I would like to use to illuminate the ventriloquial dimension of *La Belle et la Bête*. In the new model he advocates that

“(...) the sound track is a ventriloquist who, by moving his dummy (the image) in time with the words he secretly speaks, creates the illusion that the words are produced by the dummy/image whereas in fact the dummy/image is actually created in order to disguise the source of the sound. Far from being subservient to the image, the

---


\(^{271}\) Ibid., p. 61.

\(^{272}\) Ibid., p. 65.


\(^{274}\) Ibid., p. 67.
sound track uses the illusion of subservience to serve its own ends”.

For Altman, the film sound track is the ventriloquist, and in this light the remediation of *La Belle et la Bête* from film to opera is a situation in which only the ‘dummy’ (the film) changes the ventriloquist from Auric/Cocteau to Glass. In a different way from Auric’s soundtrack, the operatic ‘soundtrack’ Glass produces shows his awareness of the ventriloquial dimension of the film. Moreover, in the live synchronized version, Glass is not even interested in concealing the real source of the sound as ventriloquists usually do. He superimposes ensemble playing and singers singing live to the projected film. What Altman proposes in theory, Glass conducts in *La Belle et la Bête*.

Glass ‘confirmed’ not only that the sound track in narrative film is not and should not be redundant, but that the sound/music/voice is the one that ‘makes’ the image look in a particular way. Moreover, although *La Belle et la Bête* displays clear connections with ventriloquism, there is an important point that makes it ‘outgrow’ this ventriloquist principle, and that is that the Glass ‘soundtrack’ is not meant to be ‘concealed’ behind the image, at least in the live synchronized version. “Unless the ventriloquist can produce a believable ‘redundant’ lip movement in the dummy, he cannot induce us to transfer our allegiance from the aural to the visual witness within us”, states Altman. And that allegiance seems not to be an issue for Glass. The mechanism of his ventriloquist opera is wide open for both our eyes and ears. It does not persuade us to believe that Cocteau’s characters really sing in the film, but invites us to enjoy the transparency of the body-voice game in the film and in the opera.

Recently Glass’s *La Belle et la Bête* was further developed, pseudonymously, in a form that confirms both the composer’s and Altman’s intentions in a somewhat unexpected way. An author using the name ‘barkingbartok’ has made a new version of *La Belle et la Bête* in which Cocteau’s previously silent film is further eroded to the point of its almost total removal. Glass’s music has been roughly played back over a new video where all the characters are made of LEGO bricks. Thus, Glass’s operatized film is now made into a filmed opera, where the film is based upon LEGO animation.

---

275 Ibid.
276 Ibid., p. 77.
This puppet-like version keeps only the timelines of dialogue pronunciation in the original film, measurements that Philip Glass used while composing the music. What might have been called ‘puppetry’ in Cocteau’s characters within the film, in this version becomes tautologically obvious, suggesting that there is no ‘natural’ relation between the shown body and the singing voice. The synchronous principle becomes irrelevant, since, among other things, this ‘LEGO reality’ has distanced any trace of realism from the previous visuals; and paradoxically, the singing body has almost completely vanished, now only heard through the music.

There are ventriloquial features in La Belle et la Bête’s tendency to attach music and singing voices to film characters. The perception of a puppet body with a voice changes our perception of the body, and the same principle functions with Cocteau’s film characters. Although already puppet-like in Cocteau’s fairytale film, these characters become even more artificial and even more puppet-like when made to sing. The singing body in postopera remains ventriloquial. The body-voice gap not only persists but also develops in this piece. It itself is based on creative reinvention of that gap.

This gap reveals that ideal, complete synchronization of a body-voice construct is impossible in general, and consequently in postopera, too. Bearing in mind those features of the body-voice gap in opera that I wrote about earlier, the ‘deafness’ of the operatic characters, the different demands on body and voice while instrumentalising dramatic representation in opera, this body-voice gap appears as a specificity of the opera genre. As such, it becomes the main motor of Glass’s piece: it is precisely this impossibility of synchronization between body and voice that becomes manifest in La Belle et la Bête. The relationship between music and dramatic text, the subject of various operatic reforms in the past, appears obsolete when compared to the immediacy of the body – voice relation.
in this postopera for ensemble and film. Glass reinvents the body-voice relationship in La Belle et la Bête, and at the same time questions the relationship between opera and film, and opera and ventriloquism. By doing all that, he reworks the whole opera genre while pursuing its specificities in the age of media.
Chapter 5

Singing Letters, Multiplied Bodies and Dissociated Voice

The straightforward synchronization processes that have led to a ventriloquial relationship between the live singing voice and the movie characters in La Belle et la Bête are followed by more complex body-voice de-synchronization procedures used in Writing to Vermeer. Applying ‘new’ voices and music to ready-made existing images (in the case of Glass’s piece to the moving images of Cocteau’s film) is a procedure that plays an important role in Writing to Vermeer, too. In this postopera, the images that are being operatized are Johannes Vermeer’s (1632-75) paintings. They get their fictional textual, sonorous, musical and vocal dimensions when the situations that Vermeer painted are re-enacted, envoiced and multiplied on stage. The silent world of baroque painting becomes a Vermeerian multimedia singing tableau vivant - the site of a projected written text, female singing voices, triplicate singing/dancing figures, and music in which video, dance and opera have been put together in dynamic co-existence, framed by the simulation of female figures and the situations represented in Vermeer’s paintings.

Ventriloquial relationships between singing female voices and the bodies of the triplicate identical-looking figures on stage (of which one sings and all three have the same movements) reinvent the vocalic body while raising the issue of woman as subject and/or object in the opera. De-synchronization involving singing bodies and voices ‘speaks’ about the disruption between public and private, men and women (the private sphere of women and the public sphere of men), subject and object (man as subject – composer, director, painter, and woman as object – performer, painting model), past and present (baroque vs. today’s media society), reality and fiction (Vermeer’s paintings as ‘reality’ and opera as ‘fiction’, or the other way round). These oppositions are

---

278 The version of this chapter is going to be published as: Jelena Novak, “Postopera and De/Synchronous Narrating: Singing Letters, Multiplied Bodies and Dissociated Voice in Andriessen/Greenaway’s Writing to Vermeer”, in Isolde Schmid-Reiter, Mario Vieira de Carvalho (eds.), Opera Staging: Erzählweisen, Europäische Musiktheater-Akademie, CESEM, Vienna, 2012 (forthcoming).

279 The world premiere of Writing to Vermeer took place at De Nederlandse Opera, Amsterdam, in 1999. The author of the electronic music interludes is Michel van der Aa. Saskia Boddeke directed the piece together with Peter Greenaway, who was also the author of the libretto. Louis Andriessen wrote the music.

280 The words ‘envoice’ and ‘envoicing’ do not appear in the OED, but I understand them here in accordance with Carolyn Abbate’s text “Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women”, in Ruth A. Solie (ed.), Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1993, pp. 221-258. The meaning of ‘voicing’, according to the OED, is “the action or fact of uttering with the voice” or, in phonetics “the action or process of producing or uttering with voice or sonancy; the change of a sound from unvoiced to voiced”. According to the Oxford English Dictionary Second Edition on CD-ROM (v. 4.0.0.2) © Oxford University Press 2009. Keeping in mind the common meaning of the prefix ‘en’ in English: “to make into, to put into, to get into”, envoicing would mean to make women in the action of uttering with the voice. Thus, in this case I understand envoicing as both giving the voice to the women, and putting the women into the voice, hearing the feminine through the women’s voices.
performed and mediated in the cultural context of late capitalism, while examining what it means to envoice women in opera today.

My analysis of the relationship between singing body and voice in *Writing to Vermeer* will examine how strategies of staging (a visual triplication of characters), music (a musical dramaturgy that does not follow the dramaturgy of the libretto), writing (questioning of *écriture féminine* and the adultery motive in relation to the subject/object position of woman), and mediation (simulation and close-up procedure in Scene 2) interfere in the connection between bodies and voices on stage. The staging shows Vermeerian women, embodied in the triplicate characters of Vermeer’s wife Catharina, his mother in law Maria and the model Saskia, that, unlike women in Vermeer’s paintings, have voices. I read those strategies of envoicing against the backdrop of the concept of envoicing the women in opera by Carolyn Abbate.\footnote{Carolyn Abbate, “Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women”, in Ruth A. Solie (ed.), *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1993, pp. 221-258.} I do that in order to show how attributing and desynchronizing the singing voice to triplicate women figures generates meaning about the status of woman as subject/object in postopera, and how that affects the vocalic body. While analysing the procedures applied in music, my concern is with Andriessen’s intention to maintain the musical dramaturgy independent from the dramaturgy of the libretto. I investigate how this independence relates to the body-voice relationship.

In relation to strategies of writing and their interfering in the connection between bodies and voices on stage, I read Greenaway’s libretto against the backdrop of the concept of *écriture féminine* as defined by Hélène Cixous.\footnote{Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”, Translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Summer, 1976), pp. 875-893.} That helps me to reveal the simulation strategies that he uses when he plays with this concept, but also to show how he questions it. The adultery motive that appears in the libretto, together with questioning of *écriture féminine*, demonstrates how the female characters function as objects in a masculine discourse, and how they appear to strive to become subjects. The ambivalent position of woman between subject and object reflects the desynchronous relation between the singing body and the voice.

Concerning mediation and how it affects the relationship between body and voice, I offer a close reading of the scene in which the character of Saskia sings live on stage, while at the same time her close-up is projected on the big screen, so that it looks as if her voice is dubbed to her projected image. This scene exemplifies how the dissociated voice is problematized in *Writing to Vermeer*.\footnote{Steven Connor describes the voice in ventriloquism as sourceless, dissociated or displaced. He uses those three adjectives as synonyms. Thus, I use the term ‘dissociated voice’ in accordance with Connor’s writing, as a voice that “appears to proceed from elsewhere”. See: Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck, Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, http://www.stevenconnor.com/dumbstruck/, Accessed: March 31, 2012.} A
consideration of the interplay of all the above-mentioned strategies will demonstrate why singing in *Writing to Vermeer* reveals a specific dissociation between bodies and voices and how that particular relation establishes meanings.

**Between Absence and Presence: Men and Women in *Writing to Vermeer***

I will now map a few significant points in connection with the contrasted ways female and male characters are represented in the piece in order to provide coordinates that will help us to follow the rest of the analysis. The contrast between the domestic, private world inhabited by women and the outer, public world governed by men is transposed from Vermeer’s paintings to this postopera. The atmosphere of the 34 paintings of the artist we know of appears to be in contrast to the chaotic outer world in which they were painted – it is often stated that they emanate domestic serenity and harmony, and Greenaway used ‘the calm atmosphere’ of the paintings as an ideal that “(...) will be set against the activities of the world outside Vermeer’s front door (...)”. In *Writing to Vermeer* the events from the outer world governed by men are represented in interludes. Masculine figures appear on video in scenes that depict the gunpowder factory explosion, riots in The Hague, the tulip market crash, the French invasion etc. Aided by electronic music by Michel Van der Aa, the brutality of the outer, men’s world does indeed provide a great contrast to the chamber atmosphere and delicate ensemble of women’s voices in the six scenes. The gap between the world of men and the world of women is emphasized and present throughout the piece and that should be kept in mind during analysis of all its different aspects.

The female figures from Vermeer’s paintings became operatic heroines in *Writing to Vermeer*. The three principal singing characters, two sopranos (Catharina Bolnes, Vermeer’s wife; Saskia de Vries, his model) and a mezzo soprano (Maria Thins, Vermeer’s mother in law), dancing characters (Vermeer’s famous *Milkmaid*, the Servant and visual ‘doubles’ of Saskia, Maria and Catharina), four children, as well as the female choir members who often accompany the singers are all dressed as figures from Vermeer’s paintings and on the operatic stage they occasionally ‘freeze’ in a certain pose, which simulates the pose of the figure from the painting. The staging of the opera implies that the figures from the opera are at the same time representations of the figures from Vermeer’s paintings and representations of real women in Vermeer’s life. This conflation of meanings that happens between the women on stage, the women in Vermeer’s life and representations of women in his paintings is the vehicle for the creation of fiction. The ambivalent denotation of who the women on stage represent allows Greenaway to play

---


285 Saskia is a fictional character, while Catharina and Maria are historical characters.
constantly with the positions of the women as subjects/objects - on stage, in Vermeer’s paintings and in the ‘real’ life of Vermeer’s family. It denies the difference between the ‘real’ and the fictitious, and on the other hand it fortifies the differences between how the spheres of women and the spheres of men are represented.

The women are writing letters to Vermeer. The writing of private letters is usually an intimate occupation. When the letters of the women are turned into a libretto, they cease to be private and become public. Brooks has shown the mechanism of the invasion of the private in literature: "The novel, then, can make private life the object of its concern only through invading the private sphere by opening it up to the irrevocable publicity of writing - imaged so often in the eighteenth-century novel by the publication of a private correspondence." Although the letters are part of staging of the private sphere in this postopera, the fact that letters or their fragments are constantly projected, multiplied and magnified on the opera stage makes them public addresses rather than intimate thoughts. "So we know privacy by way of its invasion, just as we know innocence by way of its loss, and indeed could not know it otherwise." Invading what was represented as private is in this case also the way to emphasize the contrast between the worlds of women and men.

Adriana Cavarero reflects upon the stereotypes of operatic narratives: “The libretto in opera obeys the misogynistic laws of the western canon – it tells a story in which the women are the victims and men the victimizers. We would be surprised if it were otherwise”. Cavarero’s conclusions were based upon the conventional opera repertory. Greenaway and Andriessen, however, criticize the victim-position of female characters in opera in general. They did that already in their first operatic collaboration, Rosa the Death of a Composer (1993-94), where they purposely exaggerated the victim-role of the principal female character Esmeralda who was grotesquely represented as a sexual object subordinated to the desire of her macho cowboy lover, the composer Rosa. In their second common opera Writing to Vermeer, Greenaway and Andriessen continue to question operatic conventions: unusually for the opera tradition, they exclude any singing male role, so that Writing to Vermeer appears as a kind of female piece.

“In general, the heroine of the drama embodies a female figure who is somewhat anomalous or out of place”, writes Cavarero on opera heroines, and concludes: “Carmen is a gipsy, Butterfly and Turandot are exotic women. Tosca is a singer, Violeta is a ne’er-do-well. As women who live outside familiar roles, as transgressive figures who are often quite capable of

---

287 Ibid., p. 37.
independence, they do not just die - they must die so that everything can go back to normal”. 289

Women represented in Writing to Vermeer are not those who live outside familiar roles; on the contrary, they appear as the stereotypes of these roles – the wife, the mother, the servant, the painting model, all ruled by masculine discourse. Certain parts of the libretto, however, show a tendency to question those roles. Even so, the very end of the opera, when all women characters disappear (wiped out by the flood caused by bringing down the floodwalls – an act performed in order to defend the country against the enemy of war), confirms that the outer, public, men’s world still governs the private world of women. The ‘outer world’ reflected in Greenaway’s videos and Van der Aa’s interludes penetrates the domestic atmosphere in which the women live. Interruptions from ‘the outside’ can be compared to the situation when the painter Lucio Fontana slashed his paintings with a knife, to which Andriessen made reference. 290

Figure 9 – Louis Andriessen, Peter Greenaway, Writing to Vermeer, Scene 4. 2. Photo © Hans van den Bogaard

The title character, Johannes Vermeer, does not appear in this opera. There is no single scene in which his figure, image, letter, voice, or physical representation can be seen. The father, the husband, the son-in-law and the painter are absent from the stage, but still, Vermeer is the one who holds the power to objectify the women. They are the objects of his paintings, and he is the subject who regulates their existence in the painting, but also in ‘real’ life. They all long for him, seemingly not only because they love him, but because they seem to become lost, meaningless, without him.

Unlike Vermeer himself, a number of anonymous male characters appear in Writing to Vermeer. They are, however, not singing characters. Male figures only show up in film/video fragments directed by Greenaway and projected between the scenes, in instrumental interludes. They represent the outer, public, male world that determines the private feminine singing world. The most striking representation of the dominance of the masculine appears towards the end of the opera where a video features French soldiers marching into Holland. That video shows only huge military boots marching through the water. In front of the video are the figures of Vermeer’s (singing) women that appear tiny and hopeless in relation to the marching boots behind them.

The reinvention of the body-voice relationship in this postopera takes place in context of the position of the singing woman being both subject (of singing, of writing) and object (of painting, and of masculine discourse). The frame in which women characters sing underlines differences between the spheres of feminine and masculine. The rest of the analysis relies on that fact.

**Between Subject and Object: The Singing Voice and Triplicate characters**

Carolyn Abbate reaches the core of the problem of disruption between body and voice in the opera by elaborating the antagonism between the singing woman being simultaneously subject and object. She addresses the reasons that initiate the split between visible and audible in opera from a subject-object perspective involving the woman performer and the listening spectator. She claims that a singing female in opera is usually already perceived as engendered:

> For opera the question is: What happens when we watch and hear a female performer? We are observing her, yet we are also doing something for which there’s no word: the aural version of staring. And looking and listening are not simply equivalent activities in different sensory realms. Seeing a female figure may well more or less automatically invoke our culture’s opposition of male (active subject) and female (passive object), as Mulvey describes it. But listening to the female singing voice is a more complicated phenomenon. Visually, the character singing is the passive object of our gaze. But aurally, she is resonant; her musical speech drowns out everything in range, and we sit as passive objects, battered by that voice.\(^{291}\)

Abbate’s claims, at least regarding the examples she offers, have been made in accordance to her experience of conventional opera. In Writing to Vermeer, however, the position of the singing woman on stage is more complex because of the staging procedures that favor triplicate characters. There are two types of triplicate figures. First there are triplicate dancing figures such as the Milkmaid or Servant characters. Another type are triplicate singing/dancing figures, where one of them - Catharina, Maria, or Saskia - is both singing and dancing. The singers’ movements and

\(^{291}\) Carolyn Abbate, “Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women”, p. 254.
gestures are the same as those of the dancers. The voice does not get ‘confirmation’ by the simultaneous support of mimicry, gestures or bodily movements. This singing is rather visually ‘cancelled’ by the body that does not ‘recognize’ it in a manner typical for conventional opera. The result of this strategy is that often it is not possible to determine who is actually singing on stage. Sometimes (but not often), the singing character is emphasized by the stage light. The voice often appears dissociated since it is not supported by gestures and mimicry typically used by opera singers. Moreover, the stage often contains much more than three characters, and is crowded with choir members, children, screen projections. This procedure forces the listening spectators to look for the origin of the singing voice, an impulse originating in a kind of ‘natural’ reflex.

When what is seen is de-synchronized with what is heard at the same time (triplicate figures look and move in the same way, but only one of them sings, and it is not always easy to determine which one), tensions appear between body and voice that act as passive/object and active/subject respectively. When the origin of the voice is made unclear by visual procedures that accompany the singing, the processes of objectification Abbate discusses are further developed. This aspect of the opera is elaborated from the perspective of “opera’s capacity to disrupt male authority”, in Abbate’s words.

In light of the subject-object relation, an intriguing game takes place here. The woman should be visually objectified, but that objectification is destabilized, if not actually denied by the fact that the object is multiplied. And the singing voice objectifies the listening spectator, putting him/her in the position, in Abbate’s terms, of “passive objects, battered by that voice”. In order to be able to perceive the singing, the listening spectator must put him/herself in the attentive position of listening that allows the singing to be ‘executed’ for him/her. But this process of objectification brings instability because, at least at first sight, it is not possible to realize who is actually objectifying the listening spectator, since in the game of triplication a concealing of the origin of the voice is taking place. Thus, the voice becomes dissociated. What Abbate claims in connection to the body-voice relation in opera is questioned, since it is not possible to completely objectify the woman for the gaze of spectator; nor is it possible that the voice, whose corporeal origin is masked, completely objectifies the listener.

What happens instead is a dissociation of the voice from the body that involves the listening spectator on various levels. There is a constant fluctuation of the attention and production of new layers of relations between bodies singing, dancing, listening, hearing, visible and invisible, audible

---

292 This is anecdotally confirmed by the video recording of the piece I used for analysis that was being made on one of the dress rehearsals. It is obvious that the person who filmed the performance wasn’t familiar with the piece; the result is that in some parts where it is particularly difficult to discover who sings, the eye of the camera goes from one to another performer to check who ‘throws the voice’.

293 Carolyn Abbate, “Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women”, p. 258.
and inaudible. The distribution of the visible and the audible happens between multiplied women bodies, voices, video screens, listening spectators, and the dynamic of that distribution provokes constant shifts of attention and problematizes the conventional positions of the singing body and voice in opera. The ways music is involved in the structure of Writing to Vermeer reinvents that distribution further.

**Music, Libretto, Body, Voice: De/Synchronization**

In order to analyze how strategies used in the music interfere in the relationship between the bodies and the voices in Writing to Vermeer I concentrate on how and what the music represents in this piece. Abbate discusses the role of music in opera and the conventional interpretation of that role: “Interpreting operatic music as an elaboration of plot is, after all, a conventional opera-analytical habit. What has not been remarked, however, is that it involves an automatic sexing of operatic music as the voice of a male observer, and an accompanying transformation of libretto drama and characters into a female body, gazed upon and elaborated upon by that music”.294 She adds: “Because traditional, this analytical assumption has seemed both neutral and natural. It is not.”295 In her analysis of Salome Abbate arrives at a point where she is preoccupied with “music’s male gendered role in opera – to speak as the observer-commentator who gives a secret clue to the action onstage” and explains how “Strauss rejects the notion of operatic music as an objectifying gaze”.296

Andriessen, too, rejects “the notion of operatic music as objectifying gaze”. This is how he explains the way he envisaged his music to function in this postopera:

> I wish to introduce a state of opposition between the sung text and the underlying emotions. What the characters sing is not what they write about in their letters. The women sing about matters that they do not dare write about, for example, that a child may die or that Vermeer will be assaulted during his travels. There is communication at two levels: what you hear and what I will tell you as a composer.297

And indeed, the musical dramaturgy has its own dynamic, independent of what happens in the libretto. Andriessen further explains this strategy by commenting on the second part of the piece, in which the emotional tensions of the characters appear to be stronger, in accordance with more and more turbulent events from the outside world (religious riots, French invasion, flooding):

---

295 Ibid., p. 239.
296 Ibid., p. 247.
Gradually you hear that the negative emotion comes forth in the music and in the singing; it does not manifest itself in the written text because the text is strictly domestic and simple. It is clear that what happens, or what could happen outside their home, gradually enters the women’s consciousness. Their voices and their manner of singing are permeated by anxiety while they still sing the words of their happy letters to Vermeer.\(^{298}\)

Andriessen’s music is not an elaboration of what happens in the opera, if arguably anything happens there in conventional terms (there are only minor events such as Vermeer’s daughter Cornelia’s birthday and her sickness after she swallowed varnish). Instead, it is an elaboration of the composer’s view of ‘the story’ that happens in the sphere of women’s emotional life. Thus, as will be shown in Chapter 6 (which deals with the relation between body and voice in *La Commedia*), *Writing to Vermeer*, too, seems to have two plot lines – one written by the librettist, the other by the composer.

