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A Conceptual Search for a Typology of Opera Projects in the Present Day

Konceptuali šiuolaikinių operos projektų tipologijos paieška

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Abstract

The new opera productions indicate a rethinking of the opera genre. A diffuse boundary between staged opera and post-opera admonishes musicologists not to assign these phenomena to the genre of opera. Richard Wagner refused to call his musical dramas operas. But it turns out that the term “opera” is currently experiencing a renaissance, as many artefacts that combine symphony orchestras, electronic and underground music on the one hand, with film clips, vision art, and fashion design on the other, are labelled as “opera.” The dominance of directed opera (director’s opera) is prompting the invention of an alternative genre and the alternative term “anti-opera” or “post-opera.” This phenomenon has aroused the interest of musicology. It is not yet possible to define a term that encompasses all the characteristics of the new types of opera. But a typology based on some examples of the new music-theatrical artefacts is feasible in terms of content and method. That is the aim of this article. Along the path of multifaceted confrontations, the question of the methodological orientation of performance analyses, which includes the subjective perception of the scholar as recipient, arises alongside opera-text-related approaches. This requires a turn to the appeal of live events to be researched, which are in the process of creating the vision of an “idea of opera” that fulfils all artistic, socio-political, and technological requirements.

The result of the last analyses suggests artefact types that offer themselves as opera but at the same time negate the genre. What is interesting here is that this negation appears in the sense of “double negation.” The term “opera” and “opera aperta” are used as a tool (Eco, *The Open Work of Art*) in performative practices to elevate the meaning of the single *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total artwork). Opera thus no longer serves as a genre but as an impetus, impulse, code, symbol, quotation, re-post, and new premonition about The Work of Art of the Future.

Keywords: genre of opera, directed opera, post-opera, idea of opera.

Anotacija

Nauji operų pastatymai rodo, kad permąstomas operos žanras. Nebeaiški pastatytos operos ir postoperos riba įspėja muzikologus nepriskirti šių reiškinų operos žanrui. Richardas Wagneris atsisakė muzikines dramas vadinti operomis. Tačiau pasirodo, kad terminas „opera“ šiuo metu išgyvena renesansą, nes daug artefaktų, jungiančių simfoninius orkestrus, elektroninę ir andergraundo muziką su filmų klipais, vizijos menu ir mados dizainu, vadinami operomis. Režisuotos operos (režisūrinės operos) dominavimas juda link alternatyvaus žanro formavimo ir alternatyvaus termino „antiopera“, „postopera“. Šis reiškinys sukėlė muzikologų susidomėjimą. Kol kas nėra termino, kuris apimtų visas naujojo operos tipo charakteristikas; tačiau tipologija, pagrįsta kai kuriais naujųjų muzikinių-teatrinių artefaktų pavyzdžiais, yra įmanoma turinio ir metodų aspektu. Toks ir šio straipsnio tikslas. Einant daugialypių konfrontacijų keliu, greta su operos tekstu susijusių priėgų, iškyla spektaklio analizės metodologinės orientacijos klausimas, apimantis tyrėjo, kaip gavėjo, subjektyvų suvokimą. Tam reikia atsigręžti į tirtinų gyvų renginių patrauklumą, kai kuriama „operos idėjos“ vizija, atitinkanti visus bendrojo meninio, socialinio-politinio ir technologinio reikalavimus. Paskutinių analizių rezultatai pateikia artefaktų tipus, kurie prisistato kaip operos ir kartu neigia šį žanrą. Įdomu, kad šis neigimas reiškiasi kaip „dvigubas neigimas“. Terminas „opera“ vartojamas kaip įrankis, taip pat kaip ir *opera aperta* (žr. Eco „Atviras kūrinys“) performatyvioiose praktikose, siekiant iškelti *Gesamtkunstwerk* (viso meno kūrinio) reikšmę. Taigi opera tarnauja nebe kaip žanras, o kaip postūmis, impulsas, kodas, simbolis, citata, pakartojimas ir nauja nuojauta apie Ateities Meno Kūrinį.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: operos žanras, režisūrinė opera, postopera, operos idėja.

Introduction

Opera is the most comprehensive and complex of all the arts. In no other art genre are there so many levels that cooperate with each other. The history of opera reflects the story of human passion – of love and hate, struggle and redemption, resurrection, and demise. With operatic stories of life and death, gods and men, and society and individuals, artists, since opera’s inception, have been

setting to music the experiences of their own present lives. Ultimately, says Ukrainian director Tatiana Zozulia, everything depends on the individual. As life is, so will the works be, because everything we do is our self-portrait. The conclusions will be understood and elucidated only later when the artist is no longer there. All this is true both for directors as well as for composers, writers, artists – for all creators. And conclusions are drawn by others at their own discretion.

One of the most radical German opera directors, Tatjana Gürbaca, commented as follows:

In four hundred years of opera history, many different types, styles, patterns and rules have emerged, but none of them belongs in a museum. From Monteverdi to Lachenmann and Sciarrino – every work seeks a dialogue with people who want to learn something about themselves and the world. [...] Music, text, space, light, body – opera is the endless attempt to playfully reflect the inexhaustible, contradictory, enigmatic, wonderful diversity of life. (Gürbaca 2013)

As a result, the concept of “opera” in contemporary music theater is interpreted repeatedly and ever more freely. Contemporary directors are inspired by the definitions of the relationship between reader and work, aptly summarized by Marcel Proust: “In reality, every reader, when he reads, is actually the reader of himself.” Many radical composers, directors, and performers profess an axiomatic perception of the work of art, which is merely “a kind of optical instrument that the author hands to the reader so that he may recognise what he might not otherwise have been able to recognise in himself.” (Wieser 2014: 49). Today, as always, opera gives a personal space to “make us understand the heights and depths of our existence, to dialogue with a work and with ourselves, to reflect on different images of society, fears, hopes and utopias” (Ibid).

