Voicing subjectivity:
Artistic research in the realization of new Vocal Music

Ms Jessica Aszodi
MA, BMus Perf

Queensland Conservatorium
Griffith University

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Abstract

The voice and vocalizing subjects have long been a discussed in philosophical, cultural and critical studies circles as places in which meaning lives and is conveyed. In recent years, through developments in musicology, artistic research and autoethnography the bodies of performers have taken on renewed significance for knowledge production. The subjectivities involved in the realization of musical works are now being unpacked and traditional notions of objectivity and concrete meaning as conveyed by musical texts, have eroded.

Voicing Subjectivity argues for vocal subjectivity as a site for exploration and experiment in practice-based, artistic research. It queries whether a conscious negotiation of performer subjectivity makes for stronger practice and realizations in new vocal music? The thesis presents two projects, realizing five new and recent notated works for voice.


Informed by and situated within literature from subjectivity studies, interdisciplinary voice studies, music-history and professional vocal practice the author describes her artistic research through three stages: preparation, performance and recording. The exegesis fleshes out issues of embodiment, the indiscr e subject, technologized voice and inter-subjectivity through an active performer’s practice in a mixed-methodological framework that integrates elements from artistic research and auto-ethnography. By applying a considered methodological structure and actively focusing the lens through which problem-solving takes place, the author demonstrates how the conscious negotiation of subjectivity enables better understanding of practice and makes the site of knowledge production, the living subject of the author, a site that is fit to purpose.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed) ____________________________
Jessica Aszodi
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How to read this thesis:

1. Please watch the videos labeled ‘principal evidence’. If at any point you wish you to see further documentation of the events described in the exegesis, video evidence of a further three performances for each project has also been included digitally as part of the thesis.

2. Please read the exegesis from the beginning up until Chapter 6.

3. Before reading Chapter 7, please listen to the studio recordings of the four works for voice and electronics (included on the album ‘Prayer for Nil’) preferably on high quality stereo speakers, or headphones.

4. If you wish to see a fuller picture of the interviews, a supplement comprised of quotes from the interviewees (grouped by categories relevant to the thesis) is included in the appendix. Also included in the appendix is a list of sample questions and the information packets with which interviewees were provided. Biographies for the relevant composers and singers are also included in the appendix.
"the speaking subject makes and unmakes himself “

(Kristeva, 1989, p. 272)

When I sing I wallow in the inextricable humanness of my instrument. I am both the author-of and the site-of my practice. My self and my sound-producing mechanism are indivisible and I am conscious that the feedback loop they constitute, is the centrifuge of my performances. I try to utilize this knowledge in my negotiation of performative choices, to construct performances that convey the most committed, embodied and nuanced realizations of notated musical works which I am cable of producing. I want to change the performative outcomes of my work as a singer by questioning established habits in my embodied practice and by maintaining an awareness of my subjective identity within the musical context. My artistic research adapts some simple methods into my daily routine to support a systematic way of paying attention to myself as I prepare-for and reflect-upon performing.

The research-practice in which I am engaged, straddles the space between classical music and musical genres informed by popular and experimental art forms. My early training was to prepare me for a career in traditional opera. Lessons I learned there have instilled in me a deep respect for the embodied nature of the voice. I view scenography, bodies, movement and other extra-musical elements as interpenetrated catalysts for musical meaning. My current work focuses mostly on new and rarely performed notated
vocal musics, though I also sing conventional classical music, improvise and collaborate on new works. Working across these varied spaces I have had much cause to question how I position myself within the different communities I move in, how my practice and subject are shaped by the positions I occupy and how my internal world is influenced by that which I’ve absorbed from my environment. I want to know how those incorporations feed the daily choices that make up my research-practice. In order to answer these questions I have applied ideas gleaned from the literature of subjectivity and voice studies to the way I understand artistic practice.

My research uses the philosophical and critical developments in the field as a point of departure, and applies that learning in a practice-led context. Unpacking the human subject is a task ongoing through all history. To state the obvious, my work will not add anything significant to that discussion in the abstract. The principal site of my research is in my body as it labours towards realizing and performing vocal music, however that body is strongly influenced by my relationship to the literature, my community and the positions I occupy within those things. I am conscious that my subjective experiences impact upon the choices I make in my everyday life as an artist. Those choices manifest in the musical pieces I perform. In the course of this writing, I hope to make explicit and transferable the way I have sought to improve my practice and its performative realizations through a more conscious negotiation of my subjectivities; transforming practice through open dialogue with the self, and the self through open dialogue with the practice.

I realize that it may seem problematic to some readers to even be writing this text from a first person narrative perspective, that that act presumes too many impossible forms of objectivity (unity of the speaking/narrating subject, an objective perspective on the work etc). Let me say here that I make no such claims. I use this language with its imperfections in an attempt to convey something about my experiences from my vantage point and from within my milieu. As a performer engaged in a subjective practice – claiming anything more concrete is not responsible. This artistic research is
not reproducible in the same way that formulae will reproduce results, nor do I suggest that any reader would benefit from copying my methods exactly. The premise of this writing is tangled up with an idea that artists should take responsibility upon themselves for the subjective position they occupy within the work. From this vantage I move to describe some approaches that could help to make conscious negotiation of that subjectivity a strengthening, rather than a limiting, element in the realization of musical works. Exploring subjectivity has allowed me to make confident choices in my work which I believe conveys something meaningful about the relationships between the voice, its author and the space in which it resounds. By consciously seeking out opportunities within the research-practice to explore the possibilities of performed subjectivity, my practice as a vocalist has been transformed.

In the final days preparing this exegesis, I turned to my old copy of Nyman’s *Experimental Music* (Nyman, 1999) looking for a reference for a quote. While thumbing its yellowed pages a memory floated to the surface. I was transported back to a 2006: seated on a divan, in full make-up and wearing a ball-gown, my twenty year old self was reading this same book. I was waiting to go on stage to sing the minor soprano roles in Ravel’s *L’enfant et les Sortileges* with Sumi Jo and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. At some point during that performance, I started to feel a mild panic set in: all the bows in the orchestra moving in unison, the over-sized plastic flower attachment on the diva soprano’s dress, the two-thousand people in the audience staring at us in silence and the conductor in his tail coat in the middle of Summer - all seemed freshly comical and absurd. I had worked very hard to prepare for this opportunity and was genuinely ecstatic to be part of it, yet suddenly I had the urge to stand up and shout “why are we here? Why these silly clothes? Why are we presenting this music the same way it always has been? Each of us fulfilling our pre-designated roles?”

Luckily, I kept my thoughts to myself and got on with a performance. Reading Nyman’s book, I had gotten over-excited - that feeling abutted against the different kind of
excitement I felt being on stage that night. An enthusiasm for musical experiment, like the one described in Nyman’s book, inspired me to see the potential for new worlds to be created everywhere I looked. After that, I couldn’t shake the feeling that conventional classical music represented a kind of cubbyhole, curtains drawn to block out the world’s activity.

A desire to act outside that niche, testing the possibilities for making meaning in music has pretty much never left me. However, I’m now less troubled by the tension between the inherently messy truth of performing bodies and the practical necessities of music performance. I’ve certainly not since felt tempted to disrupt a performance of such a beloved piece of music, nor to sabotage my career so swiftly. In the intervening years I’ve discovered that many, many artists had walked that path of questioning before I’d got there, and that there was (and is) a whole world of artists and scholars supporting each other to change the conditions of their culture through musical experiment, offering myriad approaches to solving the problem of the aforementioned cubbyhole. Through their work I have gained a sense of community, a language and a scaffolding upon which to hang a research practice. This practice gives me the tools to move the curtains, open the door and pass in and out, though I know the experience of having lived in the dark will linger somewhere in my habits and history.
Introduction

“It goes without saying … that the simple consideration of ‘grain’ in music could lead to a different history of music from the one we know now …” (Barthes, 1977, p. 182)

This exegesis is in two parts. The first four chapters (Introduction, Methodology, Cultural Context and Interviews) comprise the first half. These sections give evidence, framing and explanation, as background to the author’s practice of artistic research, that is the main focus of this thesis. The next four chapters (Introduction to artistic research, Realizing Lachenmann’s Got Lost, Realizing four new works for Voice and Electronics, and Conclusion) discuss the foreground practices within the artistic research as evinced through two major projects, realizing five works for voice. This research is concerned with the realization\(^1\) of new, exploratory works for the voice extending out from the canon of Western composed music.

It is the author’s contention that the presence of a performing subject within a musical work should be an amplifying, rather than a limiting, factor. If performers were able to improve the conscious negotiation of their agency, negative effects of unconscious biases and ingrained habits could be ameliorated thus improving the conveyance of communicative objectives within the realization of the musical works with which the performing subject is engaged. An active approach to problem-solving and a refusal to

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\(^1\) The word realization utilized throughout the exegesis, is similar to but not exactly the same as, the more traditional word for the process of translating a composer’s instructions into musical performance: interpretation. I have chosen not to use the term ‘interpretation’ because I am interested in the idea of a performer’s role in ‘making music real’ rather than in ‘interpreting’ instructions. Some elements of what I do inevitably fall within the realm of ‘interpretation’ but to interpret someone’s meaning from signs on a page is only one step in the process of realization.
fall back upon easy conventions encourages decisions that positively enrich realizations of pieces through the presence of the performer within them. By applying a considered methodological structure and actively focusing the lens through which problem-solving takes place, performers are better positioned to affect change within their artistic practice.

This exegesis is separated into chapters that each seek to address a different element of the researcher’s practice and to situate that practice within a broader context. Following from this introduction, a chapter on methodology will explain the research methods undertaken by the author. The chapter entitled Cultural Context then orients the research within the literary and performative contexts influential to vocal performer subjectivity. Following that, Interviews specifically addresses the performative and preparatory practices of vocalists, providing insight into the diversity of practices at play in the current professional vocal milieu. The second half of the exegesis contains three chapters on artistic practice which describe the research undertaken through two significant performance projects: the realization of Helmut Lachenmann’s Got Lost, and of a series of commissions for voice and electronics composed by Anthony Pateras, James Rushford, Jeanette Little and Alexander Garsden. Accompanying the exegesis is a portfolio of audio and visual documentation of the aforementioned projects. This exegesis hopes to make a convincing argument for how vocal subjectivity can become a site of exploration and experiment in practice-based, artistic research.

This kind of research requires a methodology that is both bespoke and banal. Utilizing elements common to autoethnography, artistic research and professional practice. A mixed-methodology has been reached through experimenting with methods until reaching an approach that seemed most fit to purpose. Some of the observations made here may seem to singers involved in professional life, to be self-evident and not worthy of further problematizing. However, any active performer knows how difficult it is to make decisions that best serve the purposes of their artistic goals and this research aims to offer some possible approaches towards making those choices more effectively.
The methods here described are not new. The author undertakes specific kinds of body focused, voice focused and theoretically focused activities designed to either support the background nourishment and maintenance of the site of her musical practice (her self) or to solve foreground problems that arise through direct interactions with the musical work. These three kinds of activities (voice, body and theoretically focused) manifest through, for example: physical exercise, keeping an artistic journal or reading selected theoretical literature. These methods, enacted daily, facilitate a refinement of the physical sound producing mechanism in tandem with a more conscious system for evaluating phenomenal experience and building self-determination into practical routine.

While many varieties of scholars have described vocal subjectivity – vocal practitioners have rarely recorded their own version of events. Scholarly narratives in the voice of the agents at the centre of vocal-musical communication have had only a small place in the wider discourse. This exegesis and particularly the interviews chapter is a ‘baby-step’ towards redressing that balance. The author interviewed fourteen prominent new music vocalists across four continents, whose practices encompass performance of new notated and improvised musics, composition and conventionally staged opera. These interviews give insights into the commonalities and significant deviations present across the practices and self-conceptualization of vocalists. It demonstrates the highly individualized nature of any vocal practice, the impact of context on artistic self-picturing and the presence of generational change.

The central locus of new knowledge creation in this research lies in the author’s realization of new vocal works emergent from the traditions of Western Art-Music. For

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2 In his article in ‘New Music Box’ Joan Pamies proposes a succinct definition for the field of New Music as a subset of Western Art Music in the 21st century. His definition proved controversial but I believe it to be an accurate, if perhaps over-generous, definition of the ‘new music’ community of which I am a part: “New Music is an artistic praxis which aims at generating alternative sonic-aesthetic models to those determined by the prevailing material conditions. New Music offers a glimpse of potential futures: it is a token of different material realities. It is necessarily linked to some of the most advanced facets of modernity, such as the pursuit of self-critique and a belief in the possibility of material progress” Pamies, J. (2016). New Music Box.
this reason a great many elements of performance and subjectivity will be reduced or ignored – not least of them a comprehensive examination of vocal subjectivity, instrumental music, improvisatory approaches and the contributions of other artists adjacent to this work. Documentation of the author’s realizations of five new and recent pieces for voice are the primary outcomes by which to judge the research. Discussion and situation of these realizations form this exegesis, the crux of which is represented in chapters six and seven where the artistic researched is discussed in detail. The author relays observations of her own experience to create a narrative argument for the conscious negotiation of subjectivities through a vocal research practice. In undertaking and analysing this artistic research and by situating that research within its field of enquiry this exegesis will address the question: Can a conscious negotiation of performer subjectivity make for stronger practice and realizations in new vocal music?

Defining the subject in artistic research and autoethnography

In one sense this exegesis is all about words, and learning how to use language in a way that meaningfully supports practice-based research. The words with which I am primarily concerned here are that of subjectivity and the voice. This introduction provides a very brief perspective on subjectivity as a field of enquiry and discusses the more slippery terms of my title and research question via key philosophical and artistic texts. The existence of this vocabulary is key. If I cannot speak or write about my practice, then there is little hope of evaluating it. The adoption of a meaningful lexicon is necessary to build the methodology that enables me to make commitments in my performance practice. The methodology shields me, just a little bit, from the harsh blow-back of absolute subjectivity. I cannot claim to have objective knowledge of my own practice, but I can try to be clear in my aims, reflective process and self-analysis, and through that clarification add just a little distance to the wildly subjective work I undertake each day.

Gaining knowledge of the self has been a key philosophical project for centuries and goes back to the earliest philosophical treatises. Mining subjectivity as a site for
philosophical and cultural enquiry is a more recent development. In the 20th century the field of subjectivity became one of the most heavily ploughed in all philosophy. The language used throughout this research is informed by an engagement with subjectivity as interpreted through the lens of later 20th century western philosophy. That literature forged the ground for subjectivity as a field of enquiry. It defined and unpacked the concepts of subject, object, self, other, perception, phenomena and experience, as we now apply them.

Today it seems there are almost as many definitions of what constitutes ‘a self’ as there are thinkers in the world. In beginning to define the terms of this research, it is difficult to know where to cleave boundaries. I cannot pretend to adhere to any one philosopher’s theory as a ready-made to define the terms of the research practice, nor do I wish to make the unpacking of this topic the substantive crucible of the work – many well-qualified thinkers are in the thick of that battle and it is one I am not equipped to fight. Instead I will briefly recapitulate some literature on the self and subjectivity that I have found interesting and which have been influential to this artistic research. A broad summary of the principals of subjectivity are outlined by Nick Mansfield:

“Subjectivity refers, therefore, to an abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to imagine that, or simply helps us to understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience. In this way, the subject is always linked to something outside of it—an idea or principle or the society of other subjects.... It is probably impossible to produce an exhaustive list of the way the term subject defines our relationship to the world. For the purposes of summary, however, we could say it has four broad usages: Firstly, there is the subject of grammar...Secondly, there is the politico legal subject...Thirdly, there is the philosophical subject. Here the ‘I’ is both an object of analysis and the ground of truth and knowledge... Fourthly, there is the subject as human person. No matter how exhaustive our analyses of our selfhood in terms of language, politics and philosophy, we remain an intense focus of rich and immediate experience that defies system, logic and order and that goes out into the world in a complex, inconsistent and highly charged way” - (Mansfield, 2000, p. 8)
We see from Mansfield that subjectivity is a term that can be used in a variety of ways but that the subject should always be viewed in relation to the moving target of context. For my own purposes, I find the third and fourth of Mansfield’s subjects the most compelling. The subject I wish to interrogate as I prepare my performances is the ‘I’ as an “object of analysis and the ground for truth and knowledge” (ibid.), and the subject as a flesh and blood “human person” (ibid.). I am fascinated by the presence of the body-brain complex at the nexus of artistic practice, and how that body’s relationship to the world beyond it interacts with decision-making and perception. Through this exegesis I will unpack how I experience the embodied act of singing and the ways in which my perceived experiences are influenced by my context and collaborators, which in turn influence the choices that shape performances.

The sovereignty of the ‘I’ in its dominion of the self has not been left unchallenged. As I continue speaking as this first-person narrator, ‘I’ must acknowledge some obvious pitfalls in attempting to self-describe one’s practice-based research – though to attempt to describe one’s self-sited work in the third person seems even less reasonable. Arguments have been fashioned that deny the existence of this I that I so confidently claim to inhabit. Some authors (Dennett 1991; Wegner 2002; Metzinger 2003) have questioned the legitimacy of this term ‘the self’, emphasizing that that which we have come to call the self is merely an “interplay of various subsystems and modules in the brain” (Zahavi, 2008, p. 1). Derrida’s deconstruction teaches us to be wary of the subject that claims to be what it says it is (Derrida, 1997). Another important challenge to the use of the signifiers self or subject comes from authors who object to the stasis the term seems to imply. Adriana Cavarero in Relating Narratives (Cavarero, 2000) offers the term, ‘narratable self,’ as a substitute for the ‘subject’. The idea of this narratable self as a subject in an open-ended, relational, state with a manifest capacity to convey the narrative of its own experience, is very persuasive for me. It is a term I have come to support though not quite strongly enough to abandon the use of the word ‘subject’ in my language. Cavarero’s ideas are particularly compelling to me as I negotiate my role
as auto-ethnographer\(^3\). When I relate my own experience to others, I know I am not describing a true experience of reality but conveying a narrative of my self through the lens of my perception of that reality. Cavarero’s *narratable self* solves some of the problems presented by the inherently sticky act of subjective writing within an academic context. So much of what we our ‘selves’ perceive must remain untold in order to make one’s point with words. I’m more comfortable with the idea that I am giving an account of myself\(^4\) myself than that I’m fooling myself, or worse trying to persuade my reader, that I convey some kind of absolute truth.

Another problem to address is the difficulty of creating transferable knowledge from one’s own subjective experience. The results of auto-ethnographic and qualitative artistic research in general cannot be judged using the same value hierarchy as empirical scientific research. My position within the research, and my inherent lack of objectivity, make that impossible. There are however ways of framing one’s narrative so as to be able to convey transferable knowledge about the practice of making art, without claiming that knowledge to be a concrete truth. Anthropologist Ruth Behar gives a model for how to preserve the integrity of the material our research unearths while simultaneously acknowledging our inability to divide ourselves from it when we are positioned inside its bounds. Behar’s brand of anthropology is concerned with fleshing out the selfhood of the author while acknowledging the reader as a real and living other:

> “Our classical dichotomies of Self and Other, Object and Subject, the West and the Rest have become hopelessly inadequate …the shift toward an intersubjective Self-Self relationship challenges the boundaries of anthropological discourse and raises some crucial questions…” (Behar, 1997, p. 165)

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3 Autoethnography is one of the primary methodologies I utilize in my research. The term is discussed further in the Methodology Chapter

4 Giving ’an account of oneself’ is a phrase I borrow from Judith Butler’s book of the same title, in which she convincingly argues for the subject’s potential for subject formation and responsibility “that acknowledges the limits of self knowledge” (Butler, J. 2005, p. 19)
As I convey my narratable self to you – reader, I know that you, and the audiences for whom I am preparing to perform, approach these issues from a vantage that is different from my own. Making accurate assumptions about how an other might think or behave is not particularly useful or even possible in artistic practice. I will not try to guess what you will think, but I do make my choices with the intent to try to understand what I can about the context in which we collectively exist - ‘self to self’.

There are far too many relevant threads to follow which cannot be included within the scope of this study, whose focus must sit primarily upon the artistic research itself. Therefore the contributions of important figures to the field of subjectivity including but not limited to Derrida, Husserl, Butler, Adorno, Heidegger, Deleuze, Guattari, Kristeva, Baudrillard and Foucault will be excluded, or only briefly discussed.

None of this emphasis on the experiential elements of perceived selfhood and identity could be possible without phenomenology and the contributions of Husserl (Husserl, 1950) and Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) amongst others. Post-structuralism and deconstruction (Barthes, 1967; Baudrillard, 1981; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Derrida, 1967; 2011) also figure heavily in the picturing of a contemporary, fractured and fluid vocal subject. These texts and schools of thought have all influenced the way I view my self as the fluctuating and entangled author/site of my artistic practice.

Arguments arising from the aforementioned modes of enquiry provide ample cause for wariness when applying the signifier “subject” to describe human ontology or experience. The current consensus of western thought seems to have mostly settled upon a conception of the self that is fragmented, to a greater or lesser extent material, complex, in-flux and experiential. Despite the fluidity around the term, I will utilize the word ‘subject’ throughout this exegesis. I recognize and embrace the difficulties of being a subject in a narrative space where I am subject-to and simultaneously imposing my subjectivity-upon my environment and the reader. The subject for which I take responsibility is striving to communicate through the porous, transient and capacious vessel it lives in.
As Gannon, discussing Derrida, states:

“Derrida argues for a re-situating of the subject that entails moving from the assumption of an essentialized and unified identity that has substance independent of language towards an understanding of the subject as inscribed in language. He stresses that the concept of the subject need not be “dispensed with” rather that it should be “deconstructed”... finding points of contradiction and hierarchies of meaning and pressing at these points and hierarchies until they are on the point of collapse.” (Gannon, 2013, p 233)

In artistic research the activity of “deconstructing” experience is difficult, important, perhaps simultaneously impossible. The actions of the subject are tangled up in the musical objects and intersubjective exchanges of their milieu. At once confirming evidence of the subject’s the existence and revealing points of contradiction, entanglement and their indivisibility from language. In autoethnography we cannot offer our experience as objective, but we can describe how our decisions, our indecisions, our histories and our physical circumstance, interact with the art objects in question. If we embrace, and I do, this relational model of subjectivity as we convey our ideas and experiences through written or artistic media, we must accept the contradiction that we have simultaneously abdicated responsibility for making objective claims, and embraced a responsibility towards work that manifests meaningfully and ethically in the world. Butler convincingly argues, “…a theory of subject formation who acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge can serve a conception of ethics, and indeed, responsibility” (Butler, 2005, p. 17)

There is an obvious element of narcissism that could be inferred from this kind of ‘subject-centric’ discourse. In the naming of these open and changeable effects of subjectivity and by placing the self at the centre of the discourse, one could argue that the author places herself on a pedestal for examination – painting an unflattering portrait of Narcissus engaged in some 19th century style genius-worship. While artistic research is doubtless something of a self-centred practice I would argue that this kind of research is quite a different thing to making a flattering self-portrait - perhaps a view of Dorian’s picture in the attic – would be a more accurate metaphor. By being clear about our shortcomings, the impermanence of our positions and the many and inevitable
failures of our practice, artistic research reveals a useful counterpoint to the fetishized and flawless genius-creator we may have touted in earlier times. That is, as long as the negotiation of subjectivity within their work is conscious and vigilant. Adorno expresses his suspicion of this situation:

In the tradition of Western nominalism, art had always imagined that it could locate its enduring core and substance in the subject. This subject now stands exposed as ephemeral. While it behaves as if it were the creator of the world, the ground of reality, it turns out to be what the English call a “fake,” the mere trappings of someone who gives himself airs, sets himself up as something special, while scarcely retaining any reality at all…Impossible though it be to conceive of music, or indeed any art, as bereft of the element of subjectivity, it must nevertheless bid farewell to that subjectivity which is mirrored in expression and hence is always affirmative, a form of subjectivity which Expressionism inherited directly from neo-Romanticism. To that extent the situation is irreconcilable with the position of classical Expressionism in which expression and the individual were unproblematic features of music. (Adorno, 1988, p. 272)

I am willing to acknowledge that ‘I’ am an artist who is simultaneously totally sincere, and an undeniable fake. I stand, as Adorno puts it, “exposed as ephemeral”. However for me this situation causes no dissonance. I am not at all interested in finding an “enduring core” in my own subject or in my art practice. Subjectivity and ephemerality are necessary conditions for the experience of art. Objectively true, enduring things do exist in the world, they might even be called beautiful or affecting or transformative, but that is mathematics, maybe physics, definitely not art. Adorno’s assertion that “[music] must bid farewell to that subjectivity, which is always affirmative, a form of subjectivity which expressionism inherited directly from neoromanticism”(ibid) resonates strongly with me. I believe that contemporary artists must accept our position on the muddy battlegrounds between the self and the work. The making/performing subject of art is not a clean-cut heroic wunderkind in crisp evening dress. The artist is an actor mired in a problematic and weary discursive practice. Artistic research is one way that artists can draw back the curtain that romanticism built to shield artistic genius from the possibility of being too plainly seen for what it is.
**Voice meets subject**

Over the last several decades interest in how the critical and philosophical literature of subjectivity interacts with performance culture has been gaining momentum. Lively discussions have taken place on the topic in art and critical studies circles; many artists and theorists have contributed significantly to progressing an understanding of the performance of subjectivity as it applies to installation art, performance art and sound studies (LaBelle, 2006; Jones A., 1998; Dyson, 2009; Emmerson, 2007, et al). The fields of music performance and musicology have been relatively slow to adapt this research to their own purpose but recently a cavalcade of scholarship has emerged. There are now many texts specifically addressing the relationship between subjectivity and vocality (Bernhart, & Kramer, 2014; Bulut, 2011 & 2015; Connor, 2000; Cavarero, 2005; Davies, Feldman, Kane, Rings, & Wilbourne, 2015; Dolar, 2006; Eidsheim, 2008, 2011, 2015; Eidsheim & Schlichter (eds) 2014; Kreiman & Sidtis, 2013; LaBelle, 2014; Macpherson, & Thomaidis (eds.) 2015 & 2016; Meizel, 2011; Neumark, Gibson & Van Leeuwen, 2010; Pierson, 2015 et al) joining the decades of critical theory and philosophical literature from which a performer might draw sustenance. Many of the aforementioned texts are referred to as belonging to the emerging field of ‘Interdisciplinary Voice Studies’. This theoretical literature provides a foil to the inescapably subjective practice of performance and ensures that despite being a performer, the definition of whose function it is in the world to project their insides towards the other, that a singer might be nourished by ideas from outside of herself.

I want here to briefly introduce some of the key themes and texts which will feature more heavily in the Chapter on cultural context. The seeds of vocal subjectivity as a field of study could be traced to the day Roland Barthes gave us the signifier “grain” (Barthes, 1977) with which to describe that space within a voice that had previously seemed indescribable. The ‘grain’ is not music, or text, or body but a nexus between them all. Barthes opened up the singing voice as a site for exploring “the very precise space, the

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encounter between a language and a voice” (Barthes, 1977, p. 181). This was a ground for understanding the link between the subject and how it conveys itself to the world through the voice. Steven Connor’s contributions have helped us understand the way we perceive identity through voice and the relationship between vocality, space, society and language (Connor, 2000). Mladen Dolar’s *A voice and nothing more* (2006) could possibly be credited as being the text that sewed the most fertile seeds for the now flourishing field of ‘Interdisciplinary Voice Studies’. Other key texts have provided rigorous philosophical (Cavarero, 2005) and artistic (Chion, 1994) analyses of voice.

The 20th and 21st centuries are rich with discourse around subjectivity and the voice. Developing, however inexpertly, a familiarity with this literature has been key in learning to give myself permission to think about artistic practice as it entwines with the self. When I read and try to understand these texts, little by little I accumulate knowledge of positions to which I feel able to commit. These positions have become a framework that is stronger than my own flimsy intuitions could have built. As I parse my self and my practice through this framework, I become more confident in the choices I make, enabling me to negotiate with my self and the musical materials.

**Negotiation**

Finally I wish to address my use of the term ‘conscious negotiation’. This is a fairly simple thing in practice. Performers make choices all the time when they are in the process of moving a musical idea from the page to the world. Many of our choices are unconscious, and some of the ways we produce sounds are beyond the reach of our conscious control. A singers’ instrument is also their human body, responsible for every corporeal function besides singing. The source and site of the sound producing mechanism is also the body that sleeps, that speaks, that digests food.
My early training emphasized taking control of my body, wherever possible, to support my musical objectives\textsuperscript{6}. Over the years I have quite consciously changed my everyday behaviours which form the ‘background’ to my artistic practice. My speaking voice, posture, breathing habits, the resting tension of my throat, the ways I organize everyday motions, and much else besides have been consciously worked upon with the goal of making my body a site capable of producing the sounds that I want. In my value hierarchy, there is no one optimal set of physical alignments, necessary to produce ‘good singing’. At each point where a musical intention is formed I am making choices, with varying degrees of consciousness, about how I use my body to articulate my intentions. The inverse approach would be allow to myself to rely purely upon habits, instinct or the tacitly absorbed aesthetic tenants of the genre I happen to be working on in a given moment. New Music, the genre-frame which best describes the works that are the subject of this research, aims to provide radical lenses through which to experience culture and to form visions of societies which do not yet exist (Pamies, 2016). I contend that a methodology driven by habit and instinct is far from optimal for realizing musical pieces within the New Music frame. My goal is to be able to negotiate with my self, moving what is deformable, to improve the quality with which I am able to execute an action and the strength with which my body supports it.

Throughout this exegesis the reader will find me referring to the choices I make; how I use my body to create sounds, stances and gestures that manifest whatever musical idea I think best serve the conveyance of meaning in that moment. These activities are located not only in the body, but in the voice and in theoretical engagements. Through this highly physicalized process of negotiation, I experiment on myself until I find the action best fit for purpose. These principals guide my process as I prepare to perform musical pieces – even on matters that play out between the page and my thinking rather than through my flesh and breath. Threading together these elements, my work as a

\textsuperscript{6} Anna Connolly, in the course she taught at the Victorian College of the Arts ‘Vocal Materials’ (2004-2006), instilled in me a strong affinity for the materiality of the voice via an understanding of practical physiology, acoustical and physical principals of sound production.
vocalist has developed into a research practice. As I collaborate with other artists or make decisions alone in my studio, these concepts play out in musical decision-making again and again. Through the course of this exegesis I will provide one narrative for how this discourse plays out, in literature, in the work of other singers, and most centrally in my own artistic research.
“…habit has its abode neither in thought nor in the objective body, but in the body as mediator of the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 167)
Introduction

This thesis presents the results of four years of artistic research in support of two artistic projects, realizing five individual musical works, by five different composers, as well as a third research project interviewing prominent singers about their practices around voicing subjectivity. In this chapter I will describe the research methodologies employed in their component parts. I describe the actions I undertake as being of two distinct categories, consciously negotiated background activities which shape the site in which my research takes place (my self) and foreground activities which are the methods and activities devised in response to specific problems arising from my interaction with musical pieces along the path towards realization. Within these two categories three further sub-categories of multi-focused activity can be defined according to the site in which the activity is most concentrated: voice-focused, body-focused and theoretically focused.

My working methodology is situated between practice-based artistic research (Borgdorff, 2012; Biggs & Karlson, 2010; Borgdorff, 2006; Cook, 2015; Coessens, Douglas, & Crispin, 2009; de Assis, Coessens, & Brooks, 2009) and auto-ethnographic writing (Spry, 2008; Behar, 1997; Bartleet & Ellis, 2009). There are three main streams of knowledge production present in this thesis. The results of the first stream are presented via a summary of the results of interviews with prominent vocal practitioners. The other two streams, with which we concern ourselves for most of the current chapter, were artistic research towards realizing five works across two major artistic projects: the first, preparing and performing Helmut Lachenmann’s Got Lost, the second, preparing, performing and recording four new works for voice and electronics.

I chose these three projects because I felt that they would provide a diverse range of challenges to explore. The interviews serve to augment the cultural context chapter by adding new knowledge of current professional practice that did not yet exist. The four works for voice and electronics, which I group together, were composed for my voice by Australian composers who are my friends and peers. The fifth piece studied is for voice and piano, and was completed in 2008 by the German composer Helmut Lachenmann.
The interviews were conducted over a two-year period across Australia and the United States, as well as online. The musical pieces were prepared, and then performed in several different scenarios. Additionally, the four works for voice and electronics have been made into a studio recording for commercial release on the record label Hospital Hill. Through many and varied performance scenarios, two dozen recording sessions, geographical, analytical and collaborative challenges, a diverse range of problems presented themselves for solving.

Constructing a research design for such subjective work has been a difficult task. I describe my method as being made up of two distinct categories of activity: background and foreground. The background actions are the actions I undertake regularly, which are designed to shape the site of my practice, my body/my self, to be effective for its purpose as a singer and researcher. This background is built to serve the goals of the more direct foreground research in my artistic practice. Part 2 of this exegesis discusses the unfolding of my research process for each of the five pieces realized, describing the foreground activities involved in the identifying and solving of particular problems as they present themselves through musical texts, as well as the ways in which subjectivity factors into decision-making. In the broadest terms possible, the interaction of the different parts of the research methodology, across three different research projects, are summarized below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Stream</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Artistic research project 1: Lachenmann’s Got Lost</th>
<th>Artistic research project 2: Four new works for voice and electronics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Background Action Summary | • My background as artistic researcher and professional performer | • Autoethnographic Journaling  
• Creation of video and audio documentations of foreground activities  
• Yoga  
• Feldenkrais | • Autoethnographic journaling  
• Creation of video and audio documentations of foreground activities  
• Yoga  
• Feldenkrais |
There is often bleed between these background and foreground activities. There is not an easy way to express these things as discrete actions, because they often, and must, feed into one another. They all take place in one body – which lives in the world and happens to be the site-of as well as the author-of this research. In an effort to focus on the most relevant parts of the enquiry with relation to subjective decision-making, it has been necessary to reduce and delineate some of the grey-areas of this research. This reductionist approach and associated delineations are merely for clarity’s sake. I wish to stress that the complexity and interconnectedness of this topic makes any claim upon objectivity impossible.

Quantitative methods extrapolated from science are sometimes used to objectify the artistic experience. This thesis is about subjectivity and the realization of vocal music; it is
obviously problematic to attempt to comport this research as quantifiable data. Given that this is such self-reflexive work, I have chosen not to attempt to turn subjective experience into objective truth, but to convey knowledge made at the site of practice through writing and documented performance. I utilize methods from autoethnography and from artistic research in order to reflect the experience of decision-making and performance in a sincere manner.