In the domestic world of Vermeer’s women there are no significant events, compared to the external men’s world of trade, wars, politics, travel and art. The staging tells us that things are ‘really’ happening in the outer world, represented by the interludes. Andriessen is consistent about his music not illustrating what happens on stage. Paradoxically, it illustrates what does not happen there, but supposedly happens in the sphere of women’s emotional life, and those are unspoken concerns, anxieties, fears and unexpressed feelings. Thus, the music actually avoids the common operatic convention of commenting on or illustrating the libretto. The fact that the relation between the dramaturgies of the music and the libretto is unconventional supports the status of the dissociated voice. The emphasis on the independence between the libretto and the music corresponds to the independence between body and voice; since what listening spectators hear is not complementary to what they see on stage, the dissociation between body and voice comes as a kind of expected consequence.

At the end of the opera the French invasion is represented – on the big screen the feet of soldiers are marching through the water, and on the stage Vermeer’s women are dressed in cage-like dresses. Water first appears only in the video, but gradually huge amounts of water literally flood the stage. First, choir members are ‘wiped out’, and then gradually Maria, Catharina and Saskia disappear, too. The stage is empty; only water runs over it. In the last moments of the performance first Saskia and Catharina sing in unison “Yours, with every sign of love”, and then Maria joins in, and the three of them sing in homophony “for ever and ever, and ever and ever...”\(^{299}\) When the women’s voices stop singing, we continue to hear them for a short time gradually ‘dissolved’ in


electronic music by Van der Aa until they totally disappear. At this point in the opera there is no masking of the origin of the voice; it is easily recognizable who emits the voice, since the female figures are not triplicate any more. Body and voice are finally synchronized, and the unison singing of Saskia and Catharina stands for their union in their love for Vermeer, also confirmed by Maria a few bars later in homophony. 

Music at this point enlightens what happens in the opera – despite disasters, all the women are united in their love for Vermeer. At the end, a moment of synchronicity takes place: the public and the private becomes the same, all engulfed by a disastrous flood. The image of the body and the sound of the voice are not dissociated anymore. Previously the singing voice was typically associated with the three bodies that acted the same on stage, and at the end the three singers sing with what could be metaphorically taken as one voice (unison and homophony).

Writing Women and Écriture Féminine

A considerable number of Vermeer’s paintings show women receiving, reading or writing letters. That triggered Greenaway’s imagination when writing the libretto, which consists of eighteen fictional letters to Johannes Vermeer who appears to be on trip to The Hague, where he is allegedly invited to check the authenticity of certain paintings. The year is 1672. Letters appear to be written by Vermeer’s wife, his model and his mother-in-law. Catharina and Maria write from Delft, and Saskia writes from Dordrecht. Each of them sends six letters. They write about domestic things, children, longing and love (Catharina), troubles with an arranged marriage (Saskia), and matters regarding the painting business (Maria).

The fragmentary structure of the letters, their intersection in the libretto, and the independence of the libretto text from the musical dramaturgy create a specific postdramatic condition in which the texts involved (libretto, music, dance, video) tend to be independent. While examining the meaning of what was written in the letters I will concentrate on how Greenaway uses the ‘Dear John’ letter motive to suggest the adultery, and what the adultery motive could mean in

In Andriessen’s music unison was often used as the sign of ideological like-mindedness. Here is the quote by Andriessen that tackles the questions of unison and failed unison: “Originally I saw unison as a political matter and I ascribed a Marxist interpretation to it. Now that I see failed unison more as something philosophical, I’d soon think of Nietzsche.” From: Yayoi Uno Everett, The Music of Louis Andriessen, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 237.

For example: Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window (c. 1657), Woman in Blue Reading a Letter (c. 1662-64), Lady Writing a Letter (c. 1665-70), Lady with Her Maidservant (c. 1667-68), The Love-Letter (c. 1669-70), Lady Writing a Letter with Her Maid (c. 1670).

The year 1672 is known in the Netherlands as the ‘rampjaar’, the year of disaster. Greenaway highlights that this year “saw military disintegration, the largest financial crash in the Republic’s short history, and a great public demoralisation. The overthrow of the Republic itself seemed very possible. It certainly was the year that marked the end of the Dutch golden Age”. According to: Peter Greenaway, “The Text”, Writing to Vermeer program booklet, Amsterdam, De Nederlandse Opera, 1999, p. 21. And indeed, it was a year in which the Dutch war (1672-78) started, the same year, leading Dutch politician of the time, Johan de Witt was brutally killed by an angry mob. French invasion followed after: the country was flooded, since the dykes were brought down in order to defend from the French army.
relation to the subject/object position of the woman in this piece. I will also explore how Greenaway questions *écriture féminine* showing the ambivalence between women seen as subjects (of writing) or as objects (of painting).

Greenaway seems to be particularly intrigued by the meaning of the letters on Vermeer’s paintings, the mystery concerning the addressees with whom women corresponded. The beginning of each letter is announced by the children’s voices that sing the precise date, and full name of the sender, for example “The second letter from Catharina Bolnes to Johannes Vermeer in The Hague. 18 may 1672”. Moreover, all the letters start with “Dear Johannes”. Andriessen remembers that initially all the letters were addressed as “Dear John”, revealing Greenaway’s interest in what he describes as “twentieth century significance of Second World War wartime female correspondence in what were called Dear John letters”: letters written to servicemen by their unfaithful girlfriends or wives, to announce the end of the relationship. Greenaway’s interest in letters that reveal adultery coincides with Schneider’s interpretation of the semiotics of Vermeer’s paintings and suggests that Greenaway’s reading of the position of women in Vermeer’s paintings does not imply only domestic harmony, but also women’s adultery, insinuations of which can also be found in various symbols used in the paintings. During the course of the work, “Dear John” was changed to “Dear Johannes” in light of the need to improve ‘the asymmetry’ between the English language and the Dutch subject of the opera. Hence the reference to “Dear John letters” stays concealed in the definitive version of the opera, although it is important as an indication of Greenaway’s reading of the letter motive in Vermeer’s paintings.

The allusion to adultery previously discussed is confirmed by the implication that the relationship between Vermeer and Saskia turns into more than a working relationship between painter and model. The affection Saskia demonstrates through her letters, various remarks about Saskia in Catharina’s letters (“She has a pretty face and a kissable neck. And such kissable lips. I could kiss her myself. And I know you have thought the same”), the apparently close relation that Saskia has with Vermeer: all these generate suspicion regarding the nature of their relationship, and generate thoughts about Vermeer’s adultery. Moreover, by alluding to the adultery motive, Greenaway also interrogates the object position of women. Thus, Saskia is not only an object for the painter. She becomes a subject by transgressing the position of model to be seen as potential lover.

---

In an analysis of the literary motives, the form of the texts, the represented atmosphere, it is suggestive that Greenaway simulates *écriture féminine* defined as "(...) the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text (...)". In her search for the ways that women should express themselves through writing, the foundational theorist of *écriture féminine*, Hélène Cixous, manifestly opened up her text on the subject by these words:

> Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement.  

Cixous had also insisted on a connection between women’s writing and their bodies: “Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth.” And that is precisely what the female characters in *Writing to Vermeer* do; they write letters, and it appears as if they write themselves through these letters.

Writing themselves is manifested through writing about their bodies, among other things. Writing the feminine body could be seen in connection with female sexuality and motherhood. Catharina’s pregnancy and related issues are recurring subjects of the letter texts in this postopera.

---


311 Ibid., p. 880.
In addition Greenaway’s explanation of the synopsis in relation to the five liquids also relates it to *écriture féminine*, not least because the endless pouring of milk is mentioned: “Whilst Vermeer is absent, the women defend their household against the potential erosion of five liquids: ink, from an excess of writing; varnish, which threatens the life of a child; milk, which endlessly pours from the milkmaid’s jug; blood, which demonstrates the violence of political assassination; and, finally, water, which ultimately sweeps them, their household, their children, and the stage, away”.[312] The ‘household’ here could also be perceived as subjecthood (the state or condition of being a subject) in the light of the previous discussion.

And in a specific way ‘writing themselves’ is underlined by the fact that as well as being sung, the text of the letters is often projected onto different parts of stage (floor, back wall, screens, transparent net), so that it becomes a significant part of the staging’s visual identity. An insistence on performing writing in the opera constantly acts as a reminder of the corporeal side of handwriting, the fact that the written text is produced by a performance of the body, and thus is a kind of imprint that has a corporeal origin. So the Vermeerian women ‘write themselves’ in that way, too. The action of ‘writing themselves’ is in contradiction with the position of the women only as objects. In order to write themselves they must become the subjects of writing.

Greenaway not only simulates *écriture féminine*, but problematizes it. The ‘authors’ of the letters are Catharina, Maria and Saskia, and they all perform a function as (some heterosexual) men’s typical objects of desire – the wife, the mother (Maria keeps a mother-son dimension in her relation with Vermeer), and the virgin (Saskia). Those women ‘write’ about typical ‘feminine subjects’ - love, affection, sexuality, pregnancy, children, marriage, longing, home, and the texts are supposedly written from a woman’s angle, without privileging the masculine in the construction of meaning. However, this whole strategy is staged by Greenaway himself and that brings the text to certain ‘deformations’ in some parts.

The position of woman only within the discourse of man has been described by Cixous:

> If woman has always functioned “within” the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this “within”, to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of.[313]

And this ‘explosion’ of the ‘within status’, becoming the subject, is precisely what the Catharina character suggests when she suddenly announces her need for a mirror in Scene 6: “I would buy

---

myself a mirror, silver-backed, to really see myself, and not have to rely on seeing myself only in your paintings (...). In a mirror, or in the painting, she sees the image that represents her, and that image makes the essential part of her ‘myself’. The character of Catharina expresses the need to exit the realm of Vermeer’s world; she views the mirror as the vehicle that will enable her to create her own subject, instead of only accepting herself as the object of Vermeer’s view. But, while still without the mirror, Catharina has her writing. Her writing enables her to understand herself as the subject, to reflect the image of herself as she sees it.

While the previous example shows women expressing the need to exit the stereotypes of how they are represented in masculine discourses, another example from the same libretto confirms the opposite. It shows Catharina as a wife who expresses her own (traditionally suppressed) body and sexuality in an explicit manner that only confirms her as the object of desire in masculine discourse:

“Hurry home and come and put your ear
To my belly, masterpainter,
And hear all the kicking of another life.
At least we cannot make another
Whilst there is one in the making.
Though I would not put it past you.
Because I miss your cock-eyed,
Slippery, rednosed, jumping,
Long purple-headed prick of a paintbrush.”

When, in the conventional opera tradition, one of the principal heroines moves towards the dramatic climax of the opera, she typically sings about love or about death. In this case Catharina sings about her and Vermeer’s sexual relationship. The position of Catharina in that relationship could have been seen as objectified through the eyes of her husband: she is the caring mother of their children, his faithful wife and sexual object. On the other hand, Catharina sees Vermeer as sexual object, too, and she writes/sings about that. Thus, Greenaway’s ambivalence towards the female characters invests the representation of women simultaneously with both object and subject positions.

To conclude, strategies that Greenaway uses in the libretto show that although he depicts only female characters in singing roles, the world that those characters belong to is still in large part regulated by what happens in men’s world. At the same time, however, women’s need to exit the objectified position is given significant attention. This ambivalence is present. For example, with the content of the letters Greenaway both simulates écriture féminine, ‘stepping on women’s side’, and

---

315 Ibid., p. 85.
questions écriture féminine by writing text parts that again could be seen as a proof of a conventionally objectified women’s role. On one hand, that ambivalence confirms the position of woman as object, but at the same time it shows that Greenaway is aware of the women’s need to exit that status. That ambivalence - is the woman subject or object? - is congruent with the creation of an illusion of the dissociated voice, a voice that fluctuates between the different bodies of triplicate characters introduced by the staging procedures.

Mediation, Postopera and Close-up
All the above-mentioned procedures - triplicate characters, a dramaturgy of music that is independent from the dramaturgy of the libretto, the libretto equivocating between women as subject and object - change the vocalic body in Writing to Vermeer. There is, however, another procedure that manifestly problematized the body-voice relation in this piece. It occurs with the first appearance of the Saskia character in Scene 2. I find this scene particularly intriguing in that it shows how the reinvention of the singing body was done. This is because the relationship between the performer’s body on stage, the reproduced image of her body on the screen and the live singing voice is intentionally and manifestly reinvented on this occasion.

While examining the ways in which the media of film and opera could work together, Greenaway expressed his view of the problem of filming opera. He implies that the medium of opera is destroyed by filming. He argues that opera is not suitable for filming at all, emphasizing the different dramaturgies of time in the two media:

I believe that opera cannot be filmed. There is something about the idea of one continuous long wide shot with no cuts, no interruptions in order, a particular experience. The whole phenomenon of watching an opera is one single long, wide shot. The frustration, from sitting in an old opera house, using little opera glasses, no close-ups, no changes of perspective. Of course, many, many films have been made about operas which I would say were a good transference of the operatic experience onto film - as soon as you make a cut, of course, you interrupt the continuity, you interrupt the attention span and you break the membrane of that particular relationship which the audience has with one continuous wide shot. (...) Real opera is unfilmable because of its own characteristics, and as soon you introduce the notion of the cut it is already an interruption in space and time. I think if you want to make some manufactured product which will involve the notion of music theater you have to find another way doing it. Opera itself is the wrong material, it is not suited to application for all those things
which in some peculiar way are often desired in an opera, like close-ups or comprehensible lyrics.  

One of the most intriguing moments of *Writing to Vermeer* regarding the relationship between body and voice - Scene 2, the first appearance of Saskia - seems to be exactly the breaking of membrane that Greenaway mentions - a close-up in the opera. This is how Andriessen describes the scene:

Because Saskia is not in Delft, Greenaway shows her for the first time on a large video screen. There are all sorts of film screens with pre-made films but Saskia, sung by Barbara Hannigan, appears live. It looks as though she is miming to her own voice. Because of the other film screens, you don’t immediately realize that she is really there. It works very well.

This is the important point in the piece where the very structure of its media, through the relation between body and voice, is examined. The issue of live performance is problematized by simulating reproduced video projections of singing, with live singing that is at the same time projected on the screen on stage.

Although he regarded opera as the ‘wrong medium’ for changes in the spectator’s perspective, Greenaway experiments precisely with the possibility of a close-up in this art form, in this Scene 2. Saskia is objectified for the spectator’s gaze on the big screen, and her voice objectifies the listening spectators. The image of the body that produces the voice is projected live on the video. The presence of the performer is emphasized, since the visual close-up accompanied by the live singing makes the performance look more personally authored, as in a performance-art piece. At the same time, this singing looks like dubbing thanks to the dissociation between the video close-up and live singing voice.

Paradoxically, singing live in this scene appears as a simulation of the pre-recorded singing: the staging procedure that involves a live projection of Hannigan’s live singing manages to create a distance between the listening spectators and the performance, as if the situation were projected. What is affected is the representation of Hannigan’s presence; although she is present live on stage, her presence is mediated and looks as though it has been reproduced. And the listening spectators are not (at least at first) aware of the live presence of Hannigan on stage in this scene. The gap between body and voice that I was writing about in the Introduction and in Chapter 1 is magnified here by zooming in on a singer’s face where the mouth is clearly visible, and showing that, in accordance with claims by Dolar and Žižek quoted in the Introduction, even when we clearly see who

---


is emitting the voice, the relationship between body and voice remains ventriloquial. That was underlined in this scene that shows the author’s consciousness of the ventriloquial dimension of singing in opera, and an attempt to rework it

Before I move to the conclusion of this chapter, I will now make a short overview of the findings I have made while examining how strategies used in the staging, the music, the libretto and the mediation interfere in the connection between bodies and voices on stage in Writing to Vermeer. Strategies used in the staging influence the relationship between body and voice in the most obvious way. The fact that singing characters appear as triplicate interrogates the way in which female characters are conventionally objectified in opera according to Abbate. Triplication creates the conditions for dissociation of the voice from the body that produces it. Furthermore, independent dramaturgies of the libretto and of the music support dissociation of the voice, too. The way Greenaway questions the concept of écriture féminine is reflected in the way he makes his female characters exit the masculine discourse. Women figures thus fluctuate between object and subject status. That ambivalence goes along with the postdramatic condition of the piece, in which the independence of the texts (libretto, music, staging) is promoted. That independence contribute to a reinvention of the relation between the voice and the body. Finally, mediation in Scene 2 emphasizes the asynchronous, dissociated relation between body and voice, and the scene of Saskia’s close-up seems to be Greenaway’s manifest statement about the subject. All these strategies together significantly affect the conventional relation between body and voice, making it desynchronous, ventriloquial.

An important point that Connor raises about ventriloquism is connected to what he calls “the cultural sensorium” – “the system of relations, interimplications, and exchanges between the senses”. He initiates a discussion about “(...) construction and transformation of the sensorium because the relationship between the arousing ear and the interpreting eye are a cultural achievement, rather than a biological given”. Of all postoperas I analyze in this dissertation, Writing to Vermeer seems to elaborate this in the most obvious way. This is because it started its ‘life’ as a painting i.e. as the object of vision. In this postopera, what was previously an object of vision becomes an object of hearing, too, since the voice was attributed to the figures that ‘originate’ from the painting. This transformation is emphasized, and it reinvents the relationship between singing and hearing in the opera, and consequently between singing body and sung voice.

---

319 Ibid.
Writing to Vermeer, unusually for an opera, started its ‘life’ as a painting. ‘Singing pictures’ were born and Vermeer’s embodied women started to sing for us, but also ‘for themselves’. The complex transfer from the ‘real’ woman-model, through the two-dimensional painting motive, and finally to the singing character was accompanied by a de/synchronization process that most typically relates to the subject/object of the vision/hearing relation as it was previously discussed. The situations that Vermeer painted were reenacted, envoiced and multiplied. Reenacting Vermeer’s women, multiplying their figures and envoicing them problematizes the relation of what and how we see and hear simultaneously in opera and produces new meanings. The authors reinvent the conventional body-voice construct. This reinvented relationship between the singing body and the sung voice in this case produces questions about at least three issues: the painting in the age of new media, the status of women struggling between being subject and/or object, and the function of opera in today’s Western world.

The main cause of de-synchronization in both La Belle et la Bête and Writing to Vermeer is the fact that a single singing voice simultaneously refers to more than one body. In La Belle et la Bête the singing voice ‘belongs’ both to the singer on stage and to the film character, while in Writing to Vermeer a singing voice refers to triplicated identical figures on stage, or, as in Scene 2, is ‘divided’ between the singer’s body on stage and her simultaneous video projection. These procedures confirm Grover-Friedlander’s claims that the unity between body and voice is merely a ‘trick’. That ‘trick’ is manifestly thematized in La Belle et la Bête, where it becomes the conceptual motor of the piece, while an awareness of that ‘trick’ is embedded in the representational mechanism of Writing to Vermeer. The ‘impossible synchronization’ in both postoperas speaks of different divisions: between opera and film, man and animal, image and sound, live and reproduced, subject and object. The problematization of those divisions and the reinvention of the body-voice relationship in these pieces effectively reinvent the medium of opera. Moreover, the reinvention of the vocalic body in postopera confirms opera’s adaptation to an age in which “(...) a range of technologies for synthesizing speech makes the ventriloquial condition a prevalent one”.321

320 Connor writes about “fundamentally ventriloquial medium of cinema” and discusses the moment of synchronization when the sound was added to a film. “(...) ‘Talking picture’ is both a picture to which talking has been added, and a picture that has started to talk for itself”, he writes.320 Connor, Dumbstruck, p. 411-2.
321 Steven Connor, Dumbstruck, p. 398.
Part 3 - SINGING GENDER (AS A PERFORMANCE)
Chapter 6

Voice and Gender Standing Apart

In Part 1, I demonstrated how the relationship between the singing body and the voice in postopera is reinvented with the aid of technology, and how and why the singing appears beyond the body that produces it. Part 2 offered an analysis of how the singing body and the voice become de-synchronous through a specific reinvention of the relationship between what is heard and what is seen at the same time in postopera. Part 3 will examine the discursive ‘friction’ that appears between the singing body and the voice in relation to gender. The theoretical objects are two postoperas where the relationship between body, voice and gender is questioned through singing: La Commenda by Louis Andriessen and Hal Hartley and Homeland by Laurie Anderson. In both works, the issue of body-voice-gender relationship is interrogated in connection with what is conventionally perceived as the singing female voice. In La Commenda, Dante, sung by a female singer, is divided further into two characters, feminine and masculine, that appear simultaneously. In Homeland, Anderson introduces a certain kind of ‘vocal masquerade’ by electronic processing of her voice to sound masculine, with the help of a harmonizer (pitch shifting device).³²²

This chapter will initially investigate the postdramatic condition of La Commenda by elaborating on its multiplying narratives, deconstructing characters, and ways of mediating stage events. The singing body in La Commenda is affected by the specific postdramatic condition of the piece that engages several narratives simultaneously, two sets of characters related to different ‘stories’, and complex and asynchronous events on stage involving different media. All of these elements affect the presence of the singing body of Dante, making the relationship between the body and the voice ambiguous promoting a reinvention of the voice-gender relation. The body-voice relationships within the singing characters are first reinvented with the help of these procedures, and only later comes the vocal travesty of the principal character. Towards the end of the chapter, my focus will be on vocal travesty in relation to the character of Dante, and on the way that gender is related to that vocalic body.

I will analyze the body-voice-gender relationship by using the theoretical concept of ‘unveiled voices’ by Joke Dame that aims to dismantle stereotypes of vocal representation in relation

³²² Tereza Havelkova introduces the concept of vocal masquerade in an analogy with the concept of masquerade by the film theorist Mary Ann Doane. Havelkova states: “The notion of vocal masquerade presupposes that even when text-less, vocal expression is culturally coded. The vocal masquerade would then involve a presentation of a vocal gesture not as a direct emanation of the female body but rather as a sign of femininity”. See: Tereza Havelkova, “Bodily Presence or Vocal Masquerade? Performing the Feminine Through Extended Vocality”, conference paper read at Song, Stage, Screen conference held at University of Winchester, Winchester, UK, September 2010, manuscript.
I use Dame’s theory, which relativizes the relationship between voice, sex and gender, to examine how this is manifest in the case of La Commedia’s Dante character. A remark is needed here about the materials I use for the analysis of this postopera. The singing bodies of the principal characters in La Commedia (Dante, Lucifer and Beatrice) appear to be ‘divided’ between their stage and film presence. The voice refers to multiple bodies, and is de-synchronized, detached from those bodies at the same time. That detachment is different in the video/film recording of the opera (also directed by Hartley) which is used for the purposes of this analysis, due to the fact that the perspective of the spectator is suggested by the medium of film, while in the live performed piece one can choose between other perspectives for perceiving the piece, since a spectator’s view is not ‘directed’ as it is in the film. This is to some extent true for the difference between any of the analyzed pieces performed live and their recordings. For La Commedia, however, it may be of particular importance, due to the extreme density of the events happening on stage. When experiencing the opera from the DVD, the ‘density’ of the simultaneous events is still the same as in the live performance, but different perspectives that could be experienced in live performance are all unified in the recording. Thus, although my analysis is primarily based on the information I acquire from the DVD recording and the score, I use my impressions from the live performance as well. Although these two sources are different, I believe that by relying on them both it is possible to achieve consistent analysis since my own view of the piece is based on both what I experienced during its live performance in Amsterdam, and on what I could use as a reminder of that performance – the DVD recording.

Towards the Postdramatic Condition of La Commedia (1): Multiplying Narratives

Irony is what generates the drama in my opera – a satirical view of heaven and hell in our everyday life.

