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The audiovisual recreation of operas filmed in theaters: An analysis of Don Giovanni by W. A. Mozart

Abstract

This article analyzes select opera films produced during the 20th and 21st centuries by international opera houses to determine whether, when the diegesis of these films is recreated, an attempt is made for the films to also reflect the conventions of operatic performance. We performed content analysis on 29 filmed versions of the opera Don Giovanni by W.A. Mozart and the end of the first act therein by evaluating 44 variables related to three categories that are central to translating the original story to the new audiovisual discourse: the recreation of time and space and the use of scenery. The main results reveal that in translating Don Giovanni to audiovisual media, the films continue to be influenced by the institutional conventions of operatic theater. In relying on the original performance, these films, even in the 21st century, do not exhibit full narrative autonomy. Our article proposes several ways to better adapt –from a cinematographic perspective– these scenic representations based on elements such as depth of field or scenery, without the need for resources greater than those already available to opera houses.

Keywords

Diegesis, film, audiovisual media, performing arts, audiences, audiovisual recreation, audiovisualization, filmed operas.

1. Introduction

Since the early 20th century, the translation of opera into audiovisual language has made it possible to appreciate these performances beyond the opera house (Citron, 2000; Vanderbeeken, 2011). For this example of the performing arts, this translation has been considered a complex process, as it is influenced by the original performance in the theater (Adorno, 2006; Auslander, 2008; Zizek & Dolar, 2002). Thus far, the recreation of opera for different screens has been determined by at least two opposing vectors. On the one hand, essential elements of the original work, such as the music, *mise en scene*, and libretto, have influenced the aesthetic and language of the resulting films (Villanueva-Benito, 2014). On the other hand, the use of specific codes different from those of the stage, such as those of cinematography or videography, has modified operas that have been translated to the new medium (Anderson, 2011; Barker, 2012; Vladica & Davis, 2013).

According to the existing literature¹, for more than 100 years, the effort to translate opera to media such as film, television and video has given rise to so-called filmed opera, an audiovisual subgenre of musical cinema that does not always follow its conventions. There are two basic types of filmed opera: opera as a document—that is, filming carried out in theaters during performances or using previously employed productions—and opera recreated for narrative purposes, produced on a set or in natural settings but using the conventions of fiction film (Radigales & Villanueva, 2019, p. 153).

Although, throughout history, the majority of films have belonged to the first category, it is undeniable that there have also been many films belonging to the second category, possessing a full audiovisual identity independent of the original performance. *Shadow operas*, *opera films*, *televised operas*, *melo operas* and *video operas* are good examples. These are different modalities of films composed based on the recreation of preexisting operas or condensed fragments of original works; alternatively, their theme and composer belong to the arena of lyrics (Villanueva-Benito, 2014). Among the variety of existing films of this type, the subgenres of *television opera* and *filmed opera*, standardized in the mid-20th century in Europe and the United States, have been considered authentic adaptations for the media of film and television and have been successful from an artistic and audiovisual perspective. Complete diegetic identity and autonomy have been recognized in many films belonging to both subgenres, achieved owing to the collaboration of filmmakers such as Ingmar Bergman, Joseph Losey, Hans Jürgen Syberbeg and Jean-Pierre Ponelle. Indeed, these well-known adaptations have been so successful that were able to satisfy a commercial market of their own that lasted from 1930 until the late 1990s (Citron, 2000, pp. 4–19; Schroeder, 2002, p. 321). In recent decades, the production of these films has been declining because of factors including the appearance of businesses and live broadcasts in movie theaters in HD (Nuckols, 2017).

However, in the 20th century and, in particular, the 21st century, the subgenre of filmed opera was nourished primarily by the first type of film, consisting of what has been considered a mere filming of an original performances in a theater. These productions have sought to respect stylistic conventions and remain loyal to the original performance over acquiring audiovisual diegetic autonomy (Senici, 2010). As we have pointed out, in most 21st-century films made for cinema, television or video, there has also been a tendency to associate loyalty to the original work with a type of audiovisual discourse that is not immersive but, rather, transparent and limited in audiovisual terms (Anderson, 2011; Cenciarelli, 2013; Levin, 2011; Senici, 2010).

A remarkable number of academic works have studied the audiovisual language employed in filmed operas belonging to the second type, adaptations that are created using the criteria of audiovisual fiction and that ensure that this language, in part subordinate to the live performance, presents particularities (Citron, 2000; Schoeder, 2002). We believe that the wide spectrum of films recorded in theaters comprising the first type of subgenre of filmed opera also present particularities in the audiovisual recreation of the story and that they should be studied.

In addition to being set in a space and time specific to the text and using the original music from the story, giving life to the characters and action, the new audiovisual diegesis seeks to translate the style, conventions and certain aesthetic references specific to the art form of opera and its traditional social function (Pierson, 2005, p. 148). The fiction recreated

¹ There is an abundant academic literature regarding the relationships between opera and audiovisual media. In this article, the aim is not to analyze these relationships, but some examples of the main authors of international references are cited here: Jean-Paul Bourre, Gianfranco Casadio, Marcia J. Citrón, Richard Fawkes, Michal Grover-Friedlander, David Schroeder, Jeremy Tambling and Ken Wlaschin.

in operatic films seeks to achieve credibility not only with respect to a certain work but also with respect to the opera as a world that possesses specific practices, conventions and values and with respect to opera as a live presentation that includes circumstantial elements such as the theater in which it takes place or the specific production involved: the director, orchestra, actors, stage direction or cycle it was part of, among others (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). Thus, beyond audiovisual language, through audiovisual practices such as scenography, shot selection, artistic direction, editing, lighting, scenery and sound recording, the diegesis of these films is constructed, on the one hand, through a classical cinematographic narrative—after all, they are films—and, on the other hand, based on the legacy of institutional and presentational codes of the performing arts in opera houses.

