

When Film Becomes Opera:

The Challenges of Adaptation on the Verge of Metamorphosis

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Numerous scholars have examined the encounter between opera and film in recent decades. Their research spans a wide range of topics, including opera on film and video, cinematic adaptations of operatic works, the incorporation of operatic music in soundtracks, and the surge in live broadcasts from opera houses to movie theaters. Despite their diversity, these studies have something in common: they envision the relationship between the two arts and media, as it developed over the past century, as a journey *from stage to screen*. Whether viewed as an opportunity for opera to survive or resurrect in a media-saturated culture, or as an artistic challenge in composition, dramaturgy, or videography, this journey consistently appears as a unidirectional movement.ⁱ This article offers a different perspective by examining an emerging repertoire in which the opposite movement occurs: not from stage to screen, but *from screen to stage*.

The opera scene has undergone rapid changes since the turn of the century. Titles such as *Notorious* (1946), *Persona* (1966), *The Fly* (1986), *Lost Highway* (1997), or *Melancholia* (2011) are now associated not only with famous films by Alfred Hitchcock, Ingmar Bergman, David Cronenberg, David Lynch, and Lars von Trier, but also with freshly composed operas by Olga Neuwirth (*Lost Highway*, 2003), Howard Shore (*The Fly*, 2008), Hans Gefors (*Notorious*, 2015), Sebastian Fagerlund (*Autumn Sonata*, 2017), and Mikael Karlsson (*Melancholia*, 2023). This trend is not limited to these works, as a great many of cinematically inspired operas have seen the light of the day in the past two decades. The question thus arises as to what motivates this sudden turnabout in the interaction between opera and cinema that led to a growing stream of new operatic pieces based on cinematic works.

The solution to this enigma cannot be solely of technical nature, as the possibility of composing an opera based on a film has existed for a long time. Nothing would have prevented Messiaen, Henze, or Ligeti from using a cinematic work as a starting point for their operas. The explanation lies elsewhere: in the conscious or unconscious assumptions held by composers, librettists, directors, producers, and spectators about the two genres, their unique features and histories, and the implications of their possible

intersection. Only through an exploration of often-unconscious ideologies can we understand why only after the year 2000, with a few pioneering exceptions, including Philip Glass's "Cocteau trilogy" (1993-1996), did composers feel compelled to imagine their new works as operatic adaptations of existing films.ⁱⁱ

My goal in this article is to address this general question while avoiding the trap of generalization. My first concern will thus be to emphasize the variety of motivations behind these projects as well as the heterogeneity of the final results. While each piece deserves meticulous attention to its singularity, the fact that composing operas inspired by films became a trend in the first two decades of the twenty-first century calls for sustained discussion. Although this topic is relatively new, it has already attracted the attention of a number of scholars. Some examined individual operas, while others discussed the need for a new designation – from "film-based opera" or "film-influenced opera" to "cinemopera" or simply "film as opera". My article follows a slightly different path in prioritizing the interrogation of how the conversion from film to opera is imagined by creators, institutions, and audiences. In the course of this essay, the contrast between two conceptions of this conversion – by analogy or metamorphosis – will serve as a guiding thread. In mapping the field with this contrast in mind, my goal is not only to discuss what made this new trend possible but also to reflect on what it may come to mean in the history of opera.

1. A repertoire at a glance

This new repertoire is as unique as it is diverse. Operas based on films differ in terms of scale, style, form, subject matter, and reception. Some demand numerous singers and large ensembles, as seen in Thomas Adès's *The Exterminating Angel* (2016), which requires 22 singers and a full orchestra, including bells, a vast battery of percussions and a ondes martenot, whereas others are best described as chamber operas, such as Keeril Makan's *Persona* (2015), written for 3 singers and an octet. Likewise, these operas were commissioned by more or less conservative companies and consequently composed with more or less conservative audiences in mind, from the Metropolitan Opera House, where Nico Muhly's *Marnie* premiered in 2017, to the Netherlands Opera, where Michel van der Aa's *After Life*, commission by Pierre Audi, was first performed in 2006. Musically, in terms of style, they oscillate between romantic lyricism (e.g., *Il postino* [2010] by Daniel Catán), post-modern impressionism (e.g., *Autumn Sonata* [2017] by Sebastian Fagerlund)

and rigorous modernism (e.g., *Brokeback Mountain* [2014] by Charles Wuorinen). The variety of themes is no less impressive: love, death, passion, but also trauma, delirium, time, memory, or the afterlife are among the topics tackled by these cinema-inspired operas. Their reception and dissemination were also heterogeneous. Some of these operas have led to several productions (André Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire* [1998] has been performed in over twenty locations worldwide), while others have graced the stage only once (to my best knowledge, René Koering's *La lune vague* [1982] was only performed in Rennes where it premiered).

The diversity and complexity characterizing these operas reflect the variety of their sources. Among the films being adapted or evoked some are fairly commercial (e.g., Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain*), while others are decidedly experimental (e.g., Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*); some feature realist plots (e.g., Michael Radford's *Il postino*), while others explore surrealism (e.g., Luis Buñuel's *El ángel exterminador*), fantasy (e.g., Frank Capra's *It's a wonderful life*), or science fiction (e.g., David Cronenberg's *The fly*); some employ a lot of music (Lars von Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* is a musical), either original (e.g., Zhao Xinshui's *Visitors on the Icy Mountain*) or pre-existent (David Lean's *Brief Encounter*), while others go as far as to renounce to a soundtrack (e.g., Hirokazu Koreeda's *After Life*); some end tragically (e.g., Lars von Trier's *Breaking the Waves*), while others are comedic throughout (e.g., Robert Altman's *The Wedding*); some bet on epic grandeur (e.g., Zhou Xiaowen's *The Emperor's Shadow*), while others are intimate and lyrical (e.g., Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* [*The Tales of the Wave after the Rain Moon*]). The extent to which the opera draws on the film – whether the libretto follows the script or if the score evokes the soundtrack – and the variety of motivations behind doing so or not are also crucial factors.

In this regard, the more or less prominent role played by music in the original films is a first aspect to consider in pondering the heterogeneity of their operatic counterparts. The operas composed by Tan Dun and André Previn – *The First Emperor* (2006) and *Brief Encounter* (2009) – are based on films in which the music, whether pre-existent – Rachmaninov's *Second Piano Concerto* in the case of David Lean's *Brief Encounter* (1945) – or original – Zhao Jiping's soundtrack in the case of Zhou Xiaowen's *The Emperor's Shadow* (1996) – plays a prominent role. However, it does not necessarily follow that the composers took the music of those films into account, let alone as inspiration. In fact, the opposite seems to be true: more frequently than not, composers appear to disregard

the film's soundtrack, as if competing with it was as integral dimension of the operatic project.