Nevertheless, the operatic genre sets certain limits. In their essay on *Dramaturgy in musical theatre*, dramaturg and author Sergio Morabito and long-time co-director Jossi Wieler confess that author theater leads opera to a dead end:

Unlike drama, it is not the artistic physiognomy of a director that directly shapes a music-theatrical event. [In opera], directors cannot design “their” theatre without presuppositions, as it were, but are expected to deliver a great mediation performance. It aims, however, at nothing in the middle, but at a mediation in and through the extremes: the daredevil tour de force of a playful dynamisation of the fixed score. (Morabito 2017)

The social-historical significance of opera is far from being deciphered, but the dominance of direction in opera brings out many interesting, experimental, or even destructive genre tendencies that need to be explored. In parallel with stage direction opera, new radical opera works by contemporary composers are emerging. The dominance of the author theater in opera is pushing forward to seek alternative solutions. At the same time, the dilemma of how to redefine the term “opera” or how to invent an entirely new concept of the operatic genre to explain it, arises in musicology. The far too vague and questionable definition of the term “post-opera” (Lehmann 2001; Novak 2015) does not manage to cover or aptly describe the networked diversity of music, theater, media, and performative-visual

productions. The term “post-opera” has now established itself in opera practice as well as in musicology. However, the diffuse boundary between the terms “stage-direction-opera” or “director’s opera,” “anti-opera,” and “post-opera” requires us to be careful not to assign the new genre and its manifestations to opera too early. At this point, it is appropriate to mention that at his time, Richard Wagner also refused to call his musical dramas operas.

A definition that could consider all the features of the new development in opera is not yet possible. But a typology of a few chosen examples of the new music-theatrical artefacts is feasible in terms of content and methodology – which is also the aim of this paper.

Multifaceted and regular engagement with contemporary opera practice by the author raises the question of how to continue the methodological analysis of the performances, which by no means excludes a subjective view. Researchers of contemporary opera are recipients who analyze and eventually systematize live events they attended. Creating a vision of an “idea of opera” covering all artistic (music-theatrical, literary, etc.), socio-political, innovative-technological, and medial preconditions and possibilities will probably remain only an aspiration. Musical practice undeniably confirms the complexity and controversy of such an idea. The concept of “opera” is experiencing a renaissance precisely because it contains so many artefacts that are a mixture of the usual means of the traditional opera genre with other means of art. Thus, symphony orchestras make music together with electronic or underground music ensembles assuming the creation of a hypothetical synthesis, film clips, vision art, or fashion design shows are played or become part of the stage design. That makes the presentation of examples of “stage-direction-opera,” “anti-opera,” “anti-anti-opera,” “post-opera,” or “opera aperta” so exciting.

At the beginning of my conceptual search of the typology of opera projects, it seems to make sense to generally place the figure of the opera singer in the foreground: on the one hand, because of the new challenges that direction opera poses to singers, on the other hand, as a result of the radical views of contemporary composers who resist the dominance of the author’s theater. The new era of alternative quasi-opera genres was heralded on September 25, 1967, when Pierre Boulez made his call to “Blow up the opera houses!” in an interview, a line which was not only widely quoted but also influenced the next generation of composers (Boulez, 1967). The music theater journal *Opernwelt* describes the situation as follows:

Whether John Cage, György Ligeti, Bruno Maderna, Luigi Nono or Karlheinz Stockhausen, they all broke with the rigid form at a late stage and left opera to their reactionary colleagues Benjamin Britten, Hans Werner Henze, Giselher Klebe or Gian Carlo Menotti, at least from their point of view.

Anti-operas such as Nono's *Intolleranza* [Intolerance] (1961) and Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* [The soldiers] (1965) remained isolated meteorites that continue to have an impact today. (Schweiker 2021: 4)

Due to variety of postmodern mutations of the opera genre today, which are not easily managed, the theory lags behind the music-stage-practice. Therefore, as an introduction, it is appropriate to divide this complex set of questions into three controversial points:

1. What prospects can opera singers expect today in musical theater productions that seek to disrupt the operatic genre?

Currently, there are two poles facing each other in current opera productions: the author musical theater (stage-direction-opera) and the author opera (opera projects or performances, post-opera, opera aperta, and other types by contemporary composers). In directional opera, the expectations, demands and required theatrical performances of opera singers have increased. The interest of opera composers in opera voices significantly decreased in contrast to the experiments with voice-body synthesis (Novak 2015) through diverse voice sounds. The radical opera projects show in a questionable or uncertain way the perspective of opera singers in theater and music productions. The contemporary artefacts, which fuse a comprehensive mix of different means, such as symphony orchestra and singing with electronic, underground music, film clips, vision art, and fashion design into a total work of art, question even the concept of opera. Since until now opera singers have always been a part of the whole, complete, total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*), the question of whether and to what extent opera singers will still be sought in contemporary projects or what other role they will play remains an open question.

2. In parallel to this development, the chances of sound combinations of opera and non-opera vocalists are also interesting.

3. The question of the reaction of opera audiences to novel voice-body experiments as well as a new view on new total work of art types caused by the destruction of the genre requires the cooperation of several types of opera experts. Joint research on contemporary opera productions will be an important future task required by music-scenic practice and becoming increasingly relevant as time goes by.

It is significant that the new productions of old opera texts can make the current and contextual polarities of the present poignant for the audience. Directors such as Hans Neuenfels, Kaliksto Biejto, and Barrie Kosky demand that art becomes political, critical of state monopolies, socially effective, and provocative. Graham Wieck even claims that the unique purpose of the genre of opera should be

cultural-historical communication. Referring to the demand of Pierre Boulez in 1967 to blow up the opera houses, he recommended to rather blow up the boundary between the musicians and the audience.

On the other hand, as a reaction to the stage direction opera, the possibilities and the position of contemporary opera composers from the younger generation have changed in recent years with the new genre. None of them have wanted to follow the call of Pierre Boulez. In addition to exploring historical perspectives of opera and the contextual richness of new interpretations, an impressive mixture of new works emerged in a brief period that metaphorically or allegorically called themselves operas and apostrophized the "postmodern social way of thinking." New branches thus sprouted on the family tree of four hundred years of opera history.

Therefore, the historical background of these opera innovations will be briefly presented.