Louis Andriessen

Commedia by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) is a poem written in the first person between 1308 and 1321. It is an allegory based primarily on the afterlife and eternal love. The poet, Virgil, is Dante’s

---

324 La Commedia was premiered at Holland festival in Amsterdam theatre Carré at June 12, 2008. Louis Andriessen is both the author of music and of the libretto. Hal Hartley staged the piece and authored the film.
leader through *Hell and Purgatory*, and Beatrice, who is the feminine ideal for Dante, leads him through Heaven. The political context of Italy at that time, in particular Florence, is also embedded in the text. Dante's *Divina Commedia* (henceforth referred to as *Commedia*) is best described as an allegory and it bears many different levels of meanings. It is divided into three large parts and the plot involves the poet Dante who seeks his beloved Beatrice through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven.

The film opera *La Commedia*, inspired by Dante’s poem, consists of five parts: *The City of Dis or: The Ship of Fools; Story From Hell (Racconto dall’Inferno); Lucifer; The Garden of Earthly Delights; Luce Etterna (Eternal Light)*. Besides Dante’s *Commedia*, this opera brings several other (pre)texts that are important for its genesis and/or interpretation: paintings by Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1516), according to which parts one and four are named, verses by the poet Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679) and *Song of Songs* from the Old Testament used in the libretto.

Glass’s *La Belle et la Bête* is an “opera for ensemble and film”, and Andriessen and Hartley named *La Commedia* a “film opera”. Both pieces problematize the relationship between opera and film, but in different ways. “Film opera” appears to be a sharply accurate term for the merging of the two media – opera and film – that are of equal importance in *La Commedia*. There is the mute, black and white film divided into five parts (one for each part of the opera), projected on the big screen on stage, whose segments were ‘zoomed’ on a few smaller screens that appear and disappear during the performance in different places. And, there is the live performed opera on stage with singers, ensemble, conductor, costumes, stage set, props etc. Although it might have been expected that the events portrayed in live performance reflect the film’s occurrences (or vice versa), that is not the case – at least not in conventional terms. Opera and film, although merged into one artwork, have independent dramaturgies. What connects them is the appearance of the same actors/singers (as the same characters) both in the film and the opera. The narratives of the film and the opera both refer to *Commedia*, but in quite different ways, and that will be more elaborated during the course of this chapter.

The events represented in the film and the live opera performance do not refer to the same narrative. In Hartley’s film, the central role is given to the musical guild and their Amsterdam adventures. In Andriessen's score, there are direct references to the world of Dante’s *Commedia*, Bosch’s paintings, the Bible and Vondel’s poetry. Both Andriessen and Hartley’s narratives are related to Dante’s *Commedia*, but differently, bringing different stories and engaging partly different actors. Only three principal characters – Dante, Beatrice and Lucifer - exist both in opera and in the film, and they are played by the same singers/actors (Cristina Zavalloni, Claron McFadden and Jeroen Willems, respectively). Andriessen and Hartley even offer two parallel synopses for the opera so that

---

326 Dante’s *Commedia* is also known as *Divina Commedia*. It was named *Divina* by Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) considerably later.
it is presented as an intentional ‘impossible synchronization’. Hartley wrote the synopsis of the film, and Andriessen the synopsis of what happens in the score, so the synopsis of the whole opera appears as an archive of different historical, literary, musical and media texts and contexts.

Through its history, opera witnessed different attempts to hierarchize its different ‘texts’ (music, drama, staging). As the unfolding analysis of the chapter will clarify, in La Commedia authors manage to create complex relations between operatic texts that deny a sense of hierarchy despite their intentions to put music in a dominant position. The most compelling relationship appears to be the one between the film and the live performed opera, where film appears to be ‘of the opera’, and out of it at the same time. Or, it could be claimed that the film unfolds both ‘in’ the opera and ‘in parallel with the opera’. The relationship between those two media is reflected in large part through the singing body. The non-existent unity of the time, place and action in La Commedia, and on the other hand the fact that the same principal characters are always in two different contexts, and that they share the voice, makes the body-voice relationship de-synchronized. The voice is purposely disembodied by the fact that it pertains to two different characters from two different contexts at the same time.

Comparing Andriessen and Hartley’s synopses illustrates how different their vision of what happens in the film and in the opera are, and how the presence of operatic characters is affected. It is obvious that two significantly different ‘adaptations’ of Dante’s Commedia were made by Hartley and Andriessen. However, they did not consider this to be the obstacle for integrating their dramaturgical views in the same piece. The fact that the narratives of the film and the opera overlap constantly shifts the viewer/listener’s attention and reinforces the split between the film and the events on stage. The fact that the same actors appear in the opera and the film in the roles of principal characters makes the two plots simultaneously connected and disconnected; since the listening spectator is seeing the same actors/singers in principal roles on stage and in the film, they are expected to be in the same ‘story’, but that is not the case.

When I listened to/watched a live performance of the opera for the first time, I was not prepared for the ambiguous relationship between the film and opera. The most obvious effect this ambiguity had on my perception of the opera was a constant disturbance of the intelligibility of the plot. By routine, I was trying to ‘catch’ the story by merging what I had read in the synopsis and what I was seeing/hearing on stage. But, since I had to follow different stories, the appearance of the same characters constantly made a ‘noise’ in the denoting of the narratives and their representations in staging.

As we can see from the written tabular ‘synchronization’ of the film and music’s synopses, presented later in this chapter, Hartley’s film narrative is based on the events in relation to the
group of musicians in Amsterdam, while Andriessen’s narrative is an ironical reinterpretation of the characters in Dante’s Commedia. Hartley’s narrative, containing grotesque situations, could be seen as a reflection of the tradition of opera buffa. In contrast, Andriessen’s interpretation seems to reflect the tradition of opera seria. The character of Dante has the same ‘destiny’ in both narratives – Dante dies in Act IV under the wheels of different kind of vehicles. What follows is a comparison of Hartley’s and Andriessen’s synopses of La Commedia in order to illustrate their differences and to try to find some ‘knots’ of synchronicity:

While in the first part, The Ship of Fools, Hartley introduces the members of the musical guild in Amsterdam acting anarchically in their favourite bar, known as The Ship of Fools, he also introduces contemporary embodiments of Beatrice, Dante and Lucifer. Andriessen has a more metaphorical view of Dante’s epic:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synopsis by Hal Hartley</th>
<th>Synopsis by Louis Andriessen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 1: The City of Dis or: “The Ship of Fools”</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Terrifying Orchestra of the 21st century, also known as “The Guild”, plays their music on the streets of Amsterdam. They finish for the day, divide up the money, and go to their favorite bar, the Ship of Fools, where Lucifer, a local businessman with failed political ambitions, witnesses everything. Meanwhile, two young social activists from the suburbs, Maria and Lucia, arrive in town to hand out political pamphlets during the visit to the city of a famous public figure – Beatrice. Dante, a lady television journalist from Italy, is preparing her on-camera report of this important event. Maria is saddened to see her friend Lucia seduced by the young, tattooed, horn player, Farfarello, and taken to the Ship of Fools. At the bar, the Guild get drunk, dance, argue, fight, and try to make out with each other’s wives and girlfriends. A ferocious fight breaks out between Calcabrina and Libbicocco.</td>
<td><strong>Part 1: The City of Dis or “The Ship of Fools”</strong>&lt;br&gt;It opens with a psalm text in Latin introducing Das Narrenschiff, followed by the sixteenth century recruitment text for the guild of the Blue Barge. Anyone indulging in throwing dice, dancing and capering with pretty women is welcome. “With such folk the Barge is loaded.” Then Beatrice appears. She tells (in Italian) about her request for Virgil to help Dante on his expedition through the afterlife. There are some men in a boat on their way to Dis, the burning city in Hell. On the roof of the flaming towers they see screaming furies. Near the end someone walks on the water. Dante concludes the first act with the words: “I was certain that she was sent from heaven”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both synopses refer to the anarchic behaviour suggested also in Bosch’s painting, depicting a situation of an unusual company floating in a barge. As a metaphor for mankind, the barge is floating in an unpredictable direction, and The Ship of Fools becomes a powerful allegory.

---

327 “Opera buffa. Comic opera. This is a term that generally refers to operas in the later part of the eighteenth century (e.g. Mozart’s Nozze di Figaro); however, it also has been used to refer to comic operas into the early nineteenth century (e.g. Rossini’s Barbiere di Siviglia). (...)” See more in: Naomi André, “Glossary”, in Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2006, p. 180.

328 “‘Serious opera’. This term generally refers to operas in the latter part of the eighteenth century, but it also has been used for non-comic operas in the early nineteenth century. (...)” See more in: Naomi André, Ibid.

Part 2, *Story from Hell*, appears to be an episode representing Dante’s vision of the infernal (Andriessen) and on Hartley’s side it is a testimony to the worrying behaviour of the members of the musical guild:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hartley</th>
<th>Andriessen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 2: Story From Hell (<em>Racconto dall’Inferno</em>)</td>
<td>Part 2: Racconto dall’Inferno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guild wakes up on a beach outside the city. Lucia is with them, lost and worried. Maria has followed them. Calcabrina chastises Farfarello for having brought the girl home. Alichino chooses the day’s music while Graffiacane practices her Cello. Lucia and Maria fight.</td>
<td>Cristina, the personification of Dante, tells a funny story about one of the supreme devils, who shows her the way. This Malacoda gives Cristina an escort of ten devils. They are very frightening. While they trudge on through hell, a peculiar march is sounding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visions of Hell continue as Part 3, *Lucifer*. Andriessen presents Lucifer in confrontation with God, while Hartley embodies this character in the figure of a businessman interested in helping the guild of musicians:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hartley</th>
<th>Andriessen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 3: Lucifer</td>
<td>Part 3: Lucifer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guild goes to work, but Libbicoco gets in a fight with the Police and they all get arrested, together with Lucia who has been looking on in fascination. Maria waits outside the police station as Lucifer pays for their release and enlightens them in regards to his plans to overthrow heaven. Meanwhile, Beatrice arrives at the hotel and Dante prepares for her on-camera report.</td>
<td>A long instrumental introduction brings us to the deepest horrors of Hell. A choir describes Lucifer. Then Lucifer appears. He is very angry because God created man in His image. Lucifer, the angel who was always the nearest to God, is jealous. He roars out his vengefulness, and his wish to destroy Adam and Eve. He triumphs. In his final sentence he calls upon the Creator: “Alas, now I regret that I ever created man.” The texts of Part 3 come from two plays by the 17th century Dutch ‘Prince of Poets’ Joost van den Vondel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What follows is in clear contrast to this infernal atmosphere. Part 4, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, creates an allusion to Bosch’s eponymous phantasmagorical oil on wood triptych that is, with its vivid imagery and complex symbolism, the most ambitious of his paintings. It is rich in nudity and surreal situations. The first and third parts of the triptych represent Eden and Hell respectively. The central and most substantial part of the triptych is devoted to “earthly delights” featuring a considerable number of slim nude young male and female figures engaged in all kinds of sexual perversions and leisure activities, flying, and swimming. They are surrounded by fantastical ‘buildings’, giant fruit, birds, butterflies, seashells, fish, and other animals. Andriessen gives a rather fragmentary synopsis for this part that is seemingly engaged mostly with different emotions – between both friends and lovers. On the other hand, Hartley traces the steps of the musical guild further, this time exploring their emotions towards each other. Dante is killed.
Part 4: De Tuin der Lusten ("The Garden of Earthly Delights")

Parts I and IV derive their titles from paintings of Hieronymus Bosch. His irreverent, funny, and surrealist paintings were an important influence for the opera.

Dante, on his way to Purgatory, meets his deceased friend Casella, a musician. Casella sings one of Dante’s beautiful sonnets. Dante sings a song about a gruesome snake. Then, large birds come flying in and they chase the snake away. Dante is subsequently helped over the river Lethe and sees an impressive pageant of great beauty. He somehow gets under one of the wheels and dies. (Or is hit by a car and dies in the street.) The choir sings a text from the ‘Song of Songs’ about the bride of the Lebanon.

In the final part of the film, Eternal Light, both Beatrice and the guild leave the city. Andriessen brings the character of Beatrice on stage again, and the singer that took the role of Dante is now playing herself, Cristina (Zavalloni). A children’s choir ends the piece, mocking the whole situation:

As seen from previous analysis, there is no unity of place between the narratives of the film and the opera (the plot of the film happens in Amsterdam while the plot of the opera score happens in different places, excluding Amsterdam). There is no unity of time between them either (the film plot happens ‘today’ while the plot of the opera score is based in the distant past). The unity of action is non-existent. Furthermore, the principal characters appear both in the film and in the stage events. All of these elements destabilize the integrity of the ‘plot’ in general, and also the identity of the characters. The singing bodies are not visually multiplied, as in Writing to Vermeer, and their video recording does not enhance their performance, as was the case in One. Nevertheless, it would appear that both of these procedures were reflected partly in the use of singing bodies in La Commedia. Each singing body ‘lends’ itself to two narratives simultaneously. It participates live in
Andriessen’s story; however, a mute version of the same body, acting differently, concurrently ‘lives’ another life in Hartley’s film. These two representations constantly interfere, and reflect each other, which puts them both in an estranged, detached, and de-synchronized relationship with the singing voice that they ‘share’.

Towards the Postdramatic Condition of La Commedia (2): Deconstructing Characters

The three principal characters of La Commedia are Dante, Beatrice and Lucifer. Aside from the fact that they appear in different circumstances in the opera and film, the principal characters also come from different periods of time – the past in Dante’s world, and the present time of Western late capitalist globalized societies (the film happens in Amsterdam; the Dante-journalist comes from Italy). The exponents of contemporary Western society are the characters of the businessman (Lucifer), the journalist (Dante), and the state person (Beatrice).

For Andriessen, Lucifer is “the fallen angel, in Part III and Cacciaguida, an angry thug with frightening opinions in Part V”, and for Hartley “an angry and resentful businessman with frustrated political ambitions”. For Andriessen, Dante is “at once the famous Italian poet of 14th century Florence on his journey through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven as described in his Commedia, as well as a TV News anchor woman reporting on current affairs across Europe”, and for Hartley only a “television news journalist from Italy”. For Andriessen, Beatrice is “Dante’s true love and guide in heaven. But she is also a popular statesperson of some sort”, and for Hartley, she is “a famous foreign public figure visiting Amsterdam”. Thus, all of the principal characters are falsely ‘doubled’ on film. I write ‘falsely doubled’, because although the same actors/singers appear in the film, are dressed similarly, and even have the same names, they are playing different roles. As seen in Andriessen’s commentaries, he acknowledges Hartley’s interpretations of the characters, and keeps them in mind when making his own interpretations. All of the principal characters are therefore deconstructed at the very moment that they are conceived. This ‘unstable’ status of the character affects the relationship between the singing body and the voice.

The fact that Dante, Lucifer and Beatrice appear both as the singing characters of postopera, and also as the mute characters in the film, adds to the estranged relationship between the singing body and the voice: at the same time, the voice appears to belong to the body that sings, and refers to the body of the same actor/singer in the silent film. Moreover, the same voice of Cristina Zavalloni

330 Besides Beatrice, Dante, Lucifer, and the guild musicians, there are more characters in Hartley’s film: Maria and Lucia – two social activists from the suburbs who come to Amsterdam to hand out pamphlets during a visiting dignitary’s appearance in the city; the bartender and his wife. These, however, are not singing characters, so I will not discuss them on this occasion.

331 Andriessen and Hartley’s synopses of La Commedia, manuscript.
is simultaneously attributed to the figure of the male poet Dante (in the score), and the voice of the female journalist (in the film). This situation leads me to perceive the singer on the stage and the same singer on the film as different entities. Seeing both of these figures – singing and mute – ‘distorts’ what I hear in a way that is in line with Connor’s assertions about the vocalic body. The ambivalent position of the voice that refers both to the male and female characters at the same time provokes questions. It makes me think of what the authors wanted to ‘embed’ in such a body-voice-gender relationship. On the other hand, I am interested in what could be ‘read’ from that relationship, which was not the author’s deliberate inscription of the meaning. At this point, it remains to be seen how the mediation of stage events affects singing corporeality in this postopera.

Towards the Postdramatic Condition of La Commedia (3): Mediating Stage Events

It is common practice to include video in contemporary opera, as seen in One, Three Tales, and Writing to Vermeer for instance. However, Hartley’s achievement in La Commedia remains within the medium of film. That black and white film is silent, and it is projected, with short interruptions, during the whole duration of the live performed events on stage. The film is not projected on one screen, but on five of them, one of which is big and serves as the ‘main screen’. The rest of the four screens are activated from time to time, to ‘zoom in’ on particular situations or perspectives presented on the big screen. The fact that film is involved in this opera gives La Commedia an exciting cinematic quality that challenges the operatic listener/spectator’s expectations. The audience is faced with the unusual experience of watching the film in the opera. And the film establishes a non-conventional relation to the music – it is not illustrative, but rather coexists with the music. Two or even three dramaturgies (film, music, staging elements) interlace, and the synchronicity between them is loose. Each one interprets the story based upon Commedia, yet only sometimes do they appear to refer, and then only by coincidence, to the same situation at the same time.

What follows is Hartley’s explanation of the stage events, given in a Brechtian manner – an explanation that acts against theatrical illusion, and seems to serve as a sobering ‘warning’ for those who tend to forget that they are watching an opera:

For the evening, Carré is Purgatory. You will be surprised to discover that in Purgatory the ASKO/Schoenberg Ensemble, conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw, perform the music of Louis Andriessen while Workers go about their business preparing souls for their eventual removal to Paradise. Like any self respecting corporate body, Purgatory has lots of video screens with which to keep an eye on
Human Folly. This evening, their main concern seems to be with a particular two days in Amsterdam (...)\textsuperscript{118}

The workers that Hartley mentions are members of the instrumental ensemble, dressed in grey overalls resembling the typical outfit of construction site workers: an allusion to the working class arises here.\textsuperscript{133} The inclusion of numerous props originating from the construction site in \textit{La Commedia} seems to be an obvious reference: in order to create a new opera, you first have to scrap the old. In this case, video screens influence both what happens on the opera stage, and how the listening spectators perceive the piece. I perceive all of those screens as rather like ‘excavators’ that are used as a means of scrapping the ‘old’ opera by disfiguring its conventional structure and ways of representation.

![Figure 11 - Louis Andriessen, Hal Hartley, La Commedia. Photo © Hans van den Bogaard](image)

A number of small screens that zoom in on situations drawn from the big screen where \textit{La Commedia}’s film is being projected supply the audience with a certain kind of voyeurism that is typically associated with Internet browsing: constantly changing views and small windows that resemble those opened by surfing on the Internet become a kind of ‘default’ for this theatrical-film-opera situation. \textit{La Commedia} requires the listening spectator to experience the film in a scenario

\textsuperscript{118} Hal Hartley, \textit{La Commedia} - Synopsis, manuscript.

\textsuperscript{133} During the earlier days of his career, Andriessen was once photographed at a demolition site prior to the creation of \textit{De Stijl}: “We went off to a demolition site where a few mechanical excavators were still lying around and we were photographed amongst all that junk. It was actually quite appropriate because, in order to write new music you first have to scrap the old”. Louis Andriessen quoted in: Mirjam Zegers (ed.), \textit{The Art of Stealing Time}, Todmorden, Lancs, Arc Music, 2002, p. 217.
drastically different to that found in the cinema – watching the film within the opera. The audience watches the film when there is no dark cinema hall, the film is silent and the music ensemble is playing live in front of the film screen. There is electronic music involved, singers are singing dressed in costumes, and the conductor leads the orchestra and the choir. Moreover, there are many non-speaking and non-singing actors on stage in a simulated building-site iconography etc. The fact that a black and white film is projected while live music is performed alludes to early cinematic conventions, where silent films were often accompanied by music. This situation is, however, highly problematized since there is no trace of ‘mickey mousing’ – the practice of making music that illustrates the visuals by mimicking the action on stage or in the film.

The relationship between different texts (music, film, staging) resembles the one existing in news television networks. For example, when listening to the news presenter and following the news text on TV, it is possible to read news tickers at the bottom of the screen that have become a ubiquitous part of the television news experience, and to watch at the same time a series of documentary photos or video clips that refer to the event. Hartley transposes this experience to postopera. He plays with mass media structures in La Commedia by reflecting news television networks that combine journalism, politics and advertising. The influence of mass media in this postopera, however, is not iconic. The structure of La Commedia seems to ‘report’ on the opera, by all available means – music, screens, film, live performance, and subtitle texts appearing on the screen. It becomes the conglomerase of artifacts ‘of the opera’, and that media structure affects the representation of the singing body. In such circumstances, even technical details such as subtitle texts, or monitors that help performers to see the conductor, appear to be embedded in the opera’s self-referential structure.

Telematic cultures, as defined by Vivian Sobschack, are those in which “television, video cassettes, video tape recorder/players, video games and personal computers all form an encompassing electronic system whose various forms ‘interface’ to constitute an alternative and absolute world that uniquely incorporates the spectator/user in a spatially decentered, weakly temporalized and quasi-disembodied state”. La Commedia reinvented in postopera the world of telematic cultures that Sobschack was writing about through complex live performed and projected situations. All of these situations that are mediated imply that the relationship between the body and the voice is mediated also, and that mediation affects the immediacy of that relation making it asynchronous and ‘artificial’. Narratives that are multiplied, characters that are deconstructed, and

334 The composer of electronic music for La Commedia is Anke Brouwer.
stage events that are mediated make the vocalic body of La Commedia singing characters complex, and the relationship between the body and the voice on stage to be detached.

Through multiplying narratives, deconstructing characters and mediating stage events, Hartley and Andriessen show that perhaps the only possible resolution of the long-lasting operatic ‘battle’ for domination between different texts is to expose de-synchronicities and to insist upon them. Those three procedures influence the relationship between the singing bodies and the voices. The fact that there are different plots in the film and on the opera stage, and that both of those plots are reflected through each singing character, makes the position of the characters ambivalent. When they sing, they sing both ‘for’ live performing bodies on stage, and also in a way ‘for’ projected bodies of the same singers on the film. One voice refers to different situations of the same body at the same time. This ambivalent relationship between bodies and voices is to some extent the product of deconstructed operatic characters as well, but that relationship also deconstructs the characters simultaneously. The manner in which stage events are mediated makes an ambivalent relationship between singing bodies and sung voices on stage even more complex. The body-voice relationship is already ambivalent and destabilized due to multiplying narratives and deconstructing characters. In addition, the numerous video screens that ‘zoom’ in on particular details shifts attention further from the live body that sings on stage, to the representations of the same body projected on different screens.

In the midst of all the redefinitions that the operatic character goes through in La Commedia, yet another one takes place – a vocal travesty of the Dante character, where Cristina Zavalloni’s singing refers to two characters and two genders at the same time, paradoxically both played by her, but in different media – film and opera. The fact that I can never know if the singing Dante addresses the audience as a male or female affects the perception of the voice that fluctuates between the female and the male gender. In what follows, I will first analyze the vocalic body of the character of Dante, and then confront it with Dame’s theory in order to investigate how the relationship between body, voice and gender is reinvented in this piece.
One Voice, Two Characters, Two Genders

“In early opera”, Dame explains, “voices were chosen for their beauty, their potential, their virtuosity, and not for their gender”. But, what we choose as beauty is gendered. Therefore, despite the fact that Andriessen seems to choose vocals for La Commedia only for the ‘beauty’ of the voices and not for their gender, the way that the criterion of ‘vocal beauty’ is constructed is already gendered. Andriessen is fascinated by strong, expressive, non-vibrato, and mostly by female voices that are capable of eradicating the borders between different musical languages, strategies and contexts.

