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Singing corporeality: reinventing the vocalic body in postopera

Novak, J.

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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,\(^{41}\) Peter Brooks\(^{42}\) and Michal Grover-Friedlander.\(^{43}\) 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.\(^{44}\) 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),\(^{45}\) 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.\(^{46}\) 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

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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

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specific feature of the form, as part of its peculiar illusion.\textsuperscript{50} 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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{51}

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 \textit{of} opera and \textit{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.\textsuperscript{52} 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”,\textsuperscript{53} 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.


\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{53} Steven Connor, \textit{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.\(^\text{58}\)

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”.\(^\text{59}\) 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.\(^\text{60}\) 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

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\(^{58}\) 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 reinvites 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”.  
 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”. 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’”. 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”. 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 postoperas 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

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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. “Division 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

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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.
72 I have previously discussed some features of postopera in a conference paper “Contextualizing Opera in a Post-dramatic context: Differences and Repetitions”, First International Conference on Music and Minimalism – online proceedings, University of Bangor, Wales, 2007. See: [http://www.bangor.ac.uk/music/events/Novak%20postopera.pdf](http://www.bangor.ac.uk/music/events/Novak%20postopera.pdf), Accessed: October 21, 2011.
‘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

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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.\(^{78}\)

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”.\(^{79}\) Bleeker also emphasizes that “the central opposition in Lehmann’ text is not drama versus theatre, but dramatic theatre versus post-dramatic theatre”.\(^{80}\) 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.

![Figure 1](image)

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

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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,
has not been explicitly defined there either.\(^{84}\) 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 Praznik writes about ‘postcontemporary dance’,\(^{85}\) dance practice in the context of postdramatic theatre, and I myself examine postdramatic theatre repercussions in the context of opera.\(^{86}\) 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).\(^{87}\) 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.\(^{88}\) 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”.\(^{89}\) Therefore, the term ‘post-opera’ from Tambling’s title should be read as an indication of what comes ‘after opera’ i.e.

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\(^{84}\) The volume comprises several papers from the conference on The Postdramatic Condition as part of the Seminar on the Contemporary Performing Arts that took place in 2004 in Ljubljana accompanying the launch of the Slovenian translation of Hans-Thies Lehmann’s book *The Postdramatic Theatre*. Some of the papers in the journal discuss different aspects of postdramatic theatre such is: “Public, Private and Political in Postdramatic Theatre” by Aldo Milohnič or “Other Grounding Concepts of Logocentricity and Postdramatic Theatre” by Tomaz Toporišič. See: *Postdramatic Condition, Maska, Performing Arts Journal*, vol. 19, no. 1-2 (84-86), win. – spr. 2004, pp. 10-13, pp. 14-17.


\(^{88}\) 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-operative 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

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91 Ibid., p. 16.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
dissecting table to refigure its parts”  

“(...) trying to anatomize the scattered entrails of opera, reading them as portents, signifiers of the ‘operatic’ within contemporary culture”. They state that “(...) the company recognizes that opera today can only be ‘post-operatic’”. 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 (...)”.  

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.”

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

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:

> (...) the body in the singing voice, in the writing hand, in the performing limb"\(^{114}\), "(...) not the breath but indeed that materiality of the body emerging from the troat"\(^{115}\), "the materiality of a body speaking its mother-tongue", "(...) 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, (...), as if a single skin lined the performer's inner flesh and the music he sings."\(^{116}\)

> (...) 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 automats 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.