The performances themselves, as represented in the thesis by video documentations and the studio album, are the primary research outcomes to be judged and experienced by the viewer/listener. However, the ephemeral nature of performance makes it impossible to convey the intricacies of research through that purely experiential form. In performance I reveal only moments of my self, parsed through the dense mesh of musical and extra-musical events of which I am part. It is the responsibility of the written words in this exegesis to point towards the subjectivity of the performer, as the subject-performer points back towards the research from within the documentation of the performances. By giving narrative to the experience, I compose myself into a fuller picture of being: “Performative writing composes the body into being. Such a praxis requires that I believe in language’s representational abilities, thus putting my body at (the) stake…” (Spry, 2008, p. 343)

A brief Summary of methods in the interviews
The interviews were undertaken because that information did not yet exist elsewhere in the literature. While authors from a broad range of fields offer their impressions of what they believe singing subjects are doing and thinking, there is relatively little written from the perspective of singers themselves. It seemed important to begin to chip away at this imbalance, particularly with regard to the realization of new vocal music, situating artistic research in conversation with the broader field of professional practice.

The first step in the process was deciding what form the interviews would take and who would be asked to participate. I determined to request participation from singers within my existing professional networks who are exemplars of high-level, innovative practice.
They were asked to answer questions similar to the kinds of questions I have been asking myself in my research. Practices around confidentiality, data storage, interviewee identification, ethics approvals and interviewee consent were addressed throughout 2014. After this period, a set of sample questions, that formed the basis for all the interviews, was developed. Not all the interviewees were asked exactly the same questions, and questions were often phrased and rephrased, adapted for ease of communication with individual interviewees.

The interviewees selected (Odeya Nini, Joan La Barbara, Juliana Snapper, Nicholas Isherwood, Lucy Dhegrae, Tony Arnold, Lucy Shelton, Håkan Hagegård, Jane Sheldon, Barry Ryan, Carolyn Connors, Timur Bekbusonov, Carol Plantamura and Thomas Buckner) come from many different stylistic and educational backgrounds. Several have advanced degrees or are actively involved in academia though most are freelance performers who have, for the most part, practiced outside of academic institutions. Their geographic backgrounds stretch from the United States, Sweden, Kazakhstan, Israel and Australia. Several of the singers are primarily focused on conventional opera but have performed many new works written within that frame. Other performers had a conventional operatic training in their early life but have since altered their focus towards performance art, avant-pop music, new music, improvisation or composition. There was also a third category of interviewees who have developed idiosyncratic vocal practices that are fit to the specific purpose of their artistic goals, rather than having come through a traditional vocal training pathway. These singers are professionally active in styles as diverse as Western notated new music, opera, art-song, chamber music, free improvisation, devised composition, choreographic singing, cabaret, avant-garde pop music, electronic music and performance art.

Most of the interviews were conducted in person in cities around the world including: Sydney, Melbourne (Australia), Los Angeles (California), New York (NY), Chicago (Illinois), Lexington (Kentucky), and San Diego (California). Five of the fourteen interviews were conducted via emailed questionnaire. All interviewees were provided with an information pack and signed ethical consent forms. The interviews were then collated
and transcribed. I read and re-read the interviews looking for common threads. I decided on a set of categories which demonstrated the common threads amongst the interviewees and went about extracting quotations from each interview that exemplified the specific threads that seemed to connect and illucidate the generalized patterns I had observed. I was also specifically interested in finding direct information about specific methodologies utilized by each singer and made sure to include any references to method in my excerpted sections. Once the quotations were separated by category I decided to further narrow the scope to find the words the interviewees had shared that would best illustrate the diversity and evolution of practice and ideology amongst the interviewees, and most closely address my research question. I then wrote the chapter linking together the threads of knowledge shared across generations, styles and continents to provide a snapshot of how these singers negotiated their subjectivity in their work as vocalists.

Why Artistic Research?

Artistic research (Biggs & Karlson, 2010) is the current accepted umbrella term (Borgdorff, 2007) that encapsulates elements of various arts-related research methods that are sometimes referred to as arts-based research (Leavy, 2015), practice-based research (Freeman, 2010; Candy, 2006) practice-led research (Haseman, 2006; Smith & Dean, 2009) and practice-centred research (Harrison, 2012). All of the above definitional sub-methods are forms of qualitative enquiry (Knowles & Cole, 2008; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013) which is the broad methodological approach, distinct from empirical scientific research, which might be described as being one rung above artistic research in the taxonomy of method.

The research methods of an artist can be as unique as the work the artist themselves makes. Thus the methodologies in artistic research must flex to support the needs of the practice. Though this research has gained much from adapting elements of the above-described methodological practices, to try to ‘fit’ one particular definition or model over my practice is less interesting to me than discovering, through the “doing” of the
practice, a bespoke methodology that enables me to explore and is fit to purpose. In this way, through years of trial and error, research and exploration, I have developed my particular adaptations and applications of the methodologies I describe in this chapter.

Many researchers in traditional musical fields do not attach much value to the contributions of performers. An anecdote evidencing this is given in Research and research training in music and music education (Harrison, 2014)

“In the most authoritative reference work for music research, Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, the category of performers hardly features in the 29 volumes of its 2001 hard copy edition, or even in its more regularly updated online version Grove Online (Root 2012). Entries labeled ‘musician’ in this resource overwhelmingly refer to composers; performers occupy only a fraction of the content, and their entries tend to be brief and lacking in academic depth.” (Harrison, 2014 p. 4)

Many significant institutions of higher education in music are closed to performers entirely (the graduate schools of the University of Chicago, Stanford University and Harvard to name but a few), only admitting composers, musicologists, music historians or music theorists. A music-history PhD student once told me a story of being chastised by a Harvard administrator, while she was student there, for asking “if there were any performance courses she might take?” the administrator responded chidingly: “Harvard is not a vocational school”. Part of my motivation in aligning myself with the discipline of artistic research comes from my desire to be recognized as a performer who also has a place within the scholarly community where I might become a meaningful contributor to knowledge. It is my strong belief that the knowledge contributed by performers is essential to moving the field forward, despite the fact that some in scholarly circles still see us as craftspeople, entertainers, or composer’s vessels.

Artistic research happens in the body and in the every-day, in the practice-room, office, gym, teaching studio, the professional stage, and in the recording studio. The discoveries yielded by this kind of research are often entangled with embodied knowledge of professional practice and with literary and theoretical sources. My research is embodied, inseparable from my self, and tangled up in my professional
milieu. To the audience in the room, the performative outcomes of my research might be indistinguishable from other professional performances: “Arts-informed research includes what the artist knows how to do, a fusion of qualitative research and the expression of qualitative theories with artistic forms of expression” (Colwell & Richardson, 2012). Artistic research employs methods to solve problems in artistic work, as a way of generating new knowledge. This is distinct-from, though not disconnected-to, professional artistic practice. Many of the methods utilized in artistic research are common to both. The difference being that knowledge production is a key concern of artistic research and that knowledge must be supported by theoretical as well as experiential groundings. Both activities result in the production of artistic works or acts, but in artistic research, “artistic practice itself is an essential component of both the research process and the research results. This approach is based on the understanding that no fundamental separation exists between theory and practice in the arts.” (Borgdorff, 2006, p. 5)

In order to justify, extract and elucidate the embodied knowledge within artistic practice, research methodologies are essential. “The idea that art can be regarded as a form of knowledge does not have a secure history in contemporary philosophical thought.” (Eisner, 2008, p. 2) If we cannot systematically convey the new knowledge we are making, then the art practice slips back towards more traditional notions of art’s function in society: ephemeral forms of pleasure, ornament or emotive power. The burden to translate art production to knowledge production falls to the researcher.

Academia places a heavy emphasis on facts, proofs, and objectivity. Yet, in politics, the media, art and in many spheres of our culture we know that subjective experience can sway the action and opinion of human beings, sometimes more persuasively than the objective “truth”. For many, the quest to marry art to knowledge through artistic research is inherently problematic:

“The academy has been dominated until very recent times by a largely scientific concept of knowledge building. This kind of knowledge is somewhat impersonal and does not reflect the subjective interest of any one individual; it is supposed to tell us something objective about the world and that is why it is contrasted by
‘opinion’. If the term knowledge can be applied to the arts, then it seems unlikely that knowledge will be of this kind.” (Biggs & Karlson, 2010, p. 2)

The difficulty of objective knowledge production in artistic research is, in my opinion, a feature to be celebrated. The knowledge generated in artistic research comes with a different value hierarchy to the sciences. In the wake of post-structuralism and hyper-modernity and all we have gained from the corresponding scholarly theory it seems natural that social experiences, particularly in a field as subjective of the arts, no longer be maligned for their lack objectivity.

“...the arts address the qualitative nuances of situations. By learning how to read the images the arts make possible, awareness of those nuances is made possible. The examination or perception of a painting is as much a kind of “reading” as a text might be. One needs to learn how to see as well as learn how to read in the customary sense. Thus, in addressing what is subtle but significant, the arts develop dispositions and habits of mind that reveal to the individual a world he or she may not have noticed but that is there to be seen if only one knew how to look.” (Eisner, 2008, p. 11)

This battle within the academy, to justify the simultaneous existence of many kinds of knowledge is one that plays out in my own research and in my personal narrative. Seeking scholarly understanding of subjective experiences through the ‘doing’ of artistic research was a logical next step for me after several years in a professional practice influenced and inspired by scholarly work. In undertaking this artistic research, I search for and seek to convey, the kernels of transferable, meaningful knowledge that I’ve found from within a highly subjective practice.

**Why autoethnography?**
Most literature addressing singers through voice studies describes and hypothesizes what the voice is and does, scientifically, or from the third person perspective of their authors. I have decided to tackle some of these topics via the perilous path of narrative self-description. Autoethnography has in recent years developed into a discipline that provides inspiration and frameworks for critical engagement with fields that cannot be untangled from subjective experience. Scholarly work utilizing autoethnographic
methodologies have emerged in settings as diverse as sociology, health, law, ethnography and the arts. In recent years texts addressing and utilizing autoethnography in musical scholarship (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009; Järviö, 2006; Penny, 2009; Bartleet, 2009; Manovski, 2014) have been growing in number. Engagement with those texts has significantly aided my efforts to situate myself within my artistic research.

In this exegesis I take steps towards creating a picture of my artistic research and the way that that practice interacts with the realization of musical works. This picture is messy and ‘in progress’. It changes faster than I can describe it. The act of making the picture gives form and vocabulary to my practice as it happens. I do not hope to objectively argue for an empirical method or result, to convey static truths about the nature of subjectivity and singing, or even to offer a new perspective on the underlying literature or theory. I want to explain events as I experienced them, to convey something of the significance of each discovery as I folded it into my practice and to represent the outcomes of my artistic research as a narratable self (Cavarero, 2000).

Autoethnography is a great methodology for describing the ephemeral and the experiential. There are times where I must admit that my decisions are guided by intuition, and a bodily sense of knowing ‘rightness’, rather than any empirically testable measure of success. Occasionally, when the moment arrives where one must choose one path over another – the body just speaks for itself. It could be argued that this kind of ephemeral, phenomenally relational system of judgment is not useful in scholarly work, and yet, without the body and phenomenon, there is no site for research. These moments of understanding, if left inside the body, would never manifest as translatable knowledge. This is the reason why narration and discourse through autoethnography are necessary within my practice. In ‘Performing autoethnography’ Gingrich-Philbrook posits “…that the body ‘knows’ something doesn’t preclude the need for the linguistic situation, articulation, and critical/ethical evaluation of that knowledge’’ (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2001, p. 4). The body ‘knowing’ is not enough. The body and its knowledge need to be situated and reconstituted in a conveyable form if they are to meaningfully contribute to discourse. This process of reconstitution is one of the major differences
between the experience of art itself and the research that flows in, out and through it. Thus I attempt simultaneously to narrate, frame and discuss, my experience in the realization of these works in a manner that reflects the feeling of ‘the doing’, but seeks to avoid overshadowing the research with the drama of being. "Autoethnography has at times been criticized for a relentless emotionality...In overcompensation for the excess of objectivity in other modes of ethnographic writing, its subtext has been the production of an unproblematised subject identity for the author" (Gannon, 2013, p. 232)

Autoethnography allows me to position myself within the work, and gives me an opportunity to speak as myself. I want to acknowledge and examine the effect of my subjectivity within the research and in doing so provide a more honest picture of the practice. The decisions I made as I went about realizing these pieces are unpacked and evaluated as an integral part of the research. Autoethnographic descriptions sometimes manifested to be the most accurate way to convey that information. Some of the central tools in autoethnography, journal writing and self-documentation, were key elements in my methodological practice. Analyzing the documentary materials I made revealed many discoveries that could not have been identified through purely embodied experience.

Multi-focused activities
I am both the physical site-of and author of my practice, therefore the house in which my practice lives, is not a ‘neutral’ environment. I will here discuss some of the banal elements of what makes this site (my self and body) an active, rather than a passive, place within which the practice is situated. In the introduction to this chapter I characterize these banal undertakings as ‘background’. Many of these background activities will not be explicitly mentioned again within the artistic research chapters, but the fact of their existence shapes and colors the more specific foreground elements in impactful ways. It therefore seems important to mention them here. In this section I will first describe some of these ‘background’ practices, and then discuss some of the
foreground elements that more directly shape my artistic research. From within both the foreground and background methods, several sub-categories can be derived. These actions I have loosely grouped as actions focused on the body, the voice, and theoretical actions. I recognize that there is overlay and interplay between these categories, but will use them here for clarity. There is one final element of the methodology that I will mention here, but which defies categorization, and that is performance itself. Without performance, the other activities are meaningless, but as I find the phenomenon of performance is impossible to describe in terms of activity and method, it will be addressed briefly and separately in its own section.

The diagram below shows the three categories of activity: body-focus, voice-focus and theoretical-focus, as they interact to provide a bridge between the external world and the subject. The influence of the actions of body, voice and theory compose the colour-scheme of the subject, who propels part of themselves outwards as performance.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 2.2** A vocal subject that mediates the world and serves the purpose of the research
Background

All three of the categories of activity described above (Body-focused, Voice-focused, Theoretical-focused) are situated in one human-subject and are undertaken with different degrees of goal specificity. It may seem odd to be talking body-focused methods - that are sometimes as common as ‘going to the gym’ or ‘doing yoga’ - as if they were specific research methodologies. I do not mean to suggest that physical exercise or writing a journal should be presented as research methodologies in and of themselves, or that there is anything novel about taking up these practices. However, the way in which I engage with these activities is far from neutral. The way that I approach a yoga practice, or journaling, or physiotherapy or even lifting weights, is tangled up in and motivated-by my desires to make my body/self a productive site for working on the problems presented by my professional practice and artistic research. In the next section I will list specific kinds of actions that I undertake as part of this ‘background work’. Most of the actions within this category are applied as “everyday” actions. Many of them undertaken over a period of years, no matter what kind of research or professional work I might be doing at the time.

Foreground

Myriad problems presented themselves to be solved as I went about realizing each of the musical pieces covered by this research. The methods I utilized in these scenarios are what I am referring to as “foreground”. These foreground methods seek solutions to specific problems that arise from my interaction with the task in front of me. Some of the problems I encountered are common to many musical works. In these situations the solutions I employed are often the same ones proffered by traditional vocal pedagogy and which many other professional singers of similar training and experience utilize. In this research I have tried to limit discussion of these kinds of problems, instead attempting to discern which problems are most novel to the peculiarities of these new pieces, and to present and unpack those problems, highlighting the ways in which subjectivity influenced my negotiation of solutions.
In order to parse and validate my decision-making, oftentimes, I needed to internally resolve philosophical questions about what a work might mean for me (rather than any meaning explicitly indicated by the composer). These readings provided frameworks, supported by theoretical literature and physical experiment that allowed me to more confidently negotiate the tasks at hand. Each piece raised its own questions:

- Helmut Lachenmann: How to realize a piece where the composer expressed a concern that a singer’s presence and personality would over-shadow the ethical and aesthetic concerns of his music?
- Jeanette Little: How to realize a work where the mechanical and the fleshy worlds were at odds?
- Alexander Garsden: How to constitute myself as a deterritorialized, imaginary, vocalist?
- James Rushford: How to realize an experimental piece in a simultaneously open and entangled intersubjective context?
- Anthony Pateras: How to perform a musical task while enacting/representing the absolute, the awesome and the imaginary?

The exact methods I utilized in trying to solve the problems relayed above are outlined in Part 2 of the exegesis. At this juncture, I will describe some of the ways that I commonly addressed foreground problems along the path towards realizing each piece. The following lists summarize the activities I regularly undertake as part of the foreground methodological category, loosely grouped according to their focus on voice, body or theory.

**Voice-focused Activities**
- Vocal Warm ups and Technical Work
- Singing Lessons
- Vocal Coaching
- Vocal practice of repertoire for muscle memory
- Vocal practice of repertoire for interpretive experiment

**Body-focused Activities**
- Feldenkrais technique¹

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¹ Feldenkrais method is “an educational system that develops a functional awareness of the self in the environment. The method utilizes the fact that the body is the primary vehicle for learning” (2016, *Feldenkrais Guild of North America*). Feldenkrais aims to improve students’ abilities to organize their movements and to be attentive to themselves. I’ve practiced this method since 2004. Feldenkrais’ emphasis on mental practice, the slow accumulation of learning through
• Yoga
• Running and gym
• Vocal physiotherapy/ Vocal unloading
• Physical Practice without singing (for example practicing a piece, performing the vocal part in my mind, but only actualizing the breathing, or the intended support mechanisms)

Theory-focused Activities
• Mental practice of the actions required for a particular piece
• Reading scholarly texts by others
• Journaling of artistic practice
• Discussion of the research
• Reading and finessing my own writing

Positioning the banal at the service of the bespoke

As an undergraduate, I was required to keep a journal of my interaction with Feldenkrais as I undertook weekly classes in the method. Initially, this seemed like an incredibly boring and pointless activity. I was forced to write down what I was aware of about my physical-self, how it was responding to stimulus, to articulate the methods I was developing to better organize myself and the way I interacted with the tasks in front of me. I had to practice this attentiveness through repeated physical activities, as well as practicing using my conscious agency to affect physical change through mental practice.

This attentiveness to my physical self and gaining confidence in my own materiality have become central to my methodological and philosophical self-conception. The advantage of mental preparation for self-organization in the practice of physical action is an important element of many pedagogical and therapeutic practices. It is something that I’ve seen utilized effectively in studio teaching, and private practice

movement and the body’s ability to change itself have been highly influential to the development of my research practice and artistic world-view.

2 This is a method practiced by physiotherapist Annie Strauch (among others), who has been my voice-physio since 2007. I regularly take specific pieces into her offices to demonstrate the problems I am encountering and we work together to find therapeutic solutions to the physical tensions created by the way I am working on the pieces. She works with techniques of hand-on manual release and pressure-massage. More on her method is described in InMotion (Strauch, 2014, p. 73).
settings. It has even been shown in studies on non-human primates that preparatory neural activity in the motor cortex in advance of a motor task is learned and is task specific (Paz, 2003). Therefore it is likely that rehearsal and repetition of preparatory mental activity could improve the efficiency and accuracy with which one performs a motor task (such as singing), even without repetitious performance of the task itself. This kind of preparatory mental activity frequently features in my methods for preparing musical works (and is one of the methods highlighted in the artistic research chapter on ‘Got Lost’). In all of the activities and methods I describe in this chapter: bodily, vocal and theoretical, I am attempting to consciously organize myself in a way that will be useful for the research I am conducting.

The act of regular journaling is helpful in keeping the meaningful translation of embodied experience at the forefront of my mind. By writing down what has transpired during a day’s artistic practice, I clarify my self to myself. Usually, most of that writing is unfruitful. That having been stated, some of my most significantly informative moments have arisen through this journaling process; while sitting at my computer at the end of a hard, emotional day, facing colleagues, directors, judgment and dealing with the frustrating limits of my body and technique. Sometimes, the simple act of writing down what has transpired turns turmoil and exhaustion into transferable knowledge to wield going forward. Writing enables me to take a step back from my feeling in the moment, even as my own hand marks the page, revealing an important, objective piece of information that would otherwise have been lost to the flood of feeling upon which one can so easily be swept away.

I routinely alter elements of traditional musical practices within various physical activities. If I am working on a piece where I need to improve my breath control and support mechanism, before I begin vocalized practice that day I might do a Feldenkrais lesson

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3 Therefore, the brain learns to produce different patterns of activity in preparation of different motor tasks. In monkeys it was found that this shaping of neural activity is necessary to produce accurate and efficient behaviour as defined by the parameters of the experiment Rony Paz, T. B. (2003). Preparatory activity in motor cortex reflects learning of local visuomotor skills. Nature Neuroscience , 6, 882 - 890.
that addresses the issue via a focus on the pubococcygeus muscle – thus activating and honing the function of a key muscle required for support and breath control. I lift weights, but avoid activity that could strain or tighten the muscles of the neck, pectorals or upper back, instead I work to strengthen my pelvic floor muscles, rectus and transverse abdominus, and add muscle to areas that will not effect my breathing or production mechanisms. I run, but avoid going any faster than feels comfortable while still feeling able to release the pelvic floor and open the full-breadth of my rib-cage on inhalation. I do yoga regularly but avoid traditional yogic breathing; I have developed my own modifications which enable me to keep an open throat and high soft palate during yoga practice. I abstain from exercise which I believe will likely tighten my obliques, or place undue strain on the psoas or iliacus muscles. I stop to stretch every 20 minutes during a workout.

I know that these kinds of activities are things many people do. I don’t deny that some part of why I exercise is the socially normal motivation for general healthfulness and weight control. However, the reasons that I choose to engage in a particular activity or the way that I modify standard practices within those activities are not common to regular modes of participation and are specifically adapted to support my goals in my work as a singer. I was never a big fan of exercise and spent my whole childhood and young adulthood avoiding it as best I could; in truth it was only after I became serious in my professional life as a singer that I began to engage in any kind of regular physical activity. Now I regard my body as the site of my practice and believe it is part of my responsibility to the work to keep it healthy. More importantly than being ‘fit’ in the colloquial sense, I want be ‘fit for purpose’.

Performance

The reader may fairly note that the methods I have described are focused primarily on the processes applied in my working life as an artist and only secondarily on the fleeting phenomena of live performance. For me, performance itself is best evidenced by participation in the event. My thesis includes substantial documentation of the
performances but no significant analysis of the performer’s experiences ‘during’ the performative moment.

In the interviews conducted towards this research, singers expressed their many and varied descriptions of the phenomenal nature of performance. All the singers interviewed agreed that performance was a time for special focus or as Thomas Buckner put it: “it’s almost like an ultimate form of being” (Buckner, 2015). Performance is a way of paying attention that is particular to the singer and the kind of work they do. For me, the physical and temporal space in which the performance takes place is also a strong influencer of the experience. Each performance does have in common a hard to describe, intensity of focus – an ontological awareness beyond the everyday, but is different in its particular flavor. Performance is something which language is ill equipped to describe because it is something that “happens”, and cannot be remade with words. In my experience, whilst in the midst of performance, any active attempt to analyze or self-document, results in disaster and disconnection.

Performance is a space of phenomenological alchemy, which I will not seek to further elucidate; many clichéd pages have already been filled attempting to describe the topic. This research argues that the knowledge embodied in the performative moment has value in and of itself and is a necessary part of the research practice of a singer. The sensation of that indescribable moment is an addictive force that pulls me back to the stage again and again, which cannot be conveyed to the reader, no matter how much ink I spill.

Summary of methodologies

“The ‘grain’ is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs…” (Barthes, 1977, p. 189)

This chapter has described my mixed-methodologies towards making my self a place that is consciously prepared for and physically enabled to be an effective site for artistic research. I engage with a variety of methods: physical, vocal and theoretical, to support and shape my work through autoethnography and artistic research. These methods
manifest in the background activities of daily life and are also enacted in the foreground problem-solving activities of preparing and recording realizations of new vocal pieces. It is important to me that I never become completely consumed by one kind of activity. Not every activity I have described in this chapter happens every day, but I do make an attempt to ensure that I address each of the categories (voice focused, body focused and theoretically focused) in some sense, each day. Even as I sit here writing this exegesis, at a time in the life of an emerging researcher where they might reasonably be expected to be sitting in their pajamas, writing day and night - I have been spending an hour exercising most days and doing at least a little singing. In modulating my subjective experience between different forms of activity, and by focusing not only on the specific problems I encounter in the work, but actively working to build a baseline ‘self’ that is able to serve the work effectively, my subject-self is primed to be a conscious negotiator in research.

Through this methodology I bind my self confidently to my interpretive choices, to the supporting literature, to my physicality, and to my thoughts and feelings about the work. I build a relationship, between my self and the tangible and intangible elements of the musical text that is fused to my muscle memory. The self that I present in performance will be the result of this process. When my body remembers all these things, in just the right order, allowing me to feel nothing but ‘present’, I am able to stand confident as my self and communicate with vulnerability to the audience.
Cultural Context

“The voice is the element which ties the subject and the other together without belonging to either, just as it formed the tie between body and language without being part of them”

(Dolar, 2006 p.103)
Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to subjectivity and the voice as they influence the author’s practice of artistic research. The past two decades have seen the publication of many texts that interrogate the meeting of musical performance with subjectivity in fields as diverse as music performance (Schick, 2006), performance studies (Jones, 1998), musicology (Cook, 2015; Abbate, 2004; Duncan, 2004), autoethnography (Cumming, 2000; Bartleet & Ellis, 2009), voice science (Sundberg, 2006; Sataloff, 2013), philosophy (Goehr, 1999; Nesbitt, 2010) and artistic research (Penny, 2009; Järviö, 2006).

More recently, several books (Bernhart & Kramer 2014; Eidsheim, 2015; Kreiman & Sidtis, 2013; Macpherson & Thomaidis, 2015; Young, 2015), articles (Aszodi, 2017; Bulut, 2015; Eidsheim, 2011; Meisel, 2011), special issues (Davies, et al, 2015; Eidsheim & Schlicter, 2015) and theses (Bosma, 2013; Pierson, 2015) have been published, and a dedicated journal created (Macpherson & Thomaidis, 2016), establishing a space for the interdisciplinary study of the voice as a distinct field. Until a short while ago disparate studies of vocal subjectivity, performativity and knowledge production dwelled in the nebulous cracks between disciplines with an interest in the voice. Now, these texts often use the term ‘Voice Studies’ to encompass a new nexus of knowledge centered upon uncovering the meanings, functions and activities of the voice. This chapter lays the groundwork for artistic research performed by the author, so the focus will be on literature that unpacks and grounds the elements pertinent to that research. It is designed to be neither systematic nor exhaustive. Several of the aforementioned texts have already made significant headway towards that goal, and given that the crux of this research lives in the embodied, artistic work, a similar task will not be attempted here. The following chapter spotlights the topics of: indiscrete subjectivity, embodiment, technologized voice and inter-subjectivity because of their specific relationship to the artistic projects.
As a philosophical field of enquiry, subjectivity has proved fertile ground for centuries of debate. More recently one might credit the development of the rich lexicon we now have for describing the role of the subject-voice and its author in art, philosophy and society to foundational work by Roland Barthes (Barthes, 1977), Michel Chion (Chion, 1994), Steven Connor (Connor 2000), Adriana Cavarero (Cavarero, 2005) and Mladen Dolar (Dolar, 2006). Credit must also go to the vivid and innovative artistic-practices of singers like Cathy Berberian, Joan La Barbara, Juliana Snapper, Thomas Buckner, Pamela Z, Laurie Anderson and Meredith Monk, who are examples of how the identity and decision-making of performers can alter the status and expectations of vocalists in the musical community, and inspire new ways of thinking and speaking about voice.

The voice represents a coming together of language with the body, which is a defining characteristic of humankind. There are so many voices to consider: the social voice, the embodied voice, the voice of base human utterance, the technologized voice, the silent voice and the artistic one. We are social beings by and through the voice “…the voice presents a short-circuit between nature and culture, between physiology and structure; its vulgar nature is mysteriously transubstantiated into meaning tout court.” (Dolar, 2006, p. 14)

A singing voice carries with it markers of the singer’s physical and intellectual identity; it is a product of their physiology as well as their intentions (ibid). The sound of the voice, almost from the moment it is created, is thrust outwards from inside the singer’s body, pushes through flesh, resounds in their cavities, is shaped by their bone-structure and articulatory organs and is sent hurtling out into the world, until the sound touches the body of a listener and weaves its way inside them. The vast majority of human subjects share in this experience of giving and receiving voice, through speech. Our voices are the primal vehicle through which individuals communicate with society.

This ancient method of communication has recently come under new kinds of critical scrutiny. What we know about the voice is rapidly expanding, thanks to contributions from a broad range of scientific, musicological, and philosophical communities:
“An explosion of new knowledge has occurred in our time in the field of voice. The reason is not merely society's thirst for new knowledge. Another important reason is that the voice is one of the most frequent communication tools. This is true despite the huge amount of information transported in digital form today” (Sundberg, 2005, p. 2).

Although we live in an era of rapid change the voice remains a relevant and affecting element in virtually every culture.

The remainder of this chapter is divided into four parts, under the loosely grouped headings of: the indiscrete subject, embodiment, the technologized voice and inter-subjectivity. The discussion under each of these themes winds a narrative path through the broad fields of enquiry whose fruits appear at the intersection of vocal performance and subjectivity. The purpose of this chapter is not to convey a hegemonic ideology of the voice or to persuade the reader that some convergent evolution of cultural and philosophical strands has wound itself down to a perceivable tip embedded in the body of a practicing vocalist. The purpose is to gaze across and through the knotted threads that hold us together as a vocalizing culture, thus establishing the connectivity and fluency of language requisite for a discourse around the voice upon which an artistic research practice can be grounded.

The Indiscrete Subject

I am producing a text so as to situate the I to whom I refer within a context and a theoretical cannon. To write from one’s own subjective position is to immediately encounter decades of theory that problematize the very existence of the I in question:

In contrast to humanist versions of identity...post structuralism proposes a subjectivity that is not the property of any one of us but that is precarious, always in process and reconstituted anew each time we speak or write within constantly shifting circuits of power and knowledge. This is a dynamic and continuous crafting of the self and of experience within particular historical and cultural conditions and within circulating textual assemblages. This position problematizes autoethnographic writing that revolves around the experiences and accounts of a singular knowing subject, the confident author of a particular text. Rather the self-produced in a text is always contingent, tentative, situated, and relational. (Gannon, 2013, p. 232)
An author who subscribes to a post structuralist world view, writing in first person, must be willing to accept the contradictions inherent in this kind of subjectivity. Being so used to living within our bodies and speaking as ourselves, this usually comes fairly easily. Despite how well conditioned we are to present ourselves as a “singular knowing subject” or a “confident author” (ibid) in our writing, in autoethnography we must be prepared to admit that the thing we call the human subject/author is something we have little objective knowledge of. Defining and unpacking the self and consciousness are the oldest and perhaps the most consistently popular projects in philosophy, cultural and critical theory. Despite this, the nature of selfhood and consciousness are not particularly well understood by current scientific standards.

Neuroscientists, Psychologists, Biologists, Physicists, Physiologists and Cognitive scientists have addressed the problem from thousands of angles, but most of them agree that we are a long way from having a comprehensively accurate, objective understanding of human consciousness or selfhood. For example, it has been stated that we are literally centuries away from having a map of the connectivities of the brain (or ‘connectome’\(^1\)) whose resolution is high enough to show the veritable details of what is actually happening (Miller, 2005). Let alone the skills to read that map or accurately predict its behaviors.

We have only flash frames of an idea of how consciousness and subjectivity is constructed as a physical reality. We can however observe very specific cases and make limited generalizations of results. We can hypothesize and experiment and report presumed correlations, but we cannot ‘know’. Knowing we cannot ‘know’ – we move forward with a messy tangle of theories to test upon the material realities to

\(^1\) Connectomics is a sub-field of theoretical neuroscience whose ambition is to “construct a complete wiring diagram, or “connectome,” of all the synaptic connections between neurons in the mammalian brain”. (Miller, K. D. 2005). The field is currently in the very early stages and cannot provide results that reflect real-world biological or bio-technological scenarios. There are an enormous number of factors and variables within the human brain that we do not yet understand well enough to be able to simulate conditions that mirror the complexity and variability of the world as we experience it.
which we do have access. The vocalizing subject is a material thing, acting upon the world, entangled with the world, inextricable from the world. We cannot say exactly what the voice means, but that has never stopped any of us from attempting to make sense of a thing. From this highly subjective vantage, we begin to tease out the threads of the phenomenal experience of producing a voice at the behest of an indiscrete subject.

“In short, not just corporeal nature but the whole concrete surrounding life-world is for me, from now on, only a phenomenon of being … no matter what the status of the phenomenon’s claim to actuality and no matter whether, at some future time, I decide critically that the world exists or it is an illusion, still this phenomenon itself, as mine, is not nothing but is precisely what makes such critical decisions possible and accordingly makes possible whatever has for me sense and validity as “true” being…” (Husserl, 1950, p. 19)

We encounter the world, through the lens of our phenomenal experience in the vessel of our material bodies, and all of this is facilitated by language and how we use it to interact and self-reflect. The self is a hard pill to swallow without language and culture to reflect back our “self-ness” at us, and reinforce our belief in our position within a community of selves we recognize as “the other”.

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“Is the self necessarily embodied and embedded in a physical, social and historical environment? Some have argued that the constitution of the self is a social process, that we are selves not by individual right, but in virtue of our relation to others and that we achieve self-awareness by adopting the perspective of the other toward ourselves. Who one is depends on the values, ideals and goals one has: it is a question of what has significance and meaning, and this, of course, is conditioned by the linguistic community to which one belongs. Thus it has been said that one cannot be a self on one’s own, but only together with others.” (Zahavi, 2008, p. 2)

The constitution of the self is a social process that is difficult to pin down with respect to “significance and meaning” (ibid) and which is endlessly relational. This fluidity is fed by and has nourished a great growth in the range of signifiers which an artist might employ to articulate the complex subjective experiences that need to be named in order to speak critically about making art or artistic research. In *Mille Plateaux* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977) Deleuze and
Guattari gave us the *rhizome* and *deteritorialization*, which have become important parts of the lexicon and the self-conception of communities in artistic research and Western contemporary art-music. The *rhizome* and the *deteritorialization of the refrain* have been influential concepts for post-modern musicians seeking to unburden themselves of the yoke of absolutism placed upon them by modernism, expressionism and (in some circumstances) minimalism. In Western classical music, where many of the most powerful organizations still operate under 19th century models of artistic practice and philosophy (though the influence of neoliberal market forces do seem to be catalyzing some change in that realm). Having an established vocabulary with which to enter into critical discourse about music is of utmost importance. Unlike in the visual or performance-art worlds, there is relatively little scholarly or critical discussion of musical work outside the academy and the bulk of scholarly work created from inside the academy has been contributed from outside of music performance.

The traditional vocalizing subject presents unique problems to the post-modern compositional environment. In many of the pieces we will later examine in this exegesis, vocal tone, line, language and noise become elements used by the composers to draw attention-to or intentionally destabilize the apparently ‘unified’ vocal subject as she stands before the listener. The singer of traditional western musics is a stable figure who makes meaning relatable through voice and language. For many composers working today, this unrealistically wholesome subject must be fractured and remade so as to fit within the ethical and philosophical frameworks we currently inhabit. In response to this, composers in the field have dramatically altered the way in which they treat the elements of text and timbre in particular:

“Language has a territorializing function. It establishes boundaries and relationships, hierarchies, and connections through short- and long-term memory. Noise on the other hand is a fundamentally deteritorializing phenomenon, what Deleuze and Guattari might call a “local space of pure connection.” Indeed its noisiness lies principally in its destabilizing, its upending of communicative norms and hierarchies.” (Cassidy, 2003, p. 43).
The use of noise, and a deconstruction of language are prominent features in all the musical works examined in this exegesis.