Unique timbre preferences are confirmed by Andriessen’s choice of the voices in La Commedia, especially regarding the voice of Cristina Zavalloni, a singer whose background is both in jazz and classical music repertoire. The specific strength and intensity of Zavalloni’s voice, and a timbre that is much closer to jazz vocalists than to conventional opera singers, appeals to Andriessen’s vocal aesthetics:

There are opera singers, oratorio singers, rock ‘n’ roll singers, pop singers, actors, and between all these tiny ‘provinces’ are huge barriers. I will devote the last twenty years of my life to demolish them (...) It is necessary in order to develop the new singing style which we need.

Andriessen’s statement above confirms the importance of the vocal expression in his music.

According to the score of La Commedia, the situation in connection with the relation between the voice of Christina Zavalloni and the roles she interprets is complex. In Part 1, Zavalloni sings as Dante, in Part 2 she sings only as a “voice solo”, in Part 4 she sings as both Dante and

---

338 Some of the singers with whom Andriessen closely collaborated, or whose work he highly respects, are Cathy Barberian, Astrid Seriese, Barbara Hannigan, Marie Angel, Iva Bitova, Cristina Zavalloni. He shows much less interest in male voices, and does not use them as often as female voices. He collaborated with Jeroen Willems both in his opera Inanna and in La Commedia.
339 Zavalloni was already for some time Andriessen’s ‘vocal muse’. Some of the important recent pieces of music theatre and vocal-instrumental music were either dedicated to her, or feature her in the main roles, for example small-scale postoperas Inanna (2003) and Anais Nin (2010).
“Cristina”, and in Part 5 she is only “Cristina”. During the entire opera, her outfit does not change, so she could demonstrate differences between the characters that she ‘comments’ or ‘personifies’ only by her voice, if required. As a reminder, the character of Dante is both male poet and female journalist at the same time. Zavalloni is dressed in woman’s clothes and sings with a high voice, making no effort to appear as a male. It is symptomatic that the composer never used the term ‘soprano’ in the score. Andriessen undermines the stereotypical typology of operatic voices. With a background in various kinds of ‘non-classical’ music, Zavalloni’s voice hardly matches the conventional ‘soprano’ voice type that bears the burden of the classical music tradition.

Although it might appear so at first glance, the male side of the character of Dante is not meant to be only nominal. This is supported by the fact that Andriessen refers to the particular historical figure of the male poet, Dante. Also, in some parts of the text, a heterosexual love relationship is assumed, since it is obvious that Dante as a male sings love song to Beatrice (“Sorella mia, sposa” (...), from Part IV). But, for listening spectators who presumably do not have previous knowledge of Dante the poet, and his Commedia, the character of Dante in La Commedia would be perceived as a female because Cristina Zavalloni sings it. Only after acquiring knowledge about the context of the piece, will the recipient be able to perceive the Dante character as a male, as well.

In the synopsis of La Commedia, Andriessen states that Cristina (Zavalloni) is the ‘personification of Dante’, and this specific metaphorical relationship between the singer and the character opens the space for a reinvention of the body-voice-gender relationship in the case of the Dante character. To some extent, placing himself in relation to what he previously said on personification, Andriessen states on another occasion: “Rather than personifying the roles of Dante and Lucifer, those two singers function more as commentators.” So, the singers are both personifications and commentators, and that allows a non-mimetic relation between the singer/actor and the role s/he interprets. That situation also opens a space for playing with the ambiguity of the singer’s gender. What eventually occurs is the problematization of the body-voice-gender relationship that allows a parallel to Dame’s interrogation of gendered position of voice types to be discussed. Another level of meanings could be read from the unconventional pairing of what is conventionally considered as the female voice with the male character, in relation to similar

341 Unlike in the score of La Commedia, the program booklet of the performance always designates ‘voice’ and ‘Cristina’ as ‘Dante’.
situations from the history of opera, where examples of women singing as men, and vice versa, were not rare.  

A non-mimetic approach featured by music is important for this discussion. The music of La Commedia has an oratorio-like dramaturgy. Characters do not have dialogues. Their monologues are ecstatic and exciting thanks both to their unusual vocal powers and the different stylistic materials used. I would not argue that music ‘takes over’ in this opera, although it was meant to do so. The stage and film presence are so remarkable that they strongly and constantly divert the listening spectator’s attention away from the musical dramaturgy. In La Commedia, there is no invisibility of the ensemble. The orchestra was not in the pit, as there was no pit. The ensemble was visible, lighted, and in front of the stage. There is no darkening of the hall. Any possibility of hiding the music emitter was corrupted. As in Writing to Vermeer, the music does not accompany what happens on stage. Here, music does not reflect what happens on the screen; it is rather the opposite — the film accompanies the music. Furthermore, there is no “atemporal nonlocalized present” (Žižek) from which music would come. The musical performance is ‘staged’ in front of the stage. Andriessen and Hartley’s approach is highly anti-illusionist: at every moment the piece, the system of functioning of the piece is exposed, and its mechanisms are ironically bold. Instead of a Wagnerian synthesis of the arts, La Commedia brings together a multitude of coexisting texts. The anti-illusionist approach mirrors the relationship between the body and the voice as well, and influences the relationship between the voice and gender in the case of the character of Dante.

Naomi André traces the genealogy of interrogating the gender of the voice in opera history, and these are some of the questions she discusses: “(...) As the aural legacy of the castrati haunts the beginning of the nineteenth century in the travesti heroes, so the travesti roles then cast their shadow throughout the rest of the century and inform the female characters that emerge over the course of the nineteenth century. Since the voice of the second woman used to be heard as that of a man, how can her voice not present a different articulation of femininity in opera than that of the first woman? (...) This study explores the meaning of this aural genealogy; how a woman’s voice represents both male and female characters and the relationship between voice and gender signification”. André, Op. Cit. p. 12.

Hartly explains the need to leave the film-opera story ambivalent as necessary for the situation in which the music could lead in the process of meaning making: “How do you create this intriguing environment where the music can take over and make us all feel something big, where the music fuses all these other elements together? So far I’ve found it has to do with not being too specific. Characters and situations, in the movie as well as on stage, have to be only implied, not spelt out too exactly. Recognizable but general. I guess I’m hoping to create the circumstances for some sort of flood of associations that are meaningful but hard to state explicitly. That’s a long way out from what I usually do as a filmmaker. Here, the meaning is the music”. See: Anders Wright, „The Second Decade”, http://www.possiblefilms.com/articles.htm, Accessed: November 22, 2011.

Dante: Singing beyond Body

Parts 2 and 4 are particularly interesting in relation to the analysis of the Dante character’s vocalic body. In both of these parts, we see Cristina Zavalloni at some moments singing on the opera stage, while appearing concurrently on Hartley’s black and white film, filmed on the staircase of what appears to be the foyer of De Nederlandse Opera in Amsterdam. She appears as a kind of silent singing-talking head, and it is immediately obvious that what she sang for the film is not compatible with her simultaneous singing live on stage. She is de-synchronized. With reference to Abbate’s argument, Zavalloni as Dante objectifies us with her voice, but she cannot be objectified by our gaze, as Abbate proposed.346 This is because our attention as listening spectators is constantly diverted between what we hear as a female voice, what we see as a female singing figure, what it was suggested by authors we should perceive to be simultaneously a male and female character, and what we perceive as de-synchronization between all of these elements. Both Beatrice and Dante are female, and although they never sing in duet, the fact that Dante’s *Commedia* represents them as an ideal of heterosexual love, makes me to hear a homoerotic dimension between those voices in *La Commedia*.

Joke Dame examines the casting women in leading opera roles by way of homoerotics: “The casting of women in the leading parts is the contemporary counterpart of the historical baroque

---

performance where the homoerotics of the castrati have been displaced by lesbian erotics”. She elaborates on this issue:

Thus the audience in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who did not, as we do, automatically associate high-pitched voices with women only, were confronted with men who sang their love for each other in similar registers, regardless of the gender ascribed to them by the libretto. In this way some baroque operas gave rise to what might be called aural homosexuality – a kind of Barthesian *jouissance de l’écoute*.

Dame opens her text about sexual difference and the castrato by recollecting her first confrontation with a high male voice, countertenor, which she did not recognize as man’s voice at a time. She explains:

As far as I knew, vocal tones above a certain frequency were women’s voices. There were basses and tenors and these were men. Women and children were altos and sopranos. When I heard the countertenor, or male alto, I was at loss. Gender confusion tends to make one nervous.

The ‘gender trouble’ Dame experienced in relation to what is conventionally perceived as a female voice produced by a male body is the intriguing issue she discusses in her text. Relying on Butlerian conclusions that sex and gender are both cultural constructs rather than products of nature, Dame applies this to the gender-voice concept within the context of opera. She does this with particular attention to castrato singers that themselves exemplify the vocalic-body ‘gender trouble’, reconfiguring the conventional ways by which sex, gender and voice relate to each other.

“Does the voice have a gender?” asks Dame, and she continues:

“One is inclined to say that it does. After all, in most cases we do hear correctly whether a voice comes from a female or a male body. Nonetheless, pop music provides crafty examples of gender-disguised singing. Equally in Western art music and non-Western music there are examples that might give rise to doubts as to the ‘genderedness’ of the voice”.

I agree with Dame’s view regarding what she calls “gender-disguised singing” in pop music. Laurie Anderson is an intriguing example of it and the case of Anderson’s *Homeland* will be examined in the

---

348 Ibid., p. 147.
349 Ibid., p. 139.
350 With the term ‘gender trouble’ I refer to the acclaimed book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) by Judith Butler whose main argument is that both sex and gender are performative cultural constructs, and that they are not given by ‘nature’.
next chapter. The point where I disagree with Dame is her statement that there are examples that “give rise to doubts as to the ‘genderedness’ of the voice”. Dame’s assertion at first leads me to believe that she implies that the voice is not gendered. Further in the text, however, she admits that there is no space for claiming that the voice is not gendered, but that the category of gender-sex is reinvented along with the reinvention of the genderedness of the voice. I do not doubt if the voice is gendered, but I question rather how the voice-gender construct is reinvented in light of various reinventions of sex-gender constructs.

Dame quotes feminist theory as a departure point for her discussion, and asserts “that gender is constructed, and femininity and masculinity are neither natural nor unalterable, but rather socioculturally and historically determined categories, and therefore subject to change”. When applying the previous to the relation between sex, gender and voice, she concludes that: “Both the denaturalization of sexual difference and the denaturalization of voice difference make it in their own ways possible to sever the link between sex, voice pitch, and timbre”. As sexes are pluralized, the gender of the voice is pluralized, too. And the fact that we cannot easily decide which gender we hear through the voice, as in the case of castrato singer, is not a sign of genderedness, but of the reinvention of the voice-gender relation.

Dame criticizes a need “to categorize a voice according to gender, to assign a sex to the voice” and consequently suggests “that voice categories (soprano, alto and so on) are not sexually fixed categories but prone to choice as well”. Commenting upon Barthes’s reading of Balzac’s novella Sarrasine – one of whose main characters is the castrato, Zambinella – she points out that “having the phallus, or being the phallus, not having the phallus or not being the phallus, are all positions that can be taken by both men and women”. Such a conclusion does not deny gender, but suggests that the strict division between male and female is questionable and that there are more genders than two. She then puts the reinvention of the body-voice construct within an operatic context.

The ‘experiment’ with the character of Dante could also be read as a kind of reflection on opera’s early days and on the authenticity of its performing practice today. While analyzing the cultural history of the castrato, Dame arrives at the question “Who is to perform the role of the

352 Ibid.
353 Ibid.
354 Ibid., p. 139.
355 Ibid., p. 140.
356 Ibid., p. 141.
357 It has been suggested that authors of Florentine Camerata who created the first opera Dafne in 1597 or 98 (composer Jacopo Peri, librettist Ottavio Rinuccini) were also using the text of Dante’s Commedia in their attempts to re-create Greek tragedy. Gordana Dragović, Leksikon opera, Beograd, Univerzitet umetnosti, 2008.
“castrato in modern revivals?” La Commedia appears as Andriessen wanted to tackle similar issues in relation to Baroque opera today. Dame develops a discussion on castrato roles today in connection to the gender of the voice. Since the castrato singers ceased to exist she is interested in how vocal parts written for castratos are interpreted in contemporary revivals of Baroque opera “whereby gender and voice is put into action as stylistic option, as choice.” The relationship between the gender and the voice, freed from stereotypes and open to uncommon choices, is of special interest to Dame, and to Andriessen in La Commedia as well.

With Dante character, Andriessen and Hartley confirm Dame’s claims in her theory that voice and gender should be a ‘stylistic option’, rather than a convention. Andriessen and Hartley showed what André designated as “vocal timbre crossings (...) where the performance of sound traverses gender.” The voice of Cristina Zavalloni, although sung by female singer, and although sounding as what is conventionally understood to be a female voice, becomes a signifier, a material part of the sign. The signified for that signifier is ambivalent and fluctuating, due to all the dramaturgical and media procedures involved in the piece. The status of the singing body of Dante becomes a place that relativizes many conventions imposed over operatic character in the Western operatic tradition. That singing body becomes a ‘knot’ through which different entities are tied and/or desynchronized – body and voice, music and film, gender and sex.

With regard to Andriessen’s earlier operas and the approaches towards women characters within them, it is not surprising that the position of the woman on the opera stage is also questioned in this piece. The notion of a female taking the role of Dante erases binary oppositions between the genders in opera, together with our perception of them. It shows that gender-voice relationship should be perceived as performance. The singing Dante character, enlightened by the theories of Dame, enacts the relationship between gender and voice as a performance, and not as something pre-determined by nature. By ‘pronouncing’ Dante to be female and male, Andriessen also throws an ironical arrow towards the conventional position of women in opera. The undoing of women in this case becomes additionally the undoing of man on the opera stage. The female voice, suggested to be the male voice at the same time by a decision of the artist, is directed ‘beyond’ the body that produces it.

359 Ibid., p. 140.
361 I refer here to a book by Catherine Clement, Opera; or, The Undoing of Women, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988. In it, Clement reads the opera as a text about female oppression and male power. She supports her reading by the examples of famous operas in which women are either murdered or driven to suicide by men.
Chapter 7

Vocal Drag, Counter-Castrato and the Scandal of the Singing Body

In Laurie Anderson’s *Homeland*, for which she acted as multiple author – she wrote the lyrics, composed the music, produced the album, played several instruments on it, and sang/talked either as herself, or as her male alter ego Fenway Bergamot - the relationship between the singing body, the voice and gender carries different implications from those analyzed in *La Commedia*. The voice of Zavalloni in *La Commedia* is at the same time assigned to the man and to the woman character. That voice fluctuates between genders, and the vocal binary opposition between the genders is questioned. The gender-voice relationship is perceived as a performance. With the help of the harmonizer, Anderson invents what is conventionally considered a masculine vocal; she puts on ‘vocal drag’ and at the same time assumes a masculine identity to ‘fit’ the voice. She relies on the fact that the gender-voice relationship is performative, too. With her male alter-ego, Fenway Bergamot, she insists on a binary opposition between the voice and the gender, but only to treat it ironically and to problematize what interests her in a number of her projects: the avoidance of stereotypical roles of a woman on stage. And that stage, in Anderson’s case, is one that crosses different disciplines and genres, as she enacts the figure of the rock musician and singer, the classical music violinist, the performance artist and the multimedia artist.

In this chapter I discuss how in *Homeland* Anderson problematizes the body-voice-gender relationship, focusing on the figure of her male alter-ego Bergamot. *Homeland* shares the history of vocal drag with other pieces by the same author. In order to trace the ‘origins’ of Bergamot I first present a ‘history of vocal drag’ that spans a large part of Anderson’s career. The history they share, and Anderson’s discussions of it, contribute to an understanding of why and how she uses vocal drag in *Homeland*. After presenting the history of vocal drag in Anderson’s opus I place the figure of Bergamot in the context of discussions about castrato singers by Filipa Lã and Jane W. Davidson, Michel Poizat and Adriana Cavarero. I discuss how castrato singers expose the relationship between the body, voice and gender, and also how they undermine the conventional voice-gender construct.

---

362 The album *Homeland* was published on CD and DVD in 2010 by Nonesuch Records, and before that, during 2007-2009, it toured in a series of live performances. I attended one of these performances in Lisbon in 2007.

363 Anderson’s musical language in *Homeland* is eclectic, too, borrowing from minimal electronic, techno, world music and jazz. The ensemble Anderson has chosen to accompany her in performing *Homeland* consists of musicians engaged in New York’s experimental jazz and rock scenes. The members of the ensemble, as credited on Nonesuch CD/DVD, are: Laurie Anderson (vocals, keyboards, percussion, violin and radio), Eyvind Kang (viola), Peter Scherer (keyboards), Igor Koshkendey (Mongoun-Ool Ondar, igil), Aïdismaa Koshkendey (vocals), Rob Burger (keyboards, orchestrion, accordion, marxophone), Lou Reed (additional percussion, guitar), Antony (vocals, background vocals), Shahzad Ismaily (percussion), Omar Hakim (drums), Kieran Hebden (keyboards), Ben Witman (percussion and drums), Skuli Sverrisson (bass guitar, guitar, bass) and John Zorn (saxophone).
how the body–voice–gender construct is reinvented in case of Bergamot, whom I understand as a kind of counter-castrato figure.

Finally, I confront Homeland with the text “The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body” by Michelle Duncan.\footnote{Michelle Duncan, “The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body: Voice, Presence, Performativity”, Cambridge Opera Journal, vol., 16, no. 3, 2004, pp. 283-306.} Duncan argues that the singing voice of opera is corporeal and ‘scandalous’, borrowing the concept of the scandal of the body from Shoshana Felman.\footnote{The explanation of what Shoshana Felman understands by the term ‘scandal’ could be found in her own words about J. L. Austin’s theory: “I had better declare at once that I am seduced by Austin. I like not only the openness that I find in his theory, but the theory’s potential for scandal; I like not only what he says, but what he “does with words”. Doing with words, their performative potential, is what Felman calls scandal. Felman in: Stanley Cavell, “Foreword to the Scandal of the Speaking Body”, Shoshana Felman, The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J. L. Austin, or Seduction in Two Languages, Stanford, California, Stanford University Press, 2002, p. vii.} I illuminate Homeland with Duncan’s claims concerning the performativity of the voice based on her critique of Felman and Judith Butler in order to see how the body ‘tempers and tampers’ with the singing and speech act of Laurie Anderson, and what happens with body-voice-gender construct when vocal drag takes place.

Homeland contains eleven songs and one instrumental.\footnote{1. Transitory Life, 2. My Right Eye, 3. Thinking of You, 4. Strange Perfumes, 5. Only an Expert, 6. Falling, 7. Another Day in America, 8. Bodies in Motion, 9. Dark Time in the Revolution, 10. The Lake, 11. The Beginning of Memory, 12. Flow (instrumental).} Texts of the songs tackle issues such as US foreign policy, economic collapse, the erosion of personal freedom, control and security in contemporary United States. Homeland consists of a dramatic monologue spoken by Anderson herself and by Fenway Bergamot. Those two, however, do not carry on a dialogue. The text is beyond dramatic principles in a conventional sense: there is no conventional plot, but all the fragmented ‘stories’ that are told constitute a kaleidoscopic ‘portrait’ of life in America today. The way the musical ‘text’ is created and performed is not structured by a sung dramatic text, and this is to some extent due to the unusual way the album was produced.\footnote{During the time Anderson toured around the world with Homeland, she gathered recordings of live performances of the piece. Afterwards, in the studio, she created the Homeland album using recorded materials and incorporating them in the album so that final musical result is a carefully assembled collage of existing materials. She often used, for example, some melodic phrase, cut it from recording and ‘glued’ it in final product. According to her own words, she “constructed songs”. She assembled together instrumental parts/fragments of the same material that was recorded in different places, so that the playing of people who sometimes never even met sounds together on the recording in the same song. That way she made Homeland a documentary about itself. The collage methodology, however, is not identifiable to the common listener, since the work was produced with cutting edge technology that have made ‘the edges’ between the assembled parts smooth. See: “Laurie Anderson on the Making of Homelandi”, video, http://www.nonesuch.com/media/videos/laurie-anderson-on-the-making-of-homeland. Accessed: February 25, 2011.}

Homeland is an example of both Anderson’s problematization of the body-voice-gender relation, and her ongoing critique of contemporary US society. The character of Fenway Bergamot is the site in which both of those strategies meet. The name of the piece is Anderson’s ironic comment...
on her country in which ‘homeland security’ is the outstanding strategy of the state. She implies with melancholy that ‘homeland’ is a metaphor for a secure, warm place that does not exist for United States citizens: “(...) it’s a fuzzy word that Americans don’t use. You know, it’s kind of—sounds a little like ‘fatherland’ or sounds kind of German, (...) So, pairing it with a bureaucratic word, it rhymes with, of course, “security” in - to the American ear. You don’t just say ‘homeland’. The next word is ‘security’”. 368 In one of the interviews Anderson also underlines that the piece is about the feeling of loss: “I realized it was when we invaded Iraq and that what I had lost was my country”. 369 She made her texts in Homeland deal critically with political aspects of life in United States of America, and by this means the piece gains an activist/political dimension.

Technology makes it possible to perform in vocal drag, and this plays an important role in Homeland and in my reading of it. As in many of her previous works, Anderson involves technology in composition and performance: “(...) in Laurie Anderson’s performances, one actually gets to watch her produce the sounds we hear. But her presence is always already multiply mediated: we hear her voice only as it is filtered through Vocoder, as it passes through reiterative loops, as it is layered upon itself by means of sequencers”. 370 The singing style Anderson uses in Homeland relies on melodies whose range is small, and often the singing appears as little more than overemphasized speaking. Anderson’s voice is often doubled with the ‘shadow’ of the voice filters or with the violin sound. Sometimes the violin ‘speaks’, imitating the inflection of speech.

Only in track number 7 – Another Day in America – is there no singing. Fenway Bergamot speaks. That speech is slow and expressive, accompanied by the music of the ensemble (and at some points female, and at the end of track number 7 a male singing voice is reproduced simultaneously from the loudspeakers in the background). In the rest of the parts, Anderson sings with her ‘natural’ voice. In Another Day in America she appropriates a man’s voice with the aid of the harmonizer, and talks with it, using it as a kind of vocal mask. I will now provide an overview of how she gradually came to that standpoint. I look for motives that made her transform her own voice, and also for the reasons she uses vocal drag for.

---

A History of Being in Vocal Drag: From Voice of Authority to Gender Fiction

Andersson’s interest in the performativity of the voice goes back to beginnings of her career and her fascination with the Beat-generation writers. She was impressed by the work and also the voice of William S. Burroughs, whom she met for the first time at the Nova Convention, a three-day celebration of his work in New York in 1978. He influenced Anderson by insisting on interrogating the moral values of US society. \(^{371}\) She also remembers the Nova Convention as her first attempt to wear a man’s voice: “The Nova Convention was the first time I used the Harmonizer to alter my voice. This is a digital filter that I tuned to drop the pitch of my voice so that I sounded like a man. I called it ‘The Voice of Authority’ and used it in many performances when I wanted another edge. It was an audio mask and being in drag was thrilling”. \(^{372}\)

In 1986 Anderson’s ‘relationship’ with her alter ego outgrew the vocal means. She made the work *The Clone* in which she explored dramatic tension between her appearance as Laurie Anderson, and as a man, but this time not only by audio means, but also by video:

I was working with a filter that lowered my voice to that of a man. It was an audio mask and I really enjoyed this way of being in drag through sound. One day I thought “I wonder what this guy looks like?” So I cloned myself in video with an ADO filter, added a mustache, and came up with my alter ego – a guy who is three feet tall with size one shoes, quite insecure, as clones no doubt usually are. Through split screen, we did several videos “What You Mean We?” 1986 and “KTCA Artist Intros” 1987. \(^{373}\)

After that, Anderson started appearing regularly in drag and with a man’s voice. For example, the lyrics of the song “The Cultural Ambassador” from her 1995 album “The Ugly One with the Jewels and Other Stories: A Reading from Stories from the Nerve Bible” describe Anderson’s encounters with custom officers and security guards on the airports when she was travelling at the time of Gulf war, often being forced to explain the purpose of the electronic equipment she was bringing for her concerts: voice filters, among others. Through the lyrics spoken by a man’s voice, Anderson offers an explanation of the necessity of using a man’s voice as her own:

And I’d pull out something like this filter and say:

— Now this is what I’d like to think of as the voice of Authority.