There are also operas – *Autumn Sonata* (2017) by Sebastian Fagerlund and *The Exterminating Angel* (2016) by Thomas Adès – based on films, respectively by Ingmar Bergman (1978) and Luis Buñuel (1962), with no background music. One could even wonder whether this silence, this musical quietness of a sort, is not in itself an explanation for the composers' fascination with the films. To make the situation even more complex and fascinating, both of these films feature characters that are musicians themselves. In *El ángel exterminador*, Blanca (a pianist) and Silvia (a soprano) are among the wealthy guests at the Nobile mansion, and we see and hear Blanca playing a sonata by Paradisi. *Höstsonaten* [*Autumn Sonata*] focuses on the relationship between a concert pianist and her daughter, whom we also watch, in a decisive scene, playing a prelude by Chopin. These musical moments are key to interpreting these films. How the composers approached them – whether and how they rendered the singularity of these musical moments within the musical tissue of their operas – would deserve an article on its own.

When it comes to the librettos, some operas closely follow the original script, while others take many liberties. Gunilla Hemming, collaborating with Sebastian Fagerlund on *Autumn Sonata*, and Robert Altman and Arnold Weinstein, working with William Bolcom on *A Wedding*, recast the film narratives by eliding or adding characters. In contrast, Olga Neuwirth, collaborating with Elfriede Jelinek, and Daniel Catán, writing himself the libretto of his opera, attempted to follow the screenplays of David Lynch's *Lost Highway* and Michael Radford's *Il Postino* whenever possible. But we should not be mistaken by this similarity, for the motivations behind it are quite distinct. If *Il postino* relies on the audience remembering the film, nothing could be farther from the truth in the case of *Lost Highway*. Neuwirth does not seem to be interested in emulating the film at all. On the contrary, she explores their differences in a radical way. Yet in doing so, she takes the script as a springboard to revitalize these differences.

2. Is it all about the story?

We could hardly overstate the diversity and complexity characterizing these cinematically inspired musical-theatrical works. If, however, the heterogeneity of the operas reflects the heterogeneity of the films, the choice of this or that particular film hinges on the particular motivations, curiosities, interests, obsessions, and ambitions held by the artists

and their collaborators. Although we cannot equate the intention of the composers and librettists with the substance of their creations, neither can we isolate the examination of the latter from the consideration of the former. In other words, the latent or declared intentions must be taken into account.

As we navigate through interviews, program notes, and advertising material, a paradox emerges. On the one hand, the label “based on the film” is widely embraced, with companies using it to attract new audiences to the opera house. A brief look at the posters of these productions, featuring more or less explicit allusions to the films, immediately confirms this impression. On the other hand, this label does not always reflect the reality of these creative collaborations. *Brokeback Mountain* is a case in point. Despite much attention being drawn to the opera due to the film, composer Charles Wuorinen and librettist Annie Proulx explicitly stated that the opera was not based on Ang Lee’s film but on Proulx’s 1997 short-story of the same name.

This might be considered an extreme case. One could even argue that including *Brokeback Mountain* in this new operatic trend is misleading, given both the composer and the librettist’s affirmation that the opera is based on the short story, not the film. However, even composers who acknowledge the impact of the film on their work and cite it as the source for their operas remain somewhat ambivalent about its significance in the creative process. When asked what exactly attracted or captivated them in the film to the point of motivating them to write an opera, many composers respond quite simply and quite bluntly: the story. Poul Ruders exemplifies this attitude.

I remember when I staggered out of that movie house back in year 2000 when Lars von Trier’s film *Dance in the Dark* opened. I said to my wife: “this is the ultimate, [most] succulent operatic material you can imagine.” I actually was a bit geeky and said: “there’s only one thing wrong with this film, and that is that it is not an opera by me.” It’s so important for me to emphasize that it’s not an opera based on the film. It’s an opera based on the story. [...] The actual musical language, what goes on in the orchestra, is as precise and as much in the service of the drama as it is humanly possible. There’s no single chord or note that is not engineered to serve the story.ⁱⁱⁱ

This statement is both paradoxical and revealing, and its paradoxical nature is what makes it particularly revealing. While acknowledging the profound impression caused by

the film during its initial viewing, Ruders underscores that only the story of *Dancer in the Dark* served as a foundation for composing *Selma Jezková*. This assertion is all the more surprising because, unlike Wuorinen and many other composers, Ruders is adapting a film that is not based on any pre-existing work, literary or otherwise. *Dancer in the Dark* is entirely a product of the filmmaker's imagination. Be that as it may, it seems to me that Ruders' declarations, despite or perhaps because of his attempts to downplay the film's importance, confirm how much the film influenced the opera, whether consciously or not.

Certainly, given that *Dancer in the Dark* is a musical, the composer's eagerness to distance the opera from the film may also stem from the desire to distinguish himself not only from Lars von Trier but also from Björk. The Icelandic artist, who embodies Selma in the film, is also the composer of the film's music. This sense of competition between opera (composer) and film (director and composer) would also explain why Ruders chose to retitlle the opera after the name of its female protagonist: Selma Jezková, the impoverished, ailing mother about to go blind, sentenced to death after accidentally shooting her landlord (an accident that occurs after he stole the money she saved over the years to pay for the eye operation that would cure her son from their hereditary disease).

Ruders is not alone among the composers who, despite expressing admiration for the film, declare that their primary source was not so much the film as the story it tells. Missy Mazzoli, for instance, states that the "story [of *Breaking the Waves*] sang to me." As she explains in an interview, the idea of making an opera out of *Breaking the Waves* came from librettist Royce Vavrek. Initially hesitant due to her love for Lars von Trier's film, Mazzoli also felt that she had "the opportunity as a composer to illuminate the different layers of this story."^{iv} Similarly, in the realm of comedy, William Bolcom was attracted to *A Wedding* because of its story: "It was an attraction to me way back because I always felt it would be a kind of twentieth-century American *Marriage of Figaro*, although where in the *Marriage of Figaro* we're talking about an interface between the servant and the aristocratic class, here we have an interface between what considers itself old money, on one hand, and the nouveau riches, on the other – because of the wedding, and they are both weddings. So, I think that was the reason I was attracted to it."^v Once again, the story was the main trigger.

