
REVIEWS

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**Jelena Novak: *Postopera. Reinventing the Voice-Body*,
Ashgate 2015**

Jelena Novak's study *Postopera. Reinventing the Voice-Body* (Ashgate 2015) at the very first moment seems to be a very small book that only considers some special works. But entering the discussion and observing the dissemination of the explained body-voice theory, one realizes the very broad theoretical basis Novak's explanations are founded on.

In the 20th century, in cultural studies several 'turns' were ascertained, beginning with the linguistic turn in the 60s and then continuing with the cultural turn especially. The iconic turn and the performative turn kept at hand new methods and possibilities for describing and analyzing the objects to see more correlations and to describe cultural phenomena more extensively. Finally, the corporeal or body turn focused on the

corporeal aspects of culture and arts. Also, theatre and media sciences encompassed the facilities provided by the theories of these turns. But musicology is always struggling with new methods and that is why the corporeal turn or body turn has entered discussions much more slowly, especially regarding music theatre.

Another problem that can often be analyzed in studies of musical theatre is the fact of the gap between musicology and the theatre sciences, while speaking about the same topic, speaking about music theatre, has not been thoroughly dealt with even today.

However, in her book, Jelena Novak succeeds in bringing together theoretical discussions about corporeality and voice with the knowledge of musicology, theatre sciences, philosophic and cultural studies. She gives a substantiated theory of body and voice in music theatre, combined with the explanation of theoretical texts and the detailed description and analysis of the operas *Writing to Vermeer* and *La Commedia* by Louis Andriessen, *La Belle et la Bête* by Philip Glass, *Homeland* by Laurie Anderson, *Three Tales* by Steve Reich and *One* by Michel van der Aa. The concentrated view regarding minimalist operas originates in her special interest in that kind of musical theatre. Additionally, during the analysis she also discusses further works.

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She describes the operas with enthusiasm and deep understanding – especially the textual, dramaturgical, theoretical and also musical aspects and discusses the results by mirroring them with the theoretical texts. With that parallel motion of theoretical explanation and analysis of the works, Novak gives a very intensive presentation and forms the many particular aspects of a very detailed image.

From a theoretical point of view the reader also receives a summary of such studies like that of Carolyn Abbate, Michelle Duncan, Peter Brooks, Michal Grover-Friedlander, Joke Dame, Slavoj Žižek, Richard Leppert, Steven Connor, Adriana Cavarero, Jean-Luc Nancy, Tereza Havelkova, Brigitte Felderer, Bojana Kunst, Mladen Dolar, Rick Altman, Hélène Cixous, Shoshana Felman and Judith Butler. Therefore, Novak's book is a walk through the voice-body-theory of the English speaking world and, at the same time, we find a guide to some important operas of the last two decades.

She describes in detail the relations between the storyline, the text, the staging, the bodies of the actors/singers, their voices and the various uses of media in the works. In terms of these relations, she discusses all the theoretical possibilities of interpretation with her extensive knowledge of the works themselves, the ideas and intentions of the composers and staging directors, and on the basis of the theoretical works. In so doing, she enables the reader to imagine the discussed works almost completely in his mind's eye.

After introducing the Postopera term and finding her own definition linking up with Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory of post-dramatic theatre, Novak states the body-

voice gap as the initial point of her research. Then, she discusses several occurrences of this phenomenon, always creating a parallel between theoretical discourse and concrete analysis. For example, she discusses questions of the singing body and machine, prosthesis and amputation, live-singing and its confrontation with the media and technical conditioning. Novak takes a wide range for the discussion of body, voice and gender aspects, focussing so-called monstrous singing by fixing monstrous bodies, as well as monstrous voices. She explains all aspects of gender in the handled opera pieces from the voice-gender-relationship to special questions like vocal drag, counter-castrato and breeches parts. Another large part of the book deals with disembodied voices and unvoiced bodies, discussing facets of ventriloquism and de-synchronization, as well as the theory and practice of the intensive relationship of opera and film.

Only one wish remains: the music – in musicological studies mostly dominating the discussion – retreats into the background. I also would like to read more about *how* and *what* (music) the bodies are singing, because Novak asked rather *that* and *why* and also *what* (text) in that context the figures are singing. Certainly it would need more scope to describe also the music of the singing body. But to discuss gender aspects, relationships between figures, aspects of machine and body, ventriloquism, monstrous singing, aspects of presence/non-presence, corporality/non-corporality, and so on, the character of the produced music, the melodies, the rhythms, the colour and timbre of the voices, and all other special musical attributes, from my point of view, are very important to catch the relationships again more comprehensively.

Nevertheless, Jelena Novak provides a broadly informed work and shows her great overview to the theoretical and philosophical discourses. For further studies, her book offers the way to connect the discussion of these selected operas with the history of opera and some other concrete and outstanding works of music theatre of the 20th century. It would be interesting to historicize the discourse and to show how some of the body-voice-relationships, shown in the present study already, were prepared in the operas and pieces of musical theatre and opera of the last century. One example of my special interest: the separation of body and voice in music theatre already occurred as early as in some of Bohuslav Martinů's stage works of the 1920s and 1930s, for instance, in his opera *Hry o Marii* (1935), where he divided some of the figures into a singer and a dancer, combining folkloric traditions, ideas of the mystery play of the Middle Ages and epic theatre. The additional view to some contemporary composers like Heiner Goebels, Helmuth Oehring and Olga Neuwirth could also enrich the discussion about Postopera just as the perhaps complementary voice-body-theories by Christa Brüstle or Helga Finter.

Jelena Novak establishes a comprehensive examination of the term Postopera, using it as a concept of post-dramatic and simultaneously postmodern recent opera. This term should be established in music theatre sciences because of its ability to describe the phenomenon of such operas more exactly and to differentiate the various development directions in contemporary music theatre.

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Sanela Nikolić: *Avangardna umetnost kao teorijska praksa:*

Black Mountain College, Darmštatski internacionalni letnji kursevi za Novu muziku i Tel Quel

[*Avant-garde art as theoretical practice:* Black Mountain College, Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music and Tel Quel]

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The book *Avangardna umetnost kao teorijska praksa: Black Mountain College, Darmštatski internacionalni letnji kursevi za Novu muziku i Tel Quel* is the revised PhD thesis by Dr. Sanela Nikolić, defended at the University of Arts, Belgrade (Interdisciplinary Studies Programme, Art Theory and Media Studies Group) in 2011. The reviewers were Dr. Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman (who was also the mentor) and Dr. Miodrag Šuvaković. In her book, the author questions the status of theory in art, politics and culture, focusing on the three chosen avant-garde art worlds, and states that the roles of artistic and theoretical

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