And it would take me a while to tell them how I used it for songs that were, you know, about various forms of control, and they would say:

— Now, why would you want to talk like that?


\(^{372}\) Ibid., p. 93.

\(^{373}\) Ibid., p. 83.
And I’d look around at the SWAT teams and the undercover agents and the dogs and the radio in the corner, tuned to the Superbowl coverage of the war. And I’d say:
— Take a wild guess.374

In Homeland Anderson’s male alter ago becomes increasingly important, becoming an ‘official’ identity - Fenway Bergamot - and even it exits the realm of Anderson’s performances and starts to lead ‘his own’ public life. Bergamot’s photograph appears on the cover of the Homeland CD/DVD; Bergamot talks publicly about Homeland; and Anderson even establishes a Facebook profile of this character, posting on it clips showing him engaged in a campaign of promoting her record and shows, reporting from around the world on Anderson’s performances, or negotiating with her publisher.375 Although Bergamot is abundantly present in promoting the Homeland album, in the live performance of Homeland I saw in Lisbon Anderson was not masked as Bergamot, though she did exhibit the vocal mask. Her visual appearance, however, was deprived of the conventional attributes of feminine singers/performers. She was without makeup, short haired, and dressed in trousers. The only visible sign of conventional femininity were her hanging earrings.

Due to a bit of a clumsy appearance, Bergamot on video could appear as a benign and naive character. Beneath this appearance, however, is concealed a social critic. In a short video featuring Bergamot in Paris ‘he’ explains the origin of his surname, connecting it to Marcel Proust’s novel À la Recherche du Temps Perdu, in which the fruit bergamot is described as a memory trigger. “Fenway is a character from Proust in a way. I didn't know this when Lou [Reed, Anderson's husband] thought up the name but Bergamot is apparently a kind of fruit that’s one of the memory-jiggering devices in Proust - but that's good because Fenway is into memory in a lot of ways. So many of the songs are about memory.” Bergamot might help people to remember what they were encouraged to forget. This is what Anderson does with Homeland: inter alia, she reminds people of the state they could have forgotten or lost. Lyrics from Homeland n. 7 quoted below are an example of that reminding:

Yeah, some were sad to see those days disappear.
The flea markets and their smells, the war.
All the old belongings strewn out on the sidewalks.
Mildewed clothes and old resentments and ragged record jackets.377

377 Lyrics from “Another Day in America”, Homeland n. 7
Besides evoking the feeling of loss, when asked about what exactly the character of Fenway Bergamot allows her to do that she couldn’t do in her own voice, Anderson reveals that it is her way of tweaking oppressive people, and in the case of Homeland I would add, the oppressive state, too:

That voice started out as the voice of a pompous windbag. It was fun to tweak people who are always telling you what to do. Every time it came out of the box every few years, I would use that voice again. This time when it came out, it was meandering and melancholic, and I thought it was interesting. So that’s what it allowed me to do—to talk in a way that if I did it in my own voice, you’d be like, whoa, you’re losing the thread. But there’s something about that monotone with a little bit of oddness and quirkiness and some keyboard paths beneath it. It allows for mental drift, and I’d love to have people just move through that world and let their minds go that way.378

Having in mind this development of vocal drag in Anderson’s oeuvre, culminating in Homeland, I looked further for a closer and more direct explanation of its purpose and found it in Anderson’s own words: “I wear audio masks in my work – meaning, electronically, I can be this shoe salesman, or this demented cop, or some other character. And I do that to avoid the expectations of what it means to be a woman on a stage”.379 The avoidance of stereotypical situations related to the status and function of the woman composer and performer is a constant in Anderson’s oeuvre. She questions the identity of the female composer/performer both vocally and with her physical presence. In Homeland this questioning is, as it was previously in her United States cycle, brought into a close relation to cultural practices and power relations in the United States of America, where she lives.

Anderson explicitly points to male-female relations a couple of times in the texts, for example:

(...) When the doctor says: congratulations, it’s a boy!
Where do all the dream baby girls, those possible pearls, go?
Lorraine and Susan with the brown eyes
And lovely Irene and difficult but beautiful Betty
And tiny tiny Juanita?
They’re sailing through this transitory life.
They’re moving through this transitory life.

(380)

The texts of the songs are both critical towards America and melancholy about it, and they are melancholy too in terms of questioning the status of woman in the context of a dominant discourse of man’s power in the world of music and beyond it. Anderson uses her visual appearance as a tool for critique, too. She adds a mustache, over-emphasized eyebrows, and dresses in a man suit. Still, she stays recognizable as female, because the mimesis she creates is purposely grotesque; it exhibits signs of masculinity, but seemingly only to treat them ironically.

Susan McClary wrote about how Anderson displays her femininity in the United States cycle by noting that the androgynous look Anderson takes “downplays her sexuality, which, given the terms of the tradition, always threatens to become the whole show”. The tradition McClary mentions is the one related to the male heterosexual gaze that objectifies the woman. She does not discuss Anderson’s strategy from another perspective through which her sexuality might not look so downplayed.

Anderson shows through the Bergamot character how identity is bound to gender and sexuality. She seems to demonstrate how to read ‘gender fiction’, as Judith Halberstam would call it. “Creating gender as fiction demands that we learn how to read it. In order to find our way into a

---

posttranssexual era, we must educate ourselves as readers of gender fiction, we must learn how to take pleasure in gender and how to become an audience for the multiple performances of gender we witness everyday".\textsuperscript{382} The Bergamot character shows that gender is performed by the voice, too. The performativity of Bergamot’s voice arises from the clash between the male and female genders. In what follows I will briefly compare the figure of the castrato singer, also based on a confrontation between the genders, with what Anderson does using the Bergamot character.

**Living Backwards: Counter-Castrato**

Quoting Kierkegaard in *Homeland’s Another Day in America*, Anderson makes an effort to understand the world, and announces that the world could only be understood “when lived backwards”\textsuperscript{383} I understand that alternative not only as a trajectory from the end to the beginning, but also as something seen from a different, possibly opposite perspective. And that different perspective, ‘the other side’, as I see it in case of Anderson, assumes the standpoint of a woman instead of that of a man. The figure of ‘countercastrato’, a female performer with a masculine voice, is part of that understanding ‘from the other side’, and could be seen as the result of the history of vocal drag in Anderson’s pieces. More broadly, the whole of *Homeland* could be read from this ‘backwards position’ of Fenway Bergamot.

The figure of the baroque castrato singer imposes itself on this discussion of the body - voice relation in *Homeland* because the castrato explicitly interrogates the relationship between the gender and the voice in opera, emphasizing the concept of a constructed relation between the body, the voice and gender.\textsuperscript{384} The sex of the castrato singer is masculine, but the voice resignifies the conventional vocal representation of both female and male gender. The castrato in opera was a female-looking male with a feminine voice, and Anderson, when in the drag of Bergamot, is a male-looking female with a caricature of a masculine voice. In both cases, the vocalic body is explicit and spectacular.


\textsuperscript{383} From the lyrics of *Homeland, Homeland* DVD, Nonesuch Records, 2010.

\textsuperscript{384} Filipa Lã and Jane W. Davidson sum up historical and anatomical features of these unusual singers: "The first written evidence of a strong connection between sexual hormones and voice quality dates back to the 3rd century BC, when castration was reported as a way of preserving a boy’s high vocal range for singing purposes beyond puberty. Experiments with castration spread to all of Europe during the 8th and 9th centuries, especially to Spain and to Italy, and by the 16th century the Church became the greatest promoter of the castrato voice. A castrato had a crystalline timbre and an exceptional range, and his voice was extremely powerful. Castrati developed a reputation as skilful singers, able to sing the majority of operatic roles of their time, despite the fact that they were originally vocally altered in order to sing sacred music in churches. Their voice characteristics were a consequence of a paediatric laryngeal structure, vibrating in a female register, but having the breathing power and resonance of a man". See: Filipa Lã and Jane W. Davidson, “Investigating The Relationship Between Sexual Hormones And Female Western Classical Singing”, *Research Studies in Music Education*, 2005, vol. 24, p. 75.
It was not uncommon in operatic history for male characters to be sung by female singers, and vice versa. Cavarero goes back to the beginnings of opera, remembering that women were prohibited from being on stage, while castrato singers were used for interpreting female characters. But, even after that prohibition, castrati remained, and they continued dominating stages until the middle of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century. That fact says much about the practice of vocal travesty in opera. Paying her attention to transvestitism in opera, Cavarero concludes: “(...) transvestitism is one of the typical features of melodrama. Opera has an irresistible tendency to stage drag: women who dress like men, and men who dress like women.”\textsuperscript{385} She underlines that “transvestitism is an essential element in the historical emergence of operatic melodrama – not only because men put on women’s clothes within the plot of the story, but also because of a more austere ‘vocal transvestitism in the strict sense,’”\textsuperscript{386} alluding to castrato singers.

Michel Poizat stresses that the castrato voice is “detached from its usual functions of signification, communication, and the marking of gender difference.”\textsuperscript{387} I would not agree that it is detached from the marking of gender difference; I would argue instead that it undermines the conventional voice-gender relationship and our ways of seeing it. While I listen to Anderson’s ‘male’ voice in \textit{Homeland} I am aware that Laurie Anderson produces it, and I keep listening to its sound. Only after hearing the sound of the voice do I attach the meaning of the text to it. “The use of the castrato pointed away from the ordinary meanings of the voice, which lie in the message, and directed the listening ear to the particularities of the voice itself (...) Because this sound was a strange voice in the wrong body (insofar as it belonged to any natural body), it became impersonal, more a musical instrument than a voice at all.”\textsuperscript{388} Although the vocal drag of Anderson gained an identity, the voice of Fenway remains somewhat impersonal, too. Fenway’s impersonality, however, mostly originates from its machine-like voice. That voice is ventriloquial, ‘inhuman’, and electronically generated. As in the case of \textit{Three Tales}, it assumes a kind of monstrosity.

Anderson’s voice in \textit{Another Day in America} was transformed into an artificial man’s voice similar to the non-human voices sometimes heard in films or cartoons. Her androgenous look, seeming to question her gender identity, is supported by this vocal travesty. From the question her outlook posed – ‘Which gender would you attach to me?’ – the focus moved to the question, ‘How can a woman’s body produce a man’s voice?’ And the answer is to be found in a harmonizer capable

\textsuperscript{386} Ibid.
of manipulating vocal abilities to the point where the gender of the voice is presented as a performance, and the power of the male voice as a caricature.

**The Scandal of the Singing Body**

While elaborating the performativity of the body and voice in opera in the text “The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body”, Michelle Duncan unexpectedly introduces a digression about a film that tells the story of a family of nomadic shepherds in the Gobi desert and their troubles with a mother camel who refuses to take care of her calf after a long and difficult birth. After the hungered and exhausted calf had reached the critical stage, a local musician helped with the healing ritual. The mother camel received a ‘treatment’: a melody played on violin and sung by the female voice. After first protesting, the mother camel, “moved by the sound of a voice” was happily reunited with her calf.

Although at first the digression about the camels in Duncan’s text might look like an awkward fit, it actually conveniently serves to transpose the problem of the performativity and materiality of the voice out of the field of opera, to analyze it there, and then to bring it back, verifying and applying the results of analysis to the opera world. Duncan is particularly interested in the performativity of the voice and the singing body in opera. She warns that the singing body should be considered when the meaning of opera is analyzed, and explains its absence from pedigreed discourses by pointing to the stereotypical delineation between perceiving opera and perceiving ritual, suggesting that “opera is pegged as an (‘enlightened’) art form with metaphysical properties that transcend the body, whereas ritual is a bodily (and thus ‘uncivilised’) cultural practice.” Duncan urges that we examine opera as a corporeal cultural practice.

Reflecting on the philosopher J.L. Austin’s concept of the performative utterance “in which to say something is to do something”, Duncan asks “(...) how does the status of the utterance change according to the register of resonance? And what exactly does the vocal utterance do if this doing is not a linguistic act?” Duncan investigates what the voice does when it performs singing, and, connecting it to the story about the Mongolian camel, she refers to the effects of the materiality of the voice while posing the critical question of her text:

---

389 The film is *The Story of the Weeping Camel*, directed by Byambasuren Davaa and Luigi Falorni. 2003.
391 Ibid., p. 299.
392 Ibid., p. 298.
393 Ibid., p. 289.
394 I perceive the term materiality according to what OED suggests “Of or pertaining to material nature, or to the phenomenal universe perceived by the senses; pertaining to or connected with matter; material; opposed to psychical, mental, spiritual.” I understand it also as something pertaining of the body, corporeal.
(...) it is indeed interesting that we can clearly understand this kind of force when we see it happening to camels in Mongolia, but not when we imagine people in the developed world going to the opera. What happens to an understanding about the relationship between subject and object once we acknowledge that voice is a resonant operation with physical effects not just for camels in Mongolia? Dunc

Duncan is interested in “the bodily force of performative utterance” and reinterprets this issue in connection to the theories of Felman and Butler: in particular, to what Felman describes as the ‘scandal of the speaking body’ in which she emphasizes that speech act is bodily act. The ‘scandal’ explains how (...) the body imposes its own agency on the linguistic act. An utterance may be guided by knowledge, meaning and intent, but the body constantly interferes with those registers, inserting its own ‘knowledge’, ‘meaning’ and ‘intent’, and thus tempering and tampering with the speech act.

After acknowledging both Felman’s and Butler’s achievements in studying the performativity of the body, Duncan goes on to critique these two theorists, pointing out their lack of insight into how the voice is connected to the materiality of the body, and into how the voice itself is ‘scandalous’:

Felman, (...) avows both bodily matter and the materiality of bodily effects, although for her, as for Butler, voice remain unattached to the body. Felman is right to call the body the ‘instrument’ of speech, but what is the agency of voice as part of this instrument? What are the effects of voice, as contained within or opposed to the effects of the generic category ‘body’, and how are these effects measurable? How, for example, are tone, pitch and intonation in their own way ‘scandalous’? How does the voice act performatively, apart from merely being the (silent) vehicle for the utterance? As anyone who has ever heard opera knows, the singing voice has moments where it tears language apart, or tears itself apart from language. Certainly the voice as well as and in addition to the body, says more, or says differently, than it means to say.

The way Anderson comments on her own voice reveals that she perceives it as ‘scandalous’. She sees it as composed from different genetic and cultural factors:

My own voice is a combination of my parent’s voices really. My father learned inflexion from Chicago tough guys, actors like Jimmy Cagney and the comedian Bob Hope mixed with the flattened vowels of the Midwest. My mother’s voice was more academic, a Church of England voice. And I’ve mixed those up and found my own

---

396 Ibid., p. 291.
397 Ibid., p. 290.
398 Ibid., p. 293.
399 Ibid., p. 294.
voice. Of course, that’s not to say I’ve got only one. Like most people
I have at least twenty voices — intimate, conversational,
authoritarian and so on. In performances I use a mixture of these
voices.

She speaks of the voice as of something inheritable, in the way we inherit the color of our eyes, our
blood type, or the quality of our hair. She thus emphasizes the material, corporeal side of the voice,
but at the same time argues that corporeality is culturally conditioned. Anderson answers the
questions posed by Duncan by vocally interrogating the corporeality of the singing body through the
gender perspective. By Fenway’s voice in Homeland she creates a make-believe that the body-voice-
gender construct is performative. By putting herself in vocal drag she explicitly performs the
connections between body, voice and gender, showing that they could be unstable and changeable
once they are separated from their conventional roles.

The text that Fenway Bergamot presents bears a melancholy note, a regret about ‘these
days” that have passed, and are left behind sometime long ago, replaced by today’s world of
passwords, banking cards, experts etc. Fenway starts his monologue in Another Day in America by
talking about the new beginning:

And so finally here we are, at the beginning of a whole new era.
The start of a brand new world.
And now what?
How do we start?
How do we begin again?

If this text had been given in Anderson’s genuine voice, it could have been perceived that she was
talking about some new historical or political era. But the fact that the text is given in Fenway’s
‘artificial’, ventriloquial voice makes that ‘new world’ she writes about the world of a different
gender hierarchy. It makes it one in which gender fiction takes place, one where women can talk
with what was conventionally perceived as a male voice. The sound of the voice conventionally
assigned to the male gender, however, makes the meaning of the text different.

The stiffness and machine-like strangeness of the pitch of Bergamot’s voice have an
authoritarian dimension. The ‘artificial’ pitch and timbre and the mechanized inflection mock
authority. It appears as if the voice of authority has been reflected in some kind of strange mirror
that deforms its ‘image’ to the point of caricature. It is a grotesque representation of the (male)
voice of authority that exaggerates some striking features of authoritarian speech, such as, for
example preaching.

400 Laurie Anderson, The Record of Time, Sound in the Work of Laurie Anderson, Lyon, Musée d’Art
Dystopia and Melancholy

Bergamot finishes his performance in *Homeland* by talking about material things, money, and, again in a spirit of melancholy, poses the question about the new beginning:

Oh, another day, another dime.
Another day in America.
Another day, another dollar.
Another day in America.
And all my brothers. And all my long lost sisters.
How do we begin again?
How do we begin?

At first, this part of the text seems to focus on an economic perspective that gives money, capital, a primary position: days in America are counted by dollars and dimes, as Anderson introduces it. The last verse appears as a question with no answer, but the act of performing and repeating it still produces meaning. By insisting on it and not answering, Bergamot performs what I take to be the hopelessness of US society. Together with other texts, those lines of Fenway make the central feeling in the text, and the piece as a whole, melancholy.

I see that melancholy as Anderson’s reaction to a situation in her country which she sees as dystopia, the opposite from utopia, an imaginary place or condition one must be sure to avoid. Anderson problematizes aspects of contemporary US society, and the way she perceives her country affects the piece, turning it into a construction of dystopia. Melancholy is explicit in some lyrics:

Ah, America. And yes that will be America.
A whole new place just waiting to happen.
Broken up parking lots, rotten dumps, speed balls, accidents and hesitations.
Things left behind. Styrofoam, computer chips.

What concerns Anderson is a dystopian dimension situated in oppression and control that ‘homeland security’ issues bring to America, and large parts of the texts deal with them. Due to the above-mentioned perspective towards the US homeland, the artist starts to feel ‘homeland-less’, and reflections of that feeling become embedded in the piece.

Another way I read a dystopic dimension in the piece is its destabilization of various conventional positions. The ambivalence of the piece - it exists between conventional genres of rock concert, performance art and postopera, but also in between different musical languages - shows that a ‘homeland’ as a symbol for a secure, stable, unique place does not exist for Anderson in the music world either. The non-existence of a coherent, unique musical language is a powerful generator of Anderson’s ongoing quest for the destabilization of a stable, conventional position: that

---

402 Ibid.
403 Ibid.
of the citizen, of the woman, of the composer and of the performer. Anderson problematizes her own identity in front of the audience, fluctuating between feminine and masculine gender, between the positions of dissident and US artist, between performance artist and singer-instrumentalist, all within social and cultural circumstances of the contemporary United States she writes about in *Homeland’s* text.⁴⁰⁴

The eclectic collection of musical languages and collage methodology of the piece could be perceived as a wish to see a conventional, secure, unique, modernist identity as a place of dystopia, as something undesirable. I understand Anderson’s need constantly to problematize conventional positions as places to avoid as her reaction to the dystopic dimension of her ‘homeland’, whether it be the state or her artistic position. Anderson’s dystopian postopera in which the position of a woman on stage is reworked in the form of a counter-castrato poses the question of how a woman can take over the voice of authority, make a caricature of it, and at the same time express melancholy because of a dystopia that is embedded in that voice.

Anderson’s enduring preoccupation with vocal drag right through her career speaks of her need to use and question what is conventionally considered the male voice. To mock the voice of authority and to problematize the position of woman on stage are two of the reasons that she chooses to be in the drag of the male voice. Fenway Bergamot in *Homeland* appears as the culmination of that practice. Fenway makes Anderson’s intentions more outspoken. Moreover, Fenway ‘exits’ the work itself, taking the role of the author, and questioning the position of Anderson in the art world. Like the voice of castrato singers, Fenway’s voice too could be seen as a “strange voice in a wrong body”, and as in *Three Tales* the mechanical dimension of that voice produces a particular effect, in this case parodic. The ‘scandal’ of that voice, as discussed in relation to the text by Michelle Duncan, is divided between its mechanical side that brings an authoritarian dimension, and its subversive dimension that disrupts the voice of authority and makes it grotesque. Finally, when understood through the dystopic dimension of *Homeland*, that voice appears as a melancholic voice from a dystopic country.

In both chapters in Part 3, two issues crystalize themselves as of key importance in questioning the body-voice-gender relationship in postopera. The first is that in both cases more-or-less obvious references are made to practices that have thematized body-voice-gender relationships through the history of opera. Thus, the character of Dante in *La Commedia* could be seen as a distant

---

⁴⁰⁴ One of the curious details from Anderson’s biography is that in 2003 she became first ever National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) artist-in-residence. Taking into account that NASA is agency of the United States government somewhat contradicts the position of Anderson as an artist who disagrees with state politics of USA, as it is demonstrated in *Homeland*.
reference to *en travesti* roles and Fenway could be seen as a counter-castrato figure. The second is that the problematization of the body-voice-gender relationship in both case studies appears to confirm Butler’s insistence that sex and gender are not nature givens, but cultural constructs. Fenway’s voice is constructed as a caricature of the masculine voice with the aid of technology. Dante’s voice in *La Commedia* shows the body-voice-gender relationship as a choice of the composer and director and not something pre-determined by nature. The categories of female and male voice are interrogated in both cases, and the rigidity of norms that maintain a binary opposition between male and female voices is brought into doubt: in *La Commedia* with irony and in *Homeland* with parody. Following Butler’s conclusion about heterosexual norms, parody and self-subversion imposes itself on both the cases of body-voice-gender questioning I discussed:

It's not just the norm of heterosexuality that is tenuous. It's all sexual norms. I think that every sexual position is fundamentally comic. If you say “I can only desire X”, what you've immediately done, in rendering desire exclusively, is created a whole set of positions which are unthinkable from the standpoint of your identity. Now, I take it that one of the essential aspects of comedy emerges when you end up actually occupying a position that you have just announced to be unthinkable. That is funny. There's a terrible self-subversion in it.\(^{405}\)

In the case of *La Commedia* and *Homeland*, the questioning of norms established in relation to body, sex, gender and identity, as discussed by Butler, has been expanded to body-voice-gender relationships, whose conventional norms are reassessed.

---

Reinventing the Vocalic Body in Postopera: Conclusion

In my Introduction, I outlined four objectives that I wanted to achieve in this study:

- to extend the cultural analysis of opera to the singing body
- to identify the interaction between the singing body and the voice in opera as a site in which different discourses are encoded
- to enrich the field of opera studies with a body/voice theory
- to define the concept of postopera in relation to a set of case studies.