In light of these declarations by the artists, it is crucial to exercise caution in labeling all of these musical-theatrical works as "cinematically inspired operas." In fact, many of these new operas, to judge by what the artists assert, are only tangentially or

superficially linked to cinema. While they may reference to movies, the degree to which the mediality of their sources shapes the creative process, influences the final result or impacts the production – essentially, the extent to which these operatic projects truly *draw on* rather than merely *reference* their cinematic predecessors – varies considerably. This qualification lays the groundwork for the critical issue I aim to explore in the subsequent discussion: how deeply does the decision to compose an opera based on a film lead to engagement with film as a medium and an art form?

3. Adaptation and Its Enthusiasts

Let us step back for a moment. In a broad sense, whenever a work in one medium is transformed into another work in a different medium, we grapple with the challenges and complexities of adaptation. An age-old practice, adaptation has always been a vital and stimulating force in the relationship, not only between the arts but also between texts, media, and cultures. Opera is no exception. In fact, it can be aptly described, as Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon suggest, as the “Ur-adaptive art.”^{vi} Most operas are adaptations of previous works, and the gestures and procedures of adaptation permeate the creation of any opera, from libretto to score to performance.

Driven by an interest in intertextuality and intermediality, adaptation studies have significantly expanded in recent decades. However, despite the proliferation of both case studies and systematic approaches, Kamilla Elliott has recently argued that a common theory articulating theorization and adaptation in a non-hierarchical way is still lacking.^{vii} Although my aim is not to debate the future of adaptation studies, I have often wondered whether several presuppositions underlying both case studies and systematic approaches in the field constrain the debate on the repertoire considered in this article. Among them, the most common is a “story-centric” view of adaptation.

As mentioned earlier, several authors have already debated some of these new operas based on previous films. Terminology issues are recurrent even in case studies. How should one categorize this new sub-genre? Michael Halliwell, for instance, distinguishes between “opera *in* film”, “opera *as* film,” and “opera *on* film,” which allows him to propose, along with “film *in* opera” (the use of film media in staged opera), “film *as* opera” as the most apt label to classify this new repertoire.^{viii} This terminology has the advantage of immediately conveying the symmetry between “opera *as* film” and “film *as* opera” to label “operas adapted into films” and “films adapted into operas”.

Alternatively, Yuell E. Chandler introduces the notion of “cinemopera,” applying it to any opera connected to or influenced by film.^{ix} This having been said, it’s crucial to stress that theorization goes far beyond labeling.

In mapping previous attempts to account for this new repertoire, Linda Hutcheon deserves a special mention. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, she makes various references to the multiple ways in which opera and film interact.^x Furthermore, together with Michael Hutcheon, she wrote an article on “Adaptation and Opera” for a collective book on adaptation studies. This article focuses on opera *as* adaptation – including as adaptation of film. For all of their vision and breadth, what transpires in these theoretical efforts, especially when one reads the article on “Adaptation and Opera” against the backdrop of *A Theory of Adaptation*, is that the traditional *modus operandi* of opera creation still provides the gauge for interpreting both recent and less-recent practices. Opera as adaptation, as they describe it, “involves a series of steps: text adapted to libretto; libretto set to musical score; both libretto and score realized in performance.”^{xi}

The authors make it clear that the “adapted text” does not need to be a literary work. In fact, Linda Hutcheon is adamant in her emphasis that adaptation is not only about rendering a literary work in another medium. Moreover, she consistently opposes the myths of medium-specificity and *Werktreue* – which are not uncommon, especially the latter, in the field of opera.^{xii} Nevertheless, in framing *opera as adaptation* as a “series of steps,” consisting in adapting a text to a libretto, then a libretto to a score, and finally a score and a libretto to performance, Linda and Michael Hutcheon implicitly reduce the adapted work, whether literary or cinematic, to a text. And this text is seen as essentially consisting of a story – a story that, according to Linda Hutcheon’s theory of adaptation, can be rendered in three different modes. One can *tell*, *show*, or *interact* with a story.

My working assumption is that common denominators across media and genres can be as revealing as significant differences. Shifting the focus from particular individual media to the broader context of the three major ways we engage with stories (telling, showing, and interacting with them) allows a series of different concerns to come to the fore.”^{xiii}

When all is said and done, as far as this new repertoire of film-inspired or film-based operas is concerned, things would not have changed that much. Opera, not unlike cinema, continues to *show* a story. As always, the composer works on a libretto. As

always, the libretto and the score are performed on stage. The only change lies in the fact that the source of the libretto is now a film – or the story thereof.

4. Analogy or Metamorphosis?

In a study about operas deriving from films, it would be odd – and disappointing – to conclude that in the minds of composers and librettists cinema is nothing but a container of good stories. As the twenty-first century unfolds, it becomes evident that both literature and cinema offer opera creators plots and characters that are dramatically potent and reflective of contemporary realities. As Lawrence Kramer observes, apropos of American opera, “media concerns have independent interest, but they are ultimately a reflection of the pressure of national myths and cultural archetypes.”^{xiv} There is certainly a need to detect and deconstruct ideologies, but if story-telling were all that matters, then the fruitful differences, polarities, and tensions between the two art forms would be of secondary importance, if not irrelevant. This is, however, far from being the case. Even departing from how the composers and librettists elucidate their work, the reality is far more intricate and nuanced.

There is a crucial difference between Poul Ruders’s attitude, when he claims that only the story of *Dancer in the Dark* interested him in the composition of *Selma Jeřková*, on the one hand, and Hans Gefors’s declarations, on the other hand, recognizing that the plot of Hitchcock’s *Notorious* fascinated him, but asserting that the way in which such plot was filmed was equally, if not more, instrumental in shaping how the opera is composed. “Everything which is a close-up in the film becomes an aria,” he explains. “That way one can adjust the medium of film to the medium of opera, and that has been the goal.”^{xv} In other words, the mediality of film matters. As does the *singular* way in which Hitchcock explores its potentialities in this *particular* film. Gefors takes both the peculiarities of cinema as an art and the idiosyncrasies of Hitchcock as a practitioner of that art – he decides to take them, for this is indeed a matter of choice – into consideration while composing the opera.

