Singing corporeality: reinventing the vocalic body in postopera
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Citation for published version (APA):
Novak, J. (2012). Singing corporeality: reinventing the vocalic body in postopera

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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

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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 re-invents 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

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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.
7 Steven Connor, “Violence, Ventriloquism and the Vocalic Body”, in Patrick Campbell and Adrian Kear (eds.),
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. The

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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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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.


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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. 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.

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” 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”. For Jameson, synonyms for late capitalism are multinational capitalism and consumer capitalism. 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” 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

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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.
19 Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, London, New York, Verso, 1991, p. 35.
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

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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. 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, and Opera as Drama by Joseph Kerman, 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.

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.

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

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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 inevitably about the body;” claims Leppert.\textsuperscript{34} He designates the connection between music and the body throughout Western history as “highly

\textsuperscript{30} 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{Musicology 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.

\textsuperscript{31} 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 naiveté: 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.


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. xx.
problematic and contradictory, the product of deep socio-cultural anxieties and antagonisms". 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”.

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”. 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”. 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

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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.