In European music, from World War II onwards, the traditional artistic subject was replaced by something more abstract as represented by the rigorous method and process centred musics pouring out of European institutions. In those years many European composers, particularly those associated with the ‘Darmstadt School’ wrote music concerned with creating systems that might ameliorate the falsity of “always affirmative" subjectivity. This created some discord between various groups within European modernism (Pierson, 2015) as they worked in their different ways to solve the problem of the subject’s place in music. Composers from Cassidy (Cassidy, 2003) to Lachenmann (Lachenmann, 1995) to Xenakis (Xenakis, 2001), and a great many more, have used noise and extended techniques to destabilize the signifying power of language in vocal music, opening a path for communication that relies on visceral experience cleaved from the traditional relationship between singing and text.

The discourse birthed in the Darmstadt in the 1950s continues to play out for many, particularly European, composers still working today. One of the two central artistic projects of this exegesis is realizing a work from 2008, Lachenmann’s Got Lost, that deals directly with this legacy. The composer has spoken of his struggle to find a place for a solo singer’s presence and personality (Lachenmann, 2014) within the ethical, philosophical and aesthetic concerns of his music.

Embodiment Part 1: Vocal Bodies

The voice and the vocalist are part of the same material system. The subject produces the voice and the voice produces the subject recognizable to society. In intentionally using our voices our bodies are active, in myriad different ways: “Practically all body systems affect the voice” (Sataloff, 2005, p. 53). In its bloody parts, the voice is also a violent expulsion of air, driven up from the lungs to be chopped into tiny bursts by

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little mucous covered tissues fast flapping inside the larynx making pitch via the rules of the Bernoulli equation\(^3\) (Reeve, 2005). This fundamental frequency is shaped by the resonant qualities of the whole body of the subject but particularly the shape and material consistency of the larynx, pharynx, mouth, lips and teeth, to create the sounds we recognize as a human voice.

All this cartilage and muscle has evolved to perform the extraordinary function of creating language and voice (Leiberman, 2007). That function has allowed for the development of ever more complex communications in society – all because we have learned to recognize phonemes coming out of bodies in a particular order as having sharable meanings.

“The phonetic gesture brings about, both for the speaking subject and for his hearers, a certain structural co-ordination of experience, a certain modulation of existence, exactly as a pattern of my bodily behaviour endows the objects around me with a certain significance both for me and for others. The meaning of the gesture is not contained in it like some physical or physiological phenomenon.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 196)

A singer creates physical phenomena from within their body that acts upon space. These phenomena are the result of physiology manipulating air to create acoustic effects that play out in an environment outside the body from which they were produced. We know, in very broad strokes, how this act plays out:

“Volitional voice production begins in the cerebral cortex. Complex interactions amongst the centers of speech, musical, and artistic expression establish the commands for vocalization. The “idea” of the planned

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\(^3\) The Bernoulli equation gives the relationship of the pressure difference between two different spaces as particles move between them. “We can derive an important relationship called Bernoulli’s equation that relates the pressure, flow speed, and height for flow of an ideal, incompressible fluid. Bernoulli’s equation is an essential tool in analyzing plumbing systems, hydroelectric generating stations, and the flight of airplanes” (Young, H. D., & Freedman, R. A., 2013). The same equation describes the movement of air from high pressure in the lungs to low pressure in the air outside the body, as it passes through the focal folds. The effect that keeps planes in the air also sucks together the mucosal layer of the vocal folds periodically at various frequencies depending on the specifics of shape, the material of the apparatus, force and air pressure, creating a sound wave that manifests as musical pitch. (Sataloff, R. T, 2005).
vocalization is conveyed to the prefrontal cortex, which transmits another set of instructions to motor nuclei in the brainstem and spinal chord. These areas transmit the complex messages necessary for coordinated activity of the laryngeal, thoracic, and abdominal musculature and of the vocal tract articulators and resonators” (Sataloff, 2005, p. 79)

Singing is a volitional activity sharpened through practice and method. Singers have honed this complex set of conscious and unconscious actions to a somewhat magical level of finesse. The practice of these acts is aided by many and varied methods of somatic education. Feldenkrais method “is a self-discovery process using movement. Its aim is to produce an individual organized to perform with minimum effort and maximum efficiency” (Nelson & Blades-Zeller, 2002, p. 3). This method is popular amongst singers as source of embodied learning and for gaining improved physical self-organization.

Though listeners are usually unaware of the physics and mechanics of singing, they do perceive the relationship between voice and body, and consciously or not, take note of the body’s subtly conveyed signals through singing. Connor and his antecedents neatly expressed this bodily presence inherent in vocal sounds, with the term: ‘vocalic body’ (Connor, 2000). A paper from 2014 (Leman & Maes, 2014) gives a review of the current empirical literature in the field of music perception. They showed that a dynamical approach, that includes the body, needs to be taken in order understand how music is perceived “Based on an overview of recent studies from our laboratory, we showed that embodiment is a necessary concept for understanding music perception.” (ibid).

The vocalic body is not purely psychological or literary. There is a physical connection made by the sound that one subject sculpts and passes into the other, when a singer’s voice propels into the air:

“These wandering sound waves break against the pinnae, [of the listener] seething into the inner ears, or against the skin, flowing back into flesh. The voice, as a series of compressions and rarefactions of air across space, literally touches the listener.” (Chare, 2007, p. 57)
The performed voice of the singer connects to the listener via an explicit and physical interpenetration. Singer and listener may also share a spoken language. The singer draws the listener and herself into a co-incidence of social and physical understanding. In conventional Western-classical music the voice carries the least ambiguous signifying aspects of the work through the text. In unamplified music, signifiers are literally expelled from the vocalist’s body, unexpurgated towards the listener - physically bridging the distance between them. This two-fold penetration of the listener’s concrete experience makes for a vulnerable connection between performing and listening subjects:

“…Every time I throw my voice, I reach the other’s body with a physical echo of my body, whereby the other is stimulated to respond. Thereafter the potential exchange between us is not simply physical anymore. This bodily extension is also imagined. My voice transcends my body and makes it vulnerable for change, for being there…” (Bulut, 2010, p. 47)

When singing for an audience, the singer imprints a part of themselves into the listener through their own sensory organs. This is an intimate kind of transaction, and they are both changed by it. From this vulnerable position a singer is a vehicle for the carriage of musical and linguistic meaning at the same time as being the conveyor of the “grain of the[ir] voice” (Barthes, 1977, p. 182), that hard to describe sonic quality upon which is inscribed the genotypic\(^4\) inflections of the vocalizing self. This unmitigated connection between the author of a sound and the listener is a unique feature of singers amongst musicians:

“Unlike the instrument, which can be locked up and put away after use, the voice is something more than an instrument, precisely because it is inseparable from its interpreter” (Berberian, 2014, p. 47)

Cathy Berberian was famous for her unique voice (Karantonis, Placanica, Sivuoja-Kauppala, & Verstraete, 2014), particularly with regard to her command of timbre— the

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\(^4\)Barthes borrows Kristeva’s phenotext and genotext as models for theorizing two oppositional aspects of vocal music: ‘phenosong’ (which encompasses expression through breath, in phrasing, compositional intention and conventions of genre) and ‘genosong’, which encompasses vocal materiality, embodiment, or as he calls it “diction”.

musical element one might most easily align with Barthes’ grain. In an interview on radio during a concert at the 1977 Holland Festival, in which Joan La Barbara was performing, Berberian had the following to say:

“I’ll tell you something, that my experience with people with extended vocal technique is just that it’s, it’s a fabulous source of research, but it, it – for the moment it has hit an impasse, a kind of stop, because these people dedicate their whole existence to developing the technique, and it would be a very foolish composer, a good composer, who would compose a piece for one of these singers because it’s a very limited thing, and it can only be used by those people that specialize in it... they’re freaks, they’re phenomena – what they used to call me – but it wasn’t true in my case because I can really sing” (Berberian, quoted in Karantonis, Placanica, Sivuoja-Kauppala, & Verstraete, 2014, p. 199).

Given her place in history it may seem strange that Berberian was outspoken in her disdain towards extended techniques and that a singer’s value was attached to their ability to “really sing”. La Barbara, was “highly offended” (ibid) by these comments5 and composed the work ‘Cathing’ in response. La Barbara created the new piece by utilizing recorded extracts from the original 1977 interview and superimposing them onto a field of extended vocal techniques. Her approach to the voice was more experimental and more instrumental.

The relationship between voices and instruments and voices-as-instruments is a continuing discussion in contemporary composition that was further problematized through the 1970/80s by Steve Reich, Phillip Glass, Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk and Joan La Barbara (amongst others):

“when I started doing concerts of my music and I would go places and they would say ‘you don’t need a piano?’ and I would say. ‘No. I don’t need a piano. This is all about the voice’. And the whole ‘voice is the original instrument’ [La Barbara, 1976] is a statement of fact, but its really a kind of manifesto. Here we are dealing with this almost limitless instrument. And why do we limit it?” (La Barbara, Interview).

It is the author’s contention that a considered approach to composition for voice cannot be undertaken without acknowledgement that a voice has many things in

5 For a fuller elucidation of this relationship see the chapter on interviews with vocalists.
common with an instrument (it forms sounds, projects the artists’ musical ideas outwards, is a form of technology shaped by training and habit), but the voice is simultaneously not the same as an instrument, because the voice is not separable from the subject/body. A voice will grow, and be carried with us for all of our lives. A voice cannot be traded in for a different model, or replaced. We all have some kind of voice, and we share in this understanding of the physical act of voicing and of extending something of ourselves outward to the world through our voice. This shared awareness of ‘bodilyness’ (as well as the shared experience of language) gives the voice a prominent position in the auditory field amongst so many other noises in the environment. Abbate states⁶ that “In varying degrees, in all vocal music…the sound of the singing voice becomes, as it were, a ‘voice-object’ and the sole center for the listener’s attention.” (Abbate, 1996, p. 10).

From the 17th century until very recently, despite constantly evolving stylistic trends in Western art-music that favor one instrument or another, the role of the singer within the texture of an ensemble of instrumentalists has been remarkably consistent. The voice is almost always presented as a soloist, somehow taking the fore in varied fields of instrumental sound. For many of us schooled in the canon of western art-music, our mode of listening is habitually voco-centric, though in more recent times compositions that point towards vocal-instrumentality⁷ have provided a counterweight to that status quo, flexing the parameters of voice, exploring the potential of voice to move between positions on the spectrum from subject to object, self to other, voice to instrument.

⁷ Many vocalists and composers have experimented with the instrumental qualities of the voice, particularly composers associated with minimalism (Meredith Monk, Phillip Glass, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Pauline Oliveras and Michael Nyman to name a few).
When we begin talking about the vocalic body as object, as Abbate does above, we can hardly side-step Lacan. The relationship between the voice and its role in the human drama of demand and desire is of import. The subject, bereft of the feeling of oneness with the other it experienced during its childhood residence in Lacan’s imaginary “endlessly seeks to compensate for this lack, to fill the hole at its core. This longing for self-completion is Lacan’s definition of desire…each small transitory object that we mistake for the Other is called an object petit a…” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 45). We seek out these small objects (object petit a) which upon acquisition leave us frustrated as we realize we are no closer to a filling the lack at the center of our being.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the voice is one of the crucial part-objects equated with the “object cause of desire” (objet petit a) (Lacan 1977: 315). It is only partly an object because within Lacan’s taxonomy it also represents (or covers over) the unsymbolizable remnant of the unknowable Real that does not wholly fit within the Symbolic order of knowledge. Because it represents the incompleteness or inherent tension within symbolic “reality,” it is both beguiling and terrifying, and we find within this a sort of morbid fascination or thrill (jouissance). (Burrows, 2015, p. 204)

If Lacan offers us the voice as vehicle for a desirable encounter with the thrilling, unattainable other, Kristeva’s notion of the abject (Kristeva, 1982), which is often associated with Lacan’s “objet petit a”, offers insight into our reflex to reject these fleeting grasps towards the ecstatic. As the terrifying breakdown of meaning ensues, the actualization of the meeting of oppositional subjects brings about abjection:

“The abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-ject, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire. What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned

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8 A “vocalic body” is defined as “a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice.” (Connor, 2007 p. 35)
object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 2)

The abject voice manifests the realization of our own impossibility. Where we might once have sought contact with the unknowable imaginary through the voice, our loneliness is revealed as we listen-back to our own voices, that which ‘is opposed to I’. This tug of war between the voice as an object with provokes feelings of horror or of desire, continues to play out in cultures past and present, and in this very research. For some of the compositions discussed later in this exegesis, the desirable encountering of the Other, the sublime, the imaginary and the futility of that task become pivotal to my realizations.

**Embodiment Part 2: All performers have bodies**

There can be no doubting that singers are not the only musicians whose physical embodiment can and should be a site for discovery and expressivity. Unfortunately, meaningful discussion of this interesting counterpoint to the vocal argument around subjectivity in performance falls outside the scope of this exegesis. However this second part to this sub-chapter will seek to discuss some strands of instrumental embodiment and subjectivity that have raised themselves through the course of this research.

Much has recently been written about a resurgent interest in the “body as performing-subject” in instrumental music. Explorations of a musician’s physical life or subjectivity over say, traditional instrumentality, has a deep history manifest in a range of artistic streams that flow through 20th Century experimental traditions (Dada, Situationism, Fluxus, Cage, Cunningham et al), performance and installation art (Alconci, Moorman, Westerkamp, Cardiff et al), European and American art-music (Kagel, Berberian, Globokar, et al) and opera (Stockhausen, Ashley, Lucier, et al). Still there has been, and may always be, a resistance by some who practice serious music to taking their physical selves seriously.
This thesis discusses the performer-researcher as a site where musical and extra-musical problem-solving takes place. Part of the premise of this research posits that, moving forward from the instructions conveyed by the composer’s text, the agency of the performer drives a significant part of how performative embodiment manifests for the audience. Many composers/performers are developing methodologies for creating work that experiments with non-traditional composer-performer hierarchies.

Last year composer/performer Jennifer Walshe wrote a text for the Borealis Festival in which she outlined a manifesto for her “way of working, both in terms of composing and preparing pieces for performance”. Walshe named this practice “The New Discipline”, and listed Object Collection, James Saunders, Matthew Shlomowitz, Neele Hülcker, François Sarhan, Jessie Marino, Steven Takasugi and Natacha Diels as examples of other composers/performers to whose work this term might be applied.

“The New Discipline” as defined by Walshe is

“... a way for me to connect compositions which have a wide range of disparate interests but all share the common concern of being rooted in the physical, theatrical and visual, as well as musical; pieces which often invoke the extra-musical, which activate the non-cochlear [and]... in which we understand that there are people on the stage, and that these people are/have bodies” (Walshe, 2016).

This method/mode as described by Walshe should be delineated not as a new discipline (style, or enquiry stream) but as a form of disciplined practice: a pan-instrumental, body-focused way of approaching musical realization that takes physical activity and the way the performing body reads to the audience into account as integral to the musical work. It could just as easily be described as a new conceptual and methodological frame fitted over a form of music-making that has existed for a long time, while simultaneously seeking to instill a revitalized rigor into theatrical performances of musical bodies and their relationships to the signifiers they interact with.

The use of the word ‘new’ in relation to a tradition with such deep roots was bound to turn some heads. Practitioners in the field have also been accused of irresponsible or
cavalier approaches to the utilization of signifiers in theatrical communication (Paskvan, 2016). The former criticism might be described more as a problem of language than of content “Walshe means ‘discipline’ in terms of applying skill and rigour to composition for the body... There are antecedents...so this way of thinking is not exactly ‘new’, but there is now a concentration – such work has moved from the periphery to being a mainstream concern with new music.” (Shlomowitz, 2016).

Notwithstanding the above, given the problems we still seem to have describing and discussing issues of embodiment in Western notated music, the new discipline could offer an interesting frame for talking about methodologies that address embodiment and subjectivity in composition that approach from a different track to the ones linked to vocality or opera performance. As a preliminary attempt to flesh out this discourse, a special issue of the journal ‘Musiktexte’ (Walshe, 2016) queried what the New Discipline might mean, if we need such a term, and presented a few alternative models and terms for understanding the evolution of the performative body in relation to musical action and the audience. It includes texts by composers identified with the method, Steven Takasugi, Carolyn Chen, Matthew Shlomowitz, Juliana Hodkinson, David Helbich, and others. An excerpt from Jennifer Walshe’s delineation of this ideological stream is below:

“The New Discipline thrives on the inheritance of Dada, Fluxus, Situationism etc but doesn’t allow itself to be written off merely as Dada, Fluxus, Situationism ... It takes these styles for granted, both lovingly and cheekily, in the same way it takes harmony and the electric guitar for granted...While Kagel and others are clear ancestors, too much has happened since the 1970s for that term to work here. MTV, the Internet, Beyonce ripping off Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, Stewart Lee, Girls, style blogs and yoga classes at Darmstadt... these modes of thinking about the world, these compositional techniques – they are not “music theatre”, they *are* music. Or from a different perspective, maybe what is at stake is the idea that all music is music theatre. Perhaps we are finally willing to accept that the bodies playing the music are part of the music, that they’re present, they’re valid and they inform our listening whether subconsciously or consciously. “ (Walshe, 2016)
Many younger artists in new music, the author included, approach the realization of avant-garde and experimental music, from the vantage point of our lived experience as subjects in the mediatized, hyper-real world Walshe describes above. We do indeed take for granted the existence of all of these styles, knowledge streams and experiences. Some singers are also influenced by backgrounds in traditional theatre or opera, and are informed by the simultaneous and entangled histories of those disciplines as well as with the multiple cultures they exist in now. This reality is reflected in the interviews with singers represented in Chapter 4 of this exegesis. Younger singers tended to be very conscious of approaches to negotiating their bodies (Arnold, Sheldon, Nini, Dhegrae) and in the way they manifest meaning as performing humans, rather than performing musicians. They are aware of how their movements and expressive decision-making interact with signifiers in musical and extra-musical elements of a performance to create and convey meaning. Contrastingly, some of the older generation singers interviewed expressed their desire to be more like instruments or instrumentalists (Shelton, Plantamura), pointing towards an idea that instrumental music is more philosophically pure or involves less egoism than singing. These interviews reveal a significant change in the mode of thinking about the position of the performer on the “subject-to-object” spectrum, which might alternately be described as analogous to a “singer-to-instrument” scale.

Another way of looking at this problem, perhaps the inverse to the theatrical negotiation of instrumental musical bodies Walshe celebrates, was offered by Anthony Pateras. In a conversation started by his composition, Prayer for Nil, and my research on realizing it, Pateras posits that a fully actualized performative body need not add visual provocations or utilize elements that borrow from theatre or visual art. He offers an approach that is deeply rooted in the physical, and sensitive to signification without requiring mediation beyond the musical impulse:

“Musicians are mindful by nature, we are aware of our bodies, how they interact with the space and its acoustics, we are constantly required to be outside ourselves looking in, speaking a sophisticated language of semiotics and sound waves. Incidentally, this does not make musicians less self-involved
or more aware of the world at large. We are all fucked, we can only pray for nil, and like all deities, nil will never come.”(Pateras, 2016)

Anyone who has seen Pateras perform can attest to the connection between his physical actions, his awareness of space and the sounds he makes. When he plays he is totally present, and also in a way, beyond present – or as he puts it ‘nil will never come’. The disciplined approach to theatrical music proposed by artists like Walshe has a non-theatrical alternate-reality in the work of artists like Pateras. Or perhaps, as Thomas Buckner asserted in his interview, in players like Roscoe Mitchell whose work represents “… as embodied a performance as you’re ever going to get.” (Buckner) or David Tudor “… when he turned a knob, it was like watching a ballet dancer (ibid).” These are artists who eschew ‘theatre’ but whose work reaches into and through the body in a way that touches everything and nothing at the same time. These are instrumentalists who play with a transcendentally physical engagement that reaches past technique and method towards that impossible, imaginary space Lacan describes. With determination, they are sounding themselves into a being that is always arriving.

The technologized voice
We live in a world saturated by voices but we do not forget that those voices belong to human subjects. Not only are we used to the steady flow of living voices from our co-workers, family, passersby, but a host of mediatized ones – bodiless, projected out of speakers. These disembodied voices are so ubiquitous we barely notice them emanating out of radios, cell phones, computers and televisions. As we listen to these voices, consciously or unconsciously, our brains are absorbing or discarding information. This relationship is not simple. When we do not share space with the author of a voice, we listen differently to if we were fully present together, but that does not mean we ignore the vocalic bodies embedded in their sound. We do not skim the words from the textual communiqué of pre-recorded voices and forget the rest. We listen, consciously or unconsciously, for the “grain of the voice”: we are listening for the person who vocalizes. Tone matters, pace matters, proximity matters.
Whenever we take a moment to pay attention to these disembodied voices, we feel the pull of their absent bodies and listen in relationship to them.

In the early years of recorded music some struggle was involved in successfully recording singers (who had trained ‘pre-microphone’ or in the early years of the recording industry) whose tone and acoustic projection was not well suited to singing on a microphone. Early recordings of singers from the first decades of the 20th century show a vibrato, enunciation and power that conveys how loud these voices had to have been – even in popular styles (Lockheart, 2003). Today this powerful, vibrated singing is associated with opera and classical music. To be heard in a large space, an unamplified singer needs to sing with a physiological and acoustical efficiency that conserves effort and maximizes amplitude. Most contemporary pop singers, singing unamplified into a large hall would simply not be heard. The training of an operatic soloist involves many years of fine-tuning of the physical apparatus to enable maximal sound output and to develop the singer’s formant.

“The singer’s formant, which has relatively high directivity, plays a role in the directivity of opera soloists” (Davis, 2011).

The combination of directivity and amplitude are important elements that delineate the experience of recorded and acoustic musics. In recorded music directivity and amplitude can be controlled with incredible specificity and a broad range of expressions, at the touch of a button. In acoustic performance these elements are affected by a human body; with all its limits, flaws and blind spots. However, when that flawed producer sings there is something about being in its presence that is powerful in a way that an electronic voice cannot exactly emulate.

An anecdote on this topic is related by Dolar (Dolar, 2006), referring to an event from Proust’s ‘In search of lost time’. In a French provincial town (before the pervasive presence of telephones), a man receives his first ever phone call from his grandmother:

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9 Singers’ formant is “a high spectrum peak occurring between about 2.3 and 3.5 kHz in voiced sounds in Western concert and opera singing. This acoustic phenomenon is associated with the ‘ring’ in a voice, and with the voice’s ability to project over background noise such as a choir or orchestra.” Sataloff, R. T. (2005). Voice Science.
“…As I listened thus without seeing her who spoke to me from so far away...attached no longer to a body which I was never to see again… I heard that voice which I mistakenly thought I knew so well; for always until then every time that my grandmother had talked to me, I had been accustomed to follow what she said on the open score of her face; but her voice itself I was hearing this afternoon for the first time” (Proust, 2001, p. 420)

After a lifetime of perceiving the voice of his grandmother simultaneously translated through the “open score of her face”, the author hears the voice, separate to the body, for the first time and is traumatized. He rushes to her side. When again he sees his grandmother in the flesh, he is taken aback: he finds he cannot piece her back together in her wholeness. She appears to him as if a ghost. “The separation of body from voice had killed her for him.” (Dolar, 2006)

The voice of the grandmother in Proust’s story might be deemed some form of acousmatic performance. Acousmatic music, a concept introduced by pioneer of musique concrète Pierre Schaeffer (Schaeffer, 1966) and later developed in the realm of film by Michel Chion (Chion, 1994), is used to describe a scenario where the source of the sound being heard cannot be seen simultaneously with the audio, usually referring to pre-recorded sounds. In many situations when performing acousmatic or electro-acoustic music the choice of the directional positioning of the sound source is paramount. In cases where the vocalizing body is completely absent, highly directional speakers become a surrogate for that body. If the author of the sound is present in the visual field, their presence too must be carefully curated. If the body that makes the sound is concealed or removed entirely from the performative scenario, is that voice still perceived as a vocal subject by the listener? Does it become an object? Concrète, as they say?

The answer depends of course on how the audience perceives the action, or inaction, before them and whether or not they have a relationship to the body of the sound-making agent. Through the use of technology, a performer can play with their position on the object-subject spectrum. The framer of the direction, spacial relations and the audience’s relationship to technology can influence whether or not a voice appears to
be more closely human, or more closely inanimate.
If a singer stands a proscenium stage, encircled by the conventional trappings of opera or concertizing, they might be identified as a different kind of “object” (as Abbate might describe)? The audience presumably does know that the singer is a subject, like them, but it is possible that the medium through which that subject is conveyed becomes, to quote Marshall McLuhan, “the message” (McLuhan, 1964). In many situations the conventions of concertizing can upstage inter-subjective exchange. Perhaps this is why we are so excited to be ‘touched’ by a performer, when a particular performance transcends this imposed process of objectification and we can hear them for themselves.

In electro-acoustic performance one can use effects of liveness, proximity, directionality and interactivity to problematize this subject-object spectrum under a much more nuanced set of conditions. The mediatized (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 175) world which we inhabit teaches us that there “are few clear cut ontological distinctions between live forms and mediatized ones” (Auslander, 2008, p. 7). Technology-derived, pre-recorded and acousmatically transmitted sound are with us all the time. We feel easily present within that milieu. We are well on the way towards an evermore present seeming manifestation of Haraway’s irreverently modeled cyborgs (Haraway, 1991). As the aforementioned author suggests, we can find “pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and responsibilities in their construction” (Ibid p. 292).

In this landscape of projected, technologised, cyborg-like humans, the position and projection methods of sounds – be they produced by living bodies or mechanical ones – is of paramount importance to the way that a performing subject is perceived by an audience, “The auditory field has evolved to seek the reasons for the soundfield it encounters” (Emmerson, 1998, p. 24). The proximal perception of bodilyness and the perception of sounds as animate or inanimate governs much about the way that
audiences interact with a work. Emmerson provides a useful model for thinking about the possibilities of framing proximity and presentness in the figure below:

![Soundfield Frames](image.png)

Figure 3.1 Soundfield Frames (Emmerson, 1998)

Emmerson demonstrates that there are several impact zones for the perception of electro-acoustic sounds in the performative scenario. He invites composers to think about the possibilities inherent in the framing and positioning of their sonic elements in space, acknowledging the layers of meaning in different parts of a space where listening and performing subjects come together. A performer is just as responsible for determining how these elements interact with spaces and audiences. In practical terms, a performer is often on the front lines of negotiating with the way music unfolds in a given venue on a given day. Composers are not always present. Performers must frame sounds in space with an awareness of the invisible forces connecting, and separating, the different elements in the room.

“Electroacoustic means give composers the opportunity for superimposition of different perhaps conflicting frames. Different stages, arenas or landscapes may be super-imposed and more importantly transformed... Space itself can

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10 For example: in Janet Cardiff’s installation, ‘40 Part Motet’, listeners frequently can be observed standing very close to each of the 40 speakers, which each projects a recording of a single voice’s line from Tallis’ Spem in Alium. In conventional live performances of similar works listeners are situated far from the individual singing subjects. Something about the absence of the live subject in Cardiff’s work encourages a level of intimacy and interactivity that would be difficult to achieve in a live performance.
tell a story. A sense of space, of being and existing, now forms part of the acousmatic arts of radio, recording and sound-art.” (Emmerson, 2007 p. 138).

The bodies that move within a space are part of the narrative Emmerson describes. Performers are responsible for ensuring that story is consciously realized in space and is consistent with the objectives of the musical work.

Intersubjectivity:

“...an inside capable of being recognized by an outside” (Connor, 2007, p. 6)

Our subjects are shaped by our relationships with the external world, through our communications with others and what we perceive reflected back at us through the parameters of those relationships. At the women’s final of the Australian Open in 2012, the Australian Girls Choir\(^{11}\) sang the song: You raise me up (Loveland & Graham, 2002). The performance began with a smiling blonde soloist singing the first verse. It was later revealed that the soloist’s voice, belonged not to the blonde girl but one of the hundred or so identically dressed choristers standing directly behind her. In the wake of the controversy the choir’s director, Nicole Muir, defended her approach in an interview on Radio 3AW saying “We’re a choir. Its not about individuals” (Girls-choir-use-prerecord-at-open, 2012). By choosing one girl to stand in for the body of another the choir showed an indifference towards the expectations of listeners and the bodily agency of the girls involved. The original vocalist was made to stand behind her peer whose face was deemed so superior in that moment that in order to serve the team she needed to be silent (“which according to the patriarchal order is ‘golden,’ especially for women...” - Cavarero, 2005) reinforcing the idea that women’s and girls bodies are interchangeable for one another, and that it is our looks rather than our voices that are most important. This example teaches us (and the girls in question) that women’s’ voices - a thing upon which is marked our labour and talents – are not meaningfully our own, but are currency to be utilized in service of those in power.

\(^{11}\) Disclosure: The author was once a member of the Australian Girls Choir
Despite what we know to be true of how economics, technology and pop culture alter and manipulate the images of those in the spotlight, listeners still seem to place a premium on the perception of “authenticity” in the art they consume through mass media:

“In one sense, given the pervasiveness of audiovisual manipulation of television and film, it’s surprising that anyone should be surprised, much less outraged, at such a sleight of voice. Yet we seem to have an instinctive expectation of a direct and visible connection between a sound and its source. When that connection is severed, as is always the case with recording, or when we are misled about the nature of that connection, as the lip-synching examples demonstrate [referring to Milli Vanilli], we almost inevitably react, often with surprise, sometimes with outrage” (Katz, 2010) Pg 26.

The majority of people in the Western world are aware of what microphones do. We also understand that what we hear on television or the internet is not always a ‘true’ representation of a live event. Yet our deeply held sense of the bond between body and voice can over-power the omnipresent cultural norms that we intellectually understand to be at play. We all know that the media manipulates what we see of people but that did not stop hundreds of angry tennis fans flooding the media to complain about the ‘choir switch’. “The voice, in this way, promises a subject; it excites or haunts a listener to recognize in the voice a “someone.” (LaBelle, 2014, p. 6). When we cannot make sense of that “someone”, we are distraught.

Perhaps these sorts of scenarios so disturb us because they remind us of our own fragmentation. We see ourselves reflected in the voices of others. Their seeming wholeness or obvious dispersal reminds us of the fragility of the things and people we move amongst as if they were concrete. The vocalizing others that surround us establish us as subjects capable of communication and generating meaning in society.

“A voice also establishes me as an inside capable of being recognized by an outside. My voice comes from inside of a body and radiates through a space which is exterior to and extends beyond that body. In moving from an interior to an exterior, and therefore marking out the relations of interior and exterior, a voice also announces and verifies the co-operation of bodies and environments in which they have their being. The voice goes out into space, but also always in its calling for hearing, or the necessity of being heard, opens a space for
itself to go out into, resound in, and return from.” (Connor, 2000, p.6)

Performance requires an other for the subject to perform-for. As the voice moves out-of and away-from its site of creation, the vocalizing self is articulated by and through the other subjects that share space with that voice. This interactive space is re-created in every performance of vocal music. The artist has a responsibility to try to understand the subjective implications of their performance, exteriorly as well as interiorly, as they manifest in inter-subjectivity.

The way that the voice, the vocalist and the vocalic body engage one another in space has a significant effect on a listener’s perception of the situation. The phenomenal experience of a voice is not something an artist can predict or dictate but the material of the vocalic body should be crafted/framed with care so as to give the greatest chance that the meaning of the work be conveyed. These hard to describe intersections of subject and voice that might be called vocal materiality or ‘grain’ (Barthes, 1977) or the ‘kernel of subjectivity’ (Dolar, 2006) are powerful tools for conveying a directness of human connectivity emerging to the fore of the complicated throng of information to which a listener is at most times subject in vocal music.

Conclusion
We are tangled up in each other in ways that are too complicated to control-for. In performance the greatest possible care should be taken to clarify the environment for receiving sounds in a way that facilitates the kinds of listening and meaning formation we hope to facilitate between performing and listening subjects. We cannot assume too much about shared language and values, nor that the sounds or subjects present might objectively mean any one thing in particular. We have no guarantee of how the audience will receive the phenomena of performance.

“… When we hear something we can simply say ‘there was a sound’. We can describe a sound literally using a variety of languages. There can be a scientific attempt to describe the sound… In contrast we might have languages of description that use metaphoric kinds of expression. These might draw parallels with our other sense perceptions… We might, in time, learn to relate
these two language domains. But description of sound in these terms does not
describe our experience of it... This response will be based on a complex
negotiation of evolution and personal circumstance. It may be that we cannot
completely suspend this ‘search engine’ that is our perception system... This
engine seeks to construct and interpret the environment (perhaps the two
cannot be separated). Furthermore the perceiving body – the listener- is part of
that environment and cannot be separated from it” (Emmerson, Living
Electronic Music, 2007, p. 1)

The above quotation from Emmerson, covers a complicated terrain that describes the
‘search engine’ of our perception system as it attempts to navigate and interpret its
environment. As the “... human voice structures the sonic space that contains it ”
(Chion, 1999, p. 5) it simultaneously establishes humans as subjects “capable of being
recognized” by other subjects (Connor, 2007). The voice is at once material and
abstract and, as a product of human labour exists in the space Lacan would call the
symbolic. We are constantly scanning the voice for meaning “...hearing and thinking
of the voice first and foremost as material practice does not free us from the burden of
the symbolic” (Schlichter & Sun Eidsheim, 2014), trying to understand ourselves
through one another’s voices and desires. We cannot guarantee any meeting of the
phenomenological, linguistic or material domains – but we push onwards as studious
listeners and artists producing and framing our vocality. “We are caught up in the
world and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve
consciousness of the world” (Merleu-Ponty, 1962, p. 5).

In the next chapter the conscious negotiation of the world we inhabit will be will be
described by singers from across the spectrum of new musical practices as they outline
their distinctive and entangled approaches to negotiating their subjectivity within
musical practice.
Interviews

“God damn it, no, I’m not no one. I am fucking someone!”

(Lucy Dhegrae)
Introduction

In the latter parts of the 20th century a significant change is observable in the role and status of musical performers realizing new works. This trend is exemplified in the field of singing by a group of outstanding vocal performers who provide revolutionary models for how a singer’s body and selfhood can manifest through music. The foundations of a ‘new vocality’ can be traced through Cathy Berberian’s remarkable impact on re-shaping notated vocal music (Karantonis, Placanica, Sivuoja-Kauppala, & Verstraete, 2014), Joan La Barbara’s redefinition of the practice of vocal arts (La Barbara, 2002) and a gamut of other artists who have created decades of innovative practice. The intersectional contributions of these vocalists have created a model for what is now recognizable, for better or worse, as the new music singer. The work of the new music practitioner demonstrates that performers need not be the servants of composers nor mere technicians; they have the potential to hold position as artists producing complex communications that enmesh embodied subjectivity with performative output. Coming of age in a time where the contributions of some the aforementioned artists are already canonical, musicians of the author’s generation are empowered to think seriously about how the choices we make contribute meaning to music and reflexively nourish our selves as artists.