Since the nineteenth century, the roles in opera productions have changed dramatically, especially in the coordination between vocal and orchestral dimensions. In the twentieth century, opera became a general work of art, a "total work of art" spanning all art areas. Conductors, and later directors, decorators, illuminators, and costume designers took on an increasingly significant role in the production. Opera singers became an integral part of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The composer, who is the music creator of operas (not to mention librettists), gave up their glorious position as demiurge. Many directors tried to revive the collective or creative participation of the recipients in the action. New opera artefacts have often glorified the ritual origins of ancient theater, drama per musica, the idea of the Orphic and Dionysian mystery.

New opera productions bring together a strong team consisting of composers, directors, set designers, playwrights, artists, choreographers, designers, fashion designers, cinematographers, engineers, cobblers and tailors, and masters of interactive installations and 3D mapping. All of these specialists are equally appreciated and equally involved. For opera singers in such a situation, the specifications and coordination of singing and stage tasks expand and sometimes diverge because in a large creative group not everyone involved in the process has professional knowledge and ideas about the nature, mission, and technique of opera singing.

In modern opera productions, singers accept the challenge of radical directors and realize their role (in the persons direction they are *secondo artista*). The role is not created by the singer, but by the director. Singers are secondary. Acting requirements for singers as well that for a different intonation technique are not new. The long-standing practice of opera singing has undergone significant innovations with the speaking-voice technique of the New

Viennese School and has been successfully developed in the operas of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries from Ligeti to Neuwirth. But the deliberate shift from opera singing to non-opera singing fights tirelessly for its rights on the “territory sacrum” of opera art. As an X-time symptom, as the time that has not yet come and is now unclear, of “post-post-modern” opera, even opera is no longer understood as a genre, but as much more.

The result of the following exemplary performance analyses should in this respect present certain types of artefacts that offer themselves as opera but at the same time negate the genre of opera. The explored artefacts, which follow Hegel’s dialectical law of “double negation,” are therefore very exciting for further reception as the contrasting reactions of opera audiences and music critics have shown so far.

Using the word “opera” as a metaphor for a “work” or “tool” to enhance the meaning of a holistic narrative performance became a widespread practice in contemporary, even non-classical music. It no longer matters whether it corresponds to the traditional “opera” of the opera genre. What leads the way is the “operability” in the work or in the musical project, which can do without opera singing or symphony orchestra. The reference of such work to the operatic genre often seems to be limited to audio albums, online presentations, performances, or stage realizations in the form of video, film, or audio. Musicologist Liza Sirenko rightly assesses the dilemma of such quasi-operas like the one by American rapper, singer, record producer, and fashion designer Kanye West (also known as Ye or Yeezy) as follows:

Not only as a genre, but also as a form, opera only creates the rules of the game in which classicists, rockers, hip-hop artists, rappers and other musicians can play. That means to abandon all the attributes of opera and change the style – like a simple update, but obviously it meant for non-classical artists to attract the opera format as something different, serious, to give their low-artwork the essentiality, whose music and meaning fade in the halo of the high-art of classical art. Therefore, the answer to the question “Why opera for non-classical?” is simple: to denote the integrity and completeness (opus), and narrativity of a performance or music album, so to speak, “the seriousness of their intentions.” (Sirenko 2020)

The original example of a low artwork with opera singing (the name of Maria Callas as an opera star obliges us to honor her work accordingly) was the project of the world-famous performer Marina Abramovich *7 Deaths of Maria Callas*. Commissioned by a leading European opera house, Marina Abramovich played or embodied Maria Callas in an opera performance. Two world stars – Callas and Abramovich – as well as two related world genres – opera and performance – collided and confronted each other on the stage of the Bavarian State Opera.

Opera and performance experienced a union and died. The symbolic fusion of opera and performance revealed the artist seven times (Marina Abramovich emphasizes the “sacred meaning” of the number “7”) and celebrated on stage an artistic phenomenon of long pathetic dying with music and video clips accompaniment. The inner world of the radical performer, who had confessed in nearly every interview that she hates opera, decided with this project, thanks to the opera singing of Maria Callas, to open her long-standing (for 14 years of life) hidden heart connection with opera to the world. (Yefimenko 2020).

Marina Abramovich – a full-blooded performer – manifested in *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* a genuinely operatic phenomenon – the stage cult of the continuous, miserable death as a guarantor of immortality. With music consisting of seven selected hit arias from Callas’s repertoire and film clips *à la Hollywood* from thriller to fantasy, the artist staged her own death transformation by embodying the long-dead opera diva Maria Callas.

The stage concept of the performer is not new – the fusion of archetypes of women and men (Callas – Onassis, Willem Dafoe – Maria Callas). However, the essence of the so-called opera project in terms of “double negation” is indeed innovative.

The essence of the various opera projects is formed:

- on the one hand, through a complex approach to the pompous representations of the historical decorated and costumed opera traditions, but using new techniques,
- on the other hand, it is an exclusive show with Hollywood films, fashion shows, lighting design, and other elements.

However, the most important aspect of the performance is the reverence for the phenomenal opera tradition. The total fusion of opera and performance corresponding to body and soul is presented as integral parts of the musical theater.

A counterexample is the work of the Ukrainian composing duo Roman Grygoriv and Illia Razumeiko and their new opera compositions. These young composers try out alternative ways of updating the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Illia Razumeiko expressed the following opinion regarding the opera concept:

A modern composer cannot write a score or music and then entrust it to a stranger (meaning the director and the stage designer), who draws something approximate, paints, or produces a performance from our opera. In fact, the most interesting opera projects and performances of the 20th and 21st centuries, such as those of Trond Reinholdtsen, Manos Tsangaris, Mauricio Kagel, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and others, are the successors of opera as a total work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). Their projects made it possible to create something new, to reach another level of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Because otherwise, when a composer’s only task is to write the score,

finish it, and bring it to the theater, what comes out in the end is difficult to predict. Often it does not work. (Sirenko, 2020)

The tasks to create the operas, to respond to the theoretical as well as exclamatory insinuations about the destruction of opera, or to contradict the prediction of the death of opera, composers have creatively and characteristically fulfilled. There is currently a high-profile opera boom in theatrical practice. The new artifacts signal the new operatic guidelines and tendencies like Hegelian dialectics – in action, plot, and negation of negation. Adherence to the rules of the genre – at least of academic opera singing – have given way to the search for new voices, sounds, dramaturgy, and content. Contemporary composers are creating operatic artifacts that do not necessarily fit within the framework of a genre canon but that reinvigorate and reinvent the operatic idea in creditable operatic projections.