In this article, we focus specifically on the first type of audiovisual film, which, despite having been recorded from an original stage work, arises with the intention of being distributed beyond the theater, which means that such films are not geared only toward operatic audiences. As with the use of language in filmed operas of the second type, which are under exclusively cinematographic criteria, the way in which the diegetic time and space of operas recorded in theaters and stage sets are translated to the screen, although seeking in part to safeguard fidelity to the original work, can be better defined if its elements are studied and applied based on the criteria of fiction film (Morris, 2010; Steichen, 2011).

The main objective of this study is to analyze the way in which opera films aimed at making this art available beyond the stage seek to recreate the original diegetic time and space through elements of audiovisual language and scenography. It also aims to examine the way in which, in doing so, such films recreate the circumstances of the original work in the theater. To achieve this general objective of our article, we note two more specific objectives:

- To identify how some audiovisual practices have been employed (such as set design, shot selection, editing and the use of certain recording techniques) in the creation of operatic recordings in theaters to determine whether they are used in a way that generates a diegesis that is realistic in cinematographic terms and that is capable of providing the work with greater audiovisual comprehensibility; and
- To determine whether, with the incorporation of sophisticated systems of recording and retransmission in theaters in the 21st century, the films produced present any differences in the audiovisualization of performances.

2. Sample

To carry out the analysis, it seemed appropriate to select a single title, the audiovisual production of an opera of international renown, in this case, *Don Giovanni* by W.A. Mozart. We chose *Don Giovanni* because it is one of the musical works having the greatest number of film, television and video versions over the last 70 years (DuMont, 2000; Will, 2011, pp. 32–65). The first cinematographic version of *Don Giovanni* that has been preserved is an English film produced by the London Opera Company in 1947. Since then, *Don Giovanni* has been brought to the big screen repeatedly and was reinterpreted for television more than 12 times during the 1950s. Prior to 2000, 54 audiovisual versions of the opera were recorded. Most of them were television broadcasts of theatrical productions by theaters such as the Zürich Opera, the Regio di Parma Theater and the Metropolitan Opera House (MET) in New York (Barnes, 2003). In the 21st century, the international appetite for this opera has not waned. According to data from Operabase International, there are more than 250 productions of *Don Giovanni* per year in Europe.

We gathered a sample of 29 audiovisual versions created from the second half of the 20th century to the second decade of the 21st century. To define the sample, we take as a reference the *Encyclopedia of Opera on Screen: A Guide to More Than 100 Years of Opera Films, Videos, and DVD*, published by Ken Wlaschin in 2004. This directory contains fact sheets on operatic audiovisual products that have been brought to the screen in the United States and Europe

during the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. Of the 23 entries for *Don Giovanni* that are recorded in the second edition, we analyzed 12. We sought to have our sample include works produced in theaters or on sets, in different countries, and covering the greatest possible number of years (to study possible changes). We also sought out productions that were internationally relevant (whether based on the theater, director or cast) and a variety of original recording formats (VHS, DVD or *streaming*), and logically, they had to be available. We used these same criteria to enrich the sample for the 20th century and to add the 11 films corresponding to the first decades of the 21st century.

Below is a list of the works composing the sample for our study:

Table 1: Works in chronological order from 1954 to 2013.

| Year | Type of audiovisual product | Audiovisual format for distribution | Record label | Musical director | Audiovisual/art director | Language and duration |
|---------|--|---|---|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| 1954 | Telecast from a television studio; recorded without an audience | Salzburg Festival production for television; film recorded in a studio in Vienna | Deutsche Grammophon, Unitel | Paul Czinner | Herbert Graf | Italian, black and white, 129' |
| 1960 | Telecast from a studio for television: broadcast on Radiotelevisione Italiana of Milan (RAI) | Telecast by RAI on demand for national television | Videoartists International Inc, RAI Trade | Francesco Molinari-Pradelli | Giacomo Vaccari | Italian, black and white, 163' |
| 1961 | Theater recording: Deutsche Opera Berlin | Production filmed live for German television and broadcast on demand one day after the performance (September 23, 1961) | ArtHaus Musik | Ferenc Fricsay | Rolf Unkel | Italian, black and white, 166' |
| 1978 | Theater recording: Metropolitan Opera House (MET) in New York | Production filmed live to be broadcast on demand from the MET for public television | Pioneer Classics PC | Richard Bonyngne | Herbert Graf | Italian with English subtitles, color, 190' |
| 1980 | Theater recording: Gran Teatre del Liceu | Production for national television recorded live with mobile equipment and broadcast on national television | Gran Teatre del Liceu | Alexander Sander | Jose Luis Mendizabal | Italian, color, 173' |
| 1986 | Theater recording: Victoria State Opera | Theater production recorded live to be broadcast on demand by a channel in Melbourne | Australian Broadcasting Corporation | Richard Dival | Stephen Jones | Italian, color, 180' |
| 1987 | Theater recording: Vienna Philharmonic; archival product distributed for home video | Production at the Vienna Philharmonic, broadcast on demand from the theater as part of the Salzburg Festival program | Sony Classical | Herbert von Karajan | Claus Viller | Italian, color, 193' |
| 1987-88 | Theater recording: Teatro alla Scala (La Scala Opera House) Milan; archival product distributed for home video | Theater production: Teatro alla Scala in Milan for a live rebroadcast by RAI Italy | Opus Arte | Ricardo Muti | Giorgio Strehler | Italian with English subtitles, color, 176' |
| 1988 | Theater recording: Covent Garden | Production for BBC Television recorded in the theater by the Royal Opera House of London | ROH | Colin Davis | Peter Wood | Italian, color, 178' |
| 1990 | Theater recording: Vienna Philharmonic; archival product distributed for home video | Broadcast on demand for national television but recorded live in the theater | Coproduction of Channel 3/sat | Claudio Abbado | Not listed in credits | Italian with English subtitles, color, 176' |
| 1990 | Theater recording: the MET | Production for BBC Television, recorded in the theater by the Royal Opera House of London | The Metropolitan Opera | James Levine | Brian Large | Italian, color, 179' |
| 1990 | Telecast from a television studio in Vienna: broadcast by PBS | Original production for the Pepsico Summerfare Festival and the International Performing Arts Festival of New York; reworked in the studio for subsequent television broadcast at Emil Berliner Studios in Vienna | DECCA | Craig Smith | Peter Sellars | Italian with English subtitles, color, 190' |
| 1991 | Theater recording: Cologne Opera | Theater production in Cologne for on demand television broadcast | ArtHaus Musik | James Conlon | Michael Hampe/ | Italian with English |

The audiovisual recreation of operas filmed in theaters: An analysis of Don Giovanni by W. A. Mozart

| | | | | | José Montés Baquer | subtitles, color, 173' |
|-----------|---|--|---------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1991 | Theater recording: Prague National Theater | Production at the Prague National Theater for on demand television broadcast | Supraphon | Charles Mackerras | Michal Caban | Italian with English subtitles, color, 156' |
| 1995 | Telecast from a television studio: broadcast by ZDF/3sat | Production of Decca London staged with marionettes at the Salzburg Marionette Theater, presented by Peter Ustinov, and recorded and broadcast on demand by the television channel ZDF/3sat | DECCA London | Erich Leinsdorf | Volker Weiker | Italian, color, 153' |
| 1996 | Theater recording: Teatro La Fenice in Venice for national television | Live recording from the Teatro La Fenice in Venice for live and on demand broadcast by the channel RAITRE | Canal Raitre | Isaac Krabtchevsky | Ilio Catani | Italian, color, 176' |
| 1998 | Theater recording: Aix-En-Provence Festival | Production during the Aix-en-Provence Festival recorded for possible on demand television broadcast | Bel Air Classiques | Daniel Harding | Peter Brook/Vincent Bataillon | Italian, color 187' |
| 2000 | Telecast from theater on demand: the MET for PBS; recorded in October of 2000 | Restaging of the popular production by Zeffirelli in 1990; recorded on demand and broadcast on television two months later nationwide (December 27, 2000) | Deutsche Grammophon | James Levine | Franco Zeffirelli/Gary Halvorson | Italian with English subtitles, color, 191' |
| 2001 | Recording from theater: Opernhaus de Zürich (Zürich Opera House) | Theater production for German television | Opernhaus Zürich | Nikolaus Harnoncourt | Jürgen Flimm/Brian Large | English, color, 187' |
| 2002 | Theater recording: Gran Teatre Liceu | Theater production for subsequent distribution on DVD | Opus Arte | Bertrand de Billy | Calixto Bieito/Toni Bargalló | Italian, color, 156' |
| 2005 | Theater recording: Teatro Real | Production at the Teatro Real for TV1 | Opus Arte | Víctor Pablo Pérez | Lluís Pasqual/Robin Lough | Italian, color, 208' |
| 2006 | Telecast from a television studio | Production of the Salzburg Festival for television; film recorded at a studio in Vienna | DECCA Music Group Limited | Daniel Harding | Martin Kusej/Karina Fibich | Italian, color, 180' |
| 2008 | Theater recording: Deneder Landse Opera | Theater production for Dutch television | Opus Arte | Ingo Metzmacher | Jossi Wieler/Misjel Vermeiren | Italian, color, 179,33' |
| 2008 | Theater recording: Baden-Baden | Production of the Innsbruck Festival for sale on DVD | SWR/Arte | René Jacobs | Vincent Lemaire/Georg Wübbolt | Italian, color, 172' |
| 2008 | Theater recording: Royal Opera House | Theater production for sale on DVD | Opus Arte | Charles Mackerras | Francesca Zambello/Robin Lough | Italian, color, 202' |
| 2008-2010 | Telecast from a television studio; recorded without an audience | Production of the Salzburg Festival for television; film recorded at the theater in Vienna | Unitel Classica | Nikolaus Harnoncourt | Brian Large | Italian, color, 177' |
| 2010 | Theater recording during the Glyndebourne Festival | Production of the Glyndebourne Festival for BBC Television; film recorded in the theater in Munich | EMI Classics | Vladimir Jurowski | Jonathan Kent/Peter Maniura | Italian, color, 194' |
| 2011 | Theater recording: Sydney Opera House | Theater production for sale on DVD | Opera Australia | Mark Wigglesworth | Göran Järvefelt/Cameron Kirkpatrick | Italian, color, 176' |
| 2013 | Theater recording: Champs-Élysées in Paris | Live recording in theater for Mezzo digital television | Mezzo | Jérémie Rhorer | François Roussillon | Italian, Color, 189' |

*Note: the sample was selected based on the year of production of the original work, not the edition of the DVD that we analyzed.