This chapter focuses on a small number of common threads that help to situate and contextualize the questions explored elsewhere in this exegesis. Therefore the responses here represent only a small portion of the topics discussed with the interviewees. Fourteen professional singers were asked similar but not identical questions;¹ because of their different artistic approaches each interview was tailored to the particular singer. Each vocalist was asked approximately ten questions. All were asked, in one form or another, to address three key areas: vocal identity, methodologies and collaborative hierarchies. The fourteen interviewees were Odeya Nini, Joan La Barbara, Juliana Snapper, Nicholas Isherwood, Lucy Dhegrae, Tony Arnold, Lucy

¹ A list of sample questions is included in the appendix to this exegesis on Pg 10
Shelton, Håkan Hagegård, Jane Sheldon, Barry Ryan, Carolyn Connors, Timur Bekbusonov, Carol Plantamura and Thomas Buckner. The following presents a summary and brief discussion of the ways these singers answered three questions:

1) What is the link between subjective identity and vocal identity?
2) How do you negotiate composer-performer hierarchies and collaborative practices?
3) What embodied and reflexive methodologies do you utilize?

Vocal identities

“Sometimes if you don’t perform for two hours you just think: 'What do I do, who am I?” (Juliana Snapper)

For most of the vocalists interviewed, a singer is someone whose identity and way of being in the world is essentially linked to the performative vocal utterance. The act of singing, is bound up in who they are:

“A singer’s voice is intrinsically linked to his/her identity. Unlike in the case of an instrumentalist, to criticize a singer is a personal insult, comparable to judging one's appearance or intelligence, only much worse.” (Nicholas Isherwood)

The singing voice is not separable from the singer:

“...It’s so inconveniently tied to everything you do, the voice that you have to drag around all day and through your entire life and it’s affected by every - what kind of milk you get in your coffee and every little thing you eat. It’s just so inconveniently part and parcel of you.” (Juliana Snapper)

Or from the history that the singer carries with them in their body:

“...Genetically you are made up of hundreds and hundreds of people throughout time; your vocal chords are literally comprised of the genes of all these people who came before you.” (Lucy Dhegrae)

Or from the way a singer appears to the audience:

“It's also fascinating that our instruments come in all these different sizes and shapes. I don't mean in the size of the voice, I mean the shape of the person.

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2 Questions paraphrased here for simplification (the questions were not always asked in exactly the same way). These three questions are in some cases generalized paraphrases or amalgamations of several more specific questions interviewees were asked.
Tall, short, wide, skinny, dark haired, I mean the look of the singer with the voice.” (Lucy Shelton)

Or from the physical world they inhabit:

“Voices are reflexive. They respond to the environments they're in. They respond to this idea of music that's out there. We hear this and we want to recreate this. You cannot divorce the vocal act - from the activity of the voice. You can't do it. … the physical voice is at risk if you're treating it as something separate…” (Tony Arnold)

Different singers dealt with the problem of the voice’s entanglement with its environment in different ways. Some singers were concerned there may be no way for them to disentangle themselves. Others talked about how, within the culture of singing, a vocalist’s flaws as a human being are often called up alongside the perceived flaws in their voices:

“I had a voice teacher who was very: 'your voice is you, and you: are a mess’... like, if you’re not together, then your voice is not together. I feel like a lot of people regard this in that way, that better singers are also somehow better humans. Don’t you think? There’s like a weird reverence.” (Lucy Dhegrae)

This “reverence” for singers who are fully “together” and simultaneously exposed in performance, creates problems for singers seeking to preserve their autonomy. Jane Sheldon spoke of the difficulty of tackling personal vulnerability on stage. She has developed ways of being present and engaged without leaving herself over-exposed:

“I'm a private person so I don't like to get methody... there are singers I know who are great performers and who are excited by the idea there might be some confusion between a role or the stage presentation and themselves [through method acting] and I have no interest in that.” (Jane Sheldon)

Joan La Barbara described her recent decision to pay attention to the way she manifests characters on stage in ways that may have been unthinkable earlier:

“I've been studying acting now for the past 5 years. The acting teachers are always talking about being in the moment, I understand that completely in singing, in making music. I'm still working to fully realize this in acting. You know there are so many similarities... interestingly enough. The area of contemporary music that I got into really eschewed the idea of acting – you know ‘the curse of the theatre’. There’s even a line in one of Robert Ashley’s operas about the curse of the theatre. So to go to that and to try to understand it was an act of defiance in a way” – (Joan La Barbara)
After five decades of public musical life, La Barbara’s practice continues to evolve, challenging the status quo that she was an essential part of creating. The foundations laid by La Barbara and some of her contemporaries made it possible for younger singers to see themselves as artists capable of real change, to become aware of the interconnectedness of their roles as human subjects, vocalists, interpreters of music, and their creative agency. The beginnings of this movement towards a different incarnation of vocal identity in art music could be said to have roots in the early work of La Barbara and also in the person of Cathy Berberian. The term Berberian coined, the “New Vocality” (Berberian, 1966, trans. Placanica, cited in: Karantonis, Placanica, Sivuoja-Kauppala, & Verstraete, 2014), might be said to be the beginnings of a language with which to describe this more multi-dimensional and self-determined definition of singing many of us now strive for in new music.

Whether the voice and vocalizing requires a separate category of enquiry or whether vocal identity can be sufficiently understood within the frame of instrumental music was an issue that gathered significantly different reactions between the interviewees. Another way to put it is whether the identity of the ‘musician’ is an accurate or adequate frame for describing and problematizing vocal identity. Generally speaking the older singers tended to make fewer distinctions between vocal performance and instrumental performance: “The only difference is that voice has a second element to work with, words” (Håkan Hagegård). Barry Ryan stated that the effects as well as the production of voices are different to instruments and that that is driven by the link between a voice and the identity of the singer:

“I think the voice is much more accessible. There’s a lot more technicalities involved with instrumental playing obviously…whereas with singing I think there’s a physical thing about singing that’s, as I said, individual. Someone can hear a voice and think, that’s nice. Someone else will hear the same voice and cry.” (Barry Ryan)

Several of the younger singers felt that the voice-as-instrument metaphor could not adequately describe what a singer does:
“For ages I reached for an analogy between singing and playing an instrument. A few years ago, maybe five years ago or something I just decided the analogy comes up short because if you play an instrument... there’s this whole apparatus extending from your body. Not just extending from it but also presenting your body with an obstacle that you negotiate and wrangle somewhat. That’s just not an effective analogy of singing to me. The analogy that I have found more useful is to what a dancer does ... that you’re supposed to wrangle your body which - everyone has got one - and you’re supposed to make it do this extremely refined virtuoso thing.” (Jane Sheldon)

Lucy Shelton asserted that she preferred to be aligned more closely with the identity traditionally assigned to instrumental musicians rather than to singers:

“I don’t want to be a singery singer... I’ve realized recently that I really thought of myself as a musician. You know our thing about singers and musicians, right? That they’re separate entities? Well I really have always felt like a musician and that my singing was my instrument.” (Lucy Shelton)

La Barbara was inspired by the practices of instrumentalists:

“I was very much trying to surprise sounds out of myself. Working with jazz musicians and forgetting about where the pitches were on the staff ...I heard instrumentalists experimenting with their instruments and I wanted to do more of that with the voice. At that point in time, lets say the late 60s, the classical world was not welcoming to contemporary music – especially the contemporary music I was interested in, which was more avant-garde experimental. So I left the realm of classical music and started experimenting with my instrument. I would do sessions with individual instruments and I would ask the player to just play long tones and I would imitate the sound of different instruments and gradually got into improvisation, free improv, some jazz. I really found that that opened up all sorts of possibilities of the voice. (Joan La Barbara)

The singers interviewed practice in a range of different disciplines: from jazz to avant-garde ‘hard dots’ to performance art, improvisation, and new, conventional-operatic repertoire. Despite this there is a surprising interconnectedness apparent in their histories and influences. A piece for voice and electronics by Juliana Snapper with Miller Puckette, utilized the sampled voices of Cathy Berberian and Carol Plantamura (Snapper & Puckette, 2015). Several of the younger singers interviewed had taken lessons with the older ones or worked together on cross-generational projects. A pointed example of cross-generational critique was discussed in the previous chapter via La Barbara’s Cathing (La Barbara, 1976), creating a lasting work that showcases La Barbara’s vocal,
creative and intellectual virtuosity in electronics and extended techniques, utilizing Berberian’s seeming conservatism as a raw material.

Berberian’s defensiveness about the issue of extended vocal techniques, and her attempt to offer herself as a model of a ‘real’ singer, in opposition to the ‘freaks and phenomena’ of singers like La Barbara, is ironic given that she was the first to give high profile performances of works utilizing what we would now call ‘extra-normal’ (Edgerton, 2004) vocal techniques. “[Berberian] would turn over in her grave if she knew she was known as the grandmother of extended vocal techniques. But you know, you have to start somewhere.” (Joan La Barbara).

Within the classical music community one often hears a distinction made between contemporary or extra-normal vocal styles and what Berberian would have called a ‘real singer’³. Though Berberian may have been displeased by where extended vocal practice has gone, she deserves greater credit than she has thus far received for the impact she has had upon shaping what a singer now means in new music. The progenitor of the New Vocality, in addition to the splendid recordings she has left us with, could be seen to have had her most lasting impact through the influence she wielded upon many of the 20th century’s great composers: “I think one of the great things one could say [about Berberian] is that she ‘caused’ composers to write unusual things” (Joan La Barbara). In her subject they found boundless possibilities and she inspired new ways of thinking about singing, theatre, timbre, persona and the intellectual vitality of singers. In a time where gender hierarchies and the cult of composerly genius stifled the fullness of (especially women’s) voices, Berberian was a catalyst for change.

³ A ‘real singer’, as colloquially referred to in classical vocal circles is a singer who can capably perform standard repertoire to a professional level (as opposed to a new music specialist, a singer of popular/folk styles or an untrained vocalist). It also connotes a vocalist who is somehow gifted with a strong physiological instrument and easy command of technique that is well suited to the purpose of classical singing.
Composers, Collaboration and Hierarchy

“... Music has gone through this composer focused or performer focused thing alternately throughout history. I feel like we’re entering a performer-focused era and we’re breaking out of a composer-focused era. The composer-focused era makes the performer want to be selfless - you hear this word channeling a lot. I feel like this is a really old idea of: I am just ‘I am an open vessel, I’m empty and I let the composer speak through me’... I think ‘God damn it, no, I’m not no one. I am fucking someone!’” (Lucy Dhegrae)

Dhegrae exemplifies here a generational shift in the way musicians think about their role in collaboration and hierarchy that is fairly consistently demonstrated through the words of the interviewees. 19th century ideas of the romantic genius-composer and a mid-20th century focus on principals of objectivity have given way to a more fluid and individuated approach to collaboration and hierarchy.

These interviews presented myriad of ways of thinking about the singer’s place in the composer-performer relationship. Views ranged from performers who believed themselves to have been vessels for the composer “I figured: I’m the vehicle” (Plantamura), to singers like Dhegrae who strongly and specifically rejected “vessel” culture:

“I absolutely can’t be empty for the fucking composer ... so there’s that whole thing about being empty. I think that just means that your personal ideas of what should happen are going to taint what’s actually there, and ... the composer is a genius and we just have to uncover what it is. But as someone who works with a lot of composers, I think that very few of them are truly geniuses. We’re all just people. (Lucy Dhegrae)

All of the singers under sixty, in one way or another, expressed their belief that they should be taken into account by composers when they are realizing first performances of works. They also believed that the work itself would be benefit from some kind of understanding between composers and the performers they write for:

“...I want to recognize in them [the composers] a generous attitude, and I hope that I’m always meeting their music with a generous attitude. So if I start a piece and I feel the composer is not in the discussion, recognizing me as a collaborator

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4 Dhegrae is in her early thirties
5 For a fuller discussion of this idea see ‘Cultural Context ’ Pg 45
and is not being generous … I used to think: ‘Oh well, Okay.’ Now I just think: ‘Yeah, Bye.’ (Jane Sheldon)

The interviewees also expressed an awareness of how these composer-performer value systems are far from fixed and that what we are, or are not, willing to accept in collaboration is based upon the perceived hierarchies and goals at play in specific situations: “I mean, it would be like doing Figaro and Mozart comes up and says, ‘why don’t you sing it like that?’ You would say, ‘okay’” (Barry Ryan).

Many of the singers interviewed identify as makers or composers, as well as singers. Where a singer fell in the composer to improviser to performer spectrum seemed quite linked to the ways in which they wanted to be involved and acknowledged throughout the creative process. Performer-improviser-composer Carolyn Connors is very experienced in negotiating collaborative situations. Through her reflections upon these experiences she has developed nuanced ideas about the absence of adequate language and understanding around collaboration:

“…There is a gap in the language. And that gap translates to a gap in pay, in credit, in ownership and in the skill sets of the collaborators… we know what skills are needed as a performer but there are a whole lot of other amazing skills that you need as a collaborator… I’ve been in a lot of things where the composer is all too willing to take whatever the improvisation is that the player does, and it ends there… I feel like in those collaborations there are no boundaries being transcended. It’s something that just meets in the middle and actually is much less than what can be achieved.” (Carolyn Connors, 2015)

Through her experience Connors has formed a strict criteria for herself in taking on collaborative projects. She recognizes and diffuses situations where there is a potential for exploitative hierarchies to arise: “He just wanted to buy me, and then edit me, and then put it up in whichever way he chose. I’ve done that for so many years, and I’m not going to do that again” (ibid).

Older singers, especially ones who were not also composers or improvisers, seemed less concerned with being actively involved in the creative process. However almost all the singers interviewed expressed greater satisfaction with their composer-performer
relationships when they felt composers had given them the space to be present as themselves. Many spoke in specifics about their relationships with the composers with whom they had worked. The way singers negotiated working relationships with composers who already had achieved great status in their lifetime often differed from how they worked with younger composers. Lucy Shelton said she would “never question” an instruction from Elliot Carter. Barry Ryan liked that Carlisle Floyd allowed him to be his own version of the character (George Milton in Floyd’s *Of Mice and Men*). Tony Arnold, aware of these dynamics, offered her consciously negotiated approach:

“When the great composer asks you to leap through the ring of fire, for other reasons you’re more likely to do it … We do these things. For somebody that you don’t know at all, or somebody that’s young and upcoming, you have all kinds of conflict about that. It’s harder for you to just give yourself. It’s harder for you to give yourself up in the process.” (Tony Arnold, 2016)

Joan La Barbara, discussed her work with some of the many established and respected composers (John Cage, Alvin Lucier, Morton Feldman, Robert Ashley to name but a few) she has worked with:

JLB: “…Each composer is very different and some wanted to use the extended techniques while some stayed away from it because they felt it was too identified with me and they felt that if they used a lot of extended techniques they were just copying what I do” JA: “how did that make you feel? When a composer didn’t want to do this because it was too much like you” JLB: “I thought it was wasting some of the possibilities. I thought that unfortunately that was an ego issue and you know, my attitude was, well ‘get over it’” (Joan La Barbara, 2015)

Composer-performers-improvisers (like La Barbara, Snapper, Nini and Connors) of all generations gave specific and detailed accounts of their relationship to the power-hierarchies inherent in performing music by other people. In some circumstances issues around this hierarchical system had been strong influencers to how their artistic practice developed:

“For a long time I didn’t want to do composed works because … having to be this vessel just kind of grossed me out. Now I really do like just having to work with interpreting it and not trying to also direct or frame it in terms of meaning but to actually go a little bit deeper into it… I’m laughing because you never
quite get there but that’s also a cop out because it is something to arrive somewhere and to have a sense of what you do... in terms of getting over the vessel thing, I think I would still feel - I think I’m just lucky to work with really great composers who are not - who don’t treat the voice like a wife. ” (Juliana Snapper)

The interviewees were asked about their preferred ways of being involved in working on a piece, whether for example they preferred to receive finished scores from composers, or if they liked being part of more collaborative methods: to improvise with composers or work alongside them to develop an individuated language for the work, or beginning the process by providing demonstrations of their existing range and timbral/technical vocabulary? It was common amongst the older singers to see their role as being more fixed than younger singers, who tended to have individuated and flexible ideas about the ways in which they liked to collaborate and their role and rights within the collaborative hierarchy. Carol Plantamura talked about the roles of performer and composer as having had a strict set of boundaries during the time of her performing career:

JA: “…in what ways did you like to be involved in the creative process working with a composer on a new work?” CP: “I kept my mouth shut, except when the composer would say: ‘can you do [makes neutral sound]?’ and so I’d do it. He’d say: ‘Okay, can you [makes neutral sound]’? As for what he was writing, I would never say anything. I figured ‘I’m the vehicle’ but being a vehicle I can add what I want to it in terms of character, in terms of drama, in terms of passion, in terms of non-passion, all that stuff.” JA: “you’ve said: ‘this is how it was’. Were there ever situations where it was different...” CP: “No, not really.” (Carol Plantamura)

Lucy Shelton relayed that she had not often been actively involved in the compositional process in a collaborative sense:

JA: “If a composer, for example, wanted to work with you from the very beginning with your instrument and trying things out and... LS: “Yeah, I haven't had that experience. JA: “Okay.” LS: “I would enjoy that. Has that happened with you quite a bit?” (Lucy Shelton)

Shelton, throughout her career of realizing first performances of works by many of the world’s most significant composers, spoke of her process being driven by a relationship to written scores, rather than intervention on her part within the compositional process,
or intentionally negotiating meanings of her own as she prepared the work for performance:

“I feel like I make very compelling interpretations that are primarily drawn from what’s literally on the page and it always surprises me working with students when they want to spend so much time about well, what does this mean? What does this mean? What does - and pieces that I had premiered! I’ll, well, well I’m not actually sure [what it means] but I can certainly perform it in a committed and profound way... my raison d’être, is the commitment to the music and the composers...I mean the music isn’t heard unless we perform it and this is a responsibility and an honor and I don’t like adding a whole lot of extra stuff to it.” (Lucy Shelton, 2015)

The time we exist in now places a high value on collaboration, but collaboration itself poses many problems. The quote above from Lucy Shelton exemplifies a more traditional world-view of the role of performers, performer subjectivity, the rigidity of the musical work-concept, what a notated score can tell us and the breadth of meaning already encoded in it. This approach treats the notated score as a fixed object, emphasizing a performer’s responsibility to honor the intentions of the composer through its score-based representations. So much work being undertaken now utilizes a more flexible model, where performers, composers and all manner of co-artists collaborate on projects with fluid boundaries around methodologies, plasticity and temporal finitude. These collaboratively devised compositions are not necessarily reproducible, or even recognizable from performance to performance, as traditional score-based interpretation would be. This creates its own set of questions. Many of the singers described this part of their practice as being a source of frustration. How do we designate roles, assign credit, develop mechanisms for self-checking, and ensure that we’re operating equitably when performers are so integrally part of the creative process?

“I think there’s even an argument for saying there are the people who write, and the performers and, in between there’s this 3rd thing named ‘collaboration’ but it isn’t defined and is almost as equally big, but there’s a whole lot of things that aren’t even in the language.” (Carolyn Connors)
Embodied and reflexive methodologies

“...Any practice that doesn’t have attached to it some sort of self-reflective mechanism is completely useless to me.” (Tony Arnold)

This was a topic area that produced highly individuated answers from the interviewees. When asked what methodologies of physical/embodied entrainment they utilized, singers had strong ideas and practices that they had developed for their own bespoke purposes. For some singers, specific physical methods were not of interest to them. Other singers gave extremely detailed answers about the way they negotiate their bodies and the often finely tuned practices they undertake, as well as their goals for improvement in this area.

The majority of interviewees had some kind of physical methods in place for paying attention to their bodies. Many of them also had methods of self-reflection and analysis. Generally speaking, younger singers tended to have more to say on questions about physical and reflexive methodologies. One of the most senior interviewees declined to answer the question about his physical methods. Carol Plantamura stated she had not specifically engaged with any physical methodologies:

JA: “You never had any really physical body methods?” CP: “No, I wish I had. They didn’t go into things like that in those days.” (Carol Plantamura)

Thomas Buckner, the oldest interviewee, was an outlier to this trend. He regularly participates in a wide variety of physical methods including: yoga, Feldenkrais, Alexander technique, Qi Gong and daily walking “I do Alexander - I try to remember to do it before I get out of bed in the morning... every day, an hour walk, an hour of vocalizing.” (Thomas Buckner, 2015)

Joan La Barbara also had very specific physical practice methods in place. She described physical and vocal exercises that she adapted from sources as diverse as Phyllis Curtin6 and a registered nurse with whom she studied breathing:

6 The late Phyllis Curtin taught voice at the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s Summer Program at Tanglewood from the 1960s until 2014. Her classes were attended by several of the singers
“I developed a series of physical exercises, warm up exercises, relaxation techniques for the shoulders, neck and tongue, to defeat these tensions. We all do it, we all have that. And so, whenever I teach and whenever I’m going to sing I do those exercises and show them to my students because I feel that it’s allowed me to do the kinds of things that I do without doing any damage and also to sing for a long period of time.” (Joan La Barbara, 2015)

Lucy Dhegrae has developed a nuanced and critical set of materials with which to understand her physical body and to analyze her intuitive behaviors and habits:

“I’m not a master of this [embodied awareness]. This is something I want to work on, but this is how it actually works for me right now: It’s not how I want it to work, but I would say that I am either focused on my body or I am focused on what I’m doing, or I’m focused on the feelings and it’s really for me one or the other…Going back to Bessel van der Kolk⁷, if you’re a traumatized person, you have this hotspot in your brain and when you go back to those traumas, it literally shuts down the part of your brain that is feeling your body, that knows - that has a sense of time, that has executive function, who is in control really.” (Lucy Dhegrae)

Timur Bekbusonov sees his physical methods, his daily-life, and stage-life as interconnected:

“All of the above techniques [Feldenkrais, Alexander technique] have an influence on an overall approach I use to tackle anything I do on stage. For me, there is really not much division between the stage and the real life, but what I do off-stage, often prepares me for the moment on-stage.” (Timur Bekbusonov)

Jane Sheldon utilizes physical methods in her background maintenance for her voice, and is conscious of a desire to become more rigorous in the way she applies them:

“I do vocal exercises that are super methodical... but the non-vocal physical habits I should probably be more disciplined about...I’ve found Feldenkrais utterly revelatory... I swim. I wasn’t gifted with the most amazing set of lungs and I’ve had to kind of work at that. I have found swimming, I mean both swimming and yoga - when I’m doing them, I’m always irritated by the fact that the actual type of breathing you’re doing is not very comparable to the type of breathing

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⁷ Bessel Van der Kolk is a psychiatrist and author of The body keeps the score, a book about the neuroscience and clinical treatment of trauma that has been influential to Dhegrae in her ideas about embodiment and vocal communication.
you're doing in singing but working the system and getting it flexible enough to have the different kinds of inputs is good.” (Jane Sheldon)

Odeya Nini, with her backgrounds in dance, composition and voice has a deep sense of the connection between her vocal and her physical practices:

Much of the vocalizing style I have developed, which is connected to the physical body, comes from challenges I had with my voice. When I began experimenting with extended techniques, textures and wordless vocalizing I began to follow my body’s tendencies. I say body rather than voice because the body holds so many stories, tensions, and contains so much, that when I started working with my natural tendencies instead of against them, as in trying to do something that didn’t feel comfortable but I thought was right, I was able to really release. (Odeya Nini)

Toni Arnold has a wide lexicon of methods built into her preparatory and performative processes (too many to mention here). A guiding element of hers seems to be the ongoing conscious negotiation between labor and effort with freedom and expressivity:

“Whenever you go into the practice room, whenever you go into a performance, you’re looking to harvest past experience of vocal freedom, of function, of pleasure, of precision, of all of these things that happen in flashes. We all experience that kind of freedom. So we’re looking to set into motion the series of circumstances that were quite personal about freedom. Whether they made it happen or not or whether we just associated with it, we can still conjure that and use that energy, the energy of those feelings, the memory of those feelings, to be in that place anew, intentionally.” – (Toni Arnold, 2016)

Self-analytical, reflexive methodologies elicited a different kind of response to the question of methodologies of the body. Most singers enthusiastically detailed the processes they have developed for their bodies. Several singers described their rigorous analytical methodologies. Most utilized intuitive reflective processes:

JA: “do you employ any particular methods of self-reflection or analysis in your practice?” BR: “I think that’s part of the job. I think we’re doing that 24/7. I think in the rehearsal process after we’ve finished - I don’t know any singer that doesn’t finish a performance and think: ‘that was pretty good’ or I finished a performance and I think: ‘that wasn’t very good whatsoever. I can do a lot better than that.’ We all do that. As opera singers if we didn’t do that we wouldn’t get any better.” (Barry Ryan, 2015)
The reflexive methods practiced by the interviewees had many commonalities but, unsurprisingly, each singer adapted their methodology to the needs of their individual practice. One fairly common way of reflecting upon and analyzing performance was engaging with video or audio recordings. Lucy Dhegrae had a particularly specific and active role for video in her methodology:

“I always [have reflexive methods], if there’s a video I’ll watch it. As painful as that is, if there’s a recording I’ll listen to it, and usually as soon as possible... to get ready for performances, often I video myself because that’s a part of the process that is so important, the audience, and if you’re never thinking about the audience when you’re preparing the piece...” JA: “So, when you’re working on a piece, you use a video camera as a stand-in for the audience to practice that relationship?” LD: “Yes, to practice the knowledge of them being there. It’s like oh, there’s someone watching me and they are important. Also then to go back and watch it and be like okay, how much did I acknowledge that presence? Just by having it there, practicing the recognition and then going back and watching it is really important to me.” (Lucy Dhegrae)

Singers who also identify as makers-composers-improvisers tended to have formally developed methods for generating ideas, capturing them and evaluating themselves over time. Carolyn Connors described a rigorous set of methods she utilized:

“Self-reflection and analysis exist constantly, in many intertwined and overlapping ways. In non-formal ways, I write journals: of what gigs I did, with who, what the process was, and frustrations. I write notes on scores and workbooks, and keep these. I have books of ideas, things I want to do. I ponder and plan. I make recordings of ideas, and play with ways of constructing them... There are a few colleagues with whom I discuss technical aspects of playing and singing. I trust these people and the discussions have existed from between 10 and 30 years. We reflect, analyze, suggest solutions for each other, muse, ponder.” Carolyn Connors (2015)

On the other end of the spectrum Lucy Shelton offered the following on the topic of self-reflexive practices:

JA: “I’m wondering about your process for self-reflection and analysis.” LS: “Self-reflection? [Laughter]” JA: “Is that a dirty word?” LS: “No, oh I probably haven’t done - my process? Well I’ve been doing a lot of self-reflecting lately because I’m looking back over my good years. I don’t know that I have anything to say about that though.” JA: “I guess I can give some examples of some of the things other people have said about their reflective processes? Analyzing themselves...
through documentation or journaling - “LS: “Yeah, I haven’t done any of those things.” (Lucy Shelton, 2015)

The methods each singer adapts to reflect upon and analyze their practice is heavily tied to the needs of the work they undertake. Singers working directly in creating new work have developed ways to analyze their place within the work, track the development of ideas and make decisions to move the practice forward. Singers who see themselves primarily as interpreters serving notated scores had less cause to use these processes. In many cases a desire to be the best performer possible and to self-assess along the way was the go-to method for reflection and analysis.

Ontology of performance
The final area of this chapter is not so much a question, as a description of the breath of subjective experiential phenomena. There seems to be a divide between interviewees who described performance as a way of accessing a kind of ultimate version of themselves, and those who found that performance was a way to escape being themselves. These two ideas could be seen as two sides of the same coin, ‘being and nothingness’ so to speak, but both transcend common kinds of presence and being:

“[When performing] I’m not thinking about anything else, but the act of doing it is not really related to thinking… it’s an organic connection with your whole physical being and it takes your mind over as well. You have a - it’s almost like an ultimate form of being.” (Thomas Buckner)

In order to find freedom in a super-normal state, Juliana Snapper exposes herself to extreme situations:

“What I need in order to perform, which is to get into - to find a certain state that - of a severe limitation and through that limitation to find this freedom which is kind of this sort of trance state or this - I don’t know - it’s cheesy but kind of exalted state... I think of it as ‘miracle baiting’... because you need a fucking miracle to get you out of it. You keep setting up situations that demand miracles and then oftentimes, not all the time but oftentimes that shit will show up. I think that’s the phenomena I look for is that having to do something a little impossible as a mode of freedom.” (Juliana Snapper)
Nicholas Isherwood expressed the feeling of performance as being a highly variable one and of it being related to athletic exercise:

“The feeling of performance is as varied as the roles and/or music performed… We are the most athletic musicians and singing can provide the same sensation of well being as any other cardiovascular exercise. The coordination of the delicate muscular balance gives the singer with efficient vocal technique an agreeable feeling comparable to yoga... the exchange of energy with the audience contributes to how it all feels. In a word: exhilarating”  (Nicholas Isherwood)

Carol Plantamura found a freedom from herself through performance: “I found it [performance] always transcending, and I found the easiest things to sing for me were when I had to “not be me”… When I wasn’t me, I was free.” (Carol Plantamura)

Lucy Dhegrae described how the interplay of all the interconnected elements in the environment influence the hyper-real state of performative presence she experiences:

“For me, being present, ... there are so many things that are vying for your attention. There’s the audience and your recognition of them. There’s the music. There’s the technique and then there’s the music happening with you. There’s music in your head that you’re following and then there’s the music with the pianist or the violinist or the many people that are on stage. You’re trying to really let that music enter you and flow through you. You’re not trying to be closed to it. You’re trying to be open to all this stuff. Almost by being open to all that stuff, you’re almost not there. Do you know what I mean? Because it’s almost like - unless you’re that way as a person in life…it’s almost like a hyper-presence that is not a feeling of what we take to actually be present. (Lucy Dhegrae)

Performance is a place to be present and to pay attention to oneself – either as the best version of yourself – or a self, sublimated. Submission to this state, of sharing what one has prepared and cased inside the body with the other people present during the performance, seems to be an experience every singer shared. One might argue that performance opens a portal to some more primary state of being. The performer is intensely connected to the other subjects in the room, yet completely focused on the task occurring within the self. A satisfying performance could be described as an activity which gives access a reality beyond the constructed, sensible, symbolic order, where we forget all other desires. This feeling of returning to an essential, pre-desiring state of being is something that has us returning time and again to the face the audience.
These interviews offer a set of primary data that gives a window into the diversity of approaches at play in professional vocal practice in new music. They show that the subjective embodied and cultural experiences of singers influence the practice and processes employed as they go about realizing new musical work. These experiences are key influencers of collaborative methods and hierarchies, which have significant impacts on musical outcomes.

This concludes Part 1 of this exegesis, which has focused upon the background to artistic research: context, practices, language and cultures around vocal subjectivity. The remainder of the exegesis directly addresses the foreground practices of artistic research through the author’s realizations of five musical works.
Part 2 (Foreground)
Introduction to the artistic research

“Thus matters of will, choice and intention become indicators of an agent I am attending
to, a discourse I am observing, perhaps even participating in and influencing…”
(Emmerson 2007 p. 24)

Introduction

The artistic research portion of this exegesis aims to explain and convey the embodied
knowledge discovered through two projects, entailing the realization of five works. The
first project on Helmut Lachenmann’s Got Lost, the second on four new works for voice
and electronics by Anthony Pateras, Alexander Garsden, Jeanette Little and James
Rushford. These projects were carried out between 2013-2016. This work took place in
locations around the world: Tanglewood-Massachusetts (US), Sydney (Australia), Tel Aviv
(Israel), New York (US) Darmstadt (Germany), Chicago (US), Brisbane (Australia) and
more. These performances were documented in various forms, mostly video and audio
recordings, and through my artistic journaling. In the following chapters, through
discussion of my preparation, performance and recording, I will address these projects
and the foreground research activities I undertook towards realizing them. This chapter explains how to read the following two chapters by providing an overview of the timelines for the artistic research, some discussion of approaches taken within each research stage (preparation, performance, recording) and discussion on the context of these particular artistic projects.

The order of events in realizing artistic work is often not linear. Loosely grouped, the foreground\(^1\) activities undertaken towards realizing the Lachenmann project can be divided up into two stages of research: preparing and performing. The foreground activities towards realizing the voice and electronics project can be divided into three stages of research: preparation, performing and studio-recording/editing. Making something new out of nothing sometimes proves a strange path, and makes for meandering reading in the next two chapters. This introduction seeks to provide a clearer frame for the narrative of the next two chapters, so that it might be allowed to wander in a fashion that mirrors the research process itself.

\(^1\) A comprehensive definition of the way I utilize the term ‘foreground’ is given on p. 28 in the methodology chapter.
Below is a graph that shows the active time spent on each phase of the project for every instance mentioned in this thesis, year by year, from 2013 to 2016.

The diagram (Fig 5.1) gives a generalized representation of the frequencies and ordering of the different modes of activity for each project. Read left to right, the numbers represent the 52 weeks of each year. For each week in which foreground activities occurred towards realizing the two major artistic research projects, a coloured square is notated. The orange and red lines show the time spent preparing and (the frequency of) performing Lachenmann’s Got Lost. The green, blue and purple lines represent the three phases of activity (preparation, performing and studio recording & editing) undertaken in the voice and electronics project.

The voice and electronics project includes work towards the realization of four individual works. The four-year overview does not give high enough resolution to accurately
represent the path of each piece. To give a more detailed impression, I have included a higher resolution example. The following figure shows the principal foreground activities, demarcated by research stage (preparation, performance and recording/editing) for the first year of research towards realizing Garsden’s [ja] Maser.

The very first step we took in the active research towards realizing this piece was a studio recording session (with a brief preparation for that session undertaken in the same week). Some of the weeks indicated under the ‘studio-recording category’ involved several sessions within that same week. Overall, the time spent in the studio for this piece was far more significant than the time spent on the stage. The ramifications of this will be discussed further in chapter seven.

**Preparation and Performance**

In the figures 5.1 and 5.2 you can see the relationship between the amount of time spent on active preparation (indicated with the orange and green lines in Fig. 5.1), as compared to the less frequent activities of performance (indicated with the red and blue lines in Fig. 5.1), and recording/editing (indicated with purple line in Fig. 5.1). The performance of these works is discussed at length in the two chapters that follow, so I will not address that further here. Part of my preparation was, of course, deciding upon this course of inquiry. These pieces come out of very different geographical spaces and, while there is only seven years between the composition dates of the oldest and the newest pieces within the project, a great gulf of historical terrain is represented. Got Lost, though composed in 2008, is composed by one of the great titans of the European
avant-garde and comes out of a tradition of mid 20th century European modernism where objectivity still holds power. The voice and electronics pieces are composed by Australian composers all under forty years of age who are influenced by noise, improvisation, and minimalist schools as well as strands emerging from European modernism and post-modernism. This chapter will include discussion of the historical and personal contexts from which these projects grew and argue why these particular pieces together form an interesting space to explore vocal subjectivity. While both projects were addressed through the first two research stages, preparation and performance, the voice and electronics project was also studio-recorded for commercial release (on Hospital Hill records). A discussion of the decision-making process around the recording portion of the research and its relation to vocal subjectivity now follows.