It will be worth reviewing these objectives briefly at this point, as well as discussing some possible ways of extending the research further in new directions.

The last objective – defining the concept of postopera – was addressed already in the Introduction. There I discussed how and why I first introduced the term. Following that, in Chapter 1 (Body-Voice Gap, Postopera and Body/Voice Theory) I introduced ‘postopera’ as a theoretical notion, arguing that my concept of postopera designates opera that is postdramatic and postmodern, as inspired by Hans-Thies Lehmann’s notion of postdramatic theatre. Lehmann’s concept of a postdramatic (not necessarily postmodern) theatre responded to a diverse and wide range of theatre performances created in the last couple of decades. Likewise, my concept of postopera responds to the wide range of recent unconventional postmodern and postdramatic operatic performances that appeared from the last quarter of the twentieth century onwards.

My notion of postopera coincides with two similar terms: the notion of post-opera by Jeremy Tambling and the notion of the post-operatic by Nicholas Till and Kandis Cook. In Chapter 1 I discussed the differences between the three terms and concepts. Tambling uses the term post-opera in a non-theoretical way, to refer to what happened after modernist opera, notably the Brecht-Weill collaborations that are his main subject. Till and Cook’s notion of the post-operatic, referring to both postmodern opera and to conventional opera in a postmodern age, is more theoretical. Yet it differs from the notion of postopera as I define it. What they have in common is the reference to postmodernity. But where my concept of postopera only refers to recent pieces, Till and Cook’s notion of the post-operatic includes postmodern ‘readings’ of conventional operatic repertoire. Moreover, the two authors are not explicitly concerned with the postdramatic dimension of the post-operatic, whereas my notion of postopera explicitly refers to concept of the postdramatic in Lehmann’s terms.

Defining postopera was useful for this dissertation at least in two respects. First, it enables me to define a common platform for the pieces that I analyzed. The contemporary opera scene is by no means homogenous or self-consistent. As Salzman and Desi’s book Seeing the Voice, Hearing the
Body confirms, it is rather fragmented, dispersed and difficult to follow. Even ambitious contemporary opera spectacles such as those of Adams/Sellars, Andriessen/Greenaway, Reich/Korot or Glass are not performed often. So even in pragmatic terms it is difficult to follow this scene, since performances are not frequent, and one has to travel worldwide to be able to catch them. Defining the concept of postopera signals this scene of unconventional contemporary opera pieces, and actually proclaims it as a scene.

The second point is one that made me realize how the reinvention of one of the central operatic issues - the relationship between music and drama – significantly contributes to the reinvention of the relationship between the singing body and the voice. In postopera the dramatic text’s relationship with music is reinvented and the relationship between the music and the dramatic text takes a background rather than a foreground position. When I first introduced the notion of postopera I was not fully aware of the significance of the relationship between the body and the voice in this context. A major conclusion of this research is that it is not the relationship between music and drama that reforms opera nowadays; the really significant change, the change that enables opera to problematize its status and function in the age of new media, is a change of the singing body within it. By showing how the singing body was reinvented in six postoperas, and how that reinvention affected the medium of opera, this study demonstrates that the relationship between the body and the voice is the locus for a redefinition both of opera itself and of our understanding of it.

All the pieces I analyze in this study are postoperas. To some extent they are also representative of what was presented as high-budget-late-capitalist (‘A production’) opera spectacles on European and North American operatic stages during the last two decades. However, I did not select these six postoperas because they are typical examples of late-capitalist opera spectacles. I selected them because they are self-reflexive engagements with my principal subject: reinventing the vocalic body in postopera. Besides the ‘A production’ contemporary opera scene I also followed and sometimes participated as a dramaturgist in independent and small scenes of contemporary opera and music theatre in Europe. Those scenes too provide a number of examples of the thematization of opera as a genre and of the body-voice relationship within it. Of all the pieces from both ‘mainstream’ and independent scenes that I had an opportunity to see, the six that I have chosen present the most relevant sample for the subject I discuss. According to that

---

407 Except the works that I discuss, this scene also includes operas by John Adams/Peter Sellars, Robert Wilson, Michel Nyman, among the others.
408 Maja Ratke, Rolf Wallin, Miguel Azguime, Jasna Veličković, Anja Đorđević, Bojan Đordjev, etc. are some of the artists active on that scene.
sample and the research I conducted, I also conclude that a reinvented relationship between the body and the voice might be proclaimed one of the prominent features of postopera.

My concept of postopera invites further investigation in the field of contemporary opera, and one of my future plans is to develop this subject as a research topic in its own right. The literature about contemporary opera in general is exiguous. There are only a few book-length studies that deal exclusively with recent opera. Moreover, according to Lindenberger, it is still debatable if opera studies exist as an independent discipline at all. Broadening the research on postopera would make a pioneering contribution both to the field of postopera that still waits to be theorized as cultural practice, and to opera studies. Taken as a subject for separate research, the concept of postopera would show how, in the wake of Wagner’s “Opera and Drama” and Kerman’s “Opera as Drama”, we might today discuss what I call ‘opera after drama’, or ‘opera beyond drama’: in other words, ‘postopera’. That research would also bring new insights into how the status and function of opera are transformed when the relationship between music and drama is interrogated. The concept of postopera, developed in a broader way, could offer both a theoretical background and a more detailed ‘map’ for the performing practice of unconventional contemporary opera today.

Concerning the second objective in my Introduction - Identifying the mutual interaction between the singing body and the voice in opera as a site in which different discourses are encoded – this ‘identification’ was necessary to set this whole research operation into the motion in the first place. I made my way from the mere registering of unconventional relationships between the singing body and the voice to the reading of that relationship in postopera as a theoretically meaningful statement, and then discussing it further in relation to different theories. By making it visible for theoretical discussion I wanted to show that the body-voice relationship is postopera’s equal constitutive part and that it is as relevant to postopera as are its other texts - music, libretto or staging.

The first impulse for this identification of the body-voice relationship as a site in which different discourses are encoded came from operatic practice. Since my first encounters with opera I was always intrigued by what I call the ‘gap’ between the voice and the body there. The voice was usually over-expressive, and the body often under-expressive, and this ventriloquism-like discrepancy was supposed to be perceived as self-explanatory. Probably because, according to my social status and cultural background, I was not an ideal opera consumer, this discrepancy seemed

---


unacceptable to me, and I even found it somewhat irritating. I perceived the gap between the body and the voice in opera as an undefined ‘surplus of meaning’ that needed to be discussed. The gap exists in conventional opera and it continues to exist in different modalities when new media enter opera. In the six pieces I have analyzed the gap between the body and the voice is not accepted as a convention. It is reworked, reinvented, and problematized in different ways. Those reinventions are at the same time (at least implicitly) critical both of the institution of the opera, and of the ways we understand it.

In all six postoperas various forms of recording techniques, video, film, digital technology are used. In all of them the microphones mediate the singing voice. That significantly changed both how opera looks and how it sounds. And, as was shown in all my case studies, technology not only enables the pieces, but becomes embedded into their concepts. The problematization of vocal uniqueness in One could not have been achieved without a virtuosic interlacing between the projected sound/image and the live performance. The monstrous voice that I discuss in Three Tales could not have been presented without complex electronic vocal transformations there. The desynchronization on which La Belle et la Bête is conceived could not have been performed without questioning technology and the representational mechanisms of film and opera, simultaneously. The singing bodies of La Commedia and Writing to Vermeer are both significantly determined by the technology involved in the staging. Finally, the vocal drag performed in Homeland is made possible by an electronic pitch-shifting device.

I showed how in One the technologically upgraded relationship between the body and the voice becomes a major semiotic generator of this piece, and how such a changed body-voice construct problematizes issues about voice, identity, uniqueness and opera. In Three Tales the body-voice relationship conditioned by monstrous voice functions as a critique of cloning seen as monstrosity. De-synchronization between the body and the voice in La Belle et la Bête speaks of how what is seen in opera and in film changes meaning in relation to what is heard alongside what is seen. In Writing to Vermeer the de-synchronization between triplicate female characters and one voice interrogates the position of women on the opera stage and also the genre of opera and its relation to classical painting and new media. The reinvention of vocalic body that includes vocal travesty in La Commedia underlines that the gender of the voice is a cultural construct. Finally, a made-up man’s voice of the constructed male character in Homeland questions how the representation of woman on stage as one that does (not) have the voice of authority affects a body-voice-gender relationship. It also shows that the binary division of man’s voice and woman’s voice should be brought into question.
The type of reinvention of the mutual interaction between the singing body and the voice in these postoperas also influenced the global structure of this dissertation’s text. I divided my case studies into three groups according to the ways the body-voice relationship is reinvented in the pieces. In Part 1 (Voices beyond Corporeality: Performing Singing as Upgrading) I discuss how in One and Three Tales the body-voice relationship is ‘upgraded’ by technology intervening upon the performing body. In La Belle et la Bête and Writing to Vermeer, discussed in Part 2 (Throwing the Voice, Catching the Body: Opera, Ventriloquism and De-synchronization), different reinventions of the singing body take place. The keywords for how the body-voice relationship is reinvented there are de-synchronization and ventriloquism. Part 3 (Singing Gender (As a Performance)) contains discussions about the reinvention of vocalic bodies in La Commedia and in Homeland. In these pieces the relationship between the singing body and the voice is reinvented in relation to the vocal representation of gender and sex. In both of them the stereotypes of body-voice-gender relationship are problematized.

As to how this line of research could be developed further in opera studies, the examination and interpretation of the singing body in opera could be broadened to embrace conventional opera repertoire. It would be challenging, and I believe illuminating, to attempt a history theorisation of the singing body in opera more generally. On the other hand, I am aware of possible limits to that research imposed by the available sources. When relying only on the scores and written sources about early opera performances, the analysis of the body-voice relationship could be a difficult task. In an ideal case it would be necessary to have video recordings of the analyzed pieces because how the piece is staged and how the voices are ‘composed’ to match the singing bodies significantly influences the body-voice relations in opera.

My third declared objective - enriching the field of opera studies by confronting it with a body/voice theory - was addressed through all the chapters. I was particularly intrigued by recent developments in theories of the voice, where the voice is interpreted not only as a vehicle of linguistic meaning, but as a material, and performative, corporeal agent. Voice studies as a separate academic discipline does not exist, and theories of the voice appear in different disciplines such as philosophy, feminist critique, musicology, film studies, and theatre studies. The singing body of opera itself crosses several disciplines – musicology, opera studies and theatre studies. It might be one of the reasons that the singing body remained ‘concealed’ from critical theory for a long time. It was not on the ‘radar’ of musicology, except perhaps in matters of vocal technique.

After registering the gap between the singing body and the sung voice in operatic practice, I looked for its explanation in theory. I found some discussions of this problem of mismatch, gap,

411 A book on the subject within theatre studies was published recently: Andrew M. Kimbrough, Dramatic Theories of Voice in The Twentieth Century, New York, Cambria Press, 2011.
de/synchronization, and the ventriloquism-like relationship between the body and the voice in opera studies (Abbate, Brooks and Grover-Friedlander), in theories of ventriloquism (Connor), and in theories of the body and the voice in general (Dolar, Žižek). I mapped their writings onto the subject in the Introduction and in Chapter 1. At first I was satisfied with Dolar’s conclusion about the gap: that the mismatch happens because the real place of production of the voice could never be seen. I believed that the core of this body-voice ‘mismatch’, “poor fit between speaker and voice” as Connor puts it, or ventriloquism-like use of the voice, indeed lies in the impossibility of seeing how the voice is produced and from where it emerges. While working on this dissertation, however, I unexpectedly had a chance to test this out in a rather different context.

While an otorinolaringologist was performing the examination of rhinoscopy on me, he encouraged me to see the ‘live’ video projection of my vocal chords while I talked. It was a sobering experience. The mismatch between what I saw and what I heard when the image of my talking vocal chords was video-projected live appeared even more profound than the body-voice mismatch I knew before that: I couldn’t perceive any apparent connection between movements of my interior organs and the expressions of my voice. Even when I was finally able to see the concealed source of the voice, it did not explain the body-voice mismatch I am interested in. This for me confirmed that the key to understanding the body-voice relationship does not lie in the empirical, but in a symbolic, connection between the two. And that symbolic connection is culturally conditioned. It is different in film (moreover it is different in Italian cinematography and American cinematography for example), ventriloquism, lip-dubbing videos, conventional opera, and postopera.

I outlined the theoretical context I refer to in the Introduction and in Chapter 1. It started with explaining and discussing Connor’s concept of the vocalic body in the Introduction (Reinventing Vocalic Body (In Opera), Reinventing Vocalic Body (In Theory)). Concerning the understanding of the singing body-sung voice relationship, the concept of the vocalic body was of great value since it is based precisely on the mutual interaction between the body and the voice. I understand that the body-voice relationship, according to Connor’s concept of the vocalic body, functions as a kind of vocal mirror – one hears the voice s/he produces, but at the same time the produced voice affects the identity of the one who produced it and thus ‘closes the circle’ of mutual influences. It functions

---

412 The voice theory found its way to opera through psychoanalytical theory before. For example: Michel Poizat, The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera, Ithaca, N. Y., Cornell University Press, 1992. Žižek, Slavoj, and Salecl, Renata (eds.), Gaze and Voice as Love Objects, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1996. Most of the voice theories that I consider in this study, however, do not come from psychoanalysis, but from feminist theory (Cavarero, Dame), film studies (Chion, Altman) or ventriloquism (Connor, Felderer) or opera studies themselves (Abbate, Duncan).

like an image in the mirror: the body produces the image in the mirror, but that image reflects back, and affects the identity of the body at the same time. Thus, in this study the singing body is considered to be the vocalic body in Connor’s terms, emphasizing a mutual relationship between the body and the voice.

The other theories I discuss come from different disciplines, and might be grouped into three categories according to the concepts they problematize, as I showed in Chapter 1: theory of voice (vocal uniqueness (Cavarero), politics of voice (Dolar), speaking machines (Felderer), acousmatic voice (Chion), soundtrack as ventriloquist (Altman)), theory of body (transplanted organ that intrudes the identity (Nancy), prosthesis (Stone), restaging the monstrous body (Kunst), the body as between man and animal (Agamben)), and theories drawn from opera studies that discuss issues in relation to the singing body (envoicing women in opera (Abbate), unveiled voices (Dame), scandal of the singing body (Duncan)). The diversity of theories mirrors the diversity of the reinventions of the vocalic body that was explored in different case studies. There is no single theory that could engage with my various postoperas and the various reinventions of the singing body in them. Thus, my position is relativist.

In Chapter 2 I read One against the backdrop of concepts of vocal uniqueness by Adriana Cavarero, the concept of the intruder by Jean-Luc Nancy and the concept of prosthesis and its performativity by Sandy Stone. Those theories enabled discussion on the subjects that One itself proposes: how vocal uniqueness relates to identity via the body, how identity and vocal uniqueness are questioned by overemphasizing uniqueness, how destabilized identity relates to the performance, and how the concept of prosthesis affects identity. In Chapter 3, where I analyze Three Tales, I establish the concept of the monstrous voice. Kunst’s theory about the restaging of the monstrous body initiates the discussion, while Felderer’s theorizations about the unsettling effect of a voice produced by a machine enable me to connect it to the unsettling effects produced by the deformed voices in Three Tales. Relating it to Dolar’s concept of the politics of the voice, based on the voice’s division between meaning and sounding, I conclude that the politics of the monstrous voice in Three Tales is to critique the invasion of the human body by technology, or the ‘monsterizing’ of it by cloning.

In Chapter 4 I use Agamben’s theory to demonstrate how the relationship between man and animal embodied in the Beast may be represented vocally. I also use Chion’s theory of the acousmatic voice to show how the estrangement of the voice that appears to come from elsewhere than its apparent source produces meaning, and questions opera’s potential to use film and its representational mechanism. I also make an analogy with how Rick Altman uses the concept of ventriloquism in film theory to show how music in Glass’s opera could be viewed as the
ventriloquist. In Chapter 5 with the concept of the envoicing of women in opera by Carolyn Abbate I demonstrate how synchronization between singing bodies and sung voices in opera is impossible. In Chapter 6 I analyze the body-voice-gender relationship by using the theoretical concept of ‘unveiled voices’ by Joke Dame that dismantles stereotypes of vocal representation in relation to gender. I use Dame’s theory, which relativizes the relationship between voice, sex and gender, to examine how this is manifest in the case of La Commedia’s Dante character. In the last chapter I confront Homeland with the text “The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body” by Michelle Duncan in which she argues that the singing voice of opera is corporeal and ‘scandalous’. I investigate how the body ‘tempers and tampers’ with the singing and speech act of Laurie Anderson. It makes me wonder why and how I determine according to the voice I hear if the person is the man or the woman, and how the stereotypes of gendered voice affect not only the linguistic meaning of what I hear, but also of what I see. Importing all these theories into opera studies enables debates and insights that are invited both by the singing body, and by the concept of postopera so that their different aspects might be theoretically illuminated.

Finally, the first objective outlined in the Introduction - extending the cultural analysis of opera to the singing body – has been addressed by conducting this research and writing a book-length study whose subject is singing corporeality in postopera. As I stated in the Introduction, for me the singing body is neither invisible, nor inaudible; it establishes meanings in postopera and it becomes one of the major driving forces in it. My argument was developed and supported through six case studies in which I read the body-voice relationship as a text and emphasized that text’s intertextuality by confronting it with different theories of body and of voice. In accordance with Dolar’s elaborations on how there is no ‘perfect sound’, how “we cannot hear a voice without it carrying a story along with it, a history, a telltale web of traces, a vast panoply of experience”, how body is embedded in the singing voice, and how the singing voice betrays “the personal history and habitus, gender, age, region, education, childhood, culture, training, social status, a lifetime of experience and social practice”, and bearing in mind his claims that all these practices “sneak into the voice, they taint it, they stain it, they contaminate, they infiltrate”, I traced, deciphered and explained some of those possible ‘contaminations’ and ‘infiltrations’ and their significance in the singing body of postopera.414

I argue that the scope of the influence that singing body has in (post)opera is much bigger than the attention it presently gets both in opera theory and in opera practice. It is that imbalance that I hoped to improve by this study. I showed not only how the body-voice relationship that

---

constitutes singing corporeality is meaningful, but also how in the postoperas I discussed this relationship becomes crucial for redefining the whole medium of opera. Aside from its contribution to opera studies, this research of the relationship between the body and the voice could be seen as a contribution to theatre and performance studies, dance studies, and to the theorization of other practices that involve speaking or singing, including theatre, dance, video, and performance art. Moreover, to research the relationship between the body and the voice in postopera is to signal the importance of the relationship between the body and the voice in other cultural practices, such as lectures, radio or TV programs, religious rituals, civil ceremonies, lip-dubbing videos, and many others. Finally, this research could also be seen as a potential contribution to the performance practice of postopera, and of other performing arts whose constitutive part is the relationship between the body and the voice.

Problematising the relationship between the body and the voice in practices as diverse as contemporary opera and theatre, voice lifting or lip-dubbing videos all demonstrate that the relationship between the body and the voice and their mutual representation should not and cannot be neglected. Practices of re-juvenation, where people are subjected to a procedure of voice lifting in order to make their voice sound younger, or the mismatch between what is heard and what is seen in the postoperas I analyzed, both indicate, albeit in very different ways, that the relationship between the body and the voice is recognized as a site for the production of meaning.

Following this research into the reinvention of the vocalic body in postopera my own perception of this specific relationship has also been reinvented. Now when I am confronted with a new opera, music theatre piece, or theatre performance, I find myself examining how the performing bodies and voices are related to each other. If the singing/speaking body is upgraded by technology, and that upgrade is heard through the voice, it usually re-defines the identity of the one who speaks or sings together with its position in the piece. Or, I look for how and why bodies and voices are de/synchronized, and how the mismatch redefines the spectacle I am observing, and what that redefinition tells me about what I am hearing or listening to. Finally, it makes me wonder how gender and sex are embedded in the voice I am hearing, and how that affects what is performed. If the body-voice relationship is unconventional and thus subject to interrogation, that is surely an indicator of changes to the status and the function of the piece, problematizing and stretchings the boundaries of its world.

415 Voice lifting is a recently developed plastic surgery procedure. It is the operative intervention on vocal chords that are being tightened in order to make the voice to sound younger. Lip-dubbing is a popular way of visualizing existing music by adding to it a video in which the actors appear to be singing the words of music. In that process, however, the mismatch, de/synchronization between the voice that is heard, and the body of the singer that allegedly performs it stays obvious. David de la Fuente Garcia “The Music of the Internet Screen: the Lip Dubbing”, paper delivered at the Eleventh International Conference of the Department of Musicology, Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade, April 18-21, 2012.
Acknowledgements

Belgrade, Amsterdam, Lisbon: these are the cities that outlined my life in large measure during the years in which this dissertation was emerging. I cannot think about this research process without connecting it to these three different contexts within which it was embedded. It was all there: strained, curious and seductive Belgrade, energetic and floating Amsterdam, and luminous and unfathomable Lisbon. It would be strange to express my gratitude to the cities. Nevertheless, I am confident that my work on this thesis owes a lot to all three of them. My supervisor Rokus de Groot provided strong support during the entire period of the research and writing. Instead of offering solutions to the problems, he encouraged me through discussion to find the way out for myself. He let me establish the direction I wanted to follow, and although sometimes that was not the most comfortable way to proceed, I am extremely grateful to him that he adopted this approach.

My special thanks go to the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis that provided an institutional framework for my research, and especially to its managing director Eloe Kingma whose advice was invaluable. I am very grateful to Nuffic which supported me for the second time with a Huygens grant in 2007-8. I am also grateful to Maaike Bleeke, whose advice strengthened my argumentation. In final years of my research I became a collaborator of the Center for Studies of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music (CESEM) in Lisbon, and the support that I received there, especially from colleagues Paula Gomes Ribeiro and Mario Vieira de Carvalho, meant a lot.

Since I was an external PhD candidate at ASCA, and since I only travelled to the Netherlands from time to time, this nomadic situation prompted me constantly to re-create a context for my research from theories, arts, and discussions with friends and colleagues from different places. Among those involved were composers and directors about whose works I write and whom I was lucky to be able to meet and/or talk to: Michel van der Aa, Louis Andriessen, Philip Glass, Peter Greenaway, Hal Hartley, Robert Wilson, Steve Reich. I must mention also my colleagues from the Society of Minimalist Music who offered advice and/or helped with proofreading my text for English: Kyle Gann, Tristian Evans, Keith Potter, John Pymm, Pwyl Ap Sion; colleagues and friends that I met during conferences, with whom I had inspiring conversations and who also commented on some of the chapters: Teresa Havelkova, Ulrike Hartung, Pavel Jiracek, Bianca Michaels, Christopher Morris, Nicholas Till, John Richardson, Pieter Verstraete, Caroline Wilkins; my old friends and colleagues who read versions of the manuscript and were dynamic interlocutors: Bojan Djordjev, Siniša Ilić, Ivana Ilići-Stamatovic, Ana Vujanović, and Jim Samson, whose language support and wise advice in the final stages of writing were irreplaceable; my good friend Frits van der Waa who taught me beautiful things about music, drawing, writing, parenting and Amsterdam, and who helped with the translation of parts of the text in Dutch; my dear friends Jasna Veličković and Danijela Šendula, who
not only discussed my research problems with me, but also always generously invited me to stay in their Amsterdam and Rotterdam homes when I was in The Netherlands.

