Singing corporeality: reinventing the vocalic body in postopera

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Chapter 2

Singing beyond the Body: Uniqueness, Intruder and Prosthesis

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

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

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characteristics, One puts that uniqueness under pressure as reproduced sounds intervene. The singing body (woman) is vocally manifested as the Other (cyborg).  

Vocal Uniqueness

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

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

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

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

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124 The Other is “a term used widely within critical theory, predominantly in disciplines such as psychoanalysis and postcolonial theory. (...) It must, therefore be apparent that ‘other’ as concept will have a wide variety of applications. Although this is the case, it can be said that ‘other’ either as a human being or an inanimate object – exists in relationship to a subject from which it differs”. Lacan uses capitalized Other to designate “(...) the law, society, religion and other people encountered symbolically through their effects on me, the subject. (...) In this way, ‘I’, or ‘me’ (my identity), is possible only through the symbolic order.” In postcolonial theory the term “(...) refers, in essence, to the ‘other’ as produced by discursive practices”. Simon Malpas and Paul Wake (Eds.), Routledge Companion to Critical Theory, New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 235, 236. In this chapter I consider the woman as the Other of man, and the cyborg as the Other of human.


126 Ibid., p. 7.

127 Ibid., p. 4.

128 Ibid., p. 8.

129 Ibid., p. vii
sort of friction between the vocal and the linguistic): “Speech, understood as speech that emits from someone’s mouth, is not simply the verbal sphere of expression; it is also the point of tension between the uniqueness of the voice and the system of language.”\textsuperscript{130} She goes further, ascribing uniqueness not only to the phenomenon of the voice but also to vocal emission, which involves the articulation of sounds: “That which is proper to the voice does not lie in pure sound but rather in the relational uniqueness of a vocal emission that, far from contradicting it, announces and brings to its destination the specifically human fact of speech”.\textsuperscript{131}

The voice, as a constituent part of identity, identifies a person in a similar way to the way a fingerprint does: its physical characteristics are inseparable from the body that produces it and to whom it ‘belongs’. Consequently, the body is perceived as unique because it is signified by an unrepeatable structure of the skin imprint (for example fingerprint) or frequencies of the vocal apparatus (voice), among other things. Those physical characteristics of the voice and of the skin uncompromisingly make one body different from others and become part of its identity. Cavarero’s concept of vocal uniqueness sheds light on the connection between a body and the voice that it produces. The concept of uniqueness is strongly connected to the concept of identity. A specific network of inconsistencies, desires, languages and norms makes each identity unique. This is also the case with the voice. It is unique not only because of its specific timbre but also because of the network of unique relations that it makes with the body producing it. Cavarero’s conclusion on the differences between voices, relying on Calvino’s claims, points to physical roots: “The voice, however, is always different from all other voices, even if the words are the same, as often happens in the case of a song. This difference, as Calvino underlines, has to do with the body”.\textsuperscript{132} Putting an emphasis on the corporeality of the voice enables us to reveal the meanings that most often stay hidden.

The opus of composer Michel van der Aa is characterized by an intention to question identity and its uniqueness, constantly showing identity’s elusiveness and the multiple perspectives from which it could be perceived. This tendency already becomes apparent in the titles to some of his compositions—See Through (2000), One (2002), Second Self (2004), Imprint (2005), Mask (2006), After Life (2005-6)—all alluding to multiple perspectives that could be taken when looking at identity and the questionable uniqueness of identity itself. The search for identity in Van der Aa’s opus is emphasized by his questioning of the impact of new media on composition, his strategic choice of musical language and the economy of the expressive means used.\textsuperscript{133} In many of his compositions he

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p. 14-15.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., p. 3-4.
\textsuperscript{133} I understand the notion of economy as the manner in which something is ordered and managed.
emphasizes the juxtaposition of live performed sound and its recording in various ways. The piece *Here [In Circles]* (for soprano, cassette recorder and ensemble, 2002) could be considered as a study for the opera *One*, which in turn would later become a kind of predecessor of Van der Aa’s second and more complex opera *After Life*.

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

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

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

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

![Figure 2 - Michel van der Aa, One, video still. Courtesy of the artist](image)

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

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{137} Michel van der Aa, \textit{One} – Synopsis, See: \url{http://vanderaa.net/one}, Accessed: December 11, 2011.
Music vs. Dramatic Text and Horror of Identity

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

Could I define this space?
It is like all others
like all the others
like all the others. I’m staring into
the clearest mirror.
I am
one.\textsuperscript{138}

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

Untamable waves of
darkness breaching porous black
rocks
(...)
While trees turn
wet with night, bones become
branches.
(...) Eerie feelings of
recurrence.
(...) Choking
Drowning.
(...)\textsuperscript{139}

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

\textsuperscript{138} Michel van der Aa, “One”, in Michel van der Aa, One, Chamber opera for soprano and video, DVD, Disquiet Music, DQM 03, 2011.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
fiction (cobwebs, drowning, darkness, pain, hazy woods). It is the economy of the text’s performance, however, that creates the horror of existence in the process of losing identity. The repetition of words, scream-like movements, the splitting of the performance between the singer and her recorded double, themes of pain, the ‘fracturing’ of the performer whose performance is based on division and multiplication, and mysterious elements in the video (an old dark castle, candle lights, dungeon-like corridors, the crackling of branches etc.) all add to the hysterical economy of the performance.

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

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

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

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

died before it reached an ear.  

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

**Gendered Singing**

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

Van der Aa refers to the suppressed voice in fragments of the libretto: “The only thing I could have said died before it reached an ear”. That inability to function is opposed by the system of representation established in the piece to make the body-voice, subject-other, text-music relations functional. Hysteria as mental disorder is often manifested by the lack of control over acts and emotions, caused by anxiety and internally repressed conflicts. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, however, hysteria is considered more as a structural principle than as a set of symptoms. By analogy, the hysterical economy of expressive means in *One* could be seen as symptomatic of the suppressed voice and the identity of the Other that emerge through the singing body.

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142 Michel van der Aa, “*One* libretto”, in One DVD booklet, Disquiet Music, DQM 03, 2011.
143 I understand and use the notion of rhizome according to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. It is a different non-hierarchical organizational structure from the structure of a tree. In a rhizome, every point is in connection with all other points. See: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (trans. Brian Massumi), London and New York, Continuum, 2004, p. 23.
144 Michel van der Aa, “*One* Libretto”, in One DVD booklet, Disquiet Music, DQM 03, 2011.
145 “Whatever type of hysteria we are dealing with, the underlying economy of hysterical desire remains fundamentally the same, and this sameness can be ascertained only on the basis of structural traits deeper indications that point to a specific structure. (…) therapeutic intervention will be effective only if it succeeds in deactivating the neurotic economy of desire, that is, if it goes beyond symptoms to refer to the structural level”. See: Joël Dor, *Clinical Lacan*, New York, Other Press, 1998, p. 76.
Cavarero writes of the ‘devocalization of logos’ and the position of “the voice [...that] disturbs philosophy”. That is, the philosophy ruled by the ‘metaphysician’, as she calls the rigid philosopher’s figure, in whose world language is “bound first of all to conform to thought, to correspond to it and to reflect its order”. The ‘metaphysician’ is also “proud of his desensitized visions”, and is “the deafest of the deaf”. In that ‘deaf’ tradition, as Cavarero calls it, she points to the fact that the task of singing is typically assigned to women rather than men:

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

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

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

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

**The Intruder and Mimesis**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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