Recording

With technology comes choice; almost infinite choice. My voice is produced by a body which is wrapped in a skin that is relatively inflexible. It has limits in its amplitude, directionality, frequency range and reproducibility. With electronic means the field is opened and performers have many more decisions to make that will affect the lens through which a work is filtered. During nineteen in-studio sessions over fifteen weeks (represented with the purple line in Fig. 5.1, and the blue line in Fig. 5.2) many choices of framing and interpretation were made. Most of the time Dunscombe and I were alone in the studio, with occasional skype visits from the composers. Only rarely were composers physically present in recording sessions.

Let me state that my relationship with electronics is not that of a maker. I am not a computer musician or music technologist. I have collaborated closely with computer musicians (particularly Dunscombe) throughout this process and through those collaborations have been able to realize the works and also grow my understanding of the technology involved. My role in this project is situated in my vocal practice. My relationship to the technological elements of the project has principally been in making
decisions which shape how the electronics stretch and reframe the ontology of vocal performance and how that ontology is presented to the audience.

Preparing these pieces for a commercial studio recording created its own particular set of problems. In the discussion on the live performances the reader will hear some of the ways we experimented with realizing the spatial and proximal elements of these works. For the recording, we worked to create a balance of sonic elements within the audible field that could be clearly perceived through the limited directional capacities of a stereo speaker set up. We worked to craft an audible sense of place and architecture, articulated through the recorded music, which was fit to the purpose of each piece. Without a physical/temporal space to help the audience perceive the spatial interactions of the live voice with the electronic sounds we sought to create an illusion of that space through the recorded medium using whatever resources we had at our disposal.

We worked to intentionally highlight or dull elements of ‘liveness’ as they might influence the listener’s experience of recorded sounds:

“From the outset of recording technology until perhaps about 1960, a performance was live to those who personally witnessed it and recorded as it was listened to afterward; recordings were of live performances. More recently, these are heard as “live” (in contrast with recordings of sounds that were never produced on stage but rather were assembled in a studio). Such an artifact is paradoxically called a “live recording” to distinguish it from a “studio recording” (Puckette, 2016)

In conventional (even studio) recordings of Western Classical music this pre-1960 model of listening is often still reflected. Even if the work is recorded in a studio, all the performers are made to sound as if they are in one room, situated close to one another, but at some distance from the audience, much as occurs in a live performance situation. In the case of this recording project, rather than using the studio to recreate a semblance of a ‘real’ location (concert-hall, theatre etc.) in which the album would reside, we wanted to create a series of flexible places that specifically addressed the

\[2\] I want to make clear here that all of the technical manipulation of the sounds, with software and hardware was the work of Samuel Dunscombe. We discussed what the choices would mean, but the practical realization and problem-solving of these objectives should be credited directly to Dunscombe.
themes and objectives of each piece. As microphones were chosen, sound baffles moved and microphone direction and positions were altered, we tried to give listeners an impression of very specific space. This was a difficult task, and as you will read in chapter seven, we were not always totally successful.

The composers, Dunscombe, and myself were all players involved in the recording process with our own subjective value hierarchies and desires for the pieces. None of the pieces was recorded in a situation where all of the relevant persons were physically present with one another all of the time. Many compromises and responses to practical circumstance resulted in a final product that I know not everyone involved believes to be truly reflective of their objectives within all the pieces. Unfortunately, there rarely can be complete agreement on the success or otherwise of such subjective work. We had many, many choices to make throughout the minutiae of the recording process, and these studio recordings are the object-outcomes we now have to consider.

Towards Lachenmann

Following the horrors of World War II and distrusting the previous generation’s “bourgeois concept of music” (Lachenmann, 2004), European composers in the mid-20th century sought to create a “tabula rasa” (Ibid). “The modernistic developments of the 1950s had a special potency for young Germans, distrustful of the conventions of the past, which could be seen to have been tainted by the culture from which they originated, a culture which culminated in genocide.” (Pace, 1998, p.9) The artistic ‘self’ as conceived under romantic and humanist models was replaced by the work of a new generation of critical theorists who influenced the development of rigorous method and process-centred musics:

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3 Many recording sessions occurred with only Dunscombe and I present, others took place with a composer present via skype. Some editing sessions took place without me, between Sam, the producer at our record label Matthew McGuigan and several collaborators whose feedback Dunscombe sought, including Miller Puckette, Benoit Piccand and Tom Erbe, as we moved towards a final master. Some of the preliminary recording sessions occurred with the composer present in the room.
“The critical tradition of German aesthetic thought, encompassing such figures as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse and more recently Jurgen Habermas has continued to inform much of the intellectual and cultural life of that country. An almost mystical faith in Hegelian dialectics has provided a hope for progress even after the devastation of the war years. Lachenmann, who was born in 1935, is a child of this era, and his ideas and work are heavily influenced by this tradition.” (Pace, 1998, p.9)

In pursuit of progress, the subject and self, with their incontrovertible impurities, became for some, objects to be leapt over. Many composers associated with the Darmstadt school composed music concerned with creating systems that might ameliorate the falsity of “always affirmative” subjectivity. This created some discord (Pierson, 2015) between the various compositional camps at Darmstadt.

The most fabled outcome of this disintegration is perhaps the split between Boulez and Cage whose friendship drifted apart as they refined their very different approaches to reinventing musical authenticity and the role of responsibility and control in compositional methods. Around that time, another less prominent but nonetheless significant stream of debate was being played out, and that was over the role of subjectivity in music via the voice. The principal players were Luigi Nono (who was at the time Lachenmann’s composition teacher) and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Pierson explains that the differences between these groups of composers arose not only from aesthetical disputes but:

“… This is a disagreement about the status and means of the voice in music, which is in turn a disagreement about the status and means of expression, of subjectivity, of music’s very humanity. To draw the issue in stark black and white, one might say that Nono is in favor of an emotional music of direct expression and communication, while Stockhausen’s aesthetic relies upon abstraction and technical innovation.” (Pierson, 2015, p. 6)

Nono was arguably the most important early influence on Lachenmann’s music. He is a teacher for whom Lachenmann has expressed much admiration and respect. In Lachenmann’s late vocal works the younger composer took up Nono’s defense of the vocalizing subject by using the grainy power of the voice to convey the intrinsically human underpinnings of the sung musical gesture. Nono makes use of the inextricable humanity of singer’s voices in some of his key works, like La Fabbrica Illuminata (1964) and Il Canto Sospeso (1955). The latter, was especially influential to Lachenmann’s early development, and had a polarizing effect on the new music community of the time. Lachenmann observed the power of this approach early on during his time studying with Nono in the late 1950s. In his 1999 essay ‘Touched by Nono’ Lachenmann describes what he learned about the way structuralist values and expressivity interact through his mentor’s work:

“Only at certain expressive peaks do the individual points of sound, the syllables, come together to form a melodic, almost artificially expressive gesture... when the girl Ljubka, faced with death, calls “Addio Mama”[farewell mother].... And at a time when false pathos is cheaply available, and we suffer from an excess of this and other empty forms of emotion it is this very structuralist mutation which charges Nono’s pathos with a mysterious power, a stringency which to this day forces the listener out of his indifference. ” (Lachenmann,1999, p. 20)

Lachenmann keenly feels the link between the singing voice as it manifests in a melodic vocal line, and the powerful way that that pushes the subjectivity of the suffering protagonist in Nono’s work to the fore of the listener’s experience. The tension between subjectivity, “tabula rasa” and structuralist “stringency” continue to play out in Lachenmann’s recent music, and is a highly visible element of Got Lost. Perhaps because of the highly charged historical events through which Lachenmann has lived, of the pieces examined in this research, his is the most obviously in active dialogue with the political and aesthetic milieu in which it is situated. “[Lachenmann’s music] is a music of its time, invested in the Marxist aesthetics of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin,

with a permanent fugitive eye on the past and an eager gaze forwards to the future, but written with an unflinching ear unswayed by dogmatic tenets and informed by acoustic reality” (Swithinbank, 2011 p. 55). Lachenmann observed the artists ahead of him struggling to articulate themselves in the face of the seemingly overwhelming evils present in his home country during his childhood. This kind of trauma resists artistic representation, “All the world’s not a stage … That there is no adequate drama about Fascism is not due to lack of talent” (Adorno, 1974, p. 143), and yet Lachenmann takes it upon himself to figure out a path forward. In Lachenmann’s essay on The beautiful in music today he presents a dichotomy between composers who seek to address this bleak time through distracting themselves with a hedonistic “jungle of exotica” while the other seeks to touch the “emotional landscape”. Lachenmann took the latter path, seeking to reach the “real” emotional landscape, albeit through a circuitous route. One could posit that the journey towards this fabulous place has been ongoing in Lachenmann’s music for the last half-century.

Towards Voice and electronics

The choice to focus on voice and electronics as a project might at first seem an odd one for a singer without a developed skill-set in technology. The idea was first introduced by one the composers. I was planning to commission a number of works for solo voice, and the composer said that they would be more interested to compose something for voice and electronics. After some reflection, I decided that this project would allow me to explore a deeper set of problems than the voice alone could – while still allowing me the independence to be ‘a solo voice’, reflecting on a soloist’s practice.

Voices have been used as source material in computer music since its earliest days (Sunabacka, 2008). There exists a rich history of notated music for voice and electronics that stretches back to the mid-20th century experimentations of European modernism. Stockausen’s Gesang der Jünglinge7, Berio’s Thema (Ommaggio a Joyce8), Babbit’s

Philomel<sup>9</sup>, Nono’s <i>La fabbrica illuminata</i><sup>10</sup> and, later Morton Feldman’s <i>Three voices</i><sup>11</sup> are prominent examples. Some of these works have had relatively many scholarly lines devoted to them (in musicological, compositional and computer music fields), but very little has been written from the performer’s perspective about what it means to ‘be’ the voice in these technologised contexts.

Synthesis, analysis and manipulation of the voice in computer music have a significant and interesting history. Interrogation (Cook P. R., 1996) and analysis (Dodge, 1989) of speech and singing has been utilized by composers extensively. Computational affectation of voice has been explored within both the American experimental tradition (La Barbara, Dodge, Chowning, Subotnick et al) and by European composers and researchers at IRCAM (Liuni & Röbel, 2013), at the Royal Institute of Technology Stockholm (Sundberg, 2006), as well as by Iannis Xenakis (Xenakis, 2001), to name but a few examples. Many Australian composers have utilized electronics in their vocal music (Burt, 2013) and sound art (Neumark, 2015). Berio’s work in the field was highly influential to Jeanette Little’s work, while Xenakis could be seen as a major influencer of Garsden and Pateras in particular.

In 1966, Cathy Berberian noted the fundamental change in vocal music that had been brought about by the rise of electronic music:

> “I must state here that the techniques of recording and montage have had a fundamental role in vocal music. The fact that it is possible to record a sound or sounds with a tape recorder, isolate them from their original context, listen to them, per se, as a sound, then modify and combine them with other sonic elements belonging to other contexts has allowed the musician (and singers) to listen in ways different from reality and from all the sounds that normally escape our attention because they are absorbed and masked by the action which produces them and the experience which provokes them.” Berberian, quoted in (Karantonis, Placanica, Sivuoja-Kauppala, & Verstraete, 2014, p. 48)

From the invention of the microphone, to the advent of tape music and musique

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concrete, voices have been transformed by technology. The expectations and associations we have with voice in our contemporary world are inextricably technologised. In so many parts of our lives, technology is a mediating factor in how we communicate, whether it be through intentional interaction with music on our ipods, or phone conversations, Skype calls, Netflix marathons, or the omnipresent voices of muzak\textsuperscript{12} that form the sonic backgrounds of many public spaces. “For many listeners, perhaps most, listening to music is now primarily a technologically mediated experience” (Leman & Maes, 2014, p. 31).

Not so long ago, the normative mode of the transmission of voices in theatre and musical performances was unaided acoustic projection. A quick stroll around the internet will tell you that the consciously ‘projected’ kind of vocalism used in operatic singing is unseemly to many people in the western world today (Clegg, 2010; Gough, 2011). In professional circles I’ve often heard it expressed (particularly within the new-music community) that the vibrated tone of projected operatic voices is problematic (Valverde, 2016). Today, our cultural association with singing and performing voices is coloured by the existence of microphones. Our daily experiences of voice, and almost all popular music exists in its current form facilitated by amplification and thus we have become accustomed to a vocal subject that is simultaneously more intimate and more distant than earlier audiences were probably ever encountered.

“The experience of space is primary and primordial, but it does not, so to speak, stay that way. The bodily or phenomenological conditions of the voice determine and are themselves determined by cultural and historical orderings of space... In the idea of vocalic space, the voice may be grasped as the mediation between the phenomenological body and its social and cultural contexts...What space means, in short is very largely a function of the perceived powers of the body to occupy and extend itself through its environment. The meaning of human space is changed drastically when it becomes possible to inhabit and command with one’s voice and auditory range far greater than that prescribed by the limits of the naturally audible” (Connor 2000 p. 12)

\textsuperscript{12} I use the term ‘muzak’ here in the colloquial, rather than the specific sense. I am aware that ‘muzak’ does technically refer to the music produced by the muzak company in the early to mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century – which was always and intentionally music that did not feature vocals.
The combination of voice and electronics is an inescapable part of contemporary mediatized society. I know that some reading this exegesis will think that it’s a mistake for a performer with no expert technical knowledge to write about their experience negotiating their subjectivity via electronics means. I would argue that most of us interact with technology every day, almost as if these technologies were physically grafted to us. Very few of us have control-over or knowledge-of how that technology actually works. We learn to navigate within a given set of user-friendly parameters, yet the choices we make in how we utilize technology in our lives have wide repercussions. The presence of this technology within the practice of new music is near ubiquitous. One cannot be an expert in all fields, but we can take responsibility for how we negotiate the elements within our control by paying attention to the repercussions of our actions and working with our collaborators towards creating meaningful artistic outcomes. The technologised self is a contemporary problem inviting further unpacking, whether as agents controlling the technology or subjects in its embrace.

Coda

The voice and electronics project I discuss in this exegesis is very much situated in the youthful present. It is constituted of music by composers who are all under 40 years of age at time of writing, realized by a thirty-year old performer. Over the past sixty years, experimentally minded musicians have struggled to discover "how to be" (Lachenmann, 2012) in a milieu still remarkably well defended by the warriors of tradition. These new works seek contemporary ontological solutions, knowing that the young subjects who seek are also encumbered by the scars of battle, the original sins which we all bear in our different ways. The link between the 'voice and electronics project' and the Lachenmann work became apparent to me when I encountered a transcription of an interview conducted with Lachenmann at the Orpheus Institute in Ghent in 2012. Taking us back to the 1960s, Lachenmann critiques the ‘gastronomic’ quality of music in our culture.

“... in those days composers were asked: are you only intellectual or surrealistic, spiced for this culture or a little bit provocative ... I wanted to have a sound
situation which was totally clear, not a structural process but a sound as the result of its production. This is something we have in the music of Pierre Schaeffer, but it is all recorded: we hear a locomotive sound, a water drop, things that have to be recorded and that will come out again from the loudspeaker. And then there was a composer like Kagel, ... he made a sound where we hear not only the sound, we hear how it is made, the resistance of the material, which is tortured or corporeal. Corporeal, for me, was essential." (Lachenmann, 2012, p. 96)

This privileging of the digestible and the savory still has not been cast off by most of those who occupy the corridors of power in western art music. Lachenmann and the younger artists featured in this thesis share an unwillingness to sate ourselves with gastronomic musics or rest upon the easily reached fakeries of superficially “spiced” culture. We all care about the resistance of materials and the corporeal. The younger generation of composers represented here push back against the culture they have inherited with sincerity and earnestness. They are all probing the embodied mechanics of sonic production in an effort to reach towards something meaningful or real – the ways they extend their hand towards that out-of-reach meaning is tempered by the times and experiences of the subject doing the reaching. All five composers are pushing back against the mass production of music as commodity, salve, placation or entertainment. They do not attempt to hide the means of production. They toil in bodies, and claim space as discursive subjects, through sounds and structures and method. We show our labor and share what we have learned. And so it goes....
Artistic Research (Part A)

Realizing Lachenmann’s *Got Lost*

“If the poet says “I” that doesn’t necessarily mean himself”
(Helmut Lachenmann, 2012, p. 91)
Introduction

This chapter addresses my work towards performing Helmut Lachenmann’s 2008 piece for voice and piano, Got Lost. Three performances took place in Melbourne and Brisbane (Australia) with pianist Alex Raineri. A fourth performance took place in San Diego (United States) with pianist Todd Moellenberg. Because of the highly subjective and embodied nature of the research practice I do not feel able to convey much useful information about the pianists’ experience or the role of the piano part within this piece; for that reason I will refer to piano-related aspects of the work only peripherally and focus instead upon vocal elements of the work.

In his seventh decade, after 30 years away from writing for the solo voice, Lachenmann began work on two large-scale pieces for singers. His opera Das Mädchen mit den Schwefelhölzern (The Little Matchstick Girl) was begun in 1990 and completed in 1996. Got Lost was begun around that time. The latter is his most overtly ‘vocal’ piece and the only piece in his entire output to brazenly embrace conventional singing. Completed in 2008, the thirty-minute piece is dedicated to the soprano, Sarah Leonard. Lachenmann sets three seemingly disparate texts in English, German and Portuguese. The dominant text is “Der Wandrer” (The Wanderer), an extract from Nietzsche’s The Gay Science. The other two texts are Fernando Pessoa’s Portuguese poem (under the heteronym ‘Alvaro de Campos’) “Todas as cartas de amore sao ridiculas” (All love letters are ridiculous) and an English note the composer found in 2002 in the elevator of his apartment building in Berlin. In the note, a fellow resident pleadingly asked the reader to help her recover her laundry basket, which had “Got Lost”. In Lachenmann’s realization, the three texts are

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1 Lachenmann’s only piece utilizing a solo vocalist before the 1990s is temA from 1968. A work for voice, flute and cello where the performers all vocalize, but none of them ‘sings’ in the conventional sense of that word. The predominant forms of vocalization in the piece are breath sounds, whispers and various vocalic splutters, gasps and utterances.

2 The writer and poet Fernando Pessoa had over 100 aliases, which he called heteronyms, that he used throughout his literary career. These characters were constructed by the poet to allow him to inhabit different writing styles and, often controversial, opinions. Alvaro de Campos was created with an elaborate back story- he was supposedly a Portuguese naval engineer who studied in Glasgow and spent much time in ‘the orient’. Many details of his life can be found in Pessoa’s fragmentary autobiography The book of disquiet.
articulated in fragments that accumulate in their meanings and affects to shape the piece at all levels. The juxtaposition of the contrasting texts, with their respective languages, intentions and tone, fractures the subjectivity of the singer into variegated vectors that compete for power inside the listener’s ear. The texts and English translations are included below for reference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text 1 (Friedrich Nietzsche)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27. Der Wandrer</td>
<td>The wanderer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kein Pfad mehr! Abgrund rings und Todtenstille!</td>
<td>“No more path! An abyss all around and dead silence!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So wolltest dus! Vom Pfade wich dein Wille!</td>
<td>You wanted it this way! Your will swerved from the path!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nun, Wandrer, gilts! Nun blicke kalt und klar!</td>
<td>Now, wanderer, it counts! Now look coldly and clearly!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verloren bist du, glaubst du an Gefahr.</td>
<td>You are lost, if you believe—in danger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from Die fröhliche Wissenschaft. 1882</td>
<td>From The Gay Science. 1882</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text 2 (Álvaro de Campos)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Todas as cartas de amor são ridiculas</td>
<td>All love letters are ridiculous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todas as cartas de amor são</td>
<td>All love letters are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridículas.</td>
<td>Ridiculous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Não seriam cartas de amor se não fossem</td>
<td>Would not be love letters if they were not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridículas.</td>
<td>Ridiculous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Também escrevi em meu tempo cartas de amor,</td>
<td>In my time I also wrote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Como as outras,</td>
<td>love letters,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridículas.</td>
<td>Like the others,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ridiculous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As cartas de amor, se há amor,</td>
<td>Love letters, if there is love,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Têm de ser</td>
<td>Must be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridículas.</td>
<td>Ridiculous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mas, afinal,</td>
<td>But, ultimately,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Só as criaturas que nunca escreveram</td>
<td>Only creatures who have never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartas de amor,</td>
<td>written love letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>É que são</td>
<td>You are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ridículas.</td>
<td>Ridiculous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quem me dera no tempo em que escrevia</td>
<td>I wish that I had the time to write</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sem dar por iso</td>
<td>without realizing it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2014 I was a participant in the International Summer Course for New Music, a symposium and festival held in Darmstadt Germany. I had travelled to this course excited to hear Helmut Lachenmann speak about Got Lost. During the several hours of lectures he gave I learnt a lot about his methods and motivations. The thing that stuck with me most vividly was his explanation of why he had avoided writing for singers for so long. He said: "I never dared to write music for voice in earlier times… with one singing voice the personality of the person who sings is so beautiful and intense with personality – what should I do as a composer? The sounds are already full of intensity before I even write one note – this was a problem for me" (Lachenmann, 2014). It seemed somehow funny that I had gone all the way to Darmstadt to hear one of the greatest composers of the last century tell me point blank, that the presence of ‘one singing voice’ was a ‘problem’ for him. I heard this lecture right as I was beginning in earnest my preparation of Got Lost. I had to figure out how to realize this piece with the knowledge that the composer had expressed a concern that a singer’s presence and personality could over-shadow the ethical and aesthetic concerns of his music?
Knowing his oeuvre and scholarly output, I had guessed that Lachenmann found the singing subject-as-instrument problematic. Hearing it announced so plainly was gratifying and at the same time, a little hard to hear. Vocality’s coiled parts – body, persona and musical signification - seem to some contemporary composers (especially those who are part of or influenced by European modernism post-WWII) to present a problem for surmounting. From my singer’s perspective, that entanglement has been a source of joyful discovery and empowerment. These opposite experiences of the same problem make for interesting terrain to negotiate as a performer.

While it is evident that Lachenmann did not find the prospect of the voice an immediately easy one, he takes extraordinary care in the ways in which he goes about solving the problems of the voice as he sees them. This careful and considered approach is evident throughout *Got Lost*. The frame he places around the singer through which she must parse herself is constructed to very consciously mediate the relationship between personality and musical signification. Through the course of this research I came to better understand the motivations behind the composer’s decisions as they manifest on the musical page and the ways in which the entanglement of human-subject and musical-subject are built in to the music. Lachenmann has put a lot of energy into deciding how subjectivity manifests in his compositions and by paying attention to the way I made decisions in my realization of his music I’ve found new possibilities within my performer’s subjectivity.

I want to pause here to talk about the methods I employed in learning this piece. To be blunt, the score is missing a lot of information. There were no performance notes and many non-standard symbols in both the vocal and piano parts which needed to be

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3 At time of writing, a new edition was in preparation by Breitkopf which now contains more of the notated information I would have liked to have had. During the period where I learned the piece I had (with the permission of the composer and publishers) access to the composer’s hand-written manuscript as well as a preliminary draft of the type-set version that was to become the new Breitkopf edition.
decoded before work could begin on the piece. Before we had any rehearsal, Raineri and I, prepared for several months apart from one another. During this time, we corresponded when we had questions, undertook individual research, and shared the results of that research with one another. Rehearsals together began in Darmstadt in July 2014 and continued through September in Melbourne, in preparation for our first performance on October 10th.

To give an example of the early phases of learning this piece I will describe briefly how I unpacked the problem of the ‘tonlose’ (unvoiced) vocal line. In Got Lost the singer’s part is very often notated on two staves (see Figure 6.7). These staves represent the voiced and unvoiced sounds that the singer must perform in quick succession, occasionally simultaneously. The unvoiced sounds are placed on a percussion stave, the voiced sounds in the conventional treble stave. There is some conjecture as to the purpose of the percussion symbol. Stephan Schreiber has said that the percussion symbol means that the pitches notated need not be taken too definitively. However, I noticed when Lachenmann gave demonstrations of this technique during his lectures at Darmstadt that his unvoiced air sounds had very accurate pitches. I undertook a couple of different methods to discover the best solution for my self, through practical experiment.

At first I played and then recorded on the piano passages of the pitches (the ones notated on a percussion stave, but intended to be articulated with unvoiced air sounds), as if they had been notated on a treble stave. Then I practiced articulating these airy gestures simultaneously with the recorded piano pitches in an effort to consciously

4 My main resources for this decoding task were the recording of the performance by Stephen Drury and Elizabeth Keutsch, the score of Lachenmann’s TemA (which does have performance notes and much shared notation) and discussions with Drury and Schreiber. Drury and Keutsch are performers with significant histories working with the composer and performed the US première of the work and I leaned on their knowledge of the composer’s style and notational systems, as evidenced by their performance. I often turned to their recording of the work Keutsch, E., & Drury, S. (Performers). (2013). Lachenmann’s Got Lost. Callithumpian Consort, Boston, MA, US. When I was unsure of what I was seeing in the score. Schreiber, a Germany-based pianist who has performed the work extensively, provided counsel on practice methods and answered notational questions.

5 This is my paraphrasing of a contention Schreiber voiced during an informal discussion over dinner at Darmstadt in 2014.
entangle the noisy pitches I was producing through my body with the remembered mental re-production of the fixed pitches notated on the score. This proved useful in the opening section of the piece where all of the vocal part is unvoiced but ultimately I stopped using this method later on in the piece when the ‘tonlose’ category is used mostly in juxtaposition with other categories of voiced sound.

**Embodying Meanings**

Lachenmann’s craft and care ensures his musical representations are true to his ethical and philosophical picturing of humankind’s struggle to be and to express. An authentically Lachenmannian voice could not take the form of a melodic, whole or wholesome singing human. In his early career Lachenmann defended the kind of pathos and emotionality evident in the vocal music of his teacher Luigi Nono; many decades later Lachenmann’s recent vocal works are an attempt at realizing his own satisfactorily complex vocal subject in music.

Lachenmann’s reticence to write for solo voices is well documented. The reasons for which seem tightly entangled with the way he wishes to shape the listener’s relationship to the sounds he composes, as well as his fraught relationship with existing vocal music and the problems I’ve already mentioned raised by singing subjects themselves. Lachenmann’s music compels audiences to pay attention to their subjectivity as they listen by breaking down their illusions of safety, repeatability and unity. This desire to create a fresh relationship with the world through the sounds he composes is made more difficult by the carriage of sounds through the ‘existing category’ of vocal music.

“Expressing oneself means entering into relationship with one’s surroundings; it means confronting, as who one is and who one would like to be, the questions posed by society and the existing categories of communication, and coming to grips with the social value-concepts contained therein. It means, above all, offering as much resistance to the inherited categories of communication as is demanded by the contradictions and unfreedoms embodied in them” (Lachenmann, 1980, p. 22)
In Lachenmann’s ethics, one cannot responsibly represent subjectivity utilizing the oversimplified approach that underpins most vocal music. The performing subject should not attempt to deceive its audience by pretending it is a discrete and easily understood whole, or that that subject exists in a world which is elegantly and concretely knowable. For the interpreter of his music this makes resisting the existing categories of communication – or querying one’s habits and assumptions, paramount to effectively communicating his objectives. Lachenmann’s singer must exist in a space where the cracks in her subjectivity and her entanglement with her milieu are plain to see.

Lachenmann has made known his desire to be expressive: “I would like to "sing as the bird sings that lives in the branches" (Uhland); we live, however, in the branches of a broken forest.”

I take this to mean he would enjoy the freedom of his composer’s pen ‘flying over the page’ as it were, but he simultaneously acknowledges the danger of doing so. Lachenmann takes responsibility upon himself for composing sounds that have the potential to reflect a more realistically ‘broken’ human condition. In Got Lost his approach embraces the expressive while taking steps to avoid creating a structure where an unbridled fairy story of song might take shape.

In order to allow the singing subject some of the bird’s freedom, but to maintain still his connection to the broken forest, Lachenmann takes an unusual approach to text setting. The three texts in this piece function as separate compositional materials, organized according to their sonorous and symbolic qualities. The Nietzsche poem ‘The Wanderer’ colours the whole concept of the work and is the dominant text in the first third of the piece. Phonemes extracted from the poem are stretched out or repeated, adding their character to swathes of time. Later in the piece, the Nietzschean text is heard in larger, intelligible chunks that are usually sung in a full-bodied, expressive manner. The first such instance comes on page 12 of the work where, after a lengthy introduction of stifled syllables, hisses, unvoiced percussion and whispered single consonants, the composer declares: “Kein Pfad Mehr” (No path more).

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Figure 6.4. Got Lost (Lachenmann, 2008) measure 59-61

At that moment, it is as if the composer is announcing that there is nowhere further to go unless the vocal subject is able to unburden herself of the restraints the composer has hitherto always applied to his singers. The shouts, whispers and body percussion that open the work and which are characteristic of the Lachenmann’s vocal writing are still
present throughout the piece, but at this moment they give way to a more open expressivity. The singer will now be allowed to “sing”.

The other poems, Alvaro de Campos’ ‘Todas as cartas de amor sao, ridiculas’ (All love letters are, ridiculous) and the ‘laundry note,’ are more likely to appear juxtaposed against one another jostling for the listener’s attention. The setting of the Portuguese and English texts is more fragmented than the German, but each is still imbued with an individual character. The English ‘Laundry note’ is a ‘lament’ set quite theatrically, with sweeping, disjunct phrases:

7 Lachenmann described the note about the missing laundry basket as a ‘lament’ in his lecture at Darmstadt in 2014 – perhaps an extrapolation from the melodramatically passive-aggressive tone of the note.
Lachenmann’s setting of the De Campos poem by contrast is characteristically contained in affect, leggiero\(^8\), metrical, with a strong sense of play in the setting of the consonants and colours within the words. One can sometimes hear an audible hocket between different percussive effects derived from the sounds naturally present in the spoken texts:

\(\text{Figure 6.6 Got Lost (Lachenmann, 2008, bar 373-377)}\)

\(^8\) This is the word Lachenmann used to describe the character of the way he set this poem in his lecture at Darmstadt
None of the poems is ever presented as a singular intelligible entity. Even the notation is cut up, with the singers’ part mostly distributed across two staves and the pianist taking on various dovetailing vocal utterances too. Following the meanings of the text requires a great deal of attention from the performer, or listener. The act of trying to follow those meanings might be better described as straining towards something one knows one will be unlikely ever to take possession of. This act of reaching towards, but never settling upon, sensible meaning is characteristic of the Lachenmannian approach.

As I prepared my realization, I was conscious that the intelligibility or unintelligibility of the more concrete textual elements of the work had to be negotiated with care. A typical approach in classical interpretation, and the approach most habitual to me, would be to signpost or emphasize these ‘meaningful’ moments through specific choices in the way a text is articulated or sonorities manifested. This did not seem to be the appropriate track here. One such moment became a test case for how I would negotiate this issue throughout the piece:

*Journal Entry October 12th, 2014*

“... We had to make decisions about whether to stress the ‘meanings’ of the words, or whether a particular word or part of a word should be allowed to function percussively, or coloristically. Should I be trying to help the audience understand the words even though it is hidden inside so many different techniques, and if so, how would I go about that in this setting? An example arises in bar 158, where Lachenmann introduces the eponymous text for the first time. After a section that features a highly rhythmical figure in the vocal line where the singer hockets between percussive vocal sounds and sung sounds in fast succession, while the pianist plays and vocalizes in a busy and rhythmic passage – suddenly, the composer interrupts the hurried flow by having the singer pronounce the ‘Go...’ of ‘Got Lost’ only to have several seconds of silence unfold before the rest of the word is pronounced – in the form of a high pitched percussive click: T [t]. 2 full bars of silence follow before we are able to complete the sentence with the word ‘Lost.’”
This section is composed of rapid-fire technical acrobatics inside which is couched a fractured text that conveys information important to the work as a whole. The question of what should be emphasized in the thick of so many sounds, and how ‘to be’ in the moment between the beginning of the eponymous pronouncement (Go…-) and the completion of the sentence (…-t Lost), had to be resolved. The first part of the problem – whether or not to signpost the textual elements hidden inside the onslaught of abstract sonorous utterances, was solved mostly by becoming very familiar with the texts as separate to how they manifested in the notations. As soon as I knew the texts well, they would ‘pop out’ from within the texture, making themselves audible even as my active intention was focused not upon the meaning of the texts but of articulating exactly what was on the page – no ‘sign-posting’ necessary. The second question of ‘how to be’ in the
silence inserted within the word ‘G…ot’ was partially answered by Lachenmann himself in his lecture on the work at Darmstadt:

“I ask the audience not only to listen, but to work with his own memory – When I say “Go…..t Lost” I expect him to listen with his memory, with all his sensitivity listening for the context of the sound. A sound is like a point and there are a lot of lines going through this sound. Each of you is not only your name. You are also a father, a Portuguese, a patient, a footballer… We are all these things. The question is who are we to be this morning. I do not want to make noises. I want to figure out what to be” - (Lachenmann, Lecture on Got Lost, 2014)

The composer expects his audience to be listening and working with sensitivity, and this expectation influenced the ways in which I prepared my realization. I problematized moments like the one he describes above, focusing my decision-making lens with the goal to be sensitive to my embodied awareness, to listening, and to memory. I took an approach of actively querying my bodily intentions when I encountered these junctures - trying to ascertain what kind of presence I would offer; to put it another way, I tried actively to “figure out what to be” (ibid) in my body and intentionality. In the thick of rehearsals, I wrote the following about the ways we practiced the space between those particular gestures:

Journal Entry November 8th 2014
In today’s rehearsal we rehearsed the ‘silences’. The moments between gestures that were not actually finished- that Lachenmann talked about in his lecture. We made a point of being very still, almost frozen in place during these moments. Both Alex and I are performers who naturally move our bodies a lot, so by not moving and by paying attention to the tense stillness of that, it felt like a very active gesture – to be unmoving. In this case what seemed most important was to not add anything to the silence except our focus on the waiting through it. We were hoping the audience would wait as earnestly as we were.

The answer to the question of whether or not the audience should be ‘sign-posted’ through the music by the singer’s intentional stressing of the signifying-content of words was not a yes or no question. Most of the time, the composer had composed-in the intelligibility or unintelligibility of given texts and gestures. Opportunities to be ‘understood’ were built in, but in order that these words have a good chance of registering as that word in the audience’s ear, the singer had to have internalized the text
and its meanings separately to the text as it manifests in the musical context. In the case of the example above, we were guided by Lachenmann’s philosophical system towards a solution that was mostly reflected in our physicality, but which ultimately needed to be realized by the active listener as they participated in the meaning-making potential of that ‘Go…t Lost’ moment.