The paradoxical liberation of opera from its own genre rules highlighted the essence of its media background. As an alternative to staged opera, this gave rise to a movement of contemporary composers who, in the sense of a Hegelian *negation of the negation* of the genre, created the phenomenon of the opera project in their search for new formats for the old genre. Operas as projects, opera as media and vision art, audio albums, and video clips, together with the press media, created a fashion directed towards new spectacles, which invented and presented new opera projects and *opera ideas* under such conditions. It turned out that these so-called *opera ideas* originated from the same roots as the Old Opera: from the etymology of the word “opera” (it. – work, labor, action, plot). In the primary sense, *opera* merged with *opus* or with archaic ideas about the musical-theatrical work into a product of collective communal work, which Richard Wagner revived and restored in his music dramas in the nineteenth century. The prototype of Wagner’s utopia was *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (The Artwork of the Future) (no longer an opera because the composer refused to call his musical myth dramas operas), a collective work of medieval guild masters. Wagner produced *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (The Mastersingers of Nuremberg) as a total work of art (synthesis of arts) and not as an opera, in which he presented everyday life’s reality or the life of artists as a workshop, a collective work of experts or a collective of masters. Phenomenological sociology considers the total work of art from the point of view of the Wagner myth paradox as the model of life creation presented by its life creators. Instead of the collective creation, the myth of the unique master works in this work – a unique and unprecedented myth in the entire history of music theater. In the modern world, the opera idea or opus as a process elevates the status and the whole life of the master or author. The collaboration of several authors, each working in their field of specialization, is very

much required by the producers of current projects, since the financial success of the work is at stake.

These authors no longer remain anonymous, as in the Middle Ages, but have an explicit desire for prominence, fame, and adoration as stars and idols, whose work is supported by PR, press, and marketing measures to this end. They measure their artistic success only based on evaluations and professional eulogies to the masters, without placing their focus on the realization of the highest artistic quality as before. Their works or projects thus no longer become a myth but a commodity. Although the human voice should remain the important, personal, and living primacy of any opera, the distribution of roles in the current world of star producers looks different. The names of singers and composers, or their “star” names, are used to publicize other artists: the names of directors; painters; sculptors; designers; lighting, video, and fashion designers; and many others. This can be observed in the fact that, despite their prominent artistic position in the work, the singer’s names are only listed after all the others. According to Jelena Novak’s opinion about the voice-body, singers become increasingly dependent on the handling of their depersonalization, the emotionally sensitive working conditions, and the atmosphere in these large teams.

Both in directed opera and in the opera projects of contemporary composers, the requirements for singing have changed dramatically. For many opera conceptions, voices in opera are only servicing a dramatic function. In opera, the vocal has always been a means of expressing layers of musical meaning. The so-called voice-body dichotomy focuses on the reactive, natural, and physiological abilities of the singer. If voices move away from this function, they are commonly accused of empty virtuosity. Stage experiments by directors in the Baroque-Classical-Romantic repertoire as well as in modern and postmodern operas focus not only on vocal virtuosity and the aesthetic and emotional impact of singing but also on the singer’s physical expressiveness and artistry. The voice has recently been understood as “the experience of a relationship between producer and recipient in co-presence and co-vibration, respectively” (Risi 2014: 272–273). Clemens Risi rightly raises the question of performativity and its meaning in opera:

If the perspective of the performative highlights the special relationship between actors and audience in bodily co-presence, the question is to what extent this also applies, and in a distinct way, to the performance situation of opera. (Risi 2014: 272–273)

What does this mean for modern opera practice? One of the extreme answers to this question can be found in the work of Graham Vick, et al. The director has made a name for himself through his opera projects that are on the verge of a borderless fusion of opera and reality shows. In his opera

productions, Vick (former director of the Birmingham Opera Company) appeals to the phenomenon of effective musical impact on human beings and gives voluntary spectators the opportunity to participate directly in the production. In doing so, the director stated that the purpose of his productions is not to give opera, for example, respect, admiration, or piety, but to return what was lost, that is, its original function – public communication. In his opera projects, Vick understands and realizes the coming together of the community in a participatory act as the necessary basis for any common action. The purpose of his opera productions is to unite the audience and the musicians. The task of the singers in such projects is complex and hovers on the border of *emotio* and *actio*. Their task is to move, influence, attract and encourage the audience to participate in the action. Thus, in such opera projects, opera is perceived as a key factor and basis of human action in history and culture. Such opera projects become a modern sociological experiment. Opera's inherent ontological syncretism allows its new preformation at the intersections of various fragments of its entire "genetics" (genre, style invariants). The anthropo-socio-cultural significance of each reception in the whole field of opera production allows us, through the prism of art, not only to see the ranks of human development or the homo creator and to glimpse diverse ways of their individual artistic self-identification in society, but also to participate in the development of opera. The new opera projects gain validity through the collaboration of composers, directors, conductors, and singers and their ability to communicate by means of:

[A]n expressive artistic language that makes it possible to communicate openly and honestly what the world is today, how to live in this world and whether there is a chance to live in human dignity here and now. (Parin 2012)

These questions are the theme of many opera productions of our time. As co-director and dramaturg Sergio Morabito has noted in opera projects – more precisely, in projects "about opera" – the extraordinary and innovative diffusion of voices in opera is the consequence of its diffusion of form and genre. Opera as a total work of art becomes opera aperta (an "open work," a term used by Umberto Eco), an artistic area non-finita (incomplete). The incompleteness, the infinity of the process of the work-in-progress is planned by the artists themselves when they freely combine opera fragments, performance, virtual games, film, shows, and many other fantasies and surprises. In this way they lay the seeds of the terminological duality of opera aperta, which Umberto Eco left us as a term to think about and reflect upon and thus began to unfold interesting and exciting operatic effects.