My family is my strongest support. My parents Mirjana and Tomislav, and my brother Ivan, always respected my choices, and never failed to encourage me to explore. I am very grateful for that. My inspiring fellow traveler Dejan is the one that cherished this research daily at all kinds of levels, and without his support it would have looked much different. The work on the dissertation began in a year when our son Luka joined us. He is the most beautiful research companion that I could ever have wished for. I can only hope that at least some of his immense curiosity, love of play and irresistible charm encouraged me to make this writing more interesting for readers. Thank you, Luka.

My wonderful grandfather Col Vlastimir Stojanović has supported me in all kinds of ways since I was born. It was maybe back then when I was one year old, and when he started tape recording my first words, poems and songs, that my interest in the power of the voice and its relationship to the body was born. My grandfather is probably the most devoted reader that I will ever have. My way of sharing this special moment with him is to dedicate this book to his memory.
Summary in English

The title of this study is Singing Corporeality: Reinventing the Vocalic Body in Postopera. The first part of the title – Singing Corporeality – refers to the body that sings. In this study I perceive it through the relationship between the singing body and the sung voice. The second part of the title – Reinventing the Vocalic Body in Postopera – brings notions that immediately call for additional explanation. The verb ‘to reinvent’ has several meanings and points to something invented again, remade or redone, or brought into use again. Vocalic body, or voice-body is a theoretical concept developed and defined by Steven Connor in the context of his investigations into the cultural history of ventriloquism. As is usually understood, the body produces the voice. The concept of the vocalic body emphasizes that the other way round is not only possible, but happens all the time. Finally, with the notion of postopera I designate opera that is at the same time postmodern and postdramatic (according to the concept of postdramatic theatre proposed by Hans-Thies Lehmann, 1999).

The subject of this study is the operatic singing body and its reinvention in recent operatic works that I call postoperas. Both in opera studies and in the majority of operatic pieces the singing body is often taken for granted. My main argument is that the body-voice relationship establishes meanings produced by opera and that furthermore it becomes one of the major driving forces in recent opera. This relationship should be considered as such when opera is analyzed. I discuss how the mutual relationship between body and voice is reinvented in recent operatic practice. The reinvention in question assumes the changes that came as the result of the impact of new media, a de-synchronization between image and sound, or a redefinition of body-voice-gender relationships in opera. I also examine the ways in which the relationship between the singing body and the voice is considered in theory. I refer to how a concept of the vocalic body is reinvented in the context of opera studies. In that respect, this study strives to establish itself as the reinvention of the singing body in opera theory.

By showing how the singing body constitutes opera’s meanings I intend to achieve four aims:

- extend the cultural analysis of opera to the singing body
- identify the theme of interaction between the singing body and the voice in opera as a site in which different discourses are encoded
- enrich the field of opera studies by confronting it with the theory of voice and body
- introduce and define the concept of postopera, thus creating a theoretical context and common ‘scene’ for analyzed pieces

These four aims constitute at the same time a major contribution of this dissertation towards opera studies.
In the pieces that I have chosen to analyze – *La Belle et la Bête* (1994) by Philip Glass and Jean Cocteau, *Writing to Vermeer* (1997-98) by Louis Andriessen, Peter Greenaway, Michel van der Aa and Saskia Boddeke, *Three Tales* (1998-2002) by Steve Reich and Beryl Korot, *One* (2002) by Michel van der Aa, *Homeland* (2007) by Laurie Anderson and *La Commedia* (2004-2008) by Louis Andriessen and Hal Hartley – the relationship between the singing body and the voice becomes a site for creative exploration where the boundaries of the opera world are stretched. The vocalic bodies of the singers in these pieces could be interpreted as theoretically meaningful statements, making the body-voice relationship a place of discursive density. I specifically chose these operas for analysis because they address the questions of the relationship between the singing body and the voice. The principle of the vocalic body becomes obvious in them in various ways. In *One* and *Three Tales* technological procedures are used to produce detached, machine-like, even ‘monstrous’ vocal expression. They reflect back to the singing body and question its identity. In both *La Belle et la Bête* and *Writing to Vermeer* a purposely-obtained de-synchronization between multiplied bodies that are assigned to a single voice problematizes their mutual ‘belonging’ to each other. Finally, in *La Commedia* and in *Homeland* the way in which vocal representation of gender is projected onto the ‘wrong’ body confronts us with a break in the conventions of representation between body, voice and gender.

Concerning the coordinates in which these chosen pieces emerge, the temporal frame is between 1994 and 2008. The territory encompassed involves the Netherlands and the United States of America, since the composers of the operas depicted here are significant figures within the field of repetitive music established in the USA (Reich, Glass, Anderson), a musical language that received one of its most fruitful and productive responses in the Netherlands (Andriessen, Van der Aa). The social system discussed is that of late capitalism. With this range of recent operas my intention is not to illustrate some examples of contemporary operas within late capitalism, nor to map current trends. These works are chosen because the vocalic body becomes increasingly problematic in them in various ways, reinterpreting in turn the institution and the world of opera. Moreover, for me these and similar pieces are an impulse for establishing the concept of postopera. With this concept I reply to a wide range of operatic practices that has appeared in Western musical theatre since the last quarter of the twentieth century, practices for which the use of the notion of opera becomes somewhat inadequate.

The text of this dissertation consists of an introduction, seven chapters and a conclusion. In the Introduction and in Chapter 1 a theoretical ‘map’ is outlined and discussed. Each of the following chapters (Chapter 2 to Chapter 7) provides a case study. The chapters are divided in three parts according to different thematizations of body-voice relationships in them, as follows: Part 1: *Voices*
beyond Corporeality: Performing Singing as Upgrading, Part 2: Throwing the Voice, Catching the Body: Opera, Ventriloquism and De-Synchronization, and Part 3: Singing Gender (as a performance).

In each one of the analyzed works the body-voice gap plays a significant role since it is reworked in different ways, whether upgraded with the help of technology as shown in Part 1, deliberately deepened by over-emphasizing de-synchronizing ventriloquial features as discussed in Part 2, or ‘queered’ by performing a mismatch that depends on body – voice – gender de-synchronicities as explained in Part 3.

The purpose of the first chapter Body-Voice Gap, Postopera and Theory of Voice, a theoretical introduction to this study, is to outline and theorize three issues of particular importance for the subject: 1) the problem of ‘the gap’ between the singing body and the voice in opera; 2) the concept of postopera; and 3) theories of voice and body that I use to illuminate the reinvention of the body-voice relationship in postopera. I discuss views of the body-voice gap in opera in texts by Carolyn Abbate (1991), Peter Brooks (2000) and Michal Grover-Friedlander (2005, 2011). Revealing the mismatch between the body and the voice as the core of opera’s representational mechanism enables me to observe my theoretical objects from that point of view in subsequent chapters. Texts by Abbate, Brooks and Grover-Friedlander all tackle the problem of the body-voice gap and illuminate it from different perspectives. Abbate emphasizes the division between the liveness of the singing body and its awareness of its own singing, and the ‘deafness’ of operatic characters as to both the causes and the consequences of that division. Brooks writes about opera’s denial of realistic representation as of the result of different demands for dramatic representations of the voice and of the body that result in the disembodiment of the voice. Finally, Grover-Friedlander argues that re-voicing, the re-attaching of voices and bodies on screen, reveals that the unity of body and voice is only a ‘trick’.

Concerning the concept of postopera, I define it primarily in relation to the concept of postdramatic theatre by Lehmann. I discuss it, however, both in relation to Jeremy Tambling’s suggestions of what happened post opera, i.e. after opera or after the modernist opera project came to an end (1996), and Nicholas Till’s elaborations of postmodern opera and opera in the postmodern age in relation to notions of the post-operatic introduced by this author and his collaborator Kandis Cook (2002, 2004). Till and Cook’s notion of the post-operatic designates both postmodern opera and opera in the age of postmodernism. Opera in the age of postmodernism in their interpretation refers also to conventional operatic repertoire and its various postmodern ‘readings’. Contrary to that, the notion of postopera that I propose does not refer to conventional opera and its contemporary reworkings, but only to unconventional recently-composed works. Till and Cook do
not clearly specify a postdramatic dimension to their post-operative productions, while I insist that what is named postopera should be postdramatic and postmodern at the same time.

Finally, mapping the concepts from theories of the voice and the body relevant to the reinvention of the body-voice relationship in postopera enables me both to explore how those concepts work in the context of opera studies and how they illuminate the vocalic body in my later case studies. I divide the concepts I have depicted as the major theoretical ‘protagonists’ for discussion in the following chapters into three groups according to the issues they address. The first group comprises theories about voice (the voice in general and in film, not just its role in music or opera; Rick Altman: 1980, Michel Chion: 1994, 1999, Adriana Cavarero: 2005, Mladen Dolar: 2006, Brigitte Felderer: 2008). The second group comprises theories that discuss some curious cases in relation to the body and identity (Sandy Stone: 1995, Jean-Luc Nancy: 2003, Giorgio Agamben: 2004, Bojana Kunst: 2008). The body that is being re-defined for various reasons (the prosthetic body, the body with transplanted organs, the monstrous body, the body as between man and animal) affects identity in various ways, and these mutual influences are discussed. Unlike the first and second groups of theories, the third group contains theories that are developed in opera studies and that discuss issues in relation to the singing body (Carolyn Abbate: 1993, Michelle Duncan: 2004, Joke Dame: 2006). The shifts between these different theories from different disciplines are partly a reflection of the heterogeneity of the reinvention of the vocalic body in postopera that I am trying to bring into view. The body-voice gap, postopera and theories of voice and body are discussed in all subsequent chapters: I analyze the de-synchronous relationship between the body and the voice in a group of postoperas, and also use concepts from theories of the voice and theories of the body to illuminate reinventions of the vocalic body in my theoretical objects.

In Part 1 I am concerned with how and why singing in some postoperas appears beyond the body that produces it and with what the meaning produced in such a particular mutual agency between the singing body and the voice tells us about postopera, its status and function. In both postoperas I have chosen as theoretical objects – One and Three Tales – the voice that is heard is the result of connecting the forces of the body with technological interventions performed upon the voice and body. In One the main intervention comes in relation to live performance and the reproduced video involving one performer. The live singing body only partly produces the final vocal result, and that vocal result reflects itself back to the singing body and changes its identity. The prominent gap between the technologically upgraded voice and the ‘natural’ body as its primary source is reinvented. In Three Tales voices are pre-recorded and transformed, and brought into the sphere of the monstrous by procedures conducted by the composer.
In Chapter 2 Singing beyond the Body: Uniqueness, Intruder and Prosthesis I read One against the backdrop of several theoretical concepts: the concept of vocal uniqueness by Cavarero, the concept of the intruder by Nancy and the concept of prosthesis and its performativity by Stone. Looking at One in the light of Cavarero’s concept of vocal uniqueness enables me to show how the concept of vocal uniqueness is tied to the concept of identity via the body, the voice, and their mutual relation in postopera, but also how both concepts of identity and of vocal uniqueness could be destabilized by overemphasizing uniqueness, as happened in One, where uniqueness is deconstructed by its own multiplication. Nancy’s concept of the intruder allows a better understanding of destabilized identity, which in One intrudes upon the performance. The concept of prosthesis by Stone interrogates one’s relation to one’s own extended body, and this affects its identity. The body-voice relationship, implying multiplicity, virtuosity, extension, and mobility, changes opera’s ontology.

In Chapter 3 Monstrous Singing: The Politics of Vocal Existence, my concern is with how singing appears monstrous as a result of existing beyond the body that produces it, with the politics of the monstrous voice and with the consequences this has for the opera. I analyze the body-voice relationship in Three Tales, paying specific attention to the novel techniques of ‘dissecting the voice’ that Steve Reich introduces. The emphasis is particularly on Act 3: Dolly, which raises a number of issues regarding cloning, artificial intelligence and defining what is human, whilst also using a number of novel techniques for singing. I use several theoretical texts in discussing Three Tales: Kunst’s “Restaging the Monstrous”, Dolar’s theories on the politics and linguistics of the voice, and Felderer’s text on speaking machines. Kunst’s text is about the status of the monstrous body and its political and theatrical productivity based on a division within the human, and the constant production of the norm of what is human and what is not. I use this text to develop the monstrous voice concept and to show how the singing body in Three Tales is vocally manifested as a monster. Dolar’s theory helps me to locate the political dimension of the monstrous voice. Felderer’s text brings the historical examination of speaking mechanisms, and together with Connor’s elaborations of disembodied voice, I use it to examine the uneasiness produced by monstrous voices in Three Tales. If Reich and Korot’s comments about the political distribution of power were sung by conventional operatic voices, the effect would have been much different, I suggest, and not adversely critical. Using the monstrous singing voice is what gives their critique its sharp edge. Reich and Korot warn us how terrible the voice of artificial humanity may sound. Vocally performing the horror of artificial life, hearing it through non-human, deformed human voice, is what makes their critique poignant, memorable, and effective in influencing the public sphere and the distribution of power within it.
I show in Part 1, how in both One and Three Tales the vocalic body has been reinvented. In both of them the voices appear beyond the body that produces them, and the singing reveals the body that has been ‘upgraded’ by technology. In One the effect of such a reinvented mismatch is at the same time an enhancement of performing abilities and a denial of the performer’s uniqueness. One demonstrates a fascination with prosthetic relations and with the ways they improve the performativity of the human body and the voice in their mutual relationship. In Three Tales, however, the fascination is negative, and the way the body-voice relationship is reinvented I read as an artist’s warning that humanity is incapable of adequately responding to the powerful challenges that technology brings. A monstrous voice enables this postopera to function as a critique of monstrosity, which its authors perceive in the power-related usage of technology, especially in cloning and genetic engineering.

In Part 2, I am interested in the ventriloquial relationship between bodies and voices that appear as the result of purposely obtained de-synchronization. My theoretical objects are two postoperas in which de-synchronization between what is seen and what is heard on stage plays a central role: La Belle et la Bête and Writing to Vermeer. In both of those pieces several bodies refer to a single singing voice simultaneously. In La Belle et la Bête the live singing voice ‘belongs’ at the same time both to live singers on stage and projected film characters. In Writing to Vermeer triplicated acting characters on stage ‘share’ the same voice. A similar situation happens to the live singing body and its simultaneous video projection in Scene 2, when the character of Saskia first appears, singing live and video-projected at the same time.

In Chapter 4 Operatizing the Film: Body without Voice and Voice without Body I first show what it means to operatize the film, to reveal the concept and procedures on which La Belle et la Bête is based and which affect the body-voice relationship. This is followed by a discussion of synchronization in relation to dubbing and playback: I focus on questions on the looseness of synchronization between the operatic singing bodies and their (dis)embodied voices in this case, and the ventriloquial dimension that exists between them. I explore (de)synchronous relations between the presence of the body and of the voice in La Belle et la Bête, and the implications that a reinvented body-voice construct produces. I also demonstrate, with the help of Agamben’s theory, how the relationship between man and animal embodied in the Beast is represented vocally, and that despite all the efforts to synchronize image and sound the gap between the body and the voice remains. I use Chion’s theory of the acousmatic voice to show how estrangement of the voice that appears to come from elsewhere than its apparent source produces meaning, and questions opera’s potential to use other media and their mechanisms of representation. Finally, I postulate a new model for the conceptualisation of the body-voice relationship in this piece through analogy to how
Altman uses the concept of ventriloquism in film theory: the operatic music composed by Philip Glass is a ventriloquist who takes someone else’s ‘dummy’ (moving images of Cocteau’s film in this case). Glass’s music is attached to Cocteau’s film in synchronization to create the illusion that the singing is produced by the characters in the silent film. The (de)synchronization of the singing body and the voice in this case indexes the power of this opera to examine representational mechanisms of both film and opera, while using them to change its own status and economy.

My analysis of the relationship between singing body and voice in Writing to Vermeer in Chapter 5 Singing Letters, Multiplied Bodies and Dissociated Voice examines how strategies of staging (a visual triplication of characters), music (a musical dramaturgy that does not follow the dramaturgy of the libretto), writing (questioning of écriture féminine and the adultery motive in relation to the subject/object position of woman), and mediation (simulation and close-up procedure in Scene 2) interfere in the connection between bodies and voices on stage. The staging shows Vermeerian women, embodied in the triplicate characters of Vermeer’s wife Catharina, his mother-in-law Maria and the model Saskia, that, unlike women in Vermeer’s paintings, have voices. I read those strategies of envoicing against the backdrop of the concept of envoicing the women in opera by Abbate. I do that in order to show how attributing and de-synchronizing the singing voice to triplicate women figures generates meaning about the status of woman as subject/object in postopera, and how that affects the vocalic body. While analysing the procedures applied in music, my concern is with Andriessen’s intention to maintain the musical dramaturgy independent from the dramaturgy of the libretto. I investigate how this independence relates to the body-voice relationship. In relation to strategies of writing and their interfering in the connection between bodies and voices on stage, I read Greenaway’s libretto against the backdrop of the concept of écriture féminine by Hélène Cixous (1976). That helps me to reveal the simulation strategies that he uses when he plays with this concept, but also to show how he questions it. The adultery motive that appears in the libretto, together with the questioning of écriture féminine, demonstrates how the female characters function as objects in a masculine discourse, and how they appear to strive to become subjects. Concerning mediation and how it affects the relationship between body and voice, I offer a close reading of the scene in which the character of Saskia sings live on stage, while at the same time her close-up is projected on the big screen, so that it looks as if her voice is dubbed to her projected image. All these strategies together significantly affect the conventional relation between body and voice, making it desynchronous, ventriloquial.

The main cause of de-synchronization in both pieces discussed in Part 2 is the fact that a single singing voice simultaneously refers to more than one body. These procedures confirm Grover-Friedlander’s claims that the unity between body and voice is merely a ‘trick’. That ‘trick’ is
manifestly thematized in *La Belle et la Bête*, where it becomes a conceptual motor for the piece, while an awareness of that ‘trick’ is embedded in the representational mechanism of *Writing to Vermeer*. The ‘impossible synchronization’ in both postoperas speaks of different divisions: between opera and film, man and animal, image and sound, live and reproduced, subject and object. I show how the problematization of those divisions and the reinvention of the body-voice relationship in these pieces effectively reinvent the medium of opera.

Part 3 examines the discursive ‘friction’ that appears between the singing body and the voice in relation to gender. The theoretical objects are two postoperas where the relationship between body, voice and gender is questioned through singing: *La Commedia* and *Homeland*. In both works, the issue of body-voice-gender relationships is interrogated in connection with what is conventionally perceived as the singing female voice. In *La Commedia*, Dante, sung by a female singer, is divided further into two characters, feminine and masculine, that appear simultaneously. In *Homeland*, Anderson introduces a certain kind of ‘vocal masquerade’ by electronically processing her voice to sound masculine, with the help of a pitch harmonizer (a pitch-shifting device).

In Chapter 6 *Voice and Gender Standing Apart* I initially investigate the postdramatic condition of *La Commedia* by elaborating on its multiple narratives, deconstructing characters, and ways of mediating stage events. The singing body in *La Commedia* is affected by the specific postdramatic condition of the piece that engages several narratives simultaneously, two sets of characters related to different ‘stories’, and complex and asynchronous events on stage involving different media. All of these elements affect the presence of the singing body of Dante, making the relationship between the body and the voice ambiguous, and promoting a reinvention of the voice-gender relation. The body-voice relationships within the singing characters are first reinvented with the help of these procedures, and only later comes the vocal travesty of the principal character. Towards the end of the chapter, my focus is on vocal travesty in relation to the character of Dante, and on the way that gender is related to that vocalic body. I use Dame’s theory, which relativizes the relationship between voice, sex and gender to examine how this is manifested in the case of *La Commedia*’s Dante character. The notion of a female taking the role of Dante erases binary oppositions of the genders in opera, together with our perception of them. The singing Dante character, enlightened by the theories of Dame, enacts the relationship between gender and voice as a performance, and not as something predetermined by nature.

In the last chapter *Vocal Drag, Counter-Castrato and the Scandal of the Singing Body* I discuss how in *Homeland* Anderson problematizes the body-voice-gender relationship, focusing on the figure of her male alter-ego Fenway Bergamot. *Homeland* shares the history of vocal drag with other pieces by the same author. In order to trace the ‘origins’ of Bergamot I first present a ‘history
of vocal drag’ that spans a large part of Anderson’s career. The history they share, and Anderson’s discussions of it, contribute to an understanding of why and how she uses vocal drag in *Homeland*. After presenting the history of vocal drag in Anderson’s opus I place the figure of Bergamot in the context of discussions about castrato singers by Cavarero (2005), Filipa Lã and Jane W. Davidson (2005) and Michel Poizat (1992). I discuss how castrato singers expose relationships between body, voice and gender, and also how they undermine conventional voice-gender construct. That exposure and that undermining make the figure of the castrato productive for my reading of how the body-voice-gender construct is reinvented in the case of Bergamot, whom I understand as being a kind of counter-castrato figure. Finally, I confront *Homeland* with the text “The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body” by Michelle Duncan. Duncan argues that the singing voice of opera is corporeal and ‘scandalous’, borrowing the concept of the scandal of the body from Shoshana Felman (2002). I illuminate *Homeland* with Duncan’s claims concerning the performativity of the voice based on her critique of Felman and Judith Butler in order to see how the body ‘tempers and tampers’ with the singing and speech act of Laurie Anderson, and what happens with the body-voice-gender construct when vocal drag takes place.

The problematization of the body-voice–gender relationship in both case studies in Part 3 appear to confirm Butler’s insistence that sex and gender are not natural givens but cultural constructs. The categories of female and male voice are interrogated in both cases, and the rigidity of norms that maintain a binary opposition between male and female voices is brought into doubt: in *La Commedia* with irony and in *Homeland* with parody.
**Summary in Dutch/Samenvatting**


Het onderwerp van dit onderzoek is het zingende lichaam in de opera en de herdefinitie daarvan in recente muziektheaterwerken die ik aanduid met de term *postopera*. Zowel in de literatuur over opera als in het merendeel van het operarepertoire wordt aan de dichotomie tussen stem en lichaam nauwelijks aandacht besteed. Mijn voornaamste stelling is dat de relatie tussen de stem en het lichaam betekenissen voortbrengt die met name in de opera tot uitdrukking komen, en dat deze relatie bovendien een van de belangrijkste creatieve factoren binnen de hedendaagse opera is. Dit aspect zou dus in opera-analyses niet veronachtzaamd mogen worden. Ik laat zien hoe de onderlinge relatie tussen de stem en het lichaam in de recente operapraktijk onderwerp van herdefinitie is geworden. Deze herdefinitie gaat hand in hand met ontwikkelingen die voortkomen uit de introductie van nieuwe media: een de-synchronisatie van beeld en geluid, of een herdefinitie van de relatie tussen lichaam, stem en seksuele identiteit in de opera. Tevens ga ik in op de manier waarop de relatie tussen het zingende lichaam en de stem in diverse theoretische geschriften is behandeld, en beschrijf hoe het concept van het vocale lichaam binnen het opera-onderzoek zelf tot onderwerp van herdefinitie is geworden. In dat opzicht is het ultieme streven van dit onderzoek een herdefinitie tot stand te brengen van de theorieën over het zingende lichaam binnen de opera.