Source: Own elaboration.

To perform the analysis, we selected the end of the first act: at a party in Don Giovanni's palace, the title character tries to assault the maid Zerlina before the surprised and disturbed guests; upon being discovered, Don Giovanni accuses Leporello of the assault and escapes. We chose this fragment because it contains the spatial and temporal elements as well as the actions and characters of a film scene: a quick succession of dramatic events; the presentation of a narrative conflict and its resolution; and the intervention of all of the main characters (Will, 2011).

3. Methodology

The method used in our research was content analysis. As categories for interpreting the works, we chose three major criteria that influence diegetic recreation: the temporal conception, the recreation of space and the set design. Using this categorization, we deductively developed a broad list of variables based on the existing bibliography. Second, after an initial viewing of all of the films, which served as a pretest, we shortened the list and redefined the control questions so that there was a binary response (yes/no; this is the case, for example, for numbers 1-19 in Table 3) or a quantitative response (for example, for numbers 25 and 31). Table 2 presents the 44 variables that ultimately structured the analysis.

Table 2: List of variables studied.

| | |
|--|--|
| 1. Presence of any musical ellipsis or condensation | 26. Incorporation of long shots |
| 2. Presence of any narrative ellipsis or condensation | 27. Number of long shots |
| 3. Duration equal to or less than 150 minutes | 28. Scene closes with fade to black |
| 4. Duration equal to or more than 170 minutes | 29. Scene closes with fade to nondiegetic space of the theater |
| 5. Duration of approximately 160 minutes (length of original production) | 30. Predominance of moving shots |
| 6. Preservation of the original sound from the theatrical recording | 31. Number of moving shots |
| 7. Original sound post produced in editing | 32. Predominance of classical editing |
| 8. Sound dubbed for the film | 33. Predominance of alternative editing (through fade-outs or dissolves) |
| 9. Soundtrack perspective respected | 34. Use of transitions: dissolves (number) |
| 10. Volume of recorded sounds respected | 35. Use of transitions: fade-outs (number) |
| 11. Preservation of the environmental sound in the theater | 36. Predominance of the composition of the scene in depth of field |
| 12. Preservation of other nondiegetic sounds | 37. Predominance of the composition of the scene in a theatrical way (frontal view of the stage) |
| 13. Incorporation of other nondiegetic sounds | 38. Predominance of realistic/cinematographic acting |
| 14. Incorporation of sound effects | 39. Predominance of theatrical acting (larger gestures) |
| 15. Incorporation of visual effects | 40. Historic setting of <i>Don Giovanni</i> |
| 16. Incorporation of effects during editing of shots | 41. Anachronistic setting of <i>Don Giovanni</i> |
| 17. Incorporation of nondiegetic shots | 42. Traditional scenery and costumes |
| 18. Incorporation of nondiegetic shots during the scene | 43. Nontraditional scenery and costumes |
| 19. Incorporation of nondiegetic shots before or after the scene | 44. Photography and lighting compatible with audiovisual editing |
| 20. Typology of nondiegetic shots | |
| 21. Typology of diegetic shots of the narrative world | |
| 22. Shot/reverse shot relationship: medium and full | |
| 23. Shot/reverse shot relationship: long shots and close-ups | |
| 24. Incorporation of close-ups | |
| 25. Number of close-ups | |

Source: Own elaboration.

Forty-four variables were analyzed in 29 films to achieve a more interpretive analysis that maintains a holistic view, which is necessary when evaluating audiovisual recreation as a whole.

This analysis was accompanied by a vast bibliographic and hemerographic review of audiovisual productions of *Don Giovanni*; additionally, documents provided by the producers of the films were consulted.

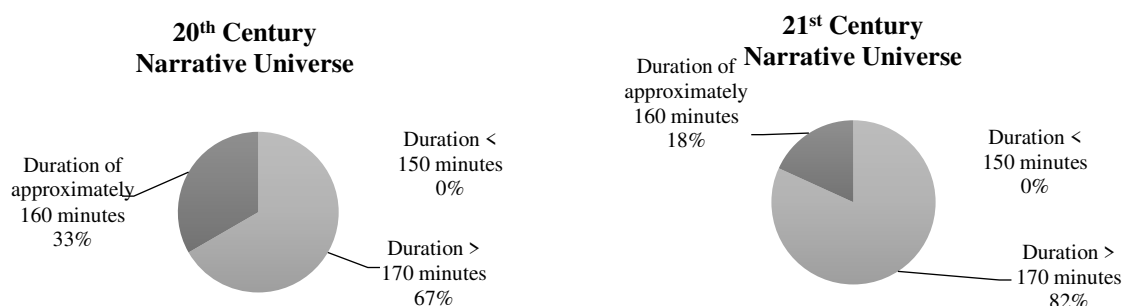
4. Results of the analysis

4.1. The conception of time and sound of the diegesis in films of *Don Giovanni*

4.1.1. Temporal representation: broadening the duration

The content analysis revealed significant data regarding the temporal duration of the opera *Don Giovanni* in its audiovisual form. First, the results of our study demonstrate that the tendency of on-screen versions of *Don Giovanni* is to respect the original length of 160 minutes of music regardless of the temporal conventions required by the story in its translation to the audiovisual medium. This duration is significantly longer than a standard film, considering that today, productions that last approximately 130 minutes are considered long audiovisual productions². Thus, by completely respecting the musical length of the original work, 94% of the films do not carry out ellipses of the libretto or edit the original score. Only in the version of *Don Giovanni* filmed in 1995, which incorporates various commentaries by the presenter Peter Ustinov, are there small musical ellipses in the score to accommodate the length of the resulting film in a time that does not exceed that of the theatrical performance.

Figure 1: Percentage of productions with a duration greater than or less than the 160-minute length of the original work.



Source: Own elaboration.

Second, as shown in Figure 1, of the 94% of films that respect the musical length of the original production, 72.4% have a length that is equal to or greater than 170 minutes. From an audiovisual perspective, this second percentage is relevant because it indicates that instead of attempting to bring the work closer to an audiovisual-based rendition that is more akin to the lengths of films shown in movie theaters, these productions further expand the structure of the opera, which is already considered one of the longest artistic performances. Far from

² According to some recent publications in press, the average duration of contemporary films has decreased with respect to that in the 20th century and ranges between 80 and 130 minutes. The musical film subgenre has an average duration of 120 minutes, a considerably shorter time than the duration of an opera. See some examples of publications: <http://cinemania.elmundo.es/noticias/son-mas-largas-las-peliculas-de-los-oscar-este-ano/>; <http://www.jotdown.es/2013/08/100-anos-de-cine-a-vista-de-datos/>.

shortening the opera to adapt it to an audiovisual medium, these productions incorporate into the film's elements such as opening credits that precede the beginning of the performance. They also add brief spaces between acts that are neither narrative nor musical but, rather, preparatory, such as closing credits. It is as if the narrative was inscribed within a superstructure (Villanueva-Benito, 2014, pp. 56-98) whose purpose was to keep the theatrical institution present in audiovisual discourse and, thus, in the diegesis of the work. What matters is not only the recreation of the work itself but also the institutional circumstances in which this recreation is produced through an operatic institution or a specific artistic cast; one of these circumstances that is very relevant is place—that is, the specific theater in which the opera took place. The superstructure helps to avoid detracting from the performative aspect of the live production show and thus does not degrade the institution in which it takes place because it is an important part of the performance. Therefore, it is logical that the institution, being theatrical and linked to a specific space, would not want to disappear from the fiction that is represented.

The prolonged duration of the films contrasts with the musical condensation seen in the 20th century in some of the previously cited operas filmed for narrative purposes that were considered adaptations (Citron, 2000; Schroeder, 2002) to the audiovisual medium, such as the commissions made and conceived specifically for television by the BBC with composers such as Benjamin Britten in the 1940s (Barnes, 2003). Thus, it seems that in the 21st century, the length of works is not a criterion that is taken into account in translating stories to an audiovisual discourse and appreciation. The conditions in which a film is now viewed (a movie theater, one's couch at home or a personal computer) do not seem to matter.

4.1.2. Sonic representation: diegetic music and nondiegetic ambient sound

The conception of sound in opera films has not garnered interest in audiovisual research, which has not gone beyond aspects related to the technical quality of recordings. In our study, we sought to incorporate a group of variables in the analysis to help us determine the approach to sound in these films from the perspective of diegesis.

The results obtained for the variables focused on sound design indicate a preference for direct sound (in 93.1% of cases) over the use of techniques that help achieve greater story credibility, such as dubbing or postproduction. In only two cases in the sample are there significant modifications in the audiovisual sound (dubbing or embellishment of the audio track). These cases are the 1954 production by Paul Czinner, the DVD version of which was post produced to achieve a result that is more immersive from the perspective of sound, and the 1960 production directed by Francesco Molinari of a telecast from an Italian studio for the television channel RAI, in which the audio track was completely dubbed.

The other cases that were filmed and broadcast on demand—including productions from television studios—respect the original sound recording of the performance. The only sound modifications applied *ex post* are slight touchups that help to highlight the music above other audio elements captured in the recording that could distort the soundtrack of the film.

Additionally, in all of the recordings, nondiegetic sounds—that is, sounds that are not part of the story or the music but contribute information about a specific performance, such as audience applause or ambient sound in the theater—are filtered out. These types of nonnarrative and imperfect sounds grant the audiovisual work a theatrical realism that is difficult to achieve through other types of visual techniques.

The results corresponding to the 20th century indicate that in only 17% of the cases did the films strictly respect the volumes and perspective of the sound in relation to the focal distance of the action captured by the cameras. In the rest of the 20th-century cases and in 100% of the 21st-century sample, the relationship between sound and the physical source that produced it is respected but such that each and every musical inflection is optimally intelligible.

Therefore, the films present a hybrid form of sound editing that prioritizes direct sound but that also seeks to prevent the loss of narrative continuity of the audiovisual film by avoiding sonic imperfections that occur in the theater.

Furthermore, this type of sound editing does not incentivize the use of sound effects and other elements of cinematographic fiction that move away from correspondence with and fidelity to the original performance. It is a sound design that brings audiovisual spectators closer to the specific original performance in a theater and, at the same time, distances them from immersion in the fiction of *Don Giovanni* by making them conscious of the fact that it is a specific staging. Therefore, the sound in these films, which is more loyal to the live version than to the opera itself, helps to engage the spectator with scenic representations and specific theaters, not with the musical story itself, which, nonetheless, maintains a certain identity from the audiovisual perspective, as occurred in operas televised or filmed in the last century.

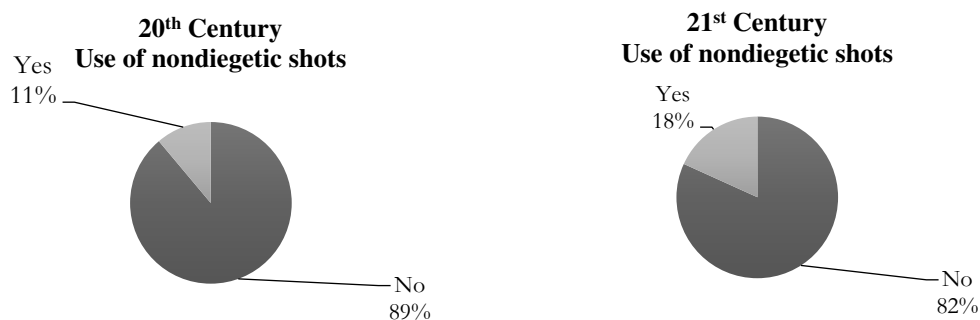
Although the creation of a plausible world in cinematographic discourse is incompatible with the incorporation of ambient sound from the theater or background noise, to the extent that an opera film requires post produced sound to be more narrative, the sound design of these films creates an engagement with the specific theatrical performance as well as the circumstances and the institution in which it was performed, not with a generic or universal narrative of the story of *Don Giovanni*.

4.2. The recreation of space in film versions of *Don Giovanni*

4.2.1. Recreation of fictional space: the hybridization of diegetic and nondiegetic perspectives

One of the results of the analysis that seemed most significant to us is the perspective adopted in the construction of audiovisual fiction in the works. Of the films, 14% include images that make reference to the nondiegetic space in which the performance takes place. That is, they show shots that do not belong to the scenic action. Figure 2 demonstrates the use of shots that are not part of the fiction of *Don Giovanni*, divided by century.

Figure 2: Percentage of works that include nondiegetic shots in the narration.



Source: Own elaboration.

The nondiegetic shots used most frequently in the films corresponding to the 20th-century sample, normally included after the close of the first act, are the image of the director of the orchestra, certain details of the instruments or their performers and a long shot of the inside of the theater in which the performance was held, always from a frontal position. No version includes shots of reactions by the public in the theater or any other detail of the physical space of the theater. As they are placed at the beginning and end of the acts, it is understood that these shots do not interfere in the operatic fiction.

However, in the 20th-century films, there are some exceptions to this *before and after* of the scenes, and nondiegetic moments are also included during the story. As an example, we

highlight the version filmed at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan in 1987, in which the end of the first act closes on an image of the face of the director, Ricardo Muti. Throughout this work, the visual reference to the director is recurrent. With this resource, the attempt is made to give the same importance to the authorship of Muti's musical direction as other strictly musical or narrative elements. Incorporating the director or members of the orchestra in a leitmotivic manner in the audiovisual narration is a common practice in these films, and in addition to prominence, it ultimately gives institutional and historical value to the production of a specific theater and cast of artists over and above the operatic title selected.

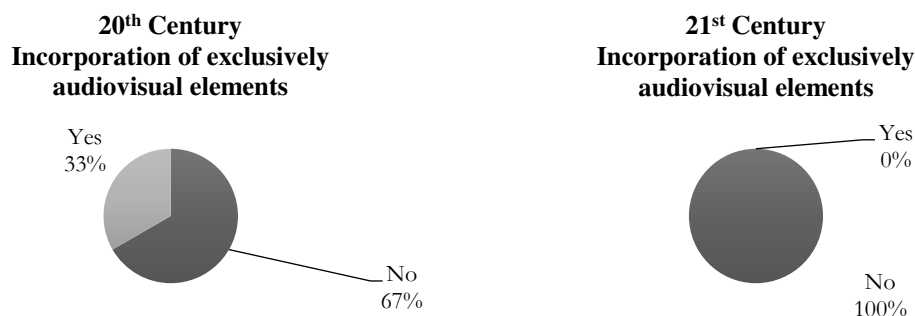
In the 21st century, the percentage of films in our sample that incorporate nondiegetic shots increases to 18.2%. Meanwhile, in these films, the diegesis is no longer respected during the development of a scene or an entire act; rather, it is interrupted repeatedly. In these films, the narrative thread is broken; unlike in the 20th century, in addition to during intermissions, shots that are not part of the action are also introduced throughout the work. We shall cite some examples: the long shot incorporated in the 2005 version by the Teatro Real de Madrid, in which one can clearly see the scenic action synchronized with the director's baton, the orchestra pit and some of the assistants in the first rows, and the 2006 Viennese version, in which an image of the orchestra is constantly filtered into the extreme long shot used for the ensemble numbers. The allusion to nondiegetic elements in audiovisual discourse, such as the curtain call or details of the performance of some instruments, helps to create a spatiotemporal structure between the audiovisual spectators and the fictionalized space.

4.2.2. Recreation of fictional space: the absence of strictly audiovisual resources

As we have seen in the previous section, while these films sporadically include shots that do not belong to the fictionalized space of *Don Giovanni* and that break with the immersive perspective typical of movies, all of them opt for an essentially diegetic approach to audiovisual discourse. Within the eminently cinematographic approach, however, it is striking that in a few cases (20.7% of the sample), elements of images or sound that are exclusively audiovisual are incorporated, such as inscriptions over the shot, texts and subtitles explaining the action or colored overlays on the image. From the cinematographic perspective, all of these elements could help to better explain the fictional story and would favor an audiovisual medium of the operatic fiction (Nogueira, 1998, pp. 44-55).

The few films that incorporate these audiovisual effects belong entirely to the 20th-century sample (33% of the total films in this period). As examples, we highlight the narrative inscriptions at the beginning of each scene introduced in the version by the MET in 2000, which are designed to better situate the spectator in the different settings in the story, and the fade to red under which the end of the first act comically disappears in the 1991 version by the Cologne Opera directed by James Conlon.

Figure 3: Incorporation of exclusive audiovisual effects in the narration.



Source: Own elaboration.

Among the total sample, the majority of the films not only fail to use the cinematographic resources that the audiovisual medium offers to improve the audiovisual credibility of the story but also frequently remind audiences of their place as outside spectators by incorporating nondiegetic shots and showing that the production is a theatrical staging. In some productions, both reminders occur simultaneously. This is true of the 1996 Venetian version, in which a stage composition consisting of only the singers on a black background was utilized to introduce, in long shots, narrative explanations of what occurred in the scene. At the same time, the orchestra and the director are shown in these long shots, such that it is possible that the spectator would not feel situated within or outside of the narrative.

In our opinion, the mix of a diegetic and immersive perspective and a nondiegetic and external perspective, facilitated by the use of resources that are not strictly narrative and a language that is not specifically audiovisual, makes it difficult for the spectator to involve him in the story, empathize with the characters or identify with the actions and sung dialog. At the same time, the lack of criteria and unity in the perspective adopted (the spectator is located neither completely within nor completely outside of the story) causes any exclusively audiovisual resource to be decontextualized and evidences the artifice of the audiovisual version instead of helping to recreate a more realistic narrative.

4.3. *Set design in film versions of Don Giovanni*

4.3.1. Use of scenography: the absence of depth of field

From an audiovisual perspective, scenography is also considered an essential element that, approached based on cinematographic criteria, could strengthen the narrative properties of the work, help to extend the space of the characters and favor a mediatic reading of this space (Scemmama & Roussell, 2007). According to studies, the staging of filmed movies based on live opera has traditionally followed the criteria and conventions of theater more than those of film (Radigales, 1999).

The results of our content analysis reveal that when composing scenes, films designed *ex ante* to bring an operatic piece to film, video or television take special care with depth of field to recreate a three-dimensional visual space, in 360°, so that the narrative world of *Don Giovanni* is extended beyond the setting of the theater. Depth of field is thus manifested as a technique capable of expanding the space of the story and translating the libretto and the action of the opera to cinematographic language (Scemama & Russel, 2007).

As examples of stage directions that enhance a more purely audiovisual depth of field, we cite the televised version directed by Peter Sellars in 1990, the version that was telecast by Italian television in 1960, and the filming for television at the Sydney Opera in 2011 conducted by Mark Wigglesworth. In all of these films, the stage direction selected and ordered the typology and internal movements of the shots based on the dramatic action. In their movements, the actors played with the distance of the camera and not that of the set. Emulating greater scenic depth avoided the need to use an extremely long shot to follow all of the dramatic action in the scene as a whole. Most importantly, it eliminated the frontal perspective of the narration typical of theatrical tradition.

These practices (nonfrontal planning and depth of field in the scenes) have not usually been employed in operas recorded in theaters due to technical limitations and the mobility of the recording equipment. The dramatic action is ordered based on a single frontal frame, structured based on a two-dimensional spatial composition, without taking advantage of the spatial possibilities offered by the dimensions of the stage from an audiovisual perspective. We found that only 24% of the films in the sample present a scenic composition that plays with the three-dimensionality of the stage.

It is logical that recordings that seek to respect the live performance utilize scenography based on the theatrical criteria that guided the original space. However, the technical

advantages and the mobility of sets have made it possible for increasingly more contemporary productions to break with theatrical frontality in the audiovisual version, with such productions having been able to take into account, from the initial phase of artistic design, that the piece would be viewed on personal or domestic screens. In our opinion, in the 21st century, a traditionally theatrical composition should not be a condition but, rather, an aesthetic option. Today, more than ever, scenography also provides options for compositions that are more three-dimensional and in line with cinematographic movement.

4.3.2. Use of scenography: theatrical tradition versus immersive composition

The composition of the scene and depth of field are not disconnected from other decisive elements of the audiovisual recreation of the diegesis of a live opera. We conclude this section by also discussing set design and the direction of actors in the films analyzed.

Based on the results obtained, in the 20th century, 77% of the productions opted for a historical setting. With the exception of just three cases (the 1996 Venetian version, the televised version directed by Peter Sellars, and the 1998 version directed by Peter Brook), all of the films carry out recreations that respect the approximate historical era and geographic region (Spain and Italy) of the original *Don Giovanni*. The scenes are constructed based on customary and historical costumes and sets of the Venetian era. Similarly, the performances of the singers and figurants respond to a theatrical approach rather than the naturalistic conception of audiovisual media.

In the 21st century, the results change significantly. Only 32% of the works recreate a customary and historical setting. However, the interpretations continue to be considered primarily theatrical; 72% of the sample presents a type of direction of the actors that gives the impression of overacting—at least compared to what is common in cinematographic media—and assumes the conventions of operatic gestures.

There are exceptions that lead us to believe that appropriate direction of actors can make on-stage opera compatible with subsequent audiovisual translation. These exceptions include the film created for the Salzburg Festival in 2008 by the Vienna Philharmonic, a version directed by Brian Large and starring Christopher Maltman. The director created mobile scenography featuring a nocturnal forest. He took into account the ability of the set to rotate on its own axis to recreate greater depth of field from the perspective that a spectator in the theater would have. The entire finale of the first act was composed based on the mobility of the set, in 360°, and special care was taken with the performances of the singers (aware that there were cameras recording close-ups), lighting, sets and *atrezzos* set in a contemporary context. During the filming, the cameras followed the dramatic action, trying not to recreate a frontal space particular to theater but, rather, an audiovisual space, such that the result was much more cinematographic. The specialized press cited the production as a good example of a fusion of the original production and its corresponding audiovisual version for DVD. This example demonstrates that when the recording equipment is not capable of adapting to the physical conditions of the theater, the conditions of the operatic exercise itself can promote a greater audiovisualization of the performance.

5. Final considerations

The audiovisual recreation of *Don Giovanni* involves a complex artistic process in the case of those films that seek to be more cinematographic and, simultaneously, to respect the version offered by a specific theater production.

In this article, we established the objective of understanding how the time and space of the lyrical scene has been translated to the screen over the last 70 years and, thus, of identifying some practices inherited from the 20th century that help opera to be better audiovisualized in the 21st century, at least for those films that were conceived with greater cinematographic intent.

The 21st century has witnessed the disappearance of the second type of filmed opera, which was produced under criteria of cinematographic fiction and which gave rise to productions that in the past were considered more narrative, such as television opera. Today, in cinema, there are few productions of filmed opera, and video opera has been limited to recordings in theaters. Our analysis revealed that the first type of film, filmed in theaters, has continued to be produced and has acquired characteristics that at present are not entirely well defined, nor do such films present a mediatic intention that makes the production more appropriate in cinematographic terms. The analysis of 44 variables helped us to determine some of the reasons for this finding.

Regarding duration, the superstructure that is added in opera films to present the story does not invigorate the psychological perception of time for the work. Opera needs this invigoration more than any other cultural production, as it is an art that is subject to an original text that is long in duration—music—that should be respected if it is to remain loyal to its essence. We believe that it should be borne in mind that the amount of time audiovisual spectators in the 21st century read is becoming shorter and shorter.

On the other hand, in certain practices of the audiovisual recreation of theatrical time and space, we found the greatest opportunities for improvement in contemporary opera films derived from live performances.

First, to ensure that, from an emotional perspective, the 21st-century spectator is more engaged with the story itself than with the recreation of that story by a specific institution, on-screen operas should avoid mixing perspectives (diegetic and nondiegetic). Moreover, in films with a clear cinematographic intent, mixing perspectives generates an undefined narrative perspective that does not help the spectator become involved in the story or the music.

Second, our analysis found that in films with a clear cinematographic intent, it is necessary to recreate a scenography that promotes greater depth of field. The three-dimensionality that is achieved with such scenography breaks with theatrical frontality and facilitates a more immersive version (shot/reverse shot), which also allows for the placement of recording equipment within the area of the action of the story (the stage).

In short, with 360° scenography, authentic audiovisual scenes can be emulated within a theater without the use of recording equipment other than that which the opera possesses today. Through scenography, acting and sets, opera can adapt its production systems to ensure that the story is compatible with its subsequent audiovisual editing and sale. Given that nontraditional settings help to break the artificial aesthetic of sets, 21st-century opera can take into account the realism required in contemporary cinematographic approaches to be more up-to-date with audiovisual media. Certainly, there is a need to develop innovative practices and recover others already tested by creators such as Jean-Pierre Ponelle and Barbara Willis Sweete that favor an authentically audiovisual discourse.

Along with scenography, these films can enhance the resources of cinematographic language that convert the text into a fully audiovisual product, such as the use of context titles, strategies of fading between shots, antenarrative music, and continuity between scenes, to avoid interrupting the fiction and to foster diegetic continuity.

In our opinion, in translating opera to film, theaters should not prioritize practices of institutional promotion over those of audiovisual production. At the same time, following the digitalization and incorporation of the latest technology in international theaters, in the 21st century, a better recreation of the space and time of operas in film and television should not mean that it is necessary to have resources beyond those that operas currently possess. The audiovisual success of opera and, by extension, of other scenic arts has more to do with an improved understanding of mediatic codes and uses than with large budgets.

Opera theaters can begin to experiment with expressive resources in their films to enhance the more audiovisual properties of the work. Throughout our article, we have

presented some ways of doing this. With these types of measures, adopted through an opera's own production systems in the theater, results can be obtained that are mediatically aesthetic and audiovisually narrative and suggestive. More importantly, these results can also be obtained despite the financial and technological constraints faced more or less by all operatic institutions today.

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