In the meantime, the extensive experience of directed opera has long proved that when the directors intervened

in the "museum of the old opera" with their new ideas from drama, visual arts, cinema, and dance – opera was born anew and reborn. Accordingly, the singers expanded their vocal abilities and became brilliant actors. However, against the backdrop of the flourishing of Western European directed opera and the still strong "museum monopoly" of Ukrainian opera houses, the desire of young composers to find a niche for new operatic works of their own, where they can compose freely and create modern complete works of art, is justified.

The main reason for earlier assumptions regarding an end time as well as the death of opera, which Boulez initiated, accompany current misunderstandings or contradictions in musical and theatrical concepts between composers, conductors, and directors. For example, curious interrelations accompanied the production of the opera *South Pole* by the Czech composer Myroslav Srnka, which premiered at the Bavarian State Opera on January 31, 2016. After learning about the conception of the performance as well as the layout of the director's stage design, Srnka revised one third of the score. Srnka's visual expectation of a stage representation of the Antarctic landscape as a "real place on the planet," an endless snowy plain, proved unsuitable for the surrealist director Hans Neuenfels. For Srnka, editing the score and adapting it to the Neuenfels's idea became something of a compromise, since Srnka's rejection of Neuenfels's concept would have hindered the premiere. Fortunately, the closed, dead-white, surreal scenography with a black cross on the ceiling perfectly suited the "Sound of the Endless Snow Room." Srnka also achieved a claustrophobic atmosphere through spectral sonorous means as well as through the imitation of Morse code, radio signals, frequency distortions of radio music, concrete music, and for example, the cracking of polar ice, among other things, in the vocal parts of the protagonists. The Srnka-Neuenfels tandem became a win-win situation and a success for both artists, even if this example is only proof of a currently confused state of affairs: directors who think something of themselves may dictate their terms for the music, which does not always lead to a good compromise as it did here.

Composers, however, do not write their music for directors.

For whom the new operas are composed is a rhetorical question that requires an appropriate response from both artists and audiences. Let us recall the remarkable statement of the former director of the art museum *Hamburger Kunsthalle* Gustav Pauli:

The museum is a work (opus) of the modern way of thinking about society. (Matt et. al. 2002: 7)

If we replace the word "museum" with the word "opera," we get the quintessence of the changes in modern compositional opera practice. For opera singers, a contemporary

opera score reveals both new techniques and new challenges. Singers and composers today become contributors, even co-creators. In opera projects by contemporary composers, however, the inclusion of non-opera singing must also be considered. For example, in the opera project called 7th Myth *Ukraine – Terra Incognita*, consisting of 7 myths dedicated to the opera singer Wasyl Slipak (as an image of “contemporary Cossack Mamay”), the folklore singer Ulyana Gorbachevska appears at the same time as an

- idea,
- donor of the project,
- initiator,
- director and
- singer

and became a researcher of archaic folk singing. For the realization of the opera project, Gorbachevska was looking for “like-minded people” – a composer (like Maria Oliynyk), who also knows how to deal with archaic rudimentary musical sounds, and soloists with “acting skills and appropriate position in life” (Tereshchuk 2020). The *Ukraine – Terra Incognita* opera project is positioned as a Ukrainian alternative to the Western European world opera tradition. In this case, the Ukrainian new opera represents a performance of the collective mystery, in which the archaic vocal body, in song and choreography, reproduces the magic of ancient rites and rudimentary forms of ritual song and dance with modern video art, quest, original costumes, and, for example, theatrical improvisation. All the singers of the *Ukraine – Terra Incognita* project are both experts in archaic singing techniques and professional performers. The archaic and ritual simulacrum reflects the performance fashion of ethno-projects. They are currently phenomenally successful and promising if they do not exceed the limits of pseudo-ethnographic decorations. More interesting examples of new opera in which folklore singing has been incorporated are offered by new works by the Norwegian composer Kaija Saariaho (*Innocence*) and the Ukrainian composing team Roman Grygoriv and Illia Razumeiko with *Chornobyldorf*. Regarding the mutations of the vocal body (voice-body) in opera, this path was guided by the idea of “patenting” a distinct national singing tradition of the pre-opera era and making it appear either as a genetic code of the people or as a mystical apparition from beyond. The vocal body is taken for granted both in opera studies and in most operatic works. As Novak presents it in her book *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body*, it is therefore important to point out that awareness of the physicality of the singing body needs to be reintroduced into opera studies. She argues that the voice-body relationship is itself a producer of meaning and further posits that this relationship is one of the most important driving forces in recent opera. As examples she focuses on six contemporary operas in the book: *La Belle et la Bête* (Philip Glass), *Writing to Vermeer* (Louis Andriessen,

Peter Greenaway), *Three Tales* (Steve Reich, Beryl Korot), *One* (Michel van der Aa), *Homeland* (Laurie Anderson), and *La Commedia* (Louis Andriessen, Hal Hartley).

Novak calls these operas “post-opera.” Novak views the works analyzed as sites of creative exploration where the boundaries of the operatic world are expanded. The focus is on the influence of new media, a desynchronization of image and sound, and a redefinition of body-voice-gender relations. Novak dissects the singing body as a set of rules, protocols, effects, and strategies. This section shows how the singing body operates in the world of opera, what interventions it makes, and how it constitutes the meanings of opera.

Novak’s research is current and contemporary. Performance with modern metamorphoses of music types such as archaic, pop, or rock with opera singing is a new trend in opera practice, which raises the question of how far the Western European operatic tradition of the professional and trained operatic voice, or opera singing, has developed as an integral part of the diverse vocal body. Considering the isolated non-heterogeneous opera traditions in different countries, until now this challenge to all types of voices seems to merge in the opera projects, although musicologists recommend including folklore as a natural laboratory for musical thinking in contemporary music (Moskalenko) and integrating archaic singing as an element in contemporary opera. For example, in *Chornobyldorf*, archaic singing is perceived as a factor of the total work of art and transported to the post-apocalyptic society as archaeological opera and “archaeology of musical thinking.” The composers construct a “post-cultural post-apocalypse” in the format of *opera aperta*. As composer Illia Razumeiko noted:

The post-apocalypse is portrayed in films in a very one-sided way: people look for canned food, they run away from zombies, and so on. We are interested in representing and sounding a cultural post-apocalypse, in which the fragments of algorithmic music are found as remnants of the music of Bach and of Schubert, as well as fragments of folk songs. (Sirenko 2020)

Thus, the phenomenon of opera aperta correlates with

- *forma aperta*,
- *conceptum apertum*,
- *fine aperto* for listeners –
- *reflexio aperto* for singers and –
- *vox aperta*.

Susanna Karpenko and Oleksiy Zayets (from the village of Krasno, within the 10-kilometer zone around Chornobyl), connoisseurs of archaic singing techniques, are also involved in the multimedia space of the opera production. The statement of the well-known Ukrainian poet Yuri Isdryk, who plays the role of Orpheus in *Chornobyldorf*, is relevant in this context:

Indeed, we live nowadays in the time of apocalypse – such a theme and cultural conception is to be understood not so much archaeologically as anthropologically. (Karpenko 2020)

Thus, the archaeological findings of post-apocalyptic artists form an imaginary bridge between “before” and “after,” and from the artefacts found we receive, as in real fantasy (“creative vision of the future post-apocalypse”), the space signals of the “Vox Humana.” The ritual, cultural, and anthropological surrealism on the stage of *Chornobyldorf* is only the outer layer of a unique work, which brings to the city in the postulated term opera aperta a “completely new artistic element,” carries a much deeper meaning, and as an opera with stylistic slogan represents a “total eclecticism” (Myhashko 2020).

It is worth noting that the composers describe themselves as the great-grandchildren of Richard Wagner, the grandchildren of Hollywood, or the children of Stockhausen. “In fact, we have a great-great-grandfather, Richard Wagner, for our big and moving Wahn (‘madness’) projects,” says Illia Razumeyko – “and even put in our UKF grant application the word ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ (total work of art) as a key word, so it’s really interesting to work with. Wagner is the founder of this madness, and he is even considered as such in modern Hollywood. The next great composer of the madness and successor of Wagner is Stockhausen.” The composers can also see themselves as grandchildren of Edmund Husserl. Phenomenology began with Husserl’s thesis, “Back to the Beginnings!” Composers understand this as a postulate: “Back to the works of art!” – the self-evidence of the “comprehensive unity of being” and the acquired vision of experience. *Chornobyldorf* as an opera aperta develops in the format of playing with time (Rhea – the goddess of time and at the same time the instrument of time: Rhea-player – the algorithmic piano of the Austrian Winfried Ritsch). The singer, his voice and his acting self-dramatization symbolize not only the restoration of opera memory but also expectations, search, and restoration of communication, in which the phenomenology of time perception (in this case – the performance time of the opera) appears as a cycle, as in a myth, as in the ancient Greeks, and as in all pre-apocalyptic civilizations. In analyzing this quotation in terms of the relationship between opera memory (retention) and expectation (protection), and considering the perceptual situation of the opera voice, it is useful to reinterpret Husserl’s notion of retention. The quintessence of our auditory perception of memory fragments (retention) simultaneously serves as a provider of sound constructions for the future by means of past fragments (protection). As composer Anastasia Sysenko describes it:

People of the post-apocalyptic generation will examine artefacts found in the deserts, create their myths, reproduce their sounds and musical fragments lying on golden surfaces.

And they will listen to each other make music together, while different imperatives and reflections are formed in growling or singing. (Sysenko 2021)

The musical material of *Chornobyldorf* makes special demands on both instrumentalists and singers. In addition to being the main actors of their opera aperta, the composers can also sing, play, and make music. They are themselves active performers of their own opera, returning to the Renaissance ideal of universal artists.

They consider musical instruments as treasures of a lost civilization, playing dulcimer, microtonal bandura, alpine zither, cantele, and morin khuur (a Mongolian two-stringed folk cello), creating a new impression of the uniqueness of live improvisation. The composers do not control the situation; instead, they participate in the collective music making as an inherited gift of human nature. Everyone can participate in such a performance (in the process of new opera creation) and create their own “opera aperta.”

Such experiments promise a complete rethinking of musical and theatrical practice. It will require the efforts of more than one generation of musicologists to investigate these new dimensions and existence vectors of the modern musical and theatrical phenomenon, until now also called opera out of inertia or convenience. Spontaneously, we think of Richard Wagner’s work “Music of the Future” and the quote attributed to him “Children, create something new,” which is heard from a new generation of opera composers.

The following examples are by no means a complete list of transformational operas in Ukraine against the backdrop of directorial artefacts of opera in Europe: the operatic Requiem *Iyov*; the operatic Circus *Babylon* of the Nova Opera formation (Roman Grygoriv, Illia Razumeiko, Vlad Troitsky); the operatic apocrypha *Judas and Magdalena* by Alexander Shchetynsky; the operatic myth by Maria Oliynyk and Ulyana Horbachevska called *Ukraine – Terra Incognita*. The last example has been dedicated to the Ukrainian baritone Wassyly Slipak, who lived in Paris, was a soloist at the Paris National Opera and the Bastille Opera House, went back to Ukraine as a soldier in 2014, and was killed in the Russia–Ukraine war (2016). Adherence to the rules of the opera genre – at least of academic opera singing – made way for the search for new sounds, dramaturgy and, above all, content. Contemporary Ukrainian composers create opera artefacts that no longer fit into the framework of the canon of the genre.

However, the term opera aperta does not solve the problem of conceptualization. It intensifies the debate about the limits of the genre and opera singing in the new formats of post-opera projects. The earlier terms of anti- or anti-anti-opera, mini-opera, and others are now obsolete for new opera projects. Rock operas, which have

long occupied a parallel territory to the classical-romantic opera tradition, from the very beginning denied the sovereignty of the energy potential of trained opera voices and a subordination of the public under an elite culture. It is no secret that famous artists (when creating the stage designs for new productions) consider opera singers as characters or images of their own installations or performances. The singers consider this meta-opera experience for themselves as an outstanding experience of collaboration in a total art workshop. This was also the reaction of the Swedish soprano Nina Stemme after *Parsifal* with stage design by Georg Baselitz (Bavarian State Opera, 2018), after *The King Kandaules* by Alexander (von) Zemlinsky with stage design by Alfred Hrdlichka (Salzburg Festival, 2006), and after *Turandot* with Pop Art scenography by David Hockney (2010, San Francisco) (Брайн 2020).