Door aan te tonen dat het zingende lichaam een betekenisgevende factor is binnen de opera hoop ik vier doelstellingen te bereiken:

- te bewerkstelligen dat in culturele analyses van opera ook aandacht wordt geschonken aan het concept van het zingende lichaam
aan te tonen dat de interactie tussen het zingende lichaam en de stem binnen de opera een gebied is waarin uiteenlopende gedachtengangen worden geëncodeerd.

een nieuwe impuls te geven aan het opera-onderzoek door het te confronteren met de theorie van de stem en het lichaam

het begrip ‘postopera’ als vakterm te introduceren en te definiëren, en daarmee aan toekomstige opera-analytici zowel een theoretisch kader als een gemeenschappelijk ‘handvat’ te bieden.

Deze vier doelstellingen behelzen tegelijkertijd een belangrijke bijdrage van deze dissertatie aan het operaonderzoek.


De gekozen werken zijn alle ontstaan in de periode 1994-2008, en zijn afkomstig uit Nederland en de USA. De componisten van de hier behandelde opera’s zijn vooraanstaande figuren binnen het domein van de repetitieve muziek, een muzikale taal die ontstaan is in de USA (Reich, Glass, Anderson), en in Nederland een van zijn meest vruchtbare voortzettingen heeft gekregen (Andriessen, Van der Aa). Het sociale systeem waarbinnen deze werken tot stand zijn gekomen is dat van het late kapitalisme. Het is niet mijn opzet om met deze selectie uit het contemporaine
operarepertoire een aantal voorbeelden van hedendaagse opera in het late kapitalisme te geven, en evenmin om recente trends in kaart te brengen. Deze werken zijn gekozen omdat ze in toenemende mate en op verschillende manieren het probleem van het vocale lichaam aan de orde stellen, en op hun beurt nieuwe interpretaties mogelijk maken van het genre en de wereld van de opera. Bovendien leveren deze en dergelijke werken mij de aanzet om tot een formulering te komen van het concept postopera. Met dit concept wil ik een breed spectrum aan operapraktijken aanduiden dat zich sinds de jaren '70 van de 20ste eeuw heeft gemanifesteerd in het muziektheater van het Westen, praktijken waarvoor de gangbare term ‘opera’ ietwat ontoereikend is geworden.

Deze dissertatie bestaat uit een inleiding, zeven hoofdstukken en een conclusie. In de Inleiding en in Hoofdstuk 1 omschrijf en belicht ik het theoretische raamwerk dat ten grondslag ligt aan deze studie. Elk van de daaropvolgende hoofdstukken gaat in op een specifiek werk. Deze hoofdstukken zijn gegroepeerd in drie delen, conform de verschillende invalshoeken die worden opgeworpen aangaande de relatie tussen stem en lichaam: Deel 1: Voices beyond Corporeality: Performing Singing as Upgrading, Deel 2: Throwing the Voice, Catching the Body: Opera, Ventriloquism and De-Synchronization, en Deel 3: Singing Gender (As a Performance). In elk van de geanalyseerde werken speelt de kloof tussen stem en lichaam een belangrijke rol, aangezien deze op verschillende manieren wordt uitgewerkt – hetzij benadrukt met behulp van technologische middelen als beschreven in Deel 1, hetzij opzettelijk aangescherpt door het overmatig accentueren en desynchroniseren van ventriloquistische aspecten, als beschreven in Deel 2, dan wel ‘vervreemd’ door het tot stand brengen van een frictie die voortkomt uit desynchronisiteit tussen lichaam, stem en gender, als beschreven in hoofdstuk 3.

‘doofheid’ van operapersonages voor zowel de oorzaken als de gevolgen van dat onderscheid. Brooks beschrijft het onvermogen van opera om tot een realistische weergave te komen als gevolg van de verschillende eisen die in dramatisch opzicht aan de stem en het lichaam worden gesteld, hetgeen erin resulteert dat de stem los komt te staan van het lichaam. Grover-Friedlander stelt dat nasynchronisatie, het tot stand brengen van een nieuwe koppeling tussen stem en lichaam op filmdoek of televisiescherm, aantoont dat de eenheid van stem en lichaam niet meer is dan een "truc".

Mijn definite van het concept postopera stoelt allereerst op Lehmans concept van het postdramatische theater. Ik breng dit echter zowel in verband met Jeremy Tamblings ideeën over wat er "post opera" is gebeurd - dat wil zeggen, na de opera of nadat er een einde gekomen was aan het modernistische operaproject - (1996) als met Nicholas Tills uiteenzettingen over postmoderne opera en opera in het postmoderne tijdperk, een nadere uitwerking van de ideeën over postopera die zijn opgeworpen door deze auteur en zijn medewerker Kandis Cook (2002, 2004). De opvattingen van Till en Cook over postopera hebben zowel betrekking op de moderne opera als op opera in het tijdperk van het postmodernisme. Volgens hun opvatting omvat opera in het tijdperk van het postmodernisme ook het conventionele operarepertoire en de diverse postmoderne interpretaties daarvan. Het door mij voorgestane concept van postopera omvat daarentegen niet het genre van de conventionele opera en eigentijdse interpretaties daarvan, maar uitsluitend onconventionele, recent tot stand gekomen werken. Till en Cook kennen hun postoperatieve producties geen specifieke postdramatische dimensie toe, terwijl ik van mening bent dat datgene wat we postopera noemen zowel postdramatisch als postmodern dient te zijn.

dat de identiteit op uiteenlopende manieren aan, en op deze verschillende verbanden ga ik nader in. Anders dan de eerste en tweede groep theorieën bevat de derde groep theorieën die zijn ontwikkeld binnen het operaonderzoek en die kwesties betreffen betrekking hebbende op het zingende lichaam (Carolyn Abbate: 1993, Michelle Duncan: 2004, Joke Dame: 2006). De discrepanties tussen deze verschillende theorieën uit verschillende disciplines zijn ten dele de weerspiegeling van de heterogeniteit van de diverse herdefinities van het vocale lichaam in postopera die ik hier in beeld probeert te brengen. Deze drie uitgangspunten - de kloof tussen stem en lichaam, postopera en theorieën over stem en lichaam - spelen in alle daaropvolgende hoofdstukken een rol: ik analyseer de de-synchrone relatie tussen het lichaam en de stem in een aantal postopera's, en maak ook gebruik van concepten uit theorieën over de stem en theorieën over het lichaam om licht te werpen op de herdefinities van het vocale lichaam in de door mij behandelde werken.

In deel 1 buig ik mij over de vraag hoe en waarom het zingen in sommige postopera's los lijkt te staan van het lichaam dat het voortbrengt en wat de betekenis die wordt voortgebracht door een dergelijke onderlinge verhouding tussen het zingende lichaam en stem ons zegt over postopera, haar status en haar functie. In de beide postopera's die ik als object van onderzoek heb uitgekozen – One en Three Tales – is de waargenomen stem de resultante van een verbinding tussen lichamelijke inspanning en technologische ingrepen op stem en lichaam. In One heeft de voornaamste ingreep betrekking op de combinatie van een live-uitvoering en het afspelen van een video met dezelfde uitvoerder. Het live zingende lichaam brengt slechts een gedeelte voort van het uiteindelijke vocale resultaat, en dat vocale resultaat grijpt in op het zingende lichaam en verandert zijn identiteit. De prominente kloof tussen de langs technologische weg ‘opgewaardeerde’ stem en het ‘natuurlijke’ lichaam als de primaire bron daarvan wordt hier op een nieuwe manier aanschouwelijk gemaakt. In Three Tales zijn de stemmen van tevoren opgenomen en getransformeerd, en worden door bewerkingen van de componist getransporteerd naar het domein van het monstrueuze.

In hoofdstuk 2, Singing beyond the Body: Uniqueness, Intruder and Prosthesis, belicht ik One aan de hand van verscheidene theoretische concepten: het concept van vocale uniciteit van Cavarero, het concept van de indringer van Nancy en het concept van prothese en zijn performatieve aspecten van Stone. Cavarero's concept van vocale uniciteit stelt me in staat om aan te tonen hoe in One het concept vocale uniciteit verbonden is met het concept identiteit via het lichaam, de stem en hun onderlinge relatie in postopera, maar ook hoe zowel het concept van de identiteit als dat van de vocale uniciteit gedestabiliseerd kan worden door de uniciteit extreem te benadrukken, zoals gebeurt in One, waar de uniciteit wordt gedeconstrueerd door haar eigen verdubbeling. Nancy's concept van de indringer biedt ruimte voor een beter begrip van de gedestabiliseerde identiteit, die in One de uitvoering binnendringt. Stone's concept van de prothese werpt de vraag op naar de
relatie van het individu tot zijn met hulpmiddelen uitgebreide lichaam, die ook weer invloed uitoefent op de identiteit. De relatie tussen stem en lichaam, waarin verdubbeling, virtuositeit, extensie en beweeglijkheid besloten ligt, verandert de ontologie van de opera.

In hoofdstuk 3, *Monstruous Singing: The Politics of Vocal Existence*, buig ik me over het feit dat zang monstrueuze aspecten krijgt wanneer ze wordt losgemaakt van het lichaam dat haar voortbrengt, over de politieke aspecten van de monstrueuze stem en welke consequenties dit heeft voor de opera. Ik analyseer de relatie tussen stem en lichaam in *Three Tales*, en besteed daarbij speciale aandacht aan de nieuwe techniek van het ‘ontleden van de stem’ die Steve Reich introduceert. De nadruk ligt daarbij op Act 3: *Dolly*, waarin een aantal kwesties aan de orde wordt gesteld, waaronder klonen, kunstmatige intelligentie en de definitie van wat menselijk is, terwijl deze nieuwe technieken worden ingezet bij het zingen. Bij mijn bespreking van *Three Tales* maak ik gebruik van diverse theoretische teksten: Kunsts ‘Restaging the Monstruous’, Dolars theorieën over de politieke en linguïstische aspecten van de stem en Felderers artikel over sprekkende machines. Kunsts tekst gaat over de status van het monstrueuze lichaam en de politieke en theatrale uitwerking daarvan die gebaseerd is op een tweedeling binnen het menselijke, en het voortdurend aankaarten van de normatieve vraag wat menselijk is en wat niet. Ik gebruik deze tekst om het concept van de monstrueuze stem nader te ontwikkelen en om te laten zien hoe het zingende lichaam in *Three Tales* zich vocaal manifesteert als een monster. Dolars theorie helpt me de politieke dimensies van de monstrueuze stem te traceren. Felderers tekst biedt een historisch overzicht van sprekkende machines, en samen met Connors verhandeling over de lichaamloze stem gebruik ik die om het ongemakkelijke effect te onderzoeken dat de monstrueuze stemmen in *Three Tales* teweegbrengen. Als het commentaar van Reich en Korot over de politieke verdeling van de macht verklankt zou worden door conventionele operastemmen, zou naar mijn bescheiden mening het effect heel anders en niet zo uitdrukkelijk kritisch zijn geweest. Juist het gebruik van de monstrueuze zingende stem maakt hun kritiek extra bijtend. Reich en Korot waarschuwen ons hoe angstaanjagend de stem van een kunstmatige mensheid zou kunnen klinken. De vocale weergave van het gruwelijke van kunstmatig leven, dit hoorbaar maken via een nietmenselijke, vervormde menselijke stem maakt hun kritiek indringend, en kan daarmee daadwerkelijk invloed uitoefenen op het publieke domein en de verdeling van de macht daarin.

Ik laat in deel 1 zien hoe zowel in *One* als in *Three Tales* het vocale lichaam wordt geherdefinieerd. In beide werken is de stem losgemaakt van het lichaam dat haar produceert en maakt het zingen aanschouwelijk dat het lichaam is uitgebreid met een technologische extensie. In *One* leidt een dergelijke geherdefinieerde wanverhouding zowel tot een uitbreiding van de mogelijkheden van de uitvoerder als tot een ontkennij van de uniciteit van de uitvoerder. Uit *One*
spreekt een fascinatie voor protethische relaties en de manier waarop deze de performatieve vermogens van het menselijk lichaam en de stem in hun onderlinge relatie verruimen. In Three Tales daarentegen is deze fascinatie negatief en de manier waarop de relatie tussen stem en lichaam hier wordt uitgewerkt vat ik op als een waarschuwing van de kunstenaars dat de mensheid niet in staat is een adequate respons te formuleren op de uitdaging waarvoor de nieuwe technologische vermogens haar stellen. Een monstrueuze stem stelt deze postopera in staat om te functioneren als een kritiek op de monstruositeit die de makers bespeuren in het toegenomen technologisch kunnen, met name op het gebied van klonen en genetische manipulatie.

In deel 2 ga ik in op de ventriloquistische relatie tussen stem en lichaam die aan het licht treedt als gevolg van opzettelijke desynchronisatie. De theorie wordt hier geadstreurd aan de hand van twee postopera’s waarin desynchronisatie tussen wat men ziet en wat op het podium klinkt een centrale rol speelt: La Belle et la Bête en Writing to Vermeer. In deze beide werken worden verschillende lichamen tegelijkertijd gekoppeld aan één enkele zingende stem. In La Belle et la Bête ‘hoort’ de live zingende stem tegelijkertijd bij levende zangers op het toneel en personages op het filmdoek. In Writing to Vermeer ‘delen’ verdriedubbelde personages op het toneel dezelfde stem. Een vergelijkbare situatie doet zich voor in scène 2, het eerste optreden van het personage Saskia, dat live zingt, maar tegelijkertijd verschijnt in een videoprojectie.

In hoofdstuk 4, Operatizing the Film: Body without Voice and Voice without Body, laat ik eerst zien wat het betekent om film tot opera te maken, en verklaar het concept en de procedures waarop La Belle et la Bête is gebaseerd en die de relatie tussen stem en lichaam beïnvloeden. Dit wordt gevolgd door een verhandeling over synchronisatie met betrekking tot dubbing en playback: ik richt me hierbij op vragen over de vrije marges van de synchronisatie tussen de zingende lichamen in een opera en hun (in dit geval) lichaamloze stemmen en de ventriloquistische dimensie die daartussen ontstaat. Ik inventariseer de (de)synchrone relaties tussen de aanwezigheid van het lichaam en de stem in La Belle et la Bête, en de implicaties die voortkomen uit een hergedefinieerd verband tussen stem en lichaam. Met behulp van Agambens theorie laat ik ook zien hoe de relatie tussen mens en dier als belichaamd in het Beest vocaal gestalte krijgt, en dat ondanks alle pogingen om beeld en geluid te synchroniseren de kloof tussen lichaam en stem manifest blijft. Ik gebruik Chions theorie over de akoesmatische stem om aan te tonen hoe het vervreemdelende effect van een stem die ergens anders vandaan lijkt te komen dan van haar oorsprong tot nieuwe betekenissen leidt, en vragen oproept over het vermogen van de opera om andere media en hun wijze van representatie te gebruiken. Tenslotte formuleer ik een nieuw model voor de conceptualisatie van de relatie tussen stem en lichaam in dit werk naar analogie van het gebruik dat Altman in de filmtheorie maakt van het concept ventriloquisme: de door Philip Glass componeerde
opera-muziek is een buikspreker die zich bedient van andermans ‘pop’ (in dit geval het bewegende beeld van Cocteau's film). Glass' muziek wordt synchroon onder Cocteau's film geplaatst om de illusie te wekken dat het gezongene wordt voortgebracht door de personages uit de zwijgende film. De (de)synchronisatie van het zingende lichaam en de stem is in dit geval een maatstaf voor het vermogen van deze opera om representatiemechanismen van zowel film als opera te onderzoeken, en die tegelijkertijd te gebruiken om haar eigen status en economie te wijzigen.

Mijn analyse van de relatie tussen het zingende lichaam en de stem in Writing to Vermeer in hoofdstuk 5, Singing Letters, Multiplied Bodies and Dissociated Voice, onderzoekt hoe de verbinding tussen lichamen en stemmen op het podium wordt beïnvloed door de ingezette strategieën. Die zijn theatraal (een visuele verdriedubbeling van personages), muzikaal (een muzikale dramaturgie die niet de dramaturgie van het libretto volgt), tekstueel (het aan de orde stellen van écriture féminine en het overspelmotief in relatie tot de ondergeschikte positie van de vrouw) en multimediair (de simulatie en close-up-procedure in scène 2). Het podium wordt bevolkt door Vermeerse vrouwen, belichaamd in de verdriedubbelde personages van Vermeers vrouw Catharina, zijn schoonmoeder Maria en het model Saskia, die, anders dan de vrouwen in de schilderijen van Vermeer, een stem hebben. Ik belicht deze stemgevende strategieën aan de hand van Abbates concept van de vrouwelijke stemgeving in opera. Ik doe dat om aan te tonen hoe de wijze waarop de zingende stem wordt gedesynchroniseerd en verbonden met verdriedubbelde vrouwenfiguren tot nieuwe uitspraken leidt over de status van de vrouw als handelend onderwerp/lijdend voorwerp in postopera en hoe dat het vocale lichaam beïnvloedt. In mijn analyses van de in de muziek toegepaste procedures richt ik mij op Andriessen’s streven om de muzikale dramaturgie onafhankelijk te houden van de dramaturgie van het libretto. Ik bekijk hoe deze onafhankelijkheid zich verhoudt tot de relatie tussen stem en lichaam. Wat de tekstuele strategieën en hun invloed op het verband tussen stemmen en lichamen op het podium aangaat beschouw ik Greenaways libretto vanuit het door Hélène Cixous geformuleerde concept van de écriture féminine (1976). Dat helpt mij de simulatiestrategieën bloot te leggen die hij gebruikt wanneer hij met dit concept speelt, maar ook om aan te tonen hoe hij daar vraagtekens bij zet. De combinatie van het overspelmotief dat optreedt in het libretto en het problematiseren van de écriture féminine toont aan hoe de vrouwelijke personages in een mannelijk discours als lijdend voorwerp functioneren, en hoe ze naar een handelende rol lijken te streven. Aangaande het gebruik van multimedia en hoe het de relatie tussen lichaam en stem beïnvloedt onderwerp ik de scène waarin het personage Saskia voor het eerst verschijnt aan close reading: terwijl ze live op het podium zingt verschijnt tegelijkertijd haar beeld in close-up op het grote scherm, zodat het lijkt of haar stem is ingedubd bij het geprojecteerde beeld.
Al deze strategieën bij elkaar tasten de gangbare conventionele relatie tussen lichaam en stem in aanzienlijke mate aan en maken haar desynchronoon en ventiloquistisch.

De voornaamste oorzaak van de desynchronisatie in de beide in hoofdstuk 2 behandelde werken is het feit dat één enkele zangstem wordt gekoppeld aan meer dan een lichaam. Deze procedures bevestigen de theses van Grover-Friedlander dat de eenheid van stem en lichaam niet meer is dan een ‘truc’. Die ‘truc’ wordt in La Belle et la Bête overduidelijk tot thema verheven, waar ze de conceptuele drijvveer van het werk wordt, terwijl in het representationele mechanisme van Writing to Vermeer een zeker bewustzijn van die ‘truc’ doorschemert. De ‘omogelijke synchronisatie’ in beide postopera's legt diverse scheidslijnen bloot: tussen opera en film, mens en dier, beeld en geluid, levende en gereproduceerde klanken en beelden, actieve en passieve personages. Ik laat zien hoe het problematiseren van deze scheidslijnen en de herformulering van de relatie tussen lichaam en stem in deze werken daadwerkelijk het medium opera herdefiniëren.

Deel 3 gaat in op de inhoudelijke ‘wrijving’ die ontstaat tussen het zingende lichaam en de stem met betrekking tot gender. De theorie wordt toegelicht aan de hand van twee postopera's waarin de relatie tussen lichaam, stem en gender met behulp van het zingen wordt onderzocht: La Commedia en Homeland. In beide werken wordt de kwestie van relaties tussen lichaam, stem en gender uitgediept aan de hand van wat normaal wordt beschouwd als de zingende vrouwenstem. In La Commedia wordt het personage Dante, dat wordt gezongen door een zangeres, opgesplitst in twee personages, vrouwelijk en mannelijk, die tegelijkertijd optreden. In Homeland introduceert Anderson een soort ‘vocale maskerade’ door haar stem met behulp van een Harmonizer (pitch shifter) zodanig elektronisch te bewerken dat hij klinkt als een mannenstem.

In hoofdstuk 6, Voice and Gender Standing Apart, onderzoek ik eerst de postdramatische aspecten van La Commedia door in te gaan op de meervoudige verhaalstructuur, de deconstructie van de personages en de manier waarop de gebeurtenissen op het podium worden uitgebeeld. Het zingende lichaam in La Commedia wordt beïnvloed door de specifieke postdramatische opzet van het werk waarin verscheidene verhaallijnen zich gelijktijdig ontwikkelen, twee groepen personages betrokken zijn bij verschillende ‘vertellingen’, en complexe en asynchrone gebeurtenissen op het podium waarbij uiteenlopende media in het spel zijn. Al die elementen zijn van invloed op de aanwezigheid van het zingende lichaam van Dante, waarmee de relatie tussen het lichaam en de stem ambigu wordt en nieuw licht wordt geworpen op de relatie tussen stem en gender. De relatie tussen lichaam en stem binnen de zingende personages wordt aanvankelijk met behulp van deze procedures geherformuleerd, en pas daarna volgt de vocale travestie van de hoofdrolspeler. Aan het eind van dit hoofdstuk richt ik mij op de vocale travestie van het personage Dante en op de relatie tussen gender en het vocale lichaam. Ik maak daarbij gebruik van Dames theorie die de relatie tussen
stem, sekse en gender relatieveert, en onderzoek hoe dit zich manifesteert in het geval van Dante uit *La Commedia*. Het idee dat een vrouwelijke zanger de rol van Dante vertolkt heft binaire tegenstellingen tussen de seksen in opera op, samen met onze waarneming daarvan. In het licht van de theorieën van Dame beeldt het zingende personage Dante de relatie tussen gender en stem uit als een theatrale voorstelling, en niet als iets dat door de natuur is voorbeschikt.


De problematisering van de relatie tussen lichaam, stem en gender in de beide in deel 3 besproken werken lijkt Butlers stelling te onderschrijven dat sekse en gender geen natuurlijke gegevens zijn, maar culturele constructies. In beide gevallen wordt het onderscheid tussen vrouwelijke en mannelijke stemmen aan de orde gesteld, en worden de rigide normen die een binaire tegenstelling tussen mannelijke en vrouwelijke stemmen aanhouden in twijfel getrokken: in *La Commedia* met behulp van ironie en in *Homeland* met behulp van parodie.
Bibliography


Dorđev, Bojan et al. (eds.), Beyond Einstein on the Beach, TkH, Journal for performing arts theory, no. 2, 2002.


---, “Libretto”, *Writing to Vermeer* program booklet, Amsterdam, De Nederlandse Opera, 1999, pp. 61-87.


Hartley, Hal, “La Commedia – Synopsis”, manuscript.


Havelkova, Tereza, “Bodily Presence or Vocal Masquerade? Performing the Feminine Through Extended Vocality”, conference paper read at Song, Stage, Screen conference held at University of Winchester, Winchester, UK, September 2010, manuscript.


Kimbrough McComb, Andrew, The Sound of Meaning: Theories of Voice in Twentieth-Century Thought and Performance, A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in The Department of Theatre, 2002.


---. “Resisting the sublime: strategies of convergence and divergence in Glass’s La Belle et la Bête”, conference paper read at the First International Conference on Minimalism in Music held at University of Wales, Bangor, UK, 2007.


Šuvaković, Miško, *Paragrami, Tela, Figure*, Beograd, Centar za novo pozorište i igru, 2001.


---. *Opera and the Culture of Fascism*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1996.


List of audio and video recordings


List of Scores


Parts of the case studies presented here have appeared in:


