

POST – OPERA INSTALLING THE VOICE

Michal Grover Friedlander (keynote)
Paul Elliman (keynote)
Hannah Bosma
Kris Dittel
Brigitte Felderer
Jelena Novak
Veronika Witte
Katarina Zdjelar

Symposium
12:30-18:00



18.05.2019

The symposium *Installing the Voice* focuses on the ways in which contemporary artists, composers and performers reinvent the relationship between the body and the voice. There is hardly any other artistic genre where the voice is more essential than in opera. Yet the operatic singing body was long taken for granted and overlooked. *Installing the voice*, in the framework of music theatre and especially of an exhibition, can be a strategy to make the voice manifest, give it a place, put it into position, and set it up for analysis or experimentation.

This one-day event is a collaboration with Operadagen Rotterdam and gathers both researchers in the emerging field of Voice Studies, Musicology, Opera Studies and Cultural Theory, and artists who explore the singing body in contexts beyond opera.

The participants will address topics related to staging the voice, the cultural history of the human voice, the emergence of singing and speaking machines, the voice in the post-human era, and vocality and power.

Programme Committee:

Ivana Ilić (University of Arts, Belgrade, Faculty of Music)

João Pedro Cachopo (Universidade Nova de Lisboa / CESEM)

Kris Dittel, independent curator

Jelena Novak (Universidade Nova de Lisboa / CESEM)

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Additionally the Post-Opera project is supported by CBK Rotterdam, Stichting Stokroos, Fonds Podiumkunsten and Culture Ireland.

SYMPOSIUM PROGRAMME

12.30-13.00

Registration and coffee

13.00-13.40

Michal Grover-Friedlander, "Staging the Voice",
Keynote lecture

13.40-14.20

Paul Elliman, "More Thrills and Regressions",
Siren Keynote*

14.20-14.30

Coffee break

14.30-15.00

Brigitte Felderer, "Temporality in Space"

15.00-15.30

Katarina Zdjelar, "Politics of the Voice"

15.30-15.50

Kris Dittel, "Vocal Becomings"

15.50-16.00

Coffee break

16.00-16.30

Hannah Bosma, "Talking Heads and Singing Machines"

16.30-17.00

Veronika Witte, "Einstein on the Beach as a Multi-Perspective
Opera Installation"

17.00-17.30

Jelena Novak, "Installing the Operatic"

17.30-18.00

Preview of the transmedial documentary project
"Martin Riches: Time Machines" by Sergio Gridelli,
Armeno Alberts and Hannah Bosma (excerpts).
Introduction by Hannah Bosma

*With a performance of "How we learn the old songs" by Angelo Custodio, Paul Elliman, Burkhard Körner, Annelie Koning, Oneka von Schrader, Kevin Walton.

ABSTRACTS

Michal Grover-Friedlander, "Staging the Voice"

In many ways, the staging of opera, for all its radical efforts, has not taken the singing voice meaningfully into account. In my talk I reflect on what it would mean to take opera's decisive attribute—voice—as the foundation of its staged performance. I think of staging through the medium of the voice in an attempt to show a conception of staging that is specifically operatic insofar as it thinks everything through the primacy of the voice: voice as inflecting meanings, as attuning us to affective mood, as forming character, as providing the impetus or force behind what is enacted and performed, as echoing, even, in the design and the props of the stage. Conversely, I show how when voice is staged, we hear it differently. In seeking to explore this understanding of the voice's primacy in staging opera, I turn to contemporary works. Twentieth- and twenty-first century opera is critical for any exploration devoted to the staging of the voice. For the very transformation undergone by the medium has compelled it to reflect on each and every aspect of the operatic voice, and to search for ways to express its self-understanding in newly formed voices. Acutely aware of the medium it has inherited, contemporary opera makes this awareness evident in its voices: their modes of delivery, how they signify, the senses of their materiality, their ambivalent embodiments, fugitive presence, and more. With contemporary opera voice becomes ever more explicitly the subject matter and driving force of the work. This being said, the ideas put forth here are germane to any opera and music theater performance, including canonic works we are well familiar with and view repeatedly.

Paul Elliman, "More Thrills and Regressions"

Scottish musicologist Marjory Kennedy-Fraser once transcribed a melody sung by a woman from South Uist which the performer called a 'seal song'. It was later printed under the title 'The Sealwoman's Sea-Joy' and attached to the legend of a magical seal-maiden whose enchanted skin was stolen. A few years later on Barra, a neighbouring island along the chain of Western Isles, Kennedy-Fraser sang the opening phrases of the song to a herd of seals basking on the rocks close to the shore. A fusillade of single notes was called back to her by the seals, followed by a solo voice singing a phrase she had never heard, sung in what she describes as a rich mezzo-soprano voice with perfect cantabile.

Brigitte Felderer, "Temporality in Space"

The presentation will deal with the voice as exhibition object and its possibilities and potentials to create a reflective space for objects with a haptic materiality. Topics like temporality in space and simultaneity in sound will be discussed in the framework of the (cultural) history of the human voice as a medium.

Katarina Zdjelar, "Politics of the Voice"

In many of her works Katarina Zdjelar interrogates the issue of voice as personal property. She is interested in discovering where does the voice begin and where it ends. Who is speaking when we speak and who is entitled to speak? We are in the middle of the struggle for power that is happening in the battlefield of voice and language, involving existing cultural norms. The presentation will discuss this politics of voice and show excerpts from Zdjelar's recent works.

Kris Dittel, "Vocal Becomings"

The paper will point at some elements and connecting lines that were taken into consideration when conceiving the Post-Opera exhibition and outline the curatorial aspects (on a practical and conceptual level) of its making. Furthermore by referring to the multiplicity of voices heard in it, the presentation will attempt to imagine a posthumanist conception of the voice.

Hannah Bosma, "Talking Heads and Singing Machines"

In our digital era, electronically mediated voices are everywhere around us: on radio, television and internet, in telephone response systems, in navigation systems, as aid for the vocally or visually disabled, in music and art.... In this lecture I will discuss how such artificial voices relate to gender and embodiment. The gender pattern of disembodied speaking male voices versus ambiguously (dis)embodied singing/crying female voices, as discussed by feminist musicologists and opera scholars, may not only be confirmed, but also destabilized by technological mediation. I will discuss how voice technology itself is formed by gendered conceptions of voice, and whether we can find alternative configurations of voice, body and technology. The speaking and singing machines of Martin Riches re-incorporate and re-materialize fundamental notions of voice science, exhibiting their strengths and limitations, foregrounding their artificiality – and emphasizing the lost and persistent material, artisanal and analogue basis of our seemingly abstract digital contemporary culture.

Veronika Witte, "Einstein on the Beach as a Multi-Perspective Opera Installation" by staatsbankberlin 2001 + 2005

The production of the opera *Einstein on the Beach* by Berthold Schneider and Veronika Witte takes as its basis the original artistic focus of the opera and venture to translate it into the architecture of a complete building as an Installation project. Instead of a set-design visual artists and scientists developed "intervention strategies" about perspective, perception and Life science, which were realized according to the building and assumed functions traditionally assigned to acting, costumes and set. During the four and a half hours of the performance the spectator was free to move around in the various halls in a scenic installation. The singers were moving around too. Music was heard throughout the entire building and video transmissions allowed for constant monitoring of what is happening in the other rooms. The traditional central perspective of the theatre was deconstructed and transformed into multi-perspective experience in space and time.

Jelena Novak, "Installing the Operatic"

In the last decade or so, visual artists have paid more and more attention to the voice and vocality. Accordingly, an increasing number of art works have emerged that take opera as their principal subject matter. At the same time, several existing operas have been presented in a visual arts context. Both these tendencies have assigned fresh meanings to the genre of (post)opera in contemporary Western society. I will discuss "Opera for a Small Room" (2005) by Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller and "The Opera of Prehistoric Creatures" (2012) by Marguerite Humeau that made me aware of the increasing affinities between opera and visual arts.

Hannah Bosma, presentation of the project "Martin Riches: Time Machines" by Hannah Bosma, Sergio Gridelli, Armeno Alberts

This presentation sketches a preliminary impression of the transmedial audiovisual documentary project Martin Riches: Time Machines (Sergio Gridelli, Armeno Alberts, Hannah Bosma, in progress). I will discuss the ideas and background of the project, show a teaser and raw film footage of Martin Riches's machines.

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Hannah Bosma is a musicologist specialised in voice, gender, electro-acoustic music and preservation. She is author of *The Electronic Cry: Voice and Gender in Electroacoustic Music*, was a lecturer at the Kunstuniversität Graz, organiser of the conference 'The Art of Voice Synthesis' at the University of Amsterdam (2016), and conducted research on born-digital cultural heritage (2014-5). Between 2019-2023 she will work on her NWO Veni research project "Preservation as performance: liveness, loss and viability in electroacoustic music" at the University of Amsterdam.

Kris Dittel is an independent curator and editor based in Rotterdam. Her curatorial work is informed by her background in economics and social sciences, and by an interest in performativity in relation to the body, language and other forms of communication. Over the past few years she has been engaged in an investigation of the use of the human voice in visual art practices.

Paul Elliman (keynote) is an artist whose work *Sirens Taken for Wonders*, originally commissioned by Performa in New York in 2009, stretches the limits of our expectations of the sound a human voice can make. In other parts of his practice language emerges in unexpected correspondences with the urban environment, resonating with issues of power and authority.

Brigitte Felderer is a researcher and curator associated with the University of Applied Art in Vienna, whose work focuses on areas where cultural history and technology intersect. She was, amongst others, curator of the exhibition 'Phonorama, a Cultural History of the Voice as a Medium' at ZKM, Karlsruhe and editor of a seminal book with the same title.

Michal Grover-Friedlander (keynote) is Professor at Tel Aviv University, Head of Musicology, opera director and artistic founder of the opera group TA OPERA ZUTA. She is author of two seminal books in the domain of voice and opera, entitled *Operatic Afterlives* (2011) and *Vocal Apparitions* (2005), and of the forthcoming book *Staging the Voice*.

Jelena Novak is a researcher at CESEM, FCSH, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa. Her fields of interests are modern and contemporary music and theatre, recent opera, capitalist realism, voice studies and feminine identities in music. Working as a researcher, lecturer, dramaturge, music critic, editor and curator she is focused on bringing together critical theory and contemporary art. Her most recent books are *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body* (2015) and *Operofilia* (2018).

Veronika Witte is director of Galerie Nord/Kunstverein Tiergarten Berlin and an artist who works with performative strategies and reflexive spaces to explore the influence of bio-technologies on our identity and self-perception. Witte was the stage designer for an adaptation of *Einstein on the Beach*, an opera by Phillip Glass and Bob Wilson.

Katarina Zdjelar is a visual artist whose core subject is the human voice. Her new film *Reading "Europe, Where Have You Misplaced love?"* (2019), produced for the *Post-Opera* project, investigates the relationship between the individual and the social in contemporary Europe by staging a music rehearsal.