“This is not a Lied”

Lachenmann firmly identifies Got Lost as being a work for ‘voice and piano’, rather than a Lied (song). That venerable genre is a hefty specter to bypass in any work for voice in combination with piano. It appears to me that the composer consciously problematizes and challenges assumptions that might be anticipated to arise upon observing Got Lost’s seeming relationship to Lieder. Got Lost plays with and subverts our expectations of Lieder via a redefinition of the roles and sonic palates of the vocalist and pianist within the composer’s musical and ethical language. Moving beyond the aesthetic and conceptual approaches one might typically expect to find in Lieder, Lachenmann draws our attention to the experience of the pianists’ and singers’ shared bodilyness, to the breadth of their sound-making facility, to their capacity to manipulate language and to their simultaneous ability to be percussive and voiced sound producers.

Evident in Got Lost is a considered approach to commenting upon and critiquing the history of pianistic and vocal performance craft and literature. Lachenmann has plainly proclaimed his disdain for music made from “off the shelf products from the supermarket of tradition” and yet, with Got Lost he uses the presence of these “products” in the listener’s mind’s ear, as a kind of raw material for shaping with his particular set of compositional tools. Unusually for Lachenmann, the pianists’ music sometimes veers sharply into a field of pianistic virtuosity that is almost romantic in nature. Similarly, the soprano is given opportunities to sing expansive, expressive lines, in traditionally

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9 Lachenmann, H. (2014, August). Lecture on Got Lost. Darmstadt, Germany. – In his lecture the composer introduced Got Lost by stressing that he was very well aware of all the big pieces of the Lieder genre “Winterreise etc” but that Got Lost was definitely ‘not a Lied’.

impressive registers that in flashes could believably have been extracted from a Verdi opera. Against these kinds of gestures Lachenmann contrasts swathes of extended techniques for both performers, where the myriad sonorous capacities of the bodies of the piano, the pianist and the singer are exploited. It is the way in which he plays off these different expressive categories against one another that could be said to justify\textsuperscript{11} the inclusion of the ‘traditional’ sonorities he uses in this piece. He uses their existence in the consciousness of his listeners to sabotage the status of the ‘supermarket of tradition’; though I would be happy to argue that the expressive opportunities afforded by this more effusive and liberated palate is justification enough.

The first of two climaxes in Got Lost is a percussive cadenza where the singer uses her cheeks like the skin of a drum struck by her fingers. That gesture alternates with pitch specific clicks produced by the tongue slapping against the hard palate:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{got_lost_cadenza.png}
\caption{Got Lost (Lachenmann, 2008 bar 334-339)
Triangular note-heads denote tongue-clicks. Circular note-heads, cheek slaps}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{11} Got Lost has been criticized, notably by Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (Mahnkopf, 2009) for its conservatism, melodrama and for making a seeming return to older modes of expression.
Throughout this cadenza the singer does not ‘sing’ at all – that is, no sound is produced by her larynx or vocal folds. She exclusively uses her ‘non-vocal’ body to perform a highly virtuosic line of pitched clicks and slaps. The virtuosity that Lachenmann demands here is not the virtuosity of Rossini or Strauss or Adams. In this music the performing subject must negotiate a field of musical demands that break down the appearance of physical, expressive or technical unity.

Virtuosity, as we colloquially understand it, is usually an opportunity for the listener to marvel at the performer’s ability to execute a seemingly impossible set of instructions with confidence, flair and ease. Like improvisation, virtuosity can be seen as a form of social contract between performer and audience (Cook, 2015, p. 355). Got Lost’s virtuosity is in the revelation of the ‘exploded’ potentialities of the body and instrument, and in the performer’s ability to articulate that fractured and complex sonic selfhood in earnest submission to the composer’s manipulation of their body. The existing contract cannot hold. The goal is not to make the thing ‘look easy’. Lachenmann’s cadenza is not merely to be admired. It is here to remind the listener of how boundless is the potential of a body and how entangled are our expectations of what a musician ‘does’ with our own assumptions. This becomes particularly clear in listener’s reactions when expectations are contravened.

While on stage, as I performed this piece for the first time, I remember noticing how the audience went very “still and smiley” during this particular passage. Afterwards, when talking to some friends about the performance, this issue of virtuosity was raised several times. They told me the focus on virtuosity felt gratuitous. They had enjoyed it, but were uncomfortable with having had that reaction. This cadenza contains no fireworks in the conventional sense but, it sets ablaze the listener’s presumption of the singer having one discrete and unified body that does a particular thing - sing. There is some thrill involved in hearing a piece that pushes the limits of a body towards something unrecognizable, of seeing the vulnerable threshold of a performer’s capacities displayed before you. From the way some of my friends reacted you might think they had just sat through a
communal viewing of a pornographic film. It could be argued they instinctively rejected this pleasurable experience because it did not come in an easily parsable form.

I initially went about preparing some of these more ‘virtuoso’ sections the same way I would usually ingrain other very difficult passages in conventional music: by breaking down gestures into small tasks so I could work on one variable at a time. I would try to get the rhythm secure, then the pitches, then the physical techniques, then the timbral and dynamic changes; trying to commit each variable to muscle-memory until such time as they could tumble easily out of my body, each layer stacked firmly upon the other.

Prior to working on this piece, I had formerly assumed the final goal of this kind of learning was to be able to perform the many tasks at once in a way that is ‘unconscious’, to create the ground-support necessary for the addition of the desirable final layer: active, conscious, communication.

After viewing and evaluating the documentation from the various performances of Got Lost, I have affirmed that this music does not need me to contort it into sounding easy or into some conventional mould of musicality. The composer has already ensured that ease, difficulty, musicality or any other affect that he desires, are articulated through the interplay between the demands of the score in relationship with the manifest practice of a trained classical singer. Extra intentionality on my part in these virtuoso passages turned out to be unnecessary. No sign posting of this piece’s bond to Lieder or bent towards Liberace flash need come from me.

Through preparing, but more importantly performing, this music I realized that the culminating active communication which I would habitually have aimed for is undesirable in Got Lost because the composer has already turned over much of that expressive, conscious, activity to the listener. It is the listener whose responsibility it is to figure out ‘what to be’. There is no need for the performer to add to this. In these virtuoso passages, the huge difficulty involved in just trying to do exactly what the notations on the page instructed turned out to be more than enough to pay attention to in a performance. Lachenmann’s cadenza could be seen as a brilliantly subversive mutant realization of the virtuosity on display throughout the Lieder genre. Another reading
could be that through this piece’s density and complexity the composer has built-in a safeguard against the possibility that a soprano might indulge their stereotype’s reputation for manipulative salesmanship – potentially thwarting Lachenmann’s plan to leave space for the audience to discover something about themselves as they listen.

Organization

Got Lost is organized by rigorous architecture, where gestural categories take the place of traditional melody-driven themes. During his 2014 lectures at Darmstadt the composer gave a detailed breakdown showing various examples of each category. He described the central idea behind the categories and how they develop throughout the piece. The opening, for example, is characterized by heavy use of the ‘Tonlose’ (toneless/whispered) category, as well as subtle elements of other categories layered upon and around it – Gesang (singing), Puls (pulsing gestures), Text and Ruf (shouts). Each of these categories, and several others, come to dominate sections later on and interact with one another. For the listener, the repetition of these musical-gestural ideas and their subsequent developed recombinations illuminate a path of recognizable signs, which assist the ear to navigate through the larger work.

Each of the categories carries with it connotations. Just as a melodic theme in traditional sonata form may carry upon its contours, intervals and articulations, a set of seemingly personal resonances for the listener, so too do Lachenmann’s ‘categories’. I will use as an example a tune with which Lachenmann, and most of us, are familiar. The composer quoted this melody in his Tanzsuite mit Deutschlandlied of 1980. It is better known as the German National Anthem, composed by Joseph Haydn for his ‘Emperor Quartet’ of 1797. This melody, the subject of the 2nd movement of Haydn’s Op 76 No. 3 (the ‘Emperor’), conveys clear qualitative markers to the listener through the way the sounds are organized. The G major tonality, the even phrase lengths, the relatively sparsely changing rhythmic values, and the stable harmonic rhythm all signal a consonant intention. These choices manipulate the listener, via their pre-conditioned expectations of music, towards perceiving this melody as something beautiful, majestic and stable.
Lachenmann's categories convey meanings that are no less concrete, but not exactly analogous to, those traditionally attached to melodic subjects in classical music. The 'subjects' conveyed in his categories are bodily ones. With his 'Ruf' (shouts) the listener hears the violent expulsion of intention from the vocalist. His 'Puls' (pulse) are often articulated via non-sung sounds that connote more of a stylized stammer than a traditional compositional device for time keeping. The 'Tonlose' (un-voiced) category where pitch is conveyed without phonation via whispering or a manipulation of air by the mouth, could be aligned with any number of dysphonic handicaps (Lachenmann stressed that this 'Tonlose' category shows that “the mouth is an instrument”). Traditional melodic subjects convey meaning via their treatment of musical elements habitually understood by listeners as having reasonably concrete meanings. The categories that make up the parts of Got Lost are utilized in a similar manner as the structural elements of conventional music (theme, meter, genre et al.).

I posit that in the absence of open and imaginative listeners (or performers) approaching their task with a generous attitude these elements may not be able to function so clearly

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as markers of structure. For many in the audience these sounds might connote physical or emotional responses which are not conventionally associated with musical elements but are entangled with the body and the listener’s empathic vocal imaginary. Connor states that these non-linguistic vocal utterances are socially powerful signifiers but that their meanings cannot be construed as fixed or objective. He states that hearing and understanding these text-less utterances constitute a sort of ‘dream theatre of the mouth’ (Connor, 2014 p. 15). He says that these sounds might best be described not using phonetics but with ‘what might be called phonophenomenology’ (ibid).’ In other words – to convey something of what these utterances mean for listeners and how they function within music we need to look beyond their linguistic and acoustical realities and examine how these sounds are perceived via the experience of the human subject. Connor states that this phenomenological approach should be employed, rather than an exclusively quantitative or scientific description of the sounds, because

“...language is made not by linguists, but by its inexpert and often stubbornly opinionated users, which suggests that their (our) fantasies and prejudices may exercise a significantly formative pressure on the ways in which language comes about and functions.” (ibid).

In the phenomenal experience of music we must account for the interaction of these sounds with the real-world experience of individual listeners “we might describe a sound as ‘threatening’, ‘reassuring’, ‘aggressive’ or even ‘beautiful’ but what we are doing is not so much describing the sound but our response to it.” (Emmerson, 2007, p. 2). In performing Lachenmann’s music we must learn what these different categories of sounds mean to- and for- us, knowing that the listener is not to be controlled by the sounds. Or as Lachenmann put it “I cannot control the audience. Who is the audience? Ronaldo?”

Negotiating the Body

I take an active approach to negotiating with myself as I work through my entrenched musical opinions, tastes and prejudices. When I make musical decisions I scan my first impulses and impressions, and if something feels awry then I attempt to problematize it. I

consider the intentions of the composer, and the milieu in which the piece functions, to find the options that I might try out upon myself, until I can settle on a solution to which I can commit. I cannot prefigure the way in which the audience will phenomenally experience these sounds. I cannot know how they will respond or what the sounds will mean to them, but I can use all the resources at my disposal to make an informed choice then produce a sound that seems to be most meaning-fit.

The part of Got Lost where it may be most difficult to breach this gulf in meaning is the very opening. The vocal part is made up exclusively from the “Tonlose” category of unvoiced sounds. While I know that the composer intended these sounds to showcase “the mouth as an instrument” (Lachenmann, 2014) and to explore the qualities of the physiological inverse of voice – breath, I am aware that there are many potential listener-interpretations of what this sound might mean: for example, someone “shushing” a talkative patron in a movie theatre or blowing out candles on a birthday cake.

This gestural category was not one I was immediately able to perform. From looking at the notation in the score, I wasn’t sure what it should sound like, or how to make it come out of my body. It required some experimentation. My first attempts sounded too much like whispers, so I tried a more rounded lip position. Those sounded too much like a stopped whistle. I moved on to the ‘blowing out the candles on a birthday cake’ idea – which made an interesting sound, but used too much air and I couldn’t get a detailed enough set of articulations. I evaluated each method to see which would produce the pitches more concretely and to get the dynamics, phrasing and articulation as clear as possible. The key to having these gestures succeed eventually became linked to the way in which I supported the air. I began thinking of these sounds not as regular exhalations, or as sung gestures with the ‘voice’ removed but as violent expulsions of air through a point of tension (the partially closed lips and teeth) creating a strong, affricative noise. The release of the air had to be very well supported from a place deep in my torso, which needed to be quite relaxed and open during inhalation. A conscious contraction of my pubococcygeus muscle in tandem with rectus abdominis and a feeling of bounce-back in the lower intercostals precipitated each of these sounds, like an aggressive exhalation
during intense exercise where the lower abdominals are the catalyst for each thrust of air. The Tonlose category might at first appear akin to a whisper but I discovered these gestures required quite some muscular support in order to accurately render the variety of pitches, articulations and dynamics notated on the page. To move an unknown musical idea from the score into the body requires negotiation and a willingness to experiment. Once such sounds have made their way into me, they become part of my bodily vocabulary, reverberating and reappearing in my musical life from that point forward.

**Embodying Method**

As is not uncommon in work of this kind, the methods and learning process for this piece continuously evolved from the day I first picked up the score. Initially, each bar was a nightmare. I was overwhelmed with information and the sheer difficulty of the task. The first couple of bars took 10 hours of my solo practice time to get sounding more or less correct. The lengthy period of time I spent figuring out how to commit each element to muscle memory allowed the piece to gradually ink itself onto me. During the early rehearsals, time moved slowly while we worked to just get the piece to ‘hang together’. Incrementally, we were able to move into a phase of detailed, gesture-by-gesture, rehearsal. It was only in the last few (very long) days of rehearsal we finally moved into a period of consolidating the larger portions of the work into something that had both detail and expressive ensemble.

I broke the multifaceted complexity of the preparatory phase of this piece into stages on a graph. There was a box to be checked for each section of the work, covering each of the following categories: 1. Solo preparation 2. Hangs together in ensemble 3. Section worked in detail 4. Satisfactorily performed in ensemble.

The first category was the most time consuming. Throughout the rehearsal period and as we became more comfortable with Lachenmann’s language, things moved faster. There were several very long rehearsal days that seemed to go by quickly. It’s a big piece, a long piece, and is unrelenting in its demands for total commitment and attention. In the final stages of preparation figuring out how to modulate my attention became a problem
of its own. On the final rehearsal day, we gave a practice performance in front of an audience of students at the Australian National Academy of Music. My diary entry from that day reads:

Diary entry from: October 9th
Today we rehearsed for 3 hours and then performed the piece in its entirety for the ANAM forum. It went very badly. I lost concentration and stopped counting at several points. I couldn’t think through the blur of information. I felt powerless. It did not feel like a performance. I was not present with the music; I could feel tension between the score and I as we drifted away from one another.

After this unsatisfying first run through, I went home with an idea of how to revise for the performance-proper the next day, with the aim of lessening the potential for this breakdown of focus I had just experienced to happen again.

The whole evening was spent on mental practice. There was no singing, just me sitting at a desk with the score. I went over all the sections of the work silently, thinking about all the details we had rehearsed. After a short break, I went over it again, also silently, but this time thinking not about the details or the expressive intentions but of moving my energy forward – imagining how I would ‘be’ during silences and between phrases. If someone had watched that final rehearsal it would have looked like someone sitting at a desk doing nothing. But this 90 minutes I spent sitting silently with the score, sharpening my image of how I would focus my attention through the performance was perhaps the most valuable preparation I undertook.

Performance
The following day, we had our first performance. I focused my attention on the score and my collaborator, and kept time moving forward with what my body had learned how to do. Afterwards I realized I had been so engrossed in my task that the sensation I usually have, of a conscious relationship to my physical body in performance, had not occurred. As a performer who prides myself on feeling grounded in my physical presence, at first, this was alarming.

My approach to the second performance, which happened five days after the first, was something of a knee-jerk reaction to the alarm I had felt upon the above-described
situation. I made an effort to prepare differently. Instead of paying attention to big picture issues of being and the movement of time, I worked on finding moments to be more expressive, more physical and to come up with more nuanced phrasing and rhythmical flavorings on a few gestures.

Unfortunately, the second performance, though less rushed and better prepared, felt like a failure. I could not focus in the same way. The ensemble suffered, and several sections of the work had really lost some of their magic. Once I received the video documentation of both performances I was able to compare and contrast to see if, with a little more objective distance, my feelings about the relative successes of the two performances could be verified. As I watched, it certainly did seem that the first performance was superior to the second.

I am accustomed to feeling as if I am working to fuse myself with a piece, or to convey an expressive intention. By evaluating the performative outcomes of the first two performances of Got Lost, I realized I didn’t need to work to translate the expressivity inherent in the score. The embodied labor of preparing the score had done the fusing for me. The more successful performance was the one where I was intentionally mediating my subject according to the composer’s value hierarchy (by focusing on the ‘beingness’ and paying attention the arcs of my attention) in tandem with the instructions on the page. The failure of the second, more expressive, performance was evidence enough of that. I resolved that for future performances I would take an approach that focused on the score and let my body do the work, avoiding adding any layers of intentional performativity. By the third and fourth performances, I let my means of bodily production guide my sensation of awareness: in the conventionally sung sections I gave myself permission to enjoy the thrill of physical power when I produced an open and efficient operatic sound, and in sections of rapid-fire extended techniques I enjoyed the mental play and creativity of conjuring myriad physical set-ups to produce different extended-vocal sounds in fast succession. The experience of ‘being’, when in the midst of performing this piece, became one of a stretchy, vivid, simultaneity of self.
Whenever I’ve come off stage after a performance of Got Lost, the intensity of forward momentum and multitude of techniques, leaves me with a sense of having gotten off a ride that has been moving forward at tremendous speed. The mode of paying attention to oneself that is enacted within this piece seems akin to trying to lift up one’s arms while strapped into place on a rollercoaster. There is freedom to be found, but the restrictions placed upon you by the composer’s instructions, make the task unusually difficult. In the moment of achievement, of letting go of the rail, one feels intensely present and alive. The physical sensation of danger, of being close to the edge, of falling off the narrow tip of attention I know I need, allows me to feel a kind of binding to the score and to my fellow performer that is as thrilling as it is strange. Being out of control, almost out of my body, actually created an intensity of presence that I had not yet identified as possible within my practice.

Presence

_Diary entry from: October 11th (Four days after the 1st performance)_

After the performance, out in the foyer, I noticed the fleshy bit of my left hand was blue and swollen. I pointed out the welt to a friend who had been sitting in the audience. “That’s not surprising” he chuckled “You were hitting yourself very hard with your tuning fork”. I didn’t even notice at the time, but I guess I must have been hitting myself unusually violently. I’ve had this raised purple bruise as a souvenir for the past few days.

Reflecting after the first and second performances of this work caused me to revise my whole philosophy on performative ‘presence’ which had, up until that point, lionized a conscious awareness of self in preparation for as well as during performance. During the preparatory phases my negotiation of self had been explicit and conscious; I still stand by that premise. However, the kind of presence I experienced in the first performance of Got Lost was something more fleeting and not so knowable. I had felt absolutely present in the music and in the ensemble, but not in my ‘self’ as I might have expected. After watching back the video documentation, I am confident that my subject was not lost in it. This effect of losing my physical relationship with my self was a symptom of this music’s particular effect on me. Whatever gaps in consciousness there have been, my physicality
and all of the ingrained personality and habits Lachenmann was trying to mediate, were quite evident to be seen.

I realized through this research process that my previously held views about performative presence had been misguided. Just as I negotiate my self in my preparations of works in a way that consciously responds to the goals and context of the specific piece, so too must I modulate my expectations of the phenomenal experience of performance. Just as a preparatory method must be fit to purpose so must a performance be. It is a special characteristic of artistic research in performance that knowledge of that purpose and the subsequent evaluation of its fitness can only be discovered through the embodied act of performing.

**Conclusion**

Lachenmann’s approach to vocal writing in this piece provided me with plenty of challenge. I delighted in the invitation to use so many of the different elements of my vocal practice within one work. I took pleasure in the feeling of being ontologically stretched. My body is a receptacle for years of learned techniques and styles but most of these articulations of my self lay dormant most of the time. I felt as if *Got Lost* made porous the skin of my body’s history by drawing from it an overflow of attention and embodied habit.

Armed with the new knowledge discovered through the first two performances, I prepared for the next performances confident in my ability to effectively parse the music through my body simply by paying attention to the instructions on the page, and the collaborative space of the moment. When I watch back the documentation from the third and fourth performances in San Diego (2015) and Melbourne (2016) I could not perceive that they lacked expressivity. Lachenmann has composed a piece that, through its complexity, philosophical nuance and extreme performative difficulty, has taught me how sing freely from my ‘broken branch’.
Got Lost score excerpts reprinted with kinds thanks to Breitkopf & Härtel

*Helmut Lachenmann: GOT LOST (edition no. EB 9007)*
© by Breitkopf & Härtel, Wiesbaden

**List of Video Documentation pertaining to this section of the exegesis**
Got Lost Performance 1 (Melbourne 10/10/14)
Got Lost Performance 2 (Brisbane 15/10/14)
Got Lost Performance 3 (San Diego 19/3/15) [Primary Document]
Got Lost Performance 4 (Melbourne 26/08/16)
Artistic Research (Part B)
Realizing new works for voice and electronics

“the presence of a human voice structures the sonic space that contains it. “
(Chion, 1999 p. 5)

Reminder:
Please listen to the studio recordings of the four works for voice and electronics – included on the album ‘Prayer for nil’ (available for download or in the USB drive) – prior to reading this chapter.
**Introduction**

This chapter will examine four works for voice and electronics by Australian composers, Anthony Pateras, Jeanette Little, James Rushford and Alexander Garsden. Each work has become a discrete site to investigate artistic research through the embodied realization of works that pair solo voice with electronics. My role in these works is as performer and artistic researcher; the realization of the technological elements of the work were enabled through close collaboration with computer musician (and composer/clarinettist) Sam Dunscombe. This research works through and upon these pieces exploring performer decision-making and the technological mediation of the voice as it interacts with a matrix of ontological possibility in vocal music. Experiments enacted and choices made throughout the preparation, performance and studio-recording of these works have left their mark upon the pieces, their performative outcomes and upon my self and my research practice.

This chapter is in several parts. This introduction is followed by a discussion on each of the four central works. These pieces are rich with possible meaning, both practical and philosophical. In an effort to isolate the new knowledge unique to each work, and to avoid repetition, I have loosely framed the narrative discussion of each piece within a theme exploring a different element of vocal subjectivity outlined below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Title of the sub-chapter</th>
<th>Theme focused upon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeanette Little</td>
<td><em>Mechanical Bride</em></td>
<td>The tension between technology and human subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Run-free cyborg lady!</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Garsden</td>
<td><em>[ja] Maser</em></td>
<td>The indiscrete subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The “grains of the voice” in thousands of gnarly pieces</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Rushford</td>
<td><em>The Fabric of Wind</em></td>
<td>Inter-subjectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The space between us</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Pateras</td>
<td><em>Prayer for Nil</em></td>
<td>Embodiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Embodying the imaginary</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7.1 Themes and titles by sub-chapter*
Project Context

This research began in 2010 when I first discussed the idea of a commission with the composers. All of the composers involved are my friends as well as my colleagues. Rushford and I met on the first day of school we attended at the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School (VCASS). We continued our friendship after high-school through our undergraduate years at the Victorian College of the Arts proper (VCA). Dunscombe joined Rushford and I in the first year of study there, and a year later we met and befriended Garsden. During this period Pateras was Rushford’s composition teacher, and over time, we became friends also. After undergrad, Rushford and I lived together. It was during this phase that Little entered my life, as she came to our house to take piano and composition lessons with Rushford.

As with any artistic research or autoethnography, there is difficulty in trying to convey a clear narrative within the passage of time and attempting to acknowledge my highly subjective position within the work. In order to provide a sincere reflection of the inescapably subjective nature of the research, this chapter will move back and forth between excerpts from primary source materials, descriptions of the methods and outcomes and references to the musico-literary inspirations that feed into my current understanding of the project. For clarity, I have attempted to address each piece as being part of a particular discursive thread in vocal subjectivity. However, those knotted threads are sometimes impossible to untangle; it would be an insincere representation of the research process to pretend otherwise.

By time of writing I have performed these works, in various configurations and scenarios, eleven times and on four continents. The transformations that occurred will be highlighted in the main discussion of the works, but the table below provides a snapshot of the variety of places and situations in which the work took place. Unless otherwise noted, I curated and performed all the concerts as solo shows, though my collaborator Samuel Dunscombe (electronics and recording) was a present and integral part of this work¹.

¹ Dunscombe was present at all bar-one of the nineteen studio recording sessions, and acted as the computer performer for three of the eleven performances
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue, City, Country, Date, World premiere*</th>
<th>Title or context of show</th>
<th>Mechanical Bride</th>
<th>[ja] Maser</th>
<th>Fabric of Wind</th>
<th>Prayer for Nil</th>
<th>Other pieces performed on the same concert</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GlottalOpticon, San Diego, May 2013</td>
<td>Automatic</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orbiting (Jeffrey Trevino) and Unspell (Bruno Ruviaro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffith University Conservatorium of Music, Brisbane, Australia, April 2014</td>
<td>Confirmation Lecture-recital</td>
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<td>Aria (John Cage)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivid at the Seymour Centre, Sydney, Australia, June 2014</td>
<td>Abject Desire</td>
<td><img src="url" alt="image" /></td>
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<td><img src="url" alt="image" /></td>
<td><img src="url" alt="image" /></td>
<td>Unspell (Bruno Ruviaro)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Darmstadt, Germany, August 2014</td>
<td>Workshop performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diurnal * (Chris Dench)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inland Series, Melbourne, Australia, October 2014</td>
<td>Abject Desire</td>
<td><img src="url" alt="image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Graft (Jenna Lyle*), Solo (John Holland), Three visits to Meun (Ori Talmon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffith University Conservatorium of Music, Brisbane, Australia, May 2015</td>
<td>Abject Desire</td>
<td><img src="url" alt="image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Concert featured several other performers. Not self-curated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constellation, Chicago, United States, June 2015</td>
<td>New music for voice &amp; electronics from Australia</td>
<td><img src="url" alt="image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Concert featured several other performers. Not self-curated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resonant Bodies, New York, United States, September 2015</td>
<td>Jessica Aszodi at Resonant Bodies</td>
<td><img src="url" alt="image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Three visits to Meun (Ori Talmon), Aria (John Cage), Improv sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inland Series, Sydney, Australia, March 2016</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td><img src="url" alt="image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Three visits to Meun (Ori Talmon), Aria (John Cage), Improv sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The unbearable lightness of Coherency, Tel Aviv, Israel, April 2016</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td><img src="url" alt="image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Three visits to Meun (Ori Talmon), Aria (John Cage), Improv sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hachanut, Tel Aviv, Israel, May 2016</td>
<td>Aszodi at Hachanut</td>
<td><img src="url" alt="image" /></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Three visits to Meun (Ori Talmon), Aria (John Cage), Improv sets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7.2 Summary of performances

In each piece-specific sub-chapter, three different stages of artistic work will be discussed: preparation, performing and studio recording/editing. These stages will not be linearly examined, because that is not how the research unfolded.\footnote{A week by week breakdown by research-phase (preparation, performance, studio-recording) across the four years of the project can be found in Chapter 5: Introduction to the Artistic Research (pg 80).} In order to try to give a more honest impression
of the process I have not delineated the discussions according to these categories. As the limits of the process and my methodologies have been discussed at length in the previous chapters, I hope the reader will find my somewhat winding approach, clear enough.

As is common in the realization of new work, each piece moved through many incarnations (de Assis, Coesse, & Brooks, 2009). The scores changed, my notations-on and -of the scores changed and significant musical and extra-musical changes were wrought throughout the many steps of recording and preparation. The circumstances of each performance situation affected the choices made in the realizations from performance to performance. These choices were oftentimes made in response to external concerns; sometimes things as banal as how much time I had to sound check or the size of the venue. Other times, performances were used as a site to experiment with a new method of performing a piece. I was trying to see if my performance of the work could be improved by altering my approach to score based interpretive decision-making as well as broader elements like score utilization, lighting, tuning aids or movement in the space.

A chart that summarizes the evolution of the performer-driven decisions, for all of the performances of these works over the past four years, is included on pg 77 of the appendix. The purpose of this chart is to contain all the information relevant to the evolving choices I made in preparation for and during performances. Some of these choices become central to the discussions that take place in the main body of this text but most of them are not. With this table I hope to convey a sense of how the circumstance of performance and my growing experience as a researcher have impacted the work, without distracting from the more specific narratives I wish to focus upon.

With each performance, I gleaned new information about what it felt like to actually ‘do the thing’ I had been preparing to do. It often took going through the phenomenal experience of performance for me to judge the success or failure of my approaches. After each performance, following analysis of the documentations, journaling, and self-query, I often decided to change elements of the plan for the next performance. These performances were a prerequisite for the next step to reveal itself. This process of revelation is the crux of the discussions that follow.
Run-free cyborg lady!

Jeanette Little’s *Mechanical Bride*

“From being the antagonist or devourer of space, 
the voice begins to be its accomplice. 
Arising, it begins to gives rise to space. 
What the scream tears apart, it also holds together”

(Connor, 2000, p. 34)

Mechanical Bride arrives with violence. The first utterance in this piece is a series of screams. When I take the stage, my body is still and silent, preparatory. Then a second or two of imitation 1960’s science-fiction glissando bends out of the loud speakers (perhaps suggesting a theramin). As soon as I hear this sound, I belt out a top C (6). I take a breath. Repeat. Breath. Up to the C# (6), and then I wait. The expressive and energetic human has exhausted her resources in the first 20 seconds of the piece. Then, with a series of deadpan *Sprechstimme* words and whirrings, we meet the mechanical force that has overtaken her: my voice re-enters, this time devoid of feeling, a monotonic automaton.

The text of this piece is derived from an Italian poem by futurist poet, Enrico Cavacchioli. The poem is never conveyed intelligibly in its entirety. It is more often treated as raw material than a text whose meaning is intended to be understood by the listener.
Sia maledetta la luna! - ENRICO CAVACCHIOLI, 1914

Anche tu la conosci, o Bella, la malattia grigia del nostro secolo: quella che fa morire giorno per giorno, come se da una montagna celeste rotolassimo i pesi della nostra gioia e la mancanza di lei ci ardesse nei polmoni.!

Piccolo sentimento di borghesia rattrappito che s’avvolge in pellicce che non potrà pagare: desiderio dell’impossibile, sete di infinità, febbre di quello che divenirremo domani ci martella le tempie così fragili che quasi potresti schiacciarle come il naso di un gatto!

E mentre la politica ci solletica i piedi con la sua lingua perfida acida e rovente, e le religioni bugiarde ci chiodono gli occhi viziosi, se tu vuoi vivere, devi creare un bel cuore meccanico, ed aspirar l’effluvio rovente delle fornaci, e tingere il bel volto nel fumo delle ciminiere, elettrizzarti in milioni di volt, alle dinamo: devi fare della vita, un automatico sogno, martoriato di leve e di contatti e di fili!

Quando il tuo cuore sarà come un rocchetto di Ruhmkorff e le tue mani tenaci avranno un furore metallico, ed il tuo petto potrà gonfiarsi più del mare, oh, grida allora la tua vittoria definitiva!

Che se la macchina greggia ha sorpassato l’uomo nella sua perfezione regolare e brutale, l’uomo sarà il Re della macchina brutta, dominatore di tutte le cose finite e infinite!

Sia maledetta la luna!

LET THE MOON BE DAMNED -ENRICO CAVACCHIOLI, 1914

You also know, my love, the grey disease of our century, that makes us go on dying day by day, as though from the blue heights we’d loosed the ballast of our joy, and now the lightness sears the heart of us.

Mild sentiment of a benumbed bourgeois wrapped in furs that never can be paid for: yearning for what cannot be, thirsting for infinity, the fever of tomorrow. Obsessions hammer at our delicate craniums as thin as the skulls of kittens.

And politics comes begging our support with her treacherous tongue, ardent and malicious, and lying religion closes our wicked eyes - if you want to live, go get a mechanical heart, inhale the red-hot blast of furnaces and powder your lovely face with chimney soot; then shoot a million volts into your system! You must make of life a computed dream triggered by levers, the contact of wires.

And when your heart has become an electrostat, and your tenacious hands are mean as iron, and you can puff your breast up like a sea, then may you vaunt your definitive victory. If, now, the cold machine surpasses man, in its perfection brutal and precise, that day will come we rule the brute machine, lords of the finite and the infinite, and the moon be damned!

Figure 7.3 Texts and translations

Though the texts are drawn from a one-hundred year-old poem, its futurism resounds eloquently in the more contemporary terrain familiar to Haraway’s cyborgs (Haraway, 1991). In Mechanical Bride the ‘human-becoming-machine-becoming-human’ narrative is a vehicle for playing upon the technologised imaginations of the listener “mapping our social and bodily reality as an imaginative resource” (ibid, p. 2). The performer’s task is to realize this work where the mechanical and the fleshy worlds are at odds.

Mechanical bride is composed of a playback tape part, which Australian audio-engineer and percussionist Joe Talia assisted Little to construct, out of recorded digital and analogue samples with an emphasis on old synths and organs. The live performed part is executed with a time-notated score, upon which are inscribed gestures taking place in relative time and which

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3 This translation was provided by the composer in the score, which is published as part of her dissertation Little, J. (2013). Jeanette Little: Masters Research thesis. Retrieved from University of Melbourne: http://hdl.handle.net/11343/50981
correspond to events on the tape. The score utilizes a combination of spatially allocated graphic and traditional notations that take cues from seminal works like Berio’s *Sequenza III* (Berio, 1966). Though clearly influenced by the work of European modernists in the 1950s and 60’s like, Berio, Nono\(^4\) and Stockhausen, Little’s approach could also align itself with the American experimental tradition that gives flexibility and license to the performer. Her notations vary from busy and detailed, to lengthy, open gestures that invite a wide variety of intentions or improvised choices. While this element of freedom is not explicitly stated in the notation, through discussions I had with Little as the piece was developed, it was clear to me that *Mechanical Bride* could be open to several conceivable styles of realization. My realization of *Mechanical Bride* is but one of many as yet unimagined scenarios floating in the realm of possibility.

This piece invites the performer to play and experiment – it is thus necessary that the performer be willing to contribute themselves to the work, finding creative solutions rather than interpreting the composer’s instructions in a strict and traditional fashion. Little’s trust in the performer is also reflected in her working methodology throughout the compositional phase of the piece. We talked a lot about her ideas as they developed, and worked on specific gestures together. Some sections of the notated score reflect improvisations of my own that were recorded during these meetings. The final notated score is undeniably Little’s composition, but also represents many elements of the discussion and sound experiments we two undertook together.

Once the score had solidified, I began work towards preparing the piece for performance. I imagined myself as an ambiguous techno-human at the centre of the piece. My character plays host to two competing semi-subjects: a fleshy human and an ominous mechanical agent. The human-singer I convey in my interpretation is battling with this invisible technology as it seeks to take over her/my voice (and body). I superimposed this battle atop the instructions given in the score to clarify for myself, which character is foregrounded at what time, and what they are attempting to communicate through each gesture. I worked through the score to find gestures which could be clearly identified with ‘human’ expressions (of pain, nostalgia, joy etc), and which

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\(^4\) The mid-20\(^{th}\) century mechanical milieu in which the playback part of Mechanical Bride is situated bears comparison to Luigi Nono’s *La Fabbrica Illuminata* (Nono, 1965) which “pits the humanistic lyricism of the solo soprano against the factory sounds of the Italsider Factory in Milan” (Emmerson, S. 2007, p. 10)
could reflect the becoming of machine (vocal gestures that take on mechanical qualities: ticking, repetitive plosives, whirring vibrants\(^5\) and monotonic expressionless speech).

In my narrative realization of Little’s score, the semi-subjects enter into battle. The human character performs acts of rebellion against the machine inside her, screaming out, pleading for help, and trying to recall remembered fragments of her life before the machine\(^6\). “The machine” retaliates against the human by momentarily devoicing\(^7\) her or by forcing her lips closed. In some phrases the machine suddenly ‘takes control’ of a gesture begun by the human midway through, transforming the human utterance into a sound for its own purpose. The human tries to reach out to her fellow subjects by appealing to them through meaningful text, but she is thwarted at every turn. The machine imposes its will and the singer can no longer control the flow or order of words as they leave her. The machine harnesses her drive to communicate, forcing her to spew meaningless, untranslatable linguistic garbage, reducing the singer’s expressive powers to that of a possessed body spewing glossolalia.

\(^5\) ‘Vibrant’ refers to a ‘vibrant consonant’: the family of continuant consonants that includes the Italianate long rolled r \([r:]\) or gutteral/uvular \([R]\) and \([x]\) sounds in French, Arabic and Hebrew.

\(^6\) Little has inserted short fragments, which are ‘not quite’ quotations, reminiscent of existing pieces. I imagined these fragments as “ear-worms” floating to the top of the human character’s memory. For example the gesture at 4’30” is a clear homage to Sciarrino’s vocal-writing. At 2’20” a reference is made to Berio’s Sequenza III with a figure reminiscent of Berio/Berberian’s laughter.

\(^7\) To ‘devoice’ is to remove the voiced element from a given vocal expression. For example, a text may be articulated using only the lips, teeth, jaw, mouth and tongue as I expel air from my lungs – but without vibration in the larynx. In its simplest sense, to ‘devoice’ is to transform conventional vocality to a whisper.
Figure 7.4 Opening measures of the 1st draft of Mechanical Bride, hand drawn in pencil by the composer (Coloured annotations, technical and expressive instructions, by the performer).

I annotated the above-described power struggles into my score by circling the machine’s gestures in blue, the expressively human sounds in pink, and adding in combinations of the two to show conflict. I also added green punctuation signs that were a reminder for me of the specific intentionality I wished to imbue each of the gestural cells with – [!] for surprise or [#] to show where I tried to gather and calm myself.

The opening of the work contains many different kinds of gestures in fast succession. I created this system of colours and signs to help visually prompt swift and decisive changes of affect that would marry neatly to each gesture notated on the page. This allowed me to commit quickly to the rapid-fire changes and helped to guard against comprehension fatigue on my part or on the part of the listener. There is always a danger with fast changing, non-traditional materials that the rapidity and virtuosity of the passage can become foregrounded at the expense of the shapes and meanings of the gestures themselves. I used this colour-coded system, and intentional overlaying of narrative to help me articulate this foreground in as a clear a fashion as possible.
Upon reflection, it is clear to me that my interpretive choices are very much coloured by the lens of my classical training. I know that I have a deeply ingrained need to feel the materials ‘under my control’. I am most confident in performance when I can sense the materials in my body and know exactly what I intend to do with them. Sometimes this reflex to ingrain and embed materials in a controlled way can become a barrier to recognizing the underlying objectives of a composer, affecting my decisions in the realization of a piece. In this case however I do believe that my approach is fit to purpose, though it must be acknowledged that it is only one possible method of realization.

Because *Mechanical Bride* draws heavily upon the tension between technology and human subjects, for our recorded outcome, I wanted the live voice to sound clearly situated in a ‘real’ space. My first opportunity to try this out came via a late night recording session in Seiji Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood. I got on stage after Bryn Terfel had just finished giving a recital - with only a few minutes in the hall before everyone needed to lock up for the night. I performed the piece with the playback part in my ear on head-phones, and used a wide diaphragm condenser microphone quite a ways from the stage to capture my performance of the vocal line. Unlike the untranslatable thrill of performance, in recording sessions, I am usually quite calm and deliberate. This night however, the experience was uncommonly heady.

The acoustic and milieu of Ozawa hall, with its back wall open to the starry night and rolling hills of the Berkshires, has something of magical quality. Stepping on that stage, late in the evening, right after listening to a recital by one of the greatest singers of our time, was intoxicating. This confluence of factors honed my attention towards a particular kind of expressivity, influenced by Terfel’s performance, and the sense of communal excitement I’d just shared with the hundreds of people who had filled the hall an hour before. I felt exhausted and yet full of energy; I felt lean and happy, fuelled by the warm summer air. The piece was recorded in two takes.

Later, in the sober light of home, I re-examined the recording I had made. I loved the way it sounded. The feeling of that evening had indeed been captured beautifully but, after discussion with my collaborators, I realized I could not use it for the album. I had wanted to convey the fleshy,

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8 The principal recital Hall of the Boston Symphony Orchestra’s Summer home at Tanglewood in Western Massachusetts, at which many of the chamber music concerts for the festival are performed for the Summer Festival. The back wall of the hall is open to the bucolic surrounds.
live character of the piece, but this version was too live and wouldn’t fit with the general aesthetic of the record or be able to blend with the electronics part – which was very important in creating a sense of place - that both the live singer and the tape could ‘live’ in. That recording became one of many attempts to capture these pieces that would be discarded.

The version we ended up using for the album was recorded in a studio in San Diego. The set-up we decided upon was one where I sang the piece quite close to the microphone, surrounded by specifically directed sound baffles. The intimacy of that sound becomes one of the baseline features of the recording and across the studio album. There are moments where I step back from the microphone; usually when I am having an emotive ‘human’ outburst. These moments are audibly different from the constant closeness a listener can perceive in the remainder of the piece. For example, at 6 minutes into the studio recording, as I begin the violent cry “anche tu le conosci...”, it sounds as if the body that produces the voice is stepping away from the listener. When I listen back to the recording, I can feel a version of my body, now passed, pull away in anger. Its force is strong - like a phantom limb.

“The soprano fights her way through the mechanical world, resisting repression, giving a sense that there is a human trapped inside a preprogrammed machine, which is controlling her thoughts and speech. …The piece seeks to lull the listener into a suspended disbelief, whereby boundaries of the natural and unnatural are blurred through extended technique, kitsch music and nostalgia”. (Little, 2014)

Little’s piece is rooted in embodied sounds produced by a real human. Whereas some of the works in this project deal with more esoteric conceptions of subjectivity, the vocalist in Little’s work, is fleshy and palpable. This vocalic body lives in a landscape littered with the corpses of primitive machinery. To our contemporary ear we hear the tongue-in-cheek cyborg element, but do not take it as too ominous a threat. The piece is a narrative science-fiction without menace.

In some ways Mechanical Bride provided a space for me to indulge in “old tricks.” From my operatic foundations I have embodied knowledge of how to build characters, conflicts and large expressive gestures into my interpretation of a musical text. In many ways this piece offers the most traditional representation of subjectivity present within this exegesis. The subject in Little’s Mechanical Bride is not complexly fractured or academic; she is a reluctant Barbarella, a pin-up, a futurist’s ‘manic pixie dream girl’. The mechanically embattled human character at the core of the work is someone’s Bride.

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Of the six performances I gave of this piece, the one that sticks out most prominently for me was the one in Darmstadt (August 2014). It was by far the least successful. I was exhausted, I was late to the performance because I was coming from another rehearsal. We didn’t have proper amplification and the space in which I performed was a classroom with very sad acoustics. The performance felt like a grand struggle. Afterwards a friend, the composer Ori Talmon, told me that my performance had been “…pornographic. It was as if you ripped your dress off in front of me” - the prospect of which is something he found extremely unpleasant.

I was hurt at the time, but in the two years since, I’ve realized that this piece is a place where I am capable of unwitting ejaculations of the most animal parts of myself. It is easy to reveal too much, and lose the details. When I am desperate, I fall back on my habits, and my habits will always wear the mantle of my operatic training; the worst parts of undergraduate-style ‘opera acting’ and melodramatic pathos are always lurking somewhere beneath my layers of well thought out interpretation. In the aftermath of this performance I have tried to more consciously amplify those elements of my “traditional” self that are fit to serve the purposes of the work, and guard against those that need to be chipped away.

When I started this research, I had wanted this section of the discussion to centre on technology but the soft-focus of kitsch and the machinery of nostalgia colour this piece with a visceral, sepia-toned, humanness that is perhaps more directly corporal than any other work within this project. It is now clear to me that the human mediated by technology can be resiliently fleshy, and not so easily captured. Even as I express my bloody anguish in the curdled screams of the work’s opening seconds, no-one really fears for my safety.
The “grains of the voice” in thousands of gnarly pieces

Alexander Garsden’s [ja] Maser

“[ja] maser limits itself to ascending glissandi, the start and end points of which are taken from a composite spectrum based on a fundamental C#0 at 70 Hz, where overtones of this fundamental are offset against overtones of its 3rd, 7th and 11th overtones. In this way, both the soloists’ and electronics parts etch out a permutation of very similar whole number ratio intervals within confined frequency territories, changing in register over the unfolding form. Additional pitch material has been distilled from unusual vocal utterances (dental multiphonics, fry multiphonics, etc.) which have been filtered and modulated via granular synthesis” Alexander Garsden, 2015

The above description gives an insight into Garsden’s compositional process, which uses recorded, electronically manipulated materials, to create both the playback part and the notations provided for the live-vocalist. The first day we worked together on this piece, following a score he had devised, we recorded me singing ascribed pitches throughout my range. Utilizing the frequency relationships Garsden gives above, the piece was composed from these original recordings of my voice-as-raw-material. Everything one hears in the final studio recording of this work conveys the “grains of the voice” (Barthes, 1977), live recorded or modulated and filtered via granular synthesis. Even the swarming glissandi in [ja] Maser’s opening minutes are derived in their most basic parts from tiny fragments of my recorded voice modulated and synthesized by the composer. This work quite literally takes the kernels of voice, the grains of my subjectivity, and filters them to create a new environment (the playback part), in which the live vocal part must live. As will be described in further detail throughout this sub-chapter, whether or not the ‘live’ vocal part will ever be truly realized live is still an open question: the singer in this piece must constitute herself as a deterritorialized, fractured vision of a vocalist.

I want to begin the discussion of this work at the recording stage because this was, for me, the most intense and interesting part of the research. I wish to try to summarize the steps taken here in order to clarify what follows. The general shape of the process of realizing this work took the following steps:

1. Capture of raw materials (in this session I sang long tones across my range)
2. Composition of the live-vocal and playback parts
3. Studio recording of the live-vocal part
4. Editing of the recordings from Step 3 to create a rendering of the live-vocal part.
5. Composition of the playback part (utilizing the recording from the previous step as raw-material) and an amended vocal score.
6. Various attempts to perform (with playback) and/or re-record the live-vocal line.
7. Performances and recordings where the live-vocal line (as represented by the recording made in step 3) is played via speakers alongside the playback part (as opposed to sung live, or studio-recorded from a through-performance of the vocal part).

The first active part I had in realizing [ja] Maser was producing the raw vocal material for capture (Step 1). Once Garsden had these samples, he was able to work on the computer-aided process of composing the playback and ‘live vocal’ lines, which he notated and sent to me to learn. The opening of the first version of the score looked like th

![Figure 7.5 [ja] Maser 2013 draft](image)

This version had to be learned very quickly for practical, deadline-related reasons. With the time we had (3 weeks from score delivery to recording) I was not able to master the materials well enough to create a semblance of a live, through-performed version of the vocal part. We had to record in tiny chunks, stopping all the time to check pitch or rhythm or articulation. Additionally, I needed a restart before each change of extended technique because I had not yet ingrained the laryngeal acrobatics that would be required for a through-performance of those technically challenging portions.
The ‘feeling’ in the studio those first days was pretty intense. I tried with all my will to make my body produce the sounds notated on the page but, through a combination of not having had the time to do the necessary embodied problem-solving and the difficulty of the requested sounds themselves, I was not able to effectively produce them. After the second session of the week, my flesh having been contorted into shapes they were not strong enough to take, I lost my voice entirely. Submitting to the composer’s will, as performers have been conditioned to do, I allowed myself to be pushed over the precipice of my better judgement. The experience left me voiceless. I temporarily lost my ability to work (sing or teach) and was unable to communicate in the world as I am accustomed. The experience felt like a musical micro-trauma.

After the panic had subsided, and my voice returned, I reflected upon the recording we had made. Garsden and Dunscombe electronically stitched together the rag-doll parts of my performance to form an aural-image of a cyborg protagonist with her stuffing hanging out through the rough edits and cuts. As I listened to this Frankenstein of my self, I was disappointed. I thought that the recording had captured how difficult and strenuous the part was, rather than an expressive or embodied reading of the work. The gathered recordings became grist which Garsden used as he composed the playback part and an amended version of the score (Step 5). The final score included a playback part that was created from these recordings, modulated via granular synthesis. The playback part, formed from the raw materiality of voice, became the universe in which the ‘live’ vocal part would live. The vocal part of the final score was very similar to the first draft, though the opening electronic introduction was greatly shortened. The major differences in the vocal part stemmed from changes made to reflect minor errors that had occurred in the earlier recording session. The first phrases of that final version are pictured below:
Despite the discomfort of making it, Garsden was “quite happy”\(^9\) with how this Frankenstein recording sounded. In the first few months after it was created, I believed that this rough and ready version of the work was surely going to be supplanted by one I would make later on, once I’d had time to ‘sing it in’. I wanted to give the piece time to settle into my body so I could make a realization where I felt like I was present in my flesh. I also thought it would be better to make a new recording after I had performed the work live - which we (Dunscombe and I) did for the first time at the Vivid Sydney Festival in 2014. Afterwards, upon hearing the live recording of this performance\(^10\), I got feedback from Garsden that he was not satisfied with the live realization as it had occurred.

Several months later we made another studio recording, which failed to meet everyone’s bar for success. We tried again. One more failure. The physical separation of this collaboration created difficulties in our communication. “My feeling is that our transcontinental workshopping approach was too innately problematic to facilitate a more rounded dialogue. If we had been in the same room, requests to try a different approach, tone, phrase structure, extended technique, would have been given and received in a very different light.” (Garsden, 2016). When every new idea has to be put into written form or communicated via Skype, words can take on greater significance.

\(^9\) An abridged copy of an email exchange that documents how we decided to approach recording these pieces is included in the appendix.

\(^10\) Garsden could not be present at the premiere but heard a ‘live recording’ of the performance.
than perhaps they should. Most of our sonic experiments had to be recorded in order to seek feedback, creating the strange scenario where each experimental step became an end in itself. This kind of process left us open to too much conjecture and angst. Instead of collaborators being able to voice their responses in real time. “...every step of the process took so much time and effort (and physical expense on your part) that an idea emerged whereby each stage of the workshopping and recording was, in itself, a finished product of sorts.” (Ibid) Often, strenuous undertakings took place in response to relatively unimportant requests that were ultimately discarded because of a lack of mutual understanding. As I tried to construct research out of our cross-continental collaboration, the need to document and analyze, sometimes compromised the natural rhythms of making. I regret we were not more aware of these dangers as we attempted this difficult kind of collaboration. The labor of making this piece was more strenuous than it should have been, and we did not have the methods in place to ameliorate the danger. As Connors stated in her interview “there is a gap in the language... we know what skills are needed as a performer but there are a whole lot of other amazing skills that you need as a collaborator” (Connors, 2015). We are still in need of better tools for discourse in our collaborative processes. After various attempts to re-record the live-vocal line (Step 6) were unsuccessful we entered into a discussion to try to better understand where the problem lay. Through a long exchange of emails seeking to clarify the phenomenological goals of the work 11 we decided to abandon (for now) our attempt to make a studio recording reflective of live through-performance, and instead to try to work with the version of the vocal line we captured initially (in Step 3). The energy I produced in my later attempts at a studio recording were too embodied sounding, too much a reflection of my human subject and consequently, imperfect. Once I had ‘sung in’ the piece, it lacked the urgency and the specificity of the original recording. As it had fused to my body, the work became fleshy and soft. That first recording captured the intensity and difficulty of the sounds and, as I was only attempting to perform tiny fragments at a time, I was capable of voicing the intention of each micro-gesture as a complete thing in itself, rather than as parts of wider phrase arcs reliant on the breathing mechanism. In the moments where one kind of sound becomes another, the nature of breath necessitates micro-sacrifices of accuracy in timbre and rhythm. ja [Maser] does not need to breathe - it is an “emission” or as the title suggests,

11 See Appendix: “[ja] Maser recording email-thread”
stimulated microwave radiation\textsuperscript{12}. The *Frankenstein* version (of Step 3) radiates my carved up flesh as waves of *musique concrete*. The singer as she manifests here is an impossible *vocalic body* (Connor, 2007) projected, shattered, in glinting pieces.

Now the problem of realizing the work as a live performance will be addressed. After the premiere, Garsden and I agreed that the shortcomings of the live performed version are most problematic in first half of the piece (up to section number 13). For example, in the figure below (Figure 7.7) the singer is asked to crescendo to triple forte in middle register out of a quasi-multiphonics fry-tone in the lower register. The resultant sound is that of a very harsh and weighty chest voice, artificially pushed up to an unnaturally high pitch (B4). This is immediately followed by three very fast, staccato, unvoiced consonants that are supposed to sound even louder than the preceding note. At the notated speed (quaver = 132 bpm) these [ʃ] [t] [k] sounds each take up less than one tenth of a second.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure7.7.png}
\caption{[ja] Maser. Bars 73-81}
\end{figure}

What is notated is, to my thinking, a very exciting thing to listen to. However, performing exactly what is written, in a literal sense is something I believe to be impossible; at least I’m pretty sure it is for me. The notation sets up something of a Catch 22. If I sing the beginning of the phrase as asked, there is no hope of the sounds [ʃ] [t] and [k] being louder than a belted middle register pitch, exploding out of a multiphonics, triple forte. I could make these sounds louder, relative to how loud they would usually sound, but in sheer decibels they would never overpower a full

\textsuperscript{12} A maser is an early cousin of the laser which, instead of stimulating emissions of photons in the frequency range of visible light, utilizes the microwave frequency range. The title stands for “Microwave Amplification by Stimulation Emission of Radiation” (What is a Maser? Stanford University, retrieved 2016 https://einstein.stanford.edu/content/faqs/maser.html)
capacity belted tone. I could significantly soften the sung portion of the phrase to contrast against the plosive/aффricative consonants at the end of the phrase, but that would prevent me from accessing the true timbre of middle register ‘ff’ with multiphonics. I am only capable of rendering a very poor reflection of what’s asked of me in this instance.

In the recording we eventually settled upon (from Step 3, combined with the playback part constructed in Step 4), all the elements of this phrase were recorded in separate parts, each of which can be manipulated to sound as loud or soft as we like. The Frankenstein singer that Dunscombe and Garsden sewed together from that recording was able to create something very close to what is asked for on the page. Me, the flesh and blood singer, could not. My habits, my bodily-limitations and the ingrained conventions of music-making suffocated the raw, desperate physicality of the sounds necessary for the piece to function at its best. The flow and intentional continuity of a ‘live’ performance took the focus off the concrete elements of the sound and onto my real body.

I believe that [ja] Maser is not a work not for a ‘real’ person but for something a lot less literal. After some discussion we decided that a live performance of this piece may never communicate well. At one point we talked about making it a purely acousmatic work. Because the first half of the piece is full of gestures like the one described in the previous paragraph, for the next live performance I decided to present a realization where the studio-recorded version of the ‘live’ vocal line would be played through speakers alongside the corresponding playback for the first half of the piece and then I would sing the vocal part live (though still amplified) for the second half of the piece. This reading was something of a hybrid between acousmatic and live, electro-acoustic performance, and was attractive because it afforded an opportunity to solve the practical problems of the first half as well as to play with how my embodiment could be perceived by the audience – drawing the limits of my presence and absence into the foreground.

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13 The question of whether this piece is possible to realize satisfactorily live still does not have a unanimous answer. At the time the studio recording was finalized, we were agreed that the piece was not going to be possible live. In 2015 at Griffith University in Brisbane, I tried an alternate version that is partly electro-acoustic and partly acousmatic. More recently (July 2016) Garsden has told me he thinks a live electro-acoustic version would be possible if we were able to workshop the piece further together.

14 Acousmatic sound is sound one hears without seeing their originating cause - an invisible sound source. Chion, M. (1994).
[ja] Maser was the first piece on the program of the concert, at Griffith University in 2015. I hid myself on a catwalk in the lighting rig, towards the back of the hall, in a corner where the audience would not easily see me. The lights went down, signalling the beginning of the performance. The studio-recorded version of the piece (comprised of both the playback and the live-vocal parts) played through the PA above the audience’s heads as they sat in the dark. Halfway through the piece a light began to fade up on my face. I was gradually made visible to the audience, should they chance to look upwards towards the lighting rig. From figure 13 onwards I began to sing the vocal part live alongside the playback, amplified by a lavalier microphone I was wearing.

I intended to draw attention towards the interplay between the embodied and the mediated. I wanted to see if I could use proximity and position to stir up the instability of meaning in the situation. By ‘perching’ myself in a space not designed for performance I required the audience to seek me out in the visual field, rather than ‘staging’ myself where the audience could more passively assume what my role was according to the conventions we all know. The raw sonic materials of this piece are derived from my voice but they are so heavily mediated it is difficult for a listener to discern their source, what is live, or what is a manipulation. I hoped the audience would decide for themselves what they believed to be ‘real’, ‘who’ was singing, and what was mere electronic reproduction, without making the physical reality explicit.

Afterwards it was drawn to my attention by my DMA supervisor, Vanessa Tomlinson, that because the stereo PA (positioned high above the stage) was the only source of amplification, she felt as if the whole performance had been acousmatic. My real body was too far away from most of the audience for the acoustic vocal sound to have been heard and no speakers were situated close enough to my physical body to create a sense of directionality\footnote{My failure in this scenario reminded me of Emmerson’s invitation to create narrative through the positioning and directionality of the various sounding elements in the performance space of acousmatic music. (Emmerson, S. 2007). I intend to further explore his model for further performances of [ja] Maser.}. Even when I did begin to sing, my presence provided more of a spectre in the visual periphery than a living voice. This tension between the live and the mediated that I was so hoping to highlight, did not manifest for her. I realized that in failing to take into account the proximity of the speakers as well as the live bodies in relation to the audience that I had shot my own idea in the foot. This moment has resulted in a
big change in approach for me when making decisions about movement, proximity and amplification – not just for this piece, but for every electro-acoustic performance I’ve given since. The above-described realization from 2015 at Griffith University was not the ‘final and best’ way of solving the problem of the fractured Frankenstein presence of the living singer in this piece, but I am glad I did not abandon the possibility of a live realization of this work. The experiment, though far from entirely successful, did provide evidence for me that a viable live version is worth pursuing, and its results offered new insights into the many possible ways of constructing vocal presence for an audience that has applications for this piece and others beyond it.

Despite being constructed of the dust of my self. This piece proved difficult ground for human habitation. Often, the problems I encountered for my part in the realization of this work came from a disconnect between the granular and the fleshy. The space Garsden has created with the electronics is a kind of placeless place, a *determinization of the grain*16 (Barthes, 1977; Deleuze & Guattari, 1977). Parsing the live work through my physical body in the normative fashion was probably a misguided goal. *ja [Maser]*’s vocalic body was more effectively addressed in pieces, though in the live setting, the full realm of possibility, has yet to be determined. Through working on this piece, I slowly came to understand that to be effective, I needed to stop thinking of my self as a unified and relatable human subject. Though, in theory I am completely at home with this idea, it seems that in practice it took a long time for me to become comfortable with producing my voice-as-material, filtered in shards through the lasers’ eye of Garsden’s notation.

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16 This term fuses Deleuze and Guattari's *determinization* with Roland Barthes' *grain of the voice* to describe the way in which this piece disintegrates the cultural, geographical and structural integrity of the performer – destabilizing the refrains of her genotype, sending them flying out into three dimensional space.
The space between us

James Rushford’s *The Fabric of Wind*

*The Fabric of wind* is the result of a novel\(^\text{17}\) compositional process. Rushford created the raw materials of the work by recording himself improvising, speaking a poem about our relationship in his own voice, while also playing organ and various auxiliary instruments. He then composed the piece utilizing these captured improvisations to form a playback part, as well as an audio score for the performer. James and I have known each other since we were teenagers. Though we have worked together many times and in many configurations, but particularly as a duo, this is the first solo piece he has composed for me to perform. The task before me was to realize an experimental piece in a simultaneously open and entangled inter-subjective context:

> “The Fabric of Wind is a duet between Jessica Aszodi and myself, and a celebration of our close friendship and creative relationship over the past fifteen years. The piece is based on recordings of my own voice embedded within an electro-acoustic playback collage. I attempt to speak a written text whilst being constantly disrupted by various wind instruments and objects that are inserted into my mouth. Some of these recordings are heard within the piece in playback form, and others are part of an audio score that Jessica interprets. Out of this process emerges two inter-connected characters - my own desperate and confused, and Jessica’s more calming yet somewhat stuttered. A deeply intimate conversation of mangled speech and murmured singing results, unclear in meaning but rich in expression.” (James Rushford, 2016)

The text that James “attempts to speak” is provided in the performance instructions, though it is only occasionally intelligibly conveyed in the playback or audio score.

*The fabric of wind –* by James Rushford

*Bringing the fabric of wind*

*Wind with colourful dimension.*

*Motherless dimension.*

*The motherless mother.*

*A certain love*

*Or a certain properness.*

*The earth-mouth, proper imbalance.*

*The discolouration of spring has come*

*Nobody knows how it was.*

*And don’t figure me out*

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\(^{17}\) While I say his method is ‘novel’ I recognize that his process features elements similar to other audio scores, mimetic music, and compositions that utilize electro-acoustic manifestations of the voice. Works that explore similar methods and ideas have a long history, including work by Alvin Lucier, John Cage, Lindsay Vickery, Luc Ferrari and others. This kind of work has been more recently discussed in artistic research by Vickery (Vickery, L. 2016) and Mailman (Mailman J. B. 2013).
(I’m trying hard for this not to be an exercise)
Wind in the colourful dimension
Bring a heavy sweet fabric.
Before existence the cartography.
Sweaty stupid seeing-stars.
Stupid stupid mother.
Can you disappear?
Will there be no question of it?

And yesterday I made music with my feet. I liked the lack of responsibility, and it’s nice to have your arms free. But it doesn’t matter, it doesn’t get heard anyway. Maybe when satin is dripping like if my mind could hum the fizz of bubble baths. Maybe. When I’m not interested in dancing with the snow-mushroom that you are. When you disappear without any question of it, no lifted sands and bored slag-sledge blocks, no between or demand attention, maybe. Sometimes front and back legs are collected to prevent any bad-world action but a definite transference happens anyway. When what fits in your body. It is a failure of communication. It is unmoderated. When spring has come, nobody knows how it was. And yesterday I dreamed that there were many different versions of the same sponge, only one was clean. A way of interacting in outer space without damaging action you believed me when I said it without any breath.

Figure 7.8 The Fabric of Wind (text by James Rushford)
The sounds captured in this recording were then recomposed electronically to create two distinct parts: one which was to be heard live by the audience via stereo playback, and one which only I would hear (via an earpiece). Both parts are to be played simultaneously. I was instructed to “imitate/represent” the sounds heard on the audio-score as closely as possible.
The score for this piece consists of the aforementioned audio-score, accompanied by succinct performance notes. The performer is instructed on dynamic range (“very quiet” throughout), microphone choice and told to quietly hum the parts of the audio-score that feature organ, the way in which the rest of the sounds are produced is at the performer’s discretion. An important element of the work is that the live performer cannot use electronic manipulation to attain a closer representation of the sounds they are imitating in the audio-score. “The performer is welcome to use auxiliary materials and extended techniques to alter their vocal sounds as required, but no electronic processing or ‘effects’ are to be used” (Rushford, 2013).
Figuring out how to perform this piece was no easy task. The entangled intimacy of the subject matter, coupled with the unconventional score and performance instructions, pushed me to design my learning methodologies creatively. I approached the realization of The Fabric of Wind as a highly subjective and unscientific experiment. Each step in the process was something to be tried out on my body, and tested for effectiveness. The test of effectiveness, or the measure of
‘success’ has been one of the most difficult things to convey in writing. Oftentimes the only evidence I can present to the reader, or myself, that one method was more fruitful than another was that my body just seemed to “know” when I had found the right route.

Rather than starting work on this piece as I conventionally might - spending time with pencils, piano and paper on a music stand, or singing the thing in sections, trying to ingrain the work into my muscle memory - in this piece, I put on headphones and listened to the voice of my dear friend and colleague in the audio-score. He was close-miked, right there in my ear, and on repeat. It was hard to know how even to begin to articulate my own part in this. With repeated listenings of the audio score, my anxiety grew. I did not feel confident about recreating it for myself.

As a performer of new notated music, I am used to being “the first” person to utter a sound into life. I am comfortable responding to information conveyed on paper then discerning how best to make the sounds a material reality. The audio score in The Fabric of Wind is a physical and finished thing that already exists in time. My voice and James’ are not so similar, yet I was tasked with recreating these sounds he had already produced from his body. I had to figure out how to closely imitate those sounds, and to perform the material on the tape in real time, produced from my body, at my instigation. These elements of timing and agency of production proved quite difficult to manage.

As I already have said, to translate these recorded sounds into my self, and out again in a communicative manner, required quite a bit of experiment. Most of these experiments I carried out alone, though I met a couple of times early on with James for problem-solving discussions. In these discussions James verbally indicated a couple of the methods he thought best for me to articulate some of the sounds (for example, James made the long noisy blasts one hears in the audio-score and playback out of eruptions from a can of compressed air. I adopted the same method in my realization of the work18) but just about everything else had to be reverse-engineered.

I began by listening and allowed each part of the process, each experiment of method, to guide how I thought best to progress. As I enacted each step, I asked myself: what else do I need to do to make this work? How can I make a sound like this come out of my body? What could I try next

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18 A table showing my method towards realizing a close imitation of these compressed air blasts, is included in the appendix (p. 4)
to make the sounds “stick”? How can I feel more ready to produce them at the moment they are supposed to occur? After each step in the process I would try to practice a ‘performance’ (just for myself) of the piece to see what I had learnt, and what still needed to manifest.

An overview of the steps in my process as are as follows:

1. Listening to the audio score repeatedly
2. Copying while listening
3. Taking notes while copying while listening
4. Making a notated ‘short’ score.
5. Making a more detailed notated score
6. Performing with the notated score and the audio score
7. Performing with the audio score but no notated score
8. Performing with the notated score but no audio score
9. Re-working my live performance as from memory - with improvisation
10. Performing my new ‘responsorial’ version of the piece, which combined a performed version of Step 6 followed by a new response of my own.

Initially I sat and listened to the audio score, over and over (Step One). Then I practiced listening to the tape, mimicking what I heard (Step Two). Though I did sincerely try, according to my subjective value hierarchy, this approach was a complete failure. Sounds had come and gone before I had grasped they were happening. I had no idea how to translate the sounds I was hearing into physical actions. This listening and copying taught me something about the sounds and their timbres, but the way the sounds unfolded in time would not ‘stick’ at all, nor did I gain any sense of control over how my physiology would go about producing the sounds. I believe that the method enacted in ‘Step 2’ is probably closest to the method of production Rushford intended for the realization of this piece but I could not seem to find a way to make it happen based purely on listening and mimicking. In all honesty, the prospect of performing the piece in this uncontrolled manner felt humiliating. Which led me to ‘Step 3’.
In Step 3, I tried an approach where I would listen to the audio score, stopping and starting frequently. When I stopped the audio score, I tried out versions of the sounds I had just heard. I tried to figure out how they were made, imitating what I heard, making notes, and then modifying my methods of sound production to try to get closer to the sounds on the audio score. For example, when I noticed the introduction of a filter that lowered the pitch of James’ voice on the audio score, I tried out different ways of getting a similarly affected low pitched vocal sound – eventually settling on the plan that I would artificially anchor my larynx by tensing my hyoglossus muscle and opening my jaw wider as the pitch was descending. I made notes about what happened when, and how I wanted each sound to be produced. An example of a journal extract where I kept notes on this process is shown above in Figure 7.9. Once I had tried these ideas out, and made notes on which sounds should be produced at what time, I tried to ‘sing-through’ the piece again with the audio score, watching my notes for prompts. Still, I could not keep up. Still I felt like what I was doing was inferior to the sounds that already existed in the audio-score part.
After I had moved through steps 1, 2 and 3, I paused to consider my next course of action. Though I observed myself improving in my ability to copy the sounds I heard on the audio-score I was not succeeding at articulating those sounds in time. When I listened to the audio score, I felt like almost every sound had come and gone before I had a chance to mentally process it, let alone try to re-create it. After spending some time with the piece, I had memorized well enough which ‘category’ of gestures might be about to happen. However the exact timing of when each sound should be prepared and then articulated outwardly, seemed thoroughly unpredictable. Without meter, or time-guide, or verbal prompt, or regulated rhythmic plan, or notated instructions of timing - I never knew what was coming. Listening was not enough. If I did manage to get some version of the sounds I wanted coming out of my body vaguely in the same time-frame as they did on the audio score - the sound of my voice reverberating inside my own body overpowered the score in my ears, and I couldn’t hear what was coming next: my most successful gestures were usually followed by my worst, as I accidently sang over the beginning of what should have been a swift change of affect. I was often out of synch with the audio score and found myself missing much of the delicate counter-point that played out between audio score and the playback part. It felt like a humiliating scramble to imitate what I was hearing - which I thought sounded beautiful on the audio-score, but which I could not share with the audience. I wondered what my panicked mutterings could possibly add to the piece that did not already exist in the audio-score-to-playback relationship James had already created?