The singer acknowledged, “We are all a part of an artist’s work” (Брайн 2020). Although the style and aesthetic language of artists such as Baselitz, Hockney, Hrdlichka, and Phyllida Barlow are very different in the current new production of Mozart’s *Idomeneo* at the Bavarian State Opera (Opera Festival, 2021), the results of such opera productions are similar. The stage sets are that attract attention. The singers play a mostly figurative role and become a part of the artist’s large painting or part of a strong representational performance. Nina Stemme says:

In the Hockney interpretation of the last scene of *Turandot*, Princess and Calaf are shown to be in love with each other: we hold hands, our cloaks form the outline of the heart, and the emperor sits on a hill above us. (The quotation from singer in: Брайн 2020)

The experience of each new opera production shows that the collaboration of composers, directors, and singers is still an important part of a successful theater production, just as the ability of opera singing to vividly portray character development ranges from high quality to unique. The vocal body of the singer is not only a means of expression for the portrayal of the character of the opera hero, but also demands identification and reinterpretation as a new challenge to all participants in each production.

Thus, on the ruins of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a new intrigue unfolds: a synthesis of operatic destruction with anti-destruction. To observe these processes is interesting, but to predict the next modulations of the negation of negation in opera projects and the further development, for example, of performance-minus-opera or opera-plus-performance in the synthesis of audio, video, and performance art as well as fashion design and painting gallery is not yet possible. The soloist of the Vienna State Opera, the Ukrainian mezzo-soprano Zoryana Kushpler, as well as many other contemporary singers, are convinced that modern opera will continue to live in the aura of a strongly pictorial performance and in

the aura of “stars” with all their diversity. Famous names, the fashion to rely on “stars” having appeal, and casting opera events not only with star singers but also with star painters, star sculptors, fashion designers, lighting designers, interior designers, and others is becoming an exciting prospect that composers must also reckon with.

In the works of renowned contemporary Western European opera composers, such as Philippe Glass, Kaija Saariaho, Aribert Reimann, Wolfgang Rihm, George Benjamin, Salvatore Carrino, John Adams, Jörg Widmann, Olga Neuwirth, Willem Jeths, Miroslav Srnka, and Hauke Jasper Berheide, opera singing remains the leading musical guide in opera dramaturgy.

The other, non-operatic voice-body is only used as a supplement. For example, in Neuwirth’s “multimedia opera” *Orlando*, (libretto by Elfriede Jelinek) the famous American star mezzo-soprano Kate Lindsey plays and sings the role of Orlando, and the role of her son is embodied by the famous cabaret artist Justin Vivian Bond, known in America as a transgender performer. It should be mentioned that Olga Neuwirth did not shorten or change a single bar of the score; she has already gone down in history of post-, meta- and media-opera with her opus summum. The balance of show, musical, queer culture, literary reflection, and transgender manifesto nevertheless preserves the quintessence of the operatic genre, which the composer defined as hybrid grand opera.

Finally, the last question concerns the reaction of singers to the processes of destruction of the operatic genre, which was transformed from a music-theatrical genre to a theatrical-musical genre. Contemporary opera is increasingly oriented towards the homo videns species, rather than the homo audiens species of the audience. How do opera singers evaluate the corresponding changes in singing in the new operas? The opinions of the singers who have had successful careers abroad on these innovations of opera singing in the post- or quasi-operas are unclear. Conversations with some of them (Liudmyla Monastyrskya, Sofia Solovij, Zoryana Kushpler, Olga Dyadiv, Taras Konoshchenko, Mykhailo Malafii, and Roman Chabaranok) sometimes reveal a desire to combine repertory opera with opera experiments of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The young Ukrainian soprano Olga Dyadiv sang not only in operas of Rossini, Mozart, and Donizetti, but also the role of Maria in the chamber opera *Phantasmagoria* by contemporary Ukrainian composer Karmella Tsepkolenko and in *The fate of Dorian*, based on Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (libretto in Ukrainian translation by Serhiy Stupak). In the world premiere of the opera *Nitch* [The Night] by Maxim Kolomiets, Dyadiv played three roles: the boy with an old bandura, the inner voice of Maria (voice dialogues), and the image of beauty embodied in the aria *Le ombre delle ceneri* [Shadows of the Ashes]. The

repertoire of the Ukrainian baritone Taras Konoshchenko, soloist of the Nuremberg Opera, includes the well-known parts of Igor Stravinsky's operas *The Rake's Progress* and Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*, as well as rarely performed operas such as *Irish Legend* by Werner Egk and *The fate of Dorian* by Karmella Tsepko. The Ukrainian baritone Iurii Samoilo, soloist of the Frankfurt Opera, sings the role of Billy Budd (in the opera with the same name, *Billy Budd* by Benjamin Britten) and the Prince of Homburg (from the opera *Prinz von Homburg* by Hans Werner Henze). The diversity of the operatic repertoire of the Ukrainian soprano Sofia Solovij should also be emphasized (Händel's *Alcina*, Mozart's *Vitellia* and *Elettra*, Wagner's *Elsa*, soprano parts in *Elijah* by Mendelssohn), as well as parts from the works of Penderecki, Moriarty, Laniuk, and D'Amico (opera *Le Malentendu* [Misunderstanding] based on the play with the same name by Albert Camus).

Ukrainian mezzo-soprano Zoryana Kushpler, soloist of the Vienna State Opera, has also made a name for herself in many modern opera productions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Among them are the operas *Gogol* by Lera Auerbach, *Three Sisters* by Peter Ertvös, *Nora* by Albin Fries, *Medea* by Aribert Reimann, and *Orest* by Manfred Trojahn. In the already mentioned opera *Orlando* by Olga Neuwirth, Zoryana Kushpler was the assistant of Kate Lindsay. The singer noted:

Every modern opera has its own peculiarities. The concept of the director and the stage designer has always been an important guarantor of success, but the singers were the material. I agree with everyone 100% that the singer's voice is no longer a decisive tool in modern opera, especially when the music is atonal, for example in Reimann's opera *Medea* with overly complex music: the parts constantly contain leaps, a nervous rhythm, sharp changes of register. Italian director Carlos Morelli directed it, and he created a moving stage aesthetic in the process. I have rarely seen such a wonderful theatrical action. Since then, this production has been called not only Reimann's opera, but also Reimann and Morelli's opera production. If the operas of the Baroque, Classical, Romantic periods are suitable for concert performances, the concert practice of modern operas indicates the opposite. (Єфіменко, Yefimenko 2020)

Zoryana Kushpler is convinced that modern opera lives as a performance.

On the other hand, the answers to the question about the future of opera projects and opera singing in experimental new productions and their conceptualization are contradictory. The singers agree that experiments should take place and new projects should be created:

With pleasure I would participate in new operas, but I don't want to go beyond my operatic qualification [...] the operatic voice doesn't need technical devices and amplifiers, the operatic voice is able to "float above the orchestra". (Єфіменко 2020)

There is a high need for communication, discussion, and further questions on the tour de force exploration of diverse opera types. Without understanding the new experiments of "directed opera," "anti-opera," "anti-anti-opera," "post-opera," or "opera aperta," the historic train of four hundred years of opera history could stop. Opera houses work with the transfer of practical knowledge from master to neophyte, from past to future. The continuity of the cultural-historical process of opera development through its historical modifications, the receptions of homo audiens and homo videns is an organic part of European anthroposociology. It is no coincidence that developed states, corporations, financial companies, and patrons determine and even patronize the opera business. Opera as a heterogeneous phenomenon has a high socio-cultural status and thus determines the intellectual and cultural level of national and state identification of every country in the world.

Conclusion

Opera tradition preserves the memory of humankind and in this sense, it contains an invaluable, instructive, and creative potential. From a historical point of view, opera has a centuries-old musical-theatrical experience that influences the education, upbringing, knowledge, and understanding of everyone, not only the educational level of the social elite, thus indicating the state of democratic thinking of a country. In the opera productions of our time, collective creativity comes alive as a means of communication.

At all times, the theater has operated with the latest technology. The coloristics of scenography, effective costumes, and the activities of homo-videns were not invented in our days. The genre of opera has always used choreography or acrobatics and sophisticated machinery that required the latest engineering knowledge and modern technical development. Thus, technology plays a significant role in modern directed opera as well.

Both musicians and musicologists agree that the quintessence of opera as a phenomenon has not changed in principle: opera remains the leading genre of artistic exclusivity.

In addition to the high status of the symphony orchestra, the opera voice has the exclusivity of a cultivated aesthetic, which often manifests itself in an ecstasy of the extraordinarily energetic trained singing voice, shaped and perfected throughout life. The operatic voice, the operatic vocal body, is the phenomenon that, through high skill, virtuosity, and psycho-emotional power, controls the audience's ability to experience different sensations. This is achieved by the professionalism of many years of training and consistent self-development, which are inseparable from each other.

The result of the performance analyses suggests various kinds of artworks that offer themselves as opera, but at the

same time negate this genre. It is interesting to note that this negation appears in the sense of “double negation.” It has been noted that the term “opera” as a “work of art,” as “opera aperta” (Eco, *The Open Work*), is used in performative practices to enhance the meaning of the total work of art in question. Accordingly, the post-opera no longer serves as a genre, but as an impetus, impulse, code, symbol, quotation, or re-post as a new premonition about The Artwork of the Future.

Thus, in history and culture, opera becomes in such opera projects a key factor and the basis for human social-cultural action.

In contemporary operatic practice, opera as a total work of art will develop into opera aperta, into an artistic area non-finita, into a work-in-progress process.

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Santrauka

Terminas „opera“ šiuolaikiniame muzikiniame teatre interpretuojamas vis laisviau. Socialinė-istorinė operos reikšmė toli gražu nėra išsifruota, tačiau dėl joje nuolat stiprėjančio režisūros vaidmens atsiranda daug įdomių ir eksperimentinių renginių. Autorinio teatro įsivyravimas operoje reikalauja kelti naujus tyrimo tikslus ir nagrinėti alternatyvių terminų paieškas dabartinės operos praktikos tipologijai. Muzikologai kol kas neranda sprendimo, kaip galėtų įvardyti tinklinę muzikos, teatro ir medijų performatyvio-vizualinės produkcijos įvairovę. O terminas „postopera“ jau įsitvirtino operos teorijoje. Šis reiškiny susidomėjimą, kaip rodo, pavyzdžiui, du leidiniai: Hans-Thieso Lehmanno „Postdramatisches Theater“ ir Jelenos Novak „Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body“. Terminų „opera“, „režisuota / režisieriaus

opera“, „postopera“ ir pan. ribos šiuolaikiniuose tyrimuose išlieka tokios ir nelabai konkrečios. Tokia apibrėžtis, kurioje būtų atsižvelgta į visas charakteristikas, artimiausiu metu neatrodo įmanoma: teorija atsilieka nuo muzikinės scenos praktikos.

Šio darbo tikslas – ieškoti apžvalginės tipologijos turinio ir metodologijos aspektu, grindžiamos naujųjų muzikinio teatro darbų pavyzdžiais, per lyginamąjį naujųjų operos pastatymų pavyzdžių tyrimą. Įvairiapusis ir nuolatinis domėjimasis šiuolaikine operos praktika kelia klausimą, kaip toliau taikyti metodologinę prieigą konkrečių spektaklių analizei. Daug šiuolaikinių kūrinių yra įprastų tradicinio

operos žanro priemonių ir kitų priemonių mišinys. Režisieriaus koncepcijos nubrėžia šiuolaikinėje teatro praktikoje nuolat galiojančią tendenciją: integruoti individualų biografinį ir kultūrinį-istorinį diskursą į pirminį operos šaltinį. Svarbi ateities užduotis bus jungtiniai šiuolaikinės operos pastatymų tyrimai, kurių aktualumas muzikinėje ir sceninėje praktikoje bus akivaizdus ir kurie laikui bėgant darysis vis aktualesni. Opera tampa unikaliu kultūrinės-istorinės komunikacijos tikslu, postmoderniosios socialinės mąstysenos menu. Taip istorijoje ir kultūroje opera pasidaro svarbiu veiksmu ir žmogaus sociokultūrinės veiklos pagrindu.

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