Gefors is not alone in his interest for the technique of the close-up. In his adaptation of David Lean’s *Brief Encounter*, André Previn also paid considerable attention to the various moments in which the camera zooms in on Laura’s face, capturing the complexities of love entangled between a once-in-a-lifetime passionate encounter and enduring familial ties. The nuanced details of her expression – the intense gaze, the

dreamy smile – convey meaning in a way that neither voice-over narration nor Rachmaninoff’s music can achieve. Previn, an adept composer in both opera and film, deliberately embraces this filmic dimension. Despite accusations that *Brief Encounter* resembles film music, Frédéric Döhl convincingly argues that Previn’s opera doesn’t replicate film music but aims to create a sonic equivalent to the visual sense of intimacy and slowness suggested by the close-up. “In the case of *Brief Encounter*,” Döhl asserts, “there are crucial moments in which music is not only an ‘extension of the word’ [as the composer declared in defense against accusations of being a mere accompaniment to existing images] but rather an *extension of the image* [emphasis in the original].”^{xvi} By appropriating a filmic technique, Previn composes *cinematically*, which is not the same as composing *for cinema*. The close-up becomes a musical device – an “acoustic close-up.”^{xvii}

This is the moment when establishing a distinction between an “analogical” and a “metamorphic” conception of film adaptation into opera becomes illuminating. The crucial question is not whether the composer focuses on the narrative, visual, or sonic dimension of the film, but whether they envision their opera as an alternative to film in showing the same story in an operatic manner *or* as a medial transformation of a cinematic work. In the first case, opera and film are positioned analogically in relation to a literary work, prompting a comparison of their valences and affordances in rendering the same story. In the second case, the emphasis is on the material, formal, and medial mutations involved in transforming a film into an opera. Certainly, such a transformation does not imply a hierarchy. As Linda Hutcheon succinctly claims, “to be second is not to be secondary or inferior”.^{xviii} If anything, being second is being comparable to a palimpsest, inviting listeners, spectators, and critics to probe the superimposition of different texts and media in a single work.

The case of Philip Glass’s “Cocteau trilogy” is telling in this context. Each opera takes one of the above-mentioned components as a point of departure: *Orphée* privileges the screenplay; *La belle et la bête* dwells on the visual aspect; *Les enfants terribles* departs from the music (Bach’s *Concerto for Four Harpsichords*, which Jean-Pierre Melville used in his film adaptation of Cocteau’s novel). However, all three operas highlight the mediality of film. Even in *Orphée*, it is not the “what” of the plot, but “how” it is cinematically deployed in Cocteau’s imaginative, mirror-laden film that inspires Glass. In short, the dialogue with cinema is the true leitmotiv of the three Cocteau operas.^{xix} In *Words Without Music*, Glass observes that one of his goals in making the trilogy “was to effectively rethink the relationship of opera to film,” and that “in doing this, it would be necessary

to turn around the conventions” and recognize that “the processes of filmmaking and opera writing offer powerful alternatives to conventional thinking.”^{xx}

It is therefore essential to stress that even composers who emphasize the importance of the film’s screenplay do not necessarily reduce the film to the story. As long as the focus is on *how* that story is filmed – as is the case in Glass’s *Orphée*, but also in Previn’s *Brief Encounter* and in Gefors’s *Notorious* – the mediality of film is underscored as that with which the composers are eager to engage in dialogue. Overall, irrespective of whether composers and librettists prioritize the screenplay or not, the hallmark of the analogical conception of film adaptation into opera lies in imagining film and opera as parallel ways of telling the same story. Conversely, the metamorphic conception emphasizes the process of transformation from film to opera, where the mediality of film cannot be ignored or set aside.

These two attitudes – seeing opera in *analogy* with or as a *metamorphosis* from film – coexist today, manifesting more or less explicitly in the discourses of artists and institutions. Occasionally, they even coexist in the minds of composers and librettists themselves. My goal in drawing this distinction is not to constrain the complexity of the real, let alone categorize adherents of these distinct views into separate groups, but to provide a conceptual framework that may help us not only to map the field but also to address the two questions raised at the outset of this article: what explains the influx of new operas based on films, and, perhaps more importantly, what these operas may come to mean in the history of opera. These questions will be revisited in the final segment of this article. For now, I’ll briefly explore two operas – Adès’s *The Exterminating Angel* and Neuwirth’s *Lost Highway* – in which considerations of film mediality has accompanied the composers and librettists from the start of their projects.

5. The Drums of Calanda

For Thomas Adès and Tom Cairns, the silence that permeates Luis Buñuel’s *El ángel exterminador* – the film has no background music and features scenes with barely any dialogue – reflects the enigmatic substance of the work. This partly explains why Adès, known for cherishing the values of instability and uncertainty in art, chose the film as a source for his third opera.^{xxi} However, unlike other composers who might view the film’s silence as an auditory void to be filled by their music, Adès explicitly regards it as an integral part of the film’s inherent musicality. As he observes in an interview shortly

before the opera's premiere, "[t]he film is *very musical* [my emphasis] in another way, too, because there's an underground river of meaning which is not exactly what people are saying. This river links the spoken lines and runs through the entire situation, but only occasionally surfaces," to which Cairns adds that "[a]s is the case with all [Buñuel's] later films, *El ángel exterminador* does not have a film score."^{xxii}

An unavoidable question, which applies to both the film and the opera, revolves around the symbolism of the exterminator angel. The perplexity associated with this question is inherited from the film, which tells the story of a select group of bourgeois, aristocrats and artists unable to leave a room after attending the opera. Although Adès refrains from a direct interpretation, asserting that raising questions is more fruitful than obtaining answers, his statements hint at a partial response. After declaring that he has come "to think very much like Buñuel," thus not feeling "the need to rationalize the situation," he claims that "the exterminating angel is an absence – an absence of will, of purpose, of action."^{xxiii} Regarding the use of ondes martenot (which he uses throughout the score, mainly in association with the sense of entrapment that dominates the opera), he states that it "becomes a symbol, the voice of this exterminating angel in the sense that the instrument is heard whenever a figure says something that contributes to the situation of immobility."^{xxiv} In brief, while we may not know what the exterminating angel represents, it seems safe to say that, whatever it is, it is represented by the ondes martenot.

What interests me in these declarations is the auditory link the composer establishes between the film and the opera. The foreboding atmosphere conveyed by the film's silence is translated into the eerie sound of the ondes martenot. In a scene described in the score, where Julio, the butler, steps into the "enchanted" room, the ondes martenot is instructed to sound "as if swallowing the orchestra"^{xxv} as it precipitously descends into the low register. However, this is not the sole inspiration drawn from the film's sonic landscape. Toward the conclusion of *El ángel exterminador*, as the guests finally exit the mansion, a scene depicts a police charge on demonstrators accompanied by the sound of drums.^{xxvi} It turns out that the rhythm of these drums mirrors that of the drums of Calanda, Buñuel's hometown, where, Adès explains, "during the Holy Week, they would drum for three days and three nights."

Buñuel was obsessed by the drums of Calanda [...] and I had thought for years about putting them in the opera, until I suddenly realized that the very judgmental

interlude after Act One has the same rhythmic structure as the – unusually long – drumming rhythm in Calanda. So the drums naturally went in, which immediately brought the military quality I was looking for.^{xxvii}

The dialectics that polarizes the score of *The Exterminating Angel*, between the chilling, electronic timbre of the ondes martenot and the aggressive, rhythmic sound of the drums, presents itself as an echo of the sonic landscape of *El ángel exterminador*. In the film, it feels as though the silence enveloping nervous conversations and sporadic musical moments is violently disrupted only by the drums. In the opera, the drums are present from the outset, serving as a foreshadowing of the catastrophe hinted at in the film through visual and verbal means alone. This sense of premonition suggests another dimension of the film's influence on the opera, one that is apparent at the level of form.

Repetition, as highlighted by many readers, lies at the heart of *El ángel exterminador*. A paradigmatic example is the scene where the guests enter the mansion twice – or so suggests the reuse of the same footage. Repetition implies sameness, yet it also, as Gilles Deleuze's reading of the film intimates, hints at the possibility of the new.^{xxviii} This ambiguity permeates Buñuel's film, shaping both its narrative and construction. If the unconscious (passive) inclination to repeat, to stick to bourgeois *habitus*, an inclination that is evident in the multiplication of conventional gestures, is what keeps the guests trapped, it is their conscious (active) decision to repeat, to re-enact a past moment as exactly as possible, that frees them from paralysis at the end (at least temporarily).

Edward Venn claims that this logic of “difference and repetition” is also the driving force behind Adès's *The Exterminating Angel*. In his painstaking analysis of the score, Venn highlights “the role that repetitions play not just in structuring the material, but firstly in providing a means of representing musically and critiquing the bourgeois norms that are enacted on stage, and secondly in depicting the characters' inability to act.”^{xxix} These musical strategies range from the slight modifications characterizing multiple repetitions throughout the score to the climatic moment where, once the characters repeat all the previous gestures until Leticia's refusal to sing an aria, the long-evaded D briefly becomes the tonal center of the music.^{xxx} Moreover, the opera's recourse to a passacaglia and a waltz, along with the composer's own variations on the Sephardic song “Lavaba la blanca niña”, attests to the fact that the elaboration of repetition for the sake of difference, the formal backbone of Buñuel's film, also permeates the score of *The Exterminating Angel*. The director and the composer share the

same obsession, but once again, this obsession extends beyond a mere narrative element in a script or a libretto. It concerns the way in which, formally and materially, the film and the opera unfold in time.

A discussion of whether and how *The Exterminating Angel* dialogues with *El ángel exterminador* would be incomplete without considering the opera's first production, where librettist Tom Cairns also assumed the role of stage director (the opera premiered in the Salzburg Festival in 2016, before travelling to the Covent Garden and The Metropolitan Opera in 2017). References to the film occasionally punctuated the staging, such as a fierce-looking bear looming over the exhausted guests on a background screen and the introduction of real sheep on stage in the beginning of the performance. Reflecting on the tension between the fixity of the filmic medium and the liveness of the opera, Laura Tunbridge notes that "[the sheep's] presence emphasized the artificiality and the liveness of the operatic setting."^{xxxii} However, from the perspective of a broader discussion about the film's influence over the opera, a discussion that is even more pertinent given her focus on the live broadcast of the opera, the overall impression may have seemed rather traditional.^{xxxiii} Ultimately, the performance might strike the spectator, whether in the opera house or a movie theater, as "a stage work that happened to have derived its narrative from a film."^{xxxiii}

This might be true about the staging. Yet we must distinguish between Cairns-the-director, who collaborated with a creative team (including Adès as conductor and Hildegard Bechtler as set and costume designer), and Cairns-the-librettist. By establishing this distinction, I want to underline that the question whether the mediality of film is engaged or not in adapting a film into an opera ultimately needs to be addressed at two different levels: that of the writing of the libretto and the score, and that of the staging. Therefore, it does not follow from the fact that a staging of the opera dialogues with the film only superficially that the same applies to the opera itself.^{xxxiv} Consequently, I would refrain from claiming, as Tunbridge does, that "there is nothing terribly filmic about Adès's opera", just as I would not follow Venn in declaring that "Adès makes no attempt to replicate Buñuel's peculiarly cinematic language of repetition and difference, developing instead his own musical techniques for doing so."^{xxxv} While the means of opera, before it is staged, are not as visually determined as those of film, and therefore the influence of the film on the opera does not consist in the literal use of cinematic techniques, many aspects of *The Exterminating Angel*, including those insightfully analyzed by Venn, suggest that the film profoundly influenced the composition of the opera.

I understand, however, why both Venn and Tunbridge approach comparisons between the film and the opera with suspicion, and I share their concerns. They aim to avoid the rhetoric of “fidelity criticism,” wherein the original film serves as a benchmark to evaluate the new opera.^{xxxvi} Yet, it’s important not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Although critics, in their comparative observations, often adopt a hierarchical view that distinguishes between faithful and unfaithful adaptations of the original work, it is not necessary to proceed in this manner. To appreciate the opera’s dialogue with the film is not enshrine the latter as a model to which the former must remain faithful. Instead, it is not only possible but also desirable, in order to elevate the discussion above the atavistic clichés of musical criticism and scholarship, to consider the connection between film and opera as an inventive endeavor, whereby the film – comprising not only its story, but also its visual, aural, and dramatic components – intrigues and inspires opera creators without ever constraining their creative work.

5. The Camera of Mystery Man

Much has been written about the “operatic” in debates on the encounter of opera and film. The concept, however, remains elusive as ever. The assumption that something inherently “operatic” is what drew composers to the films they decided to turn into operas is misleading. Not only the variety of themes is striking, but the contrasts, thematic and formal, are often more fruitful, in various adaptations, than similarities. That being said, there is a commonality worth highlighting between the films selected by Adès and Neuwirth. Buñuel’s *El ángel exterminador* and Lynch’s *Lost Highway* are deeply enigmatic, lending themselves to multiple interpretations. Both films, as anodyne as it may sound, can be characterized – and have been characterized by the composers – as depicting situations with no escape. “Personally,” declares Adès, “the bigger issue that really matters [is] that there is no escape.”^{xxxvii} Neuwirth expresses a similar sentiment regarding *Lost Highway*, stating that “this impossibility of escape from a situation, this unmerciful (time) loop that can make one crazy once one gets caught up in it, presented a basic compositional challenge.”^{xxxviii}

Not unrelated to this – and most important in the context of this essay – both Adès and Neuwirth dealt with the films as multimedia objects. Just as in the case of Buñuel and Adès, this immediately concerns the sonic dimension of *Lost Highway*. Neuwirth writes that what struck her in the first place were the “various registers of the

colours of the sound of language in Lynch, from whispering to explosions of laughter,” which “seemed [to Neuwirth] to be directly suitable for music theatre as I imagine it: no beginning, no middle, no end; innumerable (architectural and emotional) spaces inside and outside; what is real and what is phantasmal?”^{xxxix} Playing with the limits between the real and the phantasmal, the score is as decisive as the libretto (co-written by the composer with Elfriede Jelinek).

Similar to Adès and Cairns, Neuwirth and Jelinek followed the events of the film with only a few deviations.^{xl} But Neuwirth, more than Adès, is concerned with how the opera will be staged. Like any opera composer, she has to wait for, negotiate with, and ultimately rely on the ideas of the stage directors. Yet, a strong preoccupation with what will be visible on stage during the opera performance is immediately evident in the score itself. Neuwirth explained her motivations in a short essay on the opera:

Although the composer no longer gives many instructions, since – in the composer’s experience – a score for music theatre is used as people want to use it, one thing must be done without fail, namely use the video. The reasons for this are as follows: The ‘ultimate threat’ proceeds from a point-of-view shot (in the case of *Lost Highway* apparently the Mystery Man with a built-in camera eye, who sees everything and therefore perhaps records and manipulates everyone and everything, including desires and yearnings), but which cannot be clearly attributed to one of the main protagonists on stage and therefore evokes the constantly present ghost of a free-floating view. The video was also intended to adopt an impossible subjectivity, which cannot be localised within a narrative space. [...] That is why the desired use of video is not intended as decor, but rather as an integral component of the stage space.^{xli}

As mentioned earlier, Neuwirth and Jelinek preserved the ambiguities and complexities of Lynch’s film. This approach was not necessarily expected, given the intricate and ultimately incomprehensible plot of *Lost Highway*. Like Bunuel’s *El ángel exterminador*, Lynch’s *Lost Highway* avoids easy interpretation. However, unlike the former, the sequence of events in the latter is unclear, and one strategy for making sense of it is to interpret the central part of the film as a delirium.

In this delirium, Fred, who is married to Renée and seems to have murdered her in a fit of madness, forgets everything. Yet, whatever happened and was repressed emerges

as a nightmarish dream in which Fred becomes Pete (not anymore a depressed and insecure musician, but a virile and confident young man, working as a mechanic) and Renée becomes Alice (although Renee is a brunette and Alice is a blonde, both ultimately represent for him the *femme fatale* which he will never be able to fully comprehend and possess). In other words, as Slavoj Žižek suggests, the plot follows a circular movement. What is seen in the middle is a fantasy of the main character, a fiction within the fiction.^{xlii}

What seems clear and, more importantly, has fascinated Neuwirth is the uncertainty confronting the spectator's eyes and ears. What is real? What is not? Does it matter? Judging by Neuwirth's opera, where this ambiguity is systematically explored, drawing such distinction is less important than the film's resistance to interpretation until the end. It is this sense of ontological indeterminacy that the composer is eager to appropriate into her operatic adaptation – which can only be achieved by envisioning her opera as more than just a story set to words and music. The words and the music matter, of course, but not in isolation from what is visible on stage. Understanding this is crucial in interpreting what the composer means when she asserts that the “score for music theatre is used as people want to use it,” before noting that, as per the score itself, “one thing must be done without fail, namely use the video.”^{xliii}

This is not merely a case of a composer safeguarding authorial privileges. It's a more complex issue at its core. Unlike so many composers, who may want to influence the staging, Neuwirth envisioned her opera as a multimedia metamorphosis of a film from the very beginning, where time and space coordinates become porous. In other words, she considered the dramatic, sonic, and visual dimensions of the film, much like Glass, Gefors, and Adès did. And she did so with the singularity of Lynch's film in mind, in which the fragile threshold between reality and dream or nightmare is conveyed both visually and aurally. This is why the video – the very presence of a video – is so important to Neuwirth. As she puts it, “[s]ince in *Lost Highway* there is no escape from beginning to end, the video should create a constant flickering space of sounds and images correlated with the music.”^{xliv}

Just as the camera of the Mystery Man in the film seems to connote events as they happened rather than as Fred remembers them, in the opera – a multimedia enterprise devised by the composer – the duality between stage and screen, implying the tension between reality and dream, objectivity and subjectivity, proves to be formally decisive.^{xlv} In constructing this ambivalence, the visual and the sonic are inextricably connected.

Firstly, the duality between live acting and singing on stage and video projection on screen is emphasized by the interplay between performed and recorded music. Secondly, while singing seems to convey the dream-like Act II (which begins when Fred becomes Pete), Act I is dominated by declamation. Thirdly, the moments of transition in which the video fades in or out (without being turned off) are accompanied by spatialization effects. When the video fades out, the sound moves to the loudspeakers scattered in the room, whereas when the video fades in, the sound is concentrated on the stage. The ultimate realization of these effects depends on the actual staging. Yet, Neuwirth has collaborated with directors – namely with Yuval Sharon for a 2018 production at the Oper Frankfurt – who appear to have embraced and expanded many of the composer’s insights.^{xlvi}

What is clear, even before considering specific stagings, is that Neuwirth’s interest in Lynch’s film is inseparable from her desire to rethink the articulation of temporal, spatial, narrative, visual, and sonic dimensions in opera. Such an exploration cannot be undertaken unless the film is engaged in all of its components as a multimedia totality rather than as a new vehicle for telling a certain story.

As I conclude, I want to address the two questions outlined above. Why, only since the turn of the century, did contemporary composers and librettists turn to existing movies as a basis for their musical-theatrical collaborations? And what does the emergence of this trend mean – or may come to mean – in the history of opera?

My answer to this first question is relatively simple, and it applies to this repertoire as a whole. Overall, the proliferation of operas based on films bears witness to a significant shift in the way the relationship between opera and cinema is perceived in late modernity. Today, opera and cinema are considered on equal footing – if not in terms of popularity, at least in terms of prestige and relevance. This view reflects the overcoming of two anxieties that dominated the intersection of opera and film in the twentieth century: cinema’s “anxiety of influence,” which prevailed for several decades as the art of the moving image took its first steps, and opera’s “anxiety of obsolescence,” which took over in the post-war years as the lyric genre faced paradoxical accusations of being either too elitist in the context of popular culture or too accessible in the context of the avant-garde. These anxieties now belong to the past. Today, as we move forward in the twenty-

first century, opera appears to take center stage in an artistic scene increasingly dominated by multimedia experimentation. It is this new mentality, in which the very notion of a hierarchy between opera and cinema no longer makes sense that *explains* why composers and librettists have recently become prone to recreating films as operas.

Yet, this was not the only relevant question in the debate. The second one, concerning the historical and artistic significance of this operatic trend, deserves a subtler answer. In fact, it may lead to two different answers depending on the perspective taken to tackle it. It is here that the contrast between a vision that frames operas based on films in terms of an analogy between opera and film and another vision that sees it as a metamorphosis between two multimedia works – the contrast that I sought to outline in this article – becomes helpful. If we address the matter from the former perspective, thus understanding the new opera as telling the same story by other means, the ultimate significance of this new repertoire is admittedly quite modest. As Linda Hutcheon and Lawrence Kramer reflected, cinema has become a well-established repository of modern and post-modern myths that opera no longer hesitates to appropriate. After all, as Lawrence Kramer observed, “stories, perhaps, are what haunt us the most; operas are only another means of retelling them.”^{xlvii} It is important to acknowledge that today stories circulate freely through literary, operatic, and filmic media. But it is also important, and ultimately inevitable, to recognize that this acknowledgment does not invite us to reimagine opera in relation to other arts or as a creative process. Put simply, just as over the twentieth century cinema recreated operatic stories, it would now be the turn of opera to appropriate and reshape cinematic stories. It would be as simple – and dull – as that.

In contrast, if we ponder the metamorphosis entailed by the transformation of films into operas, we may need to consider some of them, at least those in which the peculiarities of the filmic medium is appropriated in a deliberate, artistically fecund manner, as leading protagonists of a deeper mutation. In summoning the mediality of film, with everything that characterizes it, from the technique of the close-up to the editing process with all the elaboration of sound and image relationships permitted by it, opera is transformed through contact with film. Curiously, this is what is already happening – in parallel to (or even regardless of) this new trend. Since the late twentieth century, with or without operas based on films, new media and technologies of audiovisual reproduction and remediation have been transforming opera as a performing art.

It is perhaps too soon to evaluate how deeply this twenty-first-century trend will inscribe itself in the history of opera. Indeed, whether it will persist or recede after the COVID-19 crisis is still an open question. Curiously enough, although the pandemic-related circumstances have illuminated the importance of screen media in reimagining the mediality of opera, they have also provoked a slight rarefaction of operatic projects based on previous films.^{xlvi} It would be ironic if the influence of cinema on opera would have little to do with projects embracing the challenge of turning a film into an opera. This irony, however, would not be unprecedented. The same happened in the twentieth century, when the impact of opera on cinema bore fruit; no one would deny that the cinematic works in which the operatic influence is the clearest are not necessarily the ones based on individual operas. Whether or not history will repeat itself in this regard, only time will tell.

What is certain is that however resilient this trend might prove itself to be, it already indicates a creative turnabout. As such, it invites spectators, critics, and scholars to revise old and less-old assumptions about opera as an art form in which adaptation continues to play a central role. To frame the phenomenon beyond the conventions that an analogy between opera and film only contributes to reifying, in an attempt to pondering the intermedial frictions inherent in the metamorphosis of a cinematic work into musical-theatrical one, is the first step – or so this article aims to suggest – to fully grasp its artistic complexity, potential, and significance.

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ⁱ See, among the multiple studies available, Jeremy Tambling, *Opera, Ideology, and Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); David Schroeder, *Cinema's Illusions, Opera's Allure: The Operatic Impulse in Film* (New York: Continuum, 2002); Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005); *When Opera Meets Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Jeongwon Joe, *Opera as Soundtrack* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

ⁱⁱ In addition to Philip Glass, at least three other composers took a film as a basis for an opera before the year 2000: René Koering (*La Lune vague*, 1982), Giorgio Battistelli (*Teorema*, 1992), and André Previn (*A Street Named Desire*, 1998). Appearing over the span of twenty years, these musical-theatrical works emerge as exceptions. It was only around the turn of the century that sporadic endeavors gave way to a noteworthy stream of new works.

ⁱⁱⁱ Poul Ruders (online interview), “Poul Ruders on Selma Jezková,” Dacapo Records, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hUU-dZIOSc> (accessed April 20, 2022).

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- iv Missy Mazzoli (online interview), “Missy Mazzoli on Breaking the Waves,” Edinburgh International Festival, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MQESY6CW2hM> (accessed April 20, 2022).
- v William Bolcom (online interview), “A Wedding,” Indiana University, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CU5KV665OrM> (accessed April 20, 2022).
- vi Linda and Michael Hutcheon, “Adaptation and Opera,” in Thomas Leitch (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 305-323 (here 305).
- vii Kamilla Elliott, *Theorizing Adaptation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.
- viii Michael Halliwell, “Film as Opera: Three Perspectives on *Still Life* and *Brief Encounter*,” in Walter Bernhart and David Francis Urrows (eds), *Music, Narrative and Moving Image* [Word and Music Studies, vol. 17] (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 208-230.
- ix Yuell E. Chandler, “Opera and the Modern Culture of Film: The Genesis of Cinemopera, Its Intertextuality and Expansion of Operatic Source Material” [PhD Dissertation] (Lexington, Kentucky: 2012).
- x Linda Hutcheon even considers some operas based on films, such as William Bolcom’s *A Wedding* (2004) and Philip Glass’s *Beauty and the Beast* (1995). Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 48.
- xi Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, “Adaptation and Opera,” 306.
- xii See Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 1-32 and 33-77.
- xiii Ibid., xiv. See, also, *ibid.*, 22: “An emphasis on process allows us to expand the traditional focus of adaptation studies on medium-specificity and individual comparative case studies in order to consider as well relations among the major modes of engagement: that is, it permits us to think about how adaptations allow people to tell, show, or interact with stories.”
- xiv Lawrence Kramer, “The Great American Opera: *Klinghoffer*, *Streetcar*, and the Exception,” *The Opera Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 1: 66-80 (here 74).
- xv Hans Gefors (online interview), “Hans Gefors and Kerstin Perski discuss their opera *Notorious*, based on Alfred Hitchcock’s film,” Göteborgsoperan, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8P2zWoh_YyM (accessed April 20, 2022).
- xvi Frédéric Döhl, “Brief Encounter: Zu David Leans Film (1945) und André Previns Oper (2009),” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, Band 70, Heft 4 (2013): 311-332 (here 332) [my translation].
- xvii Ibid., 125.
- xviii Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, xiii.
- xix See, on this issue of *Opera Quarterly*, Delphine Vincent, “Philip Glass’s Cocteau Trilogy, or the Multiple Ways of Adapting Film into Opera”.
- xx Philip Glass, *Words Without Music: A Memoir* (London: Faber & Faber, 2016), 372-3.
- xxi See Thomas Adès and Tom Service, *Thomas Adès: Full of Noises (Conversation with Tom Service)* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012).
- xxii Christian Arseni, “Interview with Thomas Adès and Tom Cairns about the World Premiere of *The Exterminating Angel*” [originally published as “Why Do We Ever Do Anything?: Thomas Adès and Tom Cairns Talk About *The Exterminating Angel*,” program booklet for *The Exterminating Angel*, Salzburger Festspiele, July 22-August 31, 2016, 46-57], *Seen and Heard International*, <https://seenandheard-international.com/2016/07/new-interview-with-thomas-ades-and-tom-cairns-about-the-operas-world-premiere/> (accessed March 15, 2022).
- xxiii Ibid.
- xxiv Ibid.
- xxv Quoted on Alex Ross, “An Explosive Opera of ‘The Exterminating Angel,’” *The New Yorker*, August 22, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/22/thomas-ades-the-exterminating-angel> (accessed April 20, 2022).
- xxvi Despite Buñuel’s refusal to offer an interpretation of his film, this scene clearly evokes the conservatism of the rich and powerful.
- xxvii Arseni, “Interview with Thomas Adès and Tom Cairns.”
- xxviii See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 130-133.
- xxix Edward Venn, “Thomas Adès’s *The Exterminating Angel*,” *Tempo* 71 (2017): 21-46 (here 35).
- xxx Ibid., 35-46 (esp. 45-46).
- xxxi Laura Tunbridge, “Recording the Exterminating Angel,” *The Opera Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 1-2: 63-76 (here 66).
- xxxii Specifically about the performance of November 8, 2017, featured in The Met Live in HD series, see Christopher Morris et al. “Review Colloquy: The Exterminating Angel,” *The Opera Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 4: 355-372, with contributions by Laura Tunbridge, João Pedro Cachopo, Francesca Placanica, Candida Mantica, and Áine Sheil.

^{xxxiii} Tunbridge, “Recording the Exterminating Angel,” 74.

^{xxxiv} In principle, there is no contraction between claiming that an opera, say Adès’s *Exterminating Angel*, bears the traces of a dialogue with the film and recognizing that its staging (or, to be more precise, one of its stagings) does not. Conversely, even an opera composed “against the grain” of the film, say Ruders’s *Selma Ježková*, might be staged in a way that reintroduces the film into the equation.

^{xxxv} Tunbridge, “Recording the Exterminating Angel,” 74; Venn, “Thomas Adès’s *The Exterminating Angel*,” 22.

^{xxxvi} Venn gives several examples of this, which include Andrew Clements claiming in *The Guardian* that “there are moments in Adès’s version when one wonders if the effort [of reworking a masterpiece from one art form in another] has been entirely worthwhile” or Anthony Tommasini commenting in *The New York Times* that “Mr. Adès’s bleak, raw take on Buñuel’s film is not exactly how I think of the story.” See Venn, “Thomas Adès’s *The Exterminating Angel*,” 22; Andrew Clements, “The Exterminating Angel review – Adès delivers unmissable operatic adaptation,” *The Guardian*, July 29, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/jul/29/the-exterminating-angel-review-thomas-ades-salzburg> (accessed April 20, 2022); Anthony Tommasini, “In This Opera, You Can Depart, but You Can Never Leave,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/30/arts/music/review-thomas-ades-the-exterminating-angel-opera-salzburg-festival.html> (accessed April 20, 2022).

^{xxxvii} Arseni, “Interview with Thomas Adès and Tom Cairns.”

^{xxxviii} Olga Neuwirth, “Afterthoughts on *Lost Highway*: A ‘Waiting for Godot’ of Passion and Closeness – A Test Arrangement about Futility,” in *Olga Neuwirth | Lost Highway* [booklet] (Vienna: Kairos, 2006), 37.

^{xxxix} Ibid.

^{xl} For example, the car chase scene – which, according to Neuwirth, would be hard to render on stage – was replaced by an episode in which the rage of Mr. Eddy is directed against someone smoking, despite the prohibition to do so, in a garage.

^{xli} Neuwirth, “Afterthoughts,” 38-9.

^{xlii} Slavoj Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch’s Lost Highway* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

^{xliii} Ibid., 38

^{xliv} Ibid.

^{xlv} A key scene in the film is when Fred explains to the cops investigating the enigmatic appearance of a video tape recording the inside of the couple’s house that the reason why he hates video cameras is that he “like[s] to remember things in [his] own way. [...] How [he] remember[s] them. Not necessarily the way they happened.”

^{xlvi} On Yuval Sharon’s stagings of Neuwirth’s opera, see, on this issue of *Opera Quarterly*, Nicholas David Stevens, “Leveling Up in Oper Frankfurt’s *Lost Highway* (2018)”.

^{xlvii} Kramer, “The Great American Opera,” 67.

^{xlviii} See, on the COVID 19 pandemic’s impact on the opera world, João Pedro Cachopo, *The Digital Pandemic: Imagination in Times of Isolation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 83-89.