The solution to this problem was begun in Step Four, when I decided to create a notated score for myself. This choice has not been uncontroversial. It might be said that it goes against the spirit of the audio-score genre and reveals a lot about how my deeply held habitual preferences and biases which effect what I can, and cannot, seem to make my body do. I have learned well how to make sounds using a visual prompt but was failing terribly at making sounds from out of other sounds. My inability to copy or recreate sounds in real time from a listening prompt highlights my weaknesses as a listener, and as an imaginer of sounds. I believe that James would have preferred I did not take this step of making a written score. Yet from the moment I began to move in this direction, I felt like I was regaining control over my performance. I am not proud to

19 Both Rushford and my doctoral supervisor Vanessa Tomlinson have expressed dissatisfactions of various kinds over me having taken this step
admit it, but the whole history of my training and habits and ingrained preferences combined to influence me in this decision – the making of a score became the key to my ‘successful’ realization of this piece.

I did not at first intend this score to be used in performance (part of the first version I made of the notated score is illustrated in figure 7.10 above). I hoped that creating a score would enable me to better interiorize the pace and shapes of the audio-score, but eventually become unnecessary. I hoped that by writing it down, by parsing the sounds through my hands as well as my ears, I could ingrain the sonic ideas and timings into my muscle memory. Indeed, as I sat with pencil and paper at my desk, I could feel in my body, a growing sense of commitment and understanding with the piece.

Once I had completed the notated score, I listened again to the audio score complete. As I simultaneously listened and looked at the score my hands had made, my ability to ‘sense’ the piece improved greatly. I was beginning to feel echoes of the sounds mirrored in my body as I
listened. These silent, physical echoes are something I almost always feel when listening to pieces I have worked on, or when spending time with a notated score I have worked on. I often feel physical residues while watching someone else sing a piece with which I am familiar. I had not felt these sensations with this despite having spent relatively a lot of time working on it already. Perhaps the fact that these echoes took so long to take root in me was a progenitor of the anxiety I felt in this piece more generally.

I practiced performing with the notated part I had made, simultaneously listening to the audio score and playing the playback part through speakers. The score pictured in Fig 7.10 takes the form of a series of prompts, and advance cues, alerting me that a certain group of gestures is about to happen, so that I would have enough time to breathe, or reach for the appropriate auxiliary percussion instrument. As I practiced, I realized that though the situation had improved, the score I had made was still not detailed enough. I knew that the piece was composed with the intention that I perform it without the aid of any notated material, and so, in an attempt to stay closer to the composer’s intention, I had intentionally made this first score more in the fashion of a low resolution guide-map than a detailed, notated representation of the sounds I was hearing in the audio-score. After some amount of working with this loosely notated score, I still felt I was failing at being simultaneously receptive to the sounds I could hear in the audio-score and expressive in my own performance. I certainly didn’t feel any closer to being able to perform the piece without a visual prompt. Eventually I decided to try to create a fully notated score.

This new score had a transformative effect on my ability to realize the piece. As soon as I began practicing with this new score, the experience of making the sounds in the audio-score was instantly improved. I was able to prepare well for upcoming gestures, imagining the sounds and movements I needed to make in my mind’s eye in the moments before each gesture began. I was able to time my gestures to reliably translate some of the most affecting moments of rhythmic counterpoint between the audio-score and the playback part. I was able to listen to the audio score at the same time as recreating the sounds I heard there, with intentionality. As I listened to the audio-score my body responded with a fluid recreation of a memory of production. The performance was so much better that I decided to begin performing the piece using this notated score I had made.
Figure 7.11 shows the first page of the score I have been using since the premiere. I give myself tempo markings, rhythms, pitches, text (or IPA transcriptions of the requisite sounds atop the orthographic words from which the sounds were derived), dynamics, phrase markings, most of the usual elements of a notated score (as well as a few anatomical instructions on how to produce the sounds) – framed by timer markings for when key gestures need to start, stop or line up with an event in the tape part. At time of writing, the notated score has become an integral element to performing this piece for me. The score creates a bridge between the actual sounds Rushford makes on the audio score, and the imagined sounds I need to make in my mind in order to prompt my body to action musical decisions. The score makes a space for my self so that my performance might become sincerely my own, rather than a poor attempt to copy Rushford’s recorded performance, always a step behind.

The trajectory of the various performative incarnations of *The Fabric of Wind* have been particularly changeable. It has probably undergone the most dramatic changes from performance to performance of any of the pieces discussed in this exegesis. I’ve changed significant elements of the piece’s realization nearly every time I’ve performed it. As described above, initially, I
performed with the notated score as well as the audio-score. I’ve subsequently performed using only the audio score, and also tried it using just the written score (and no audio score). On one occasion, where I performed without a notated score (as described in Step 7 on p. 149), a technical malfunction resulted in the audio score failing to come through my ear-piece and I had to improvise my performance alongside the playback. Recently, I tried to extend the piece by adding a ‘response’ of my own: a hybrid realization designed to reuse materials from Rushfords’ work to form a piece that follows directly after *The Fabric of Wind*.

This *responsorial realization* (described in Step 9 on p. 149) was inspired by a process Rushford and I worked on over a decade ago as part of an undergraduate sound-art project. We recorded a minute of audio while standing out the front of Rushford’s parent’s suburban home, capturing whatever sounds happened across our field of audition. We then made a 20-minute piece by altering this found-sound recording in a concertina-like process. First, James took this minute of audio and changed one thing – applying a single electronic process to the sound. I then took that new version he had made, and also changed one thing. We repeated this exchange until the piece was 20 minutes long. At each layer we only allowed ourselves to enact one new process (eg. change the gain, filter out some noise, add a pitched tone). We did not discuss with one another what steps we planned, somewhat in the manner of the game of ‘exquisite corpse’, we were trying to make a piece that was reflective of the nature of inter-subjectivity. The piece was a metaphor for how subjects comment and build on experiences they share together but cannot ever perceive the event phenomenally as the same thing. We tasked ourselves to create a concrete object together knowing our experience of that object and communications around the making of it were always approximations.

The ending of the work sounded quite different to the beginning but still contained the residue of what we experienced, standing together on that suburban street. It became a little sonic journal of our shared action upon a memory of something that had already passed. We could act upon the thing together but we could not communicate with one another in the absolute sense. Inspired by the project of shared responsibility and subjectivity we had undertaken as twenty-year olds, I thought of my *responsorial realization* of *The Fabric of Wind* as a kind of discussion between two subjects acting upon a found sound. Though the ‘found sound’ in this case is the existing object of the audio score and rather than switching back and forth twenty times like a
concertina as we did a decade ago, this responsorial realization would be a single layer of call and response, with just one fulcrum point.

This new version began like the other recent performances of the work: Rushford’s playback part coming out of a stereo PA, my voice - performing my realization of his audio score, aided by my own notation of that score, came out of that same PA. My newly composed response began where Rushford’s work ended. When the piece would usually be finished (at the end of Rushford’s composition), a pre-recorded version of the live-vocal part (my realization of his audio-score) I had just performed began to sound from the speakers. Alongside that predetermined playback version of me, I begin to improvise with myself. Thus the nine minute piece, The Fabric of Wind is performed as it usually would be, but is immediately followed by a ‘response’ which is made from the materials Rushford had given me, alongside an improvisation which mirrors something of the improvisatory process he undertook in making the work in the first place. This work is both teleologically fixed and deterministically open. It is made of a sonic-fabric that already exists, with instructions for the future, but has no determined path for how to get from here to there.

The final element I want to discuss with regard to this piece is the recording process and how the representation of the vocalizing subject was problematized within that context. During the tracking, editing and mixing we made choices about how best to frame the voice and about how we would convey the materiality of her/my vocalic body to the listener.

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**Notes from a mixing session 19-12-14:**

Can we have more movement from the sung sounds’ proximity to the listener (eg – switching between foregrounding room mic, body mic, under carpet mics)? As if the singer is darting around the space – hiding from the various other sound sources?

The sounds should all come from one perceivable singer – but they are layered as if to suppose a space – the agent in the space delineates the space, maps it - it is not all directionally pushed towards the listener straight on.

1st pass listening notes:
-0-30” tape up? more room sound?
1’08 – Paper crackles gain up. Pan crackles L to R?
1’21” more gain- aggressive spray
1 30 – tape part needs to sound more directional – front on

2nd half, Drop some of the room sound to create continuity between the previous whispered and sung sections. There is a fine line between sounding like I’m darting around the room and sounding like a bad edit. It has to sound purposeful – I need to be the same person in a temporal continuity. The live voice kind of transforms into the world of the tape’s vocals. Bring in a slap delay and EQ that mirrors the tape here?

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Figure 7.12 Journal Notes on mixing session
For the studio album we decided we wanted the ‘live’ performer’s sounds to intentionally occupy and delineate the aural space. Instead of trying to represent my voice traditionally as directional, present and unified – we worked to exaggerate how broken up and apart the singing subject was – while still capturing a strong sense of its liveness in relation to the composedness of the playback part. Dunscombe put an unusual number of microphones in lots of unconventional positions so we would have choices as to what sounds and directions were to be emphasized in the final product. I had contact microphones under my feet, close mics at a couple of different depths as well as the usual room mics. Using this geographic record of bodilyness we were able to map out my physical presence and the space it occupied. Recording the sounds at different proximities, allowed us to move our aural gaze over and around the vocalizing body as we edited and mixed. We took notes about our objectives and discussed how we would best approach realizing them. The final recorded version of this piece is perhaps the most deliberately mobile of all the works on the record – on a good set of speakers it feels like the recorded subject/object is in constant flux. Despite our deliberate highlighting of the flexibility and disunity of the singing subject, with so much movement going on, the vocalist on the record (me) is conveyed as being quite actively present.

In my own estimation the studio recording of The Fabric of Wind does successfully convey a kind of restless, personal nostalgia: the sound of the organ in the tape part, the simple vocal performance and the found object percussion, give the piece a directness of intimacy. Yet the singing subject as presented here is dynamic and in flux. She is recognized as real through her relationship to the environment and objects to which she is subject and which are subject to her presence. There is nothing flashy or even too strongly emotive about the piece – but it does capture the sense of neurotic closeness that quite sweetly conveys something of the awkward complexities of long friendships, especially ones where the parties involved have grown together and changed and recognized one another as an Other, within whose reflection we see our selves. We (I) move around, recede, get too close, and pull away. Through all the layers of abstraction - it’s vulnerably, comfortably, realistic.

My DMA supervisor has asked me if (and why) I did not seek more advice from Rushford in my choices and methods of realization as I went, and if he approves of my final decision to use a self-notated score. Rushford and I are so tangled up in one another’s histories, it may be that it is not
possible for me to submit to his instructions (and potentially discover something interesting in the process) in the same way I might be able to for a composer I do not know. Maybe, when I reached ‘Step 3’ (the listening and mimicking) and felt I was failing, it provoked frustrations in me that I would not have felt so keenly if I’d not known Rushford since I was fourteen years old. I did try to perform the piece utilizing only the audio score, as I presume was his intention, but it is probably also true that I did not push myself as hard at that task as I might have before coming up with an alternate solution if Rushford were a stranger to me. I am reminded of Tony Arnold’s words from her interview “The entire human act is an act of submission.” (Tony Arnold). Knowing Rushford as I do, to give up my wants in order to satisfy a presumption about his, seemed hardly the appropriate default position. I do not think he would want that either. He is not the kind of composer who would “treat the voice like a wife” as Juliana Snapper might describe it.

As a performer trained in classical music, my sense of the traditional composer-performer hierarchy is deeply ingrained. I fight against this residue from vessel-culture in my practice and work to claim space for myself as a substantive subject. This piece would not be well served by obeying some inherited hierarchical order. I followed the performance instructions I was given but I chose a methodology of my own to get there, even though I knew it was unlikely to be the same one the composer had envisaged. As Rushford stated in his commentary on the work, it is a “deeply intimate conversation” (Rushford, 2016) between friends and colleagues. A good conversation cannot be negotiated without honesty and acceptance of a little friction.

I want to end this sub-chapter by summarizing my reasons for remaining alone for the majority of the later-phases of decision-making. While Rushford was composing The Fabric of Wind, I asked if he desired input from me. He declined, and eventually sent me a finished ‘piece’. This is in keeping with other collaborations of ours, like the aforementioned “inter-subjectivity concertina” piece from a decade ago, where we both added our own layer to each other’s work without further discussion. I therefore felt that the right approach was for me to add my layer, without significant input from him, and that that was permissible within the parameters the work presents. The performance instructions Rushford provided were very open-ended. They leave space for me to solve the problems of realizing this piece in my own way, as my self, and that way is something Rushford knows as well as most anyone probably can. The inter-subjectivity of this piece is not a
performance of discursiveness; it is about separate yet simultaneously entangled subjects who are comfortable making and being themselves in one another’s company.
Embodying the imaginary

Anthony Pateras’ Prayer for Nil

“There is no new self, except as the endlessly receding horizon of desire.”
(Mansfield, 2000, p.46)

Journal entry. January 14th, 2014
One morning last week, in a studio on the ground floor of a rickety building in Berlin in the middle of Winter, Anthony was sitting in a chair surrounded by various hardware and tape machines and I stood with my back to the window that faced the street. I sang into a microphone while Anthony listened. He recorded the sound I made onto a Revox B77 and at some point he began to feed my recorded voice into another tape machine - looping and playing me back against myself, composing with the sounds that had been captured as he stood between them. I was improvising, within a set of rules he’d given me, against this version of myself that re-sounded instantaneously. As the tape passed between the reels Anthony played the tape with his hands, very carefully and purposefully like an instrument, except that the sounds were mine too.

After the recording session described above, Pateras worked with the materials he collected to construct a playback part, and notated a part for a live performer. After about a month I received the new notated score, and the playback part, along with an example realization Pateras had made where he performed the notated vocal part on piano. Listening to this version with him playing the piano, I was very moved (I thought it splendidly beautiful) – but worried about how I might possibly make my voice do what the piano was doing. If this version was more or less how he wanted it to sound, I knew my voice would fail to embody the percussiveness or the speed the piano attained so easily. The live vocal part Pateras had composed seemed to have been conceived with a degree of instrumentality built in. The voice in this piece is not a ‘real’ singer, but some kind of instrumental image of a voice – like the bridge between embodied vocality and absolute music. Negotiating that instrumentality into my body proved one of the keys to realizing this work. I had to figure out how to be a real person while representing the something more free, more visceral and more in touch with the imaginary. The first version, along with the annotations I made in the lead up to the first performance, is included in the figure below:
PERFORMANCE NOTES

Performer is given pitch collections to work with within specific time codes.

Phrases should be ad lib, using durations of 1-9 semiquavers at a brisk tempo. The same duration may be used twice in a row, but never three times in a row.

Rhythmic flavor of phrases vary between molto rubato and rigid, as indicated.

Phrases should be constructed out of vowel sounds and be of varying length. The same vowel may be used twice in a row, but never three times in a row.

Modules that have two bars should be treated as two subcollections. The performer is allowed to sing 2 pitches from either bar in a row, but never 3 pitches from the same bar in a row.

Each phrase should always end with a different pitch to the previous phrase, and pitch should be held and faded over 4-6 seconds. Breaths of 1-2 seconds should punctuate breaks between phrases.

Modules that have stemmed pitches indicate a repeating sequence of pitches as written. Each repeat should be at a different tempo.

Singing tone should be more akin to the joyous brutality of Balkan choral musics, but not an appropriation of that tone. Furthermore it should not under any circumstances reference any kind of operatic tradition.

From modules 14-20 the number of repeats is specified to indicate how long execution should take.

ELECTRONICS & AMPLIFICATION

Performer needs a sound engineer to assist with balance levels and in some cases, backing tape.

Electronics are a stereo backing track that can be played from either CD or computer. Singer needs to be able to see the time counter from either device, or synchronize a stopwatch with a cue from the sound engineer. It is preferable not to have a computer on stage.

The voice should be amplified with a megaphone for the first 4 minutes, then a high quality vocal mic for the remaining 10. The microphone should not amplify the megaphone, and should be muted for the first four modules.

Electronic playback should be relatively loud. Dynamic of the electronics should blend with the amplified voice, so the sources of sound are melded and confused.
Pateras’ score elegantly and succinctly conveys quite a lot of information (The type-set instructions on this page are the composer’s, the scrawled pencil and highlighter are my own). The live performer is given a group of pitches for each numbered module of the work. The performance notes that precede the score-proper (Figure 7.13) tell me that I’m to sing streams of pitches according to a kind of game: a very particular set of rules that govern rhythmic duration, order and tempi, within the specified timeframe. This is true for all the sections where the notes have no stems. The stemmed notes should be performed in the order in which they are written,
but the tempo of the phrase should be constantly varied. The score conveys enough material for a 14-minute piece within two neat pages. The complicated part of the task was establishing the strong internalization of the rule structures that would allow me to improvise in a committed way within such an elegant framework.

Pitch is a tricky thing for me. I do not have anything resembling perfect pitch. The piano realization described above, overflowed with pitches. It worried me that that realization was in Pateras’ mind and under his fingers as he thought about the piece. I knew my voice could not produce so many pitches in such fast succession. The score contains only the information for my part, so asides from a starting note, without some additional aid, I was going to need to be able to correctly plan and identify every interval I sang for fourteen minutes. This is quite beyond my skill-set. The playback, for the most part, consists of recorded clusters of my own voice with various microtonal inflections; so again, without perfect pitch, the tape provides little help.

My classical training has well-prepared me to reliably reproduce certain pitches in a practiced order, but Prayer for Nil calls for constantly active production of pitch intervals, rather than reproduction. The modules Pateras gave me are not melodies, or phrases that can be learned, they are pools of notes from which to choose. Improvising and active choice-making necessitates a constant awareness of which interval I have just sung, from which position I must purposefully choose the next, lest I break a rule or find myself on a pitch not permitted within the module. Preparing this work for performance meant etching these rules and pitch-sets into myself until they were so deeply embodied as to allow my improvised choice-making to propagate a fast and furious flood of pitches sung as ‘if the last person on earth’ (which is the opening expression mark).

I knew that the voice that tumbled nimbly in my imagination as I read these instructions would probably never materialize. Therefore, I set to work looking for alternative places to find pitch, and trying to ingrain Pateras’ instructions and pitch sets into my body as firmly as possible. That seemed to be the first best step towards being able to improvise within the structure. I spent lots of time at the piano, playing each module over and over, singing along. Then playing the pitches of each module as a chord and improvising over it with my voice. I had to improvise very slowly, because I was trying not to sing more than two pitches in a row as they occurred in the module, and attempting to remember always to start a phrase on a different note than the previous ended
on, and trying to make sure I varied the tempo and rhythms, not to mention following the rules for which vowels to sing and when.

The preparation phase of this piece required a significant amount of actual ‘singing’. Unlike other works discussed in this chapter, which required less muscle-memory practice or involved more recording, writing and methodical experiment, Prayer for Nil’s preparation was a vocally active and time-consuming process of embodiment. I wanted to teach my vocal folds to respond intuitively, to produce the desired frequencies automatically when prompted by a change in the playback, or by visual information from the score: conventional, muscle-memory type practice. For everything except the vowel rules, it seemed relatively straight-forward to train myself to follow Pateras’ rules. Much as I would in learning conventional notated music, I repeated each section over and over, accompanying myself with a chord (containing the allowable pitches within the module) on the piano, focusing on one rule at a time. Each time I felt a rule was sufficiently ingrained I worked to ‘add’ another rule on top. I built a sort of automation into the piece in layers. Gradually this process picked up pace, until I was able to produce sounds that were probably 80% accurate to the rules\(^{20}\). Eventually, I was able to stop playing the chord underneath, but by the time of the first performance (June 2014) I did still need additional pitch aid. For the premiere I used a keyboard app that I listened to with an earpiece to prompt myself with pitches at the beginning of modules, or when I realized I had critically mis-pitched.

As I undertook more performances and developed more familiarity with the work, the need for such measures lessened. In the second performance I substituted the app for a tuning fork, which I used less and less frequently in subsequent performances. For the sixth and seventh performances I attempted to perform without it. Having now tried this ‘no-fork’ approach twice, and both times having strayed off pitch to the point where I was unable to find my way back, I plan to go back to using the tuning fork. While practicing pitch was difficult, the element of the work that I found myself least able to master turned out to be the discontinuity of vowels Pateras had specified in his rules.

\(^{20}\) I’d consider than an unacceptably bad success rate in any other piece but I came to realize that, unless I developed perfect pitch over-night, getting to a higher level of accuracy in this scenario was unlikely to happen.
The performance instructions specify that the performer is not to sing the same vowel on more than two pitches in a row, within a stream of pitches, sung entirely on vowels with no consonants to break them up. I am well-practiced in singing text (like in operatic or song repertoire), or singing a piece on one vowel (as in the manner of a conventional vocalise), and in articulating a specific set of non-language-based vowels or phonemes in a pre-designated order (as is a common approach in new music) but it was really hard to get used to the constantly changing, actively improvised approach to “text” here called for. This mode of singing seemed intentionally designed to avoid anything that created a memorable pattern reminiscent of speech. In a stream of voice that contained no consonants and avoided repetition, the signifier so characteristic of vocal music - language – had been side-stepped, but not escaped. The voice, its neurological underpinnings and our practiced mode of perceiving it, is married to language. Voice and language are indivisible in the listener’s and vocalist’s perception:

“The phonetic gesture brings about, both for the speaking subject and for his hearers, a certain structural co-ordination of experience, a certain modulation of existence, exactly as a pattern of my bodily behaviour endows the objects around me with a certain significance both for me and for others. The meaning of the gesture is not contained in it like some physical or physiological phenomenon.”(Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 196)

The presence of the singing voice in this work endows it with an inescapable quality of humanness. In the Lacanian sense, humans co-ordinate our subjectivity in the symbolic realm through language, experiencing “the tension and interplay between the imaginary and the symbolic” (Mansfield, p. 44). Prayer for Nil overflows with what would conventionally be called singing (a recognizably symbolic utterance) but Pateras’ vocalist is missing a key part of what would serve to make her a fully human subject – language. It is common in new music to work against normative definitions of language, but this work deals with words in a way that is unique for its combination of consciously enacted bodily activity and linguistic neutrality. The “doing” of Prayer for Nil is embodied and active. The singer must consciously play this game of voicing, according to the rules set out by the composer. Yet, on stage as the sounds pour out of me, I feel as if I am reaching past the game. Prayer for Nil attempts to circumvent the signified, towards some primordial experience beyond language, where one might encounter the truth of the vocal body, or even a moment to ourselves back in our childhood image of oneness with the Lacanian Other. I have not sung another piece that takes the same approach.
At time of writing, after seven performances of this work, I still find myself regularly breaking the rules with regard to vowels: accidently creating a pattern, or starting a new phrase on the same vowel I ended the last one on. My need to create patterns with the sounds shaped by the articulatory organs, my lips and tongue, is very deeply ingrained. In the sections where the modules are to be performed in order with specific rhythmic relationships but at different tempi (e.g. Modules 8 and 10, as illustrated in Figure 7.14), I often catch myself singing the same set of vowels for the same phrase more than once. To try to counteract this tendency I annotated sets of vowels above each module, each combination of vowels a little different. I did this so that my eyes might be able to visually ‘roam’ between the vowels as articulated on the page while I sing. As my gaze weaves in and around the notated vowel groupings I am able to produce the vowel changes with greater accuracy. By altering the intended activity on which my attention was primarily focused, from ‘singing’ to ‘seeing’, I was better able to perform the task. This issue of combining my ocular gaze with the individual compositional materials proved quite an effective tool in generating the amount of variation Pateras had requested. As I became more and more comfortable with the piece this tactic became less necessary. However, I have found that if I stop actively engaging with the marks on the page for too long, I quickly get off track.

Remaining active, open to suggestion, and continuing to truly improvise, is not simple when performing a work over and over. There is an uneasy tension between the need for training the body to perform certain actions, and the spontaneous agency required for the improvised element. *Prayer for Nil* is simultaneously almost memorized and almost improvised. I am ever in immanent danger of falling into freedoms that will lead me away from the composer’s intentions, so I keep the visual channel open between me and the page. In order to be able to “follow the rules” of the game, I have embedded the vocabulary of the work in my muscle memory; in that sense the piece is also memorized. This embodied memory of the piece, is now part of me, yet I know it is only one possible version. It changes from performance to performance. I am curious to hear how it would unfold differently in the voice of another performer.

*Prayer for Nil* bears some obvious relationship to the work of Morton Feldman. Pateras once told me that Feldman’s *Three Voices for Joan La Barbara* was a favourite piece of his. I think that that conversation was what led me to *Three Voices* in the first place, and that very piece led me down
the voice and electronics rabbit-hole in which I now find myself submerged. Both works execute a simple concept over a prolonged period of time, creating a plane of listening that is ‘empty’ enough for the audience to project themselves upon it, yet rich enough to spur the same listener to query that self in fresh ways as they go about the listening. This call towards self-attention through a concentration of activity is similar to the approach applied by minimalist and abstract expressionist painters like Mark Rothko and (early) Phillip Guston, who Feldman much admired (Feldman, 2000), and bares some conceptual relationship to the approaches taken in vocal works by 20th century minimalist composers like Steve Reich, Phillip Glass, Terry Riley and Pauline Oliveros.

Both Pateras and Feldman harness the human quality of the voice to announce the presence of a subject inside the crucible of abstract sounds and shapes. That subject affects the way the audience perceives their relationship to the sound. The voice that sings, whether recorded or live is always linked to a body. The qualitative presence or absence of that body colours the way the piece is perceived. In both Pateras’ and Feldman’s vocal works, the relative presence and autonomy of the embodied (live) and disembodied (pre-recorded playback) voices are key to interpreting the work. As a performer, I had to give careful consideration to the way my body manifested in space and how it was relationally connected to the playback element of the work.

In order to address this, I tried out different options for positioning myself (and the sources of any relevant amplified sounds) during the several performances of this work.

Initially, I performed on a stage with my live voice amplified (first by a megaphone and then via a microphone through a stereo PA). This situation proved unsatisfying. Pateras, Dunscombe and I wanted to find a way for my voice to blend with the playback part without sounding as if it emanated from the same physical source. I wanted the audience to be able to sense the liveness and bodilyness of the live vocal part, so I began experimenting with alternative methods of vocal amplification and positioning.

The realizations I have been most satisfied with thus far have been when I’ve performed in very acoustically live spaces when the audience is able to be relatively close to me. In situations such as this I have chosen to perform the live part unamplified, and positioned myself either directly in front-of or nestled within the audience. The speakers which relayed the playback part were positioned so that the audience could perceive the live sound as coming towards them from a
different direction to the playback, but the audience themselves were positioned at the junction where both sounds (the playback and the live acoustic voice) met as they projected towards them. One such performance was as part of a solo recital at the Resonant Bodies Festival in New York. In a review, the New York Times remarked that my recital was an “intense program — meditating on the relationship of performance, performer and performed… In Anthony Pateras’s eloquent, lulling “Prayer for Nil” (2014), rooted in a jackhammering synthesizer [sic] line, the singer became one of us, standing in the back row, as if reading a lesson from a chapel choir” (David Allen, 2015, NY Times).

Geography has made it difficult for Dunscombe, Pateras and I to be together to workshop this piece. Most of the discursive finessing of the work has come about through Skype, email and the exchange of recordings of rehearsals and performances. Pateras first heard the work performed live in Sydney in 2015, which was its sixth public outing. After the first score (included in Figure 7.14) two more scores followed. The final score looked liked this:

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**Figure 7.15 Prayer for Nil, Page 1 (of 2), Modules 1-4 [Version 3]**
The pacing of the work was altered, the phrasing, dynamics and expression markings were simplified, and the megaphone amplification in the opening was scrapped. Pateras had reduced an already minimally constructed frame to its bare essentials. The over-arching expressive instruction had gone from the drastically poetic: “as if the last person on the planet” to the pragmatic: “still, focused, no phrasing, no vibrato, no drama”\(^ {21} \). Most of these changes arrived in my inbox swiftly after Anthony heard the recording of the premiere. Presumably, the way in which I imagined myself behaving at the end of the world was more melodramatic than what Pateras had envisaged, and he felt a need to moderate his instructions accordingly.

There is a poetic tension in *Prayer for Nil* between an aching physicality and a desire for absolution. It is impassioned and nihilistic, emotional and uncommunicative, awestruck and banal. There are no words and relatively few instructions, it treats the voice as both an instrument and a cathartic, fleshy space. I’m given repetitive modules of pitches to sing in the order of my choosing, but am hemmed-in by instructions that rule out many possible choices and which fix the main events in time. I communicate without words, the *grain of the voice* fore-grounded. Pateras instructs against making reference to particular styles of music (balkan singing, opera etc), but simultaneously draws upon these reference points to explain his desires, what Eidsheim might call “tacitly agreed-upon timbral ideals” (Eidsheim, 2015, p. 134). The physical act of producing a timbre that actively stretches between and across genres, as Pateras asks, but which is more or less consistently applied throughout the work, is one that requires active attention and labor. The production of these sounds represents the vocalists’ labor in service to recognizable cues of genre and cleaving the boundaries that secure the integrity of the musical work concept (Goehr, 1992). Eidsheim describes the work of the vocal performer:

“… as going beyond the careful production of beautiful timbres and individual works. She is required both to be an ideal listener who knows and listens within the frame of the work concept… and to develop the ability to deliver these musical subtleties to an audience… the need for this labor is one area in which we can see that music’s status, definition and meaning are not a priori” (Eidsheim, 2015, p. 135).

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\(^ {21} \) The expression marking has since been amended to reflect something of both the initial and the revised expression marking: “As if the last person on the planet: still, focused, no phrasing, no vibrato”
Unlike the vast majority of works in the history of vocal music, in *Prayer for Nil* I’m not labouring within the frame of a musical work concept defined by unspoken timbral, spacial and relational rules. In performing this piece I am playing a game, but its rules are created to idiosyncratically reflect something of the inner life of the composer, avoiding easy links to the symbolic, agreed-upon architectures of western music or casual relationships to the frames of genre, language and audience expectation. I construct my performing subject in relation to Pateras’ game of un-signs, to whose rules the listener has not been made privy. While I’m playing it for the audience, I’m declamatory, I’m alone, I’m avoiding signification.

This heroic act of avoidance could fall under the category of actions of demand and desire which Lacan would teach us are doomed to failure. In other words, a ‘Prayer for Nil’

“The tension between the endless desire that is the source of human motivations, and the hopeless demands that fail to appease it, is the very heart of human tragedy, according to Lacan. We feel desire only because the imaginary has escaped us, because we are lost in the symbolic. In other words the very fact that we feel desire means that we are part of the order in which desire cannot be satisfied. All the demands we pursue arise only in the symbolic. They are doomed to inevitable frustration, because we cannot fulfil what desire really seeks from us: to return from the symbolic to the imaginary we have always already lost” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 46)

This piece drives towards some sort of unreachable, pre-symbolic life, in which singer, composer, listener and the materials of sound itself might all be one and the same inseparable and unrecognizable self/other. Yet with each thrust towards this state of being, we are already lost in the symbolic, already a subject betraying our desires. With this wordless, improvised stream of notes, sung ‘fff’ (as loud as possible) I forcefully announce the existence of my symbolic-dwelling subject self.

The live vocal subject is situated in a field of pre-recorded “noisy” voices. What the NY Times reviewer thought was a ‘jackhammering synth’ but which turns out to be an electronically affected and composer-reconstructed, multiplication of my recorded self. In any case, these voices manifest for the audience as something closer to a violent expulsion of chaotic noise than “the careful production of beautiful timbres” (Eidsheim) which evoke the presence of a coherent, vocal subject. With these re-composed pre-recorded vocals in the playback part the lines between living and dead, inside and outside are muddied. The vocal sound is no longer ‘clean and proper’ (Kristeva, 1982). As the work progresses this violent swarm of voices becomes more coherent but
it never coheres. As the pre-recorded voices become ever less noisy and more ordered, my live voice begins to sing in ensemble with these already fixed echoes of myself. Instinctively, I seek relationships with these pre-recorded other 'me’s. Habitually I seek to make patterns and to create language, to create counterpoint between myself and these mirrors of my self. I cannot help my self, the ‘rules of the game’ forbid this falling towards language and relationship, but each time the body’s knowledge intervenes. There is a sensation of cognitive dissonance. I am memorized, and also improvising. I am playing a game, but the rules are set to avoid casual attachments to meaning.

“...in every utterance one has a dimension of signification, which is ultimately the dimension of desire—... the satisfaction of desire in what apparently runs counter to signification, but actually accomplishes its course... The voice ties language to the body, but it doesn’t belong to either. It is not part of linguistics, but it is not a part of the body either—it detaches itself from the body, it doesn’t fit the body, it floats, it is like a bodily missile which has detached itself from its source, emancipated itself.” (Dolar, 2003)

Prayer for Nil is an act of desiring, running counter to signification, reaching past it towards the big emancipated nothingness on the other side. There is something about this scenario I find resonantly moving. I often feel emotionally exhausted after performing the piece; I’ve seen audience members cry. I don’t feel happy or sad or anything else definitive, just, emptied. Initially when asked for a description of the work, Pateras provided me with this single sentence answer:

“The desire for nothing is nothing in itself” Anthony Pateras (2014)
Conclusion

This chapter has explored four of the different possible manifestations of subjective presence within a project realizing four works for voice and electronics. Rushford’s fluid inter-subject is more palpable than Garsden’s deterritorialized, granular one, but much less fleshy than Little’s science-fiction bride. Pateras’ subject has no body and all the bodies at the same time. In each piece I explored how my decisions through the preparatory, performative and recording stages affected the way in which my subjectivity was conveyed, the interpretive frameworks I built within each piece, and the knowledge gained from the activity of embodied “doing”.

During my early education I struggled with how to frame myself as both a singer, and a person with a desire for knowledge. Like so many of the younger singers I interviewed for this research, the idea that I needed to make myself empty in order to be good at my job infuriated me. I have repeatedly encountered colleagues, and people in positions of power, who hold traditional ideas about musicians as vessels, and singers as vacant, beautiful objects upon which real artists might project their genius, or from whose naïve and radiant performances scholars might uncover some meaning. Railing against this basic negation of my subjectivity became a default response.

Articulating, revealing and problematizing subjectivity in music is a multifaceted and methodically rich process, which I now apply as broadly as possible within my practice in order to seek solutions to problems encountered in musical works. I recognise my responsibility to negotiate my subjective presence in a nuanced way, and hope that I am able to do so in a less petulant fashion than I did when I first became aware of these problems as a young undergraduate. This does not mean I am able to separate myself from my base instincts, or that I claim any power of objectivity. However, I do make efforts to find effective ways of being present within musical works, actively querying my ingrained habits and assumptions during the realization process. In this way my subject becomes more fit for the purpose of performative communication and my realizations of musical works are fit for the purpose of the works themselves.

The four composers whose work is discussed in this chapter have given me a great gift by composing these pieces for me. I feel, like La Barbara, that “when a composer is writing something ‘for you’ first of all it feels very nice. It’s a compliment. They like something about you
something about your voice, about what you do, your intellect….” (La Barbara, 2015). I’m grateful for the gift of the task at hand, and yet, this writing will convey that part of the process of realization for me is a struggle with submission.

So much of what I have learned thus far in my artistic life has come about in response to discoveries encountered while performing composer-designated tasks as part of my preparation and performance of musical works. Portions of the new knowledge generated in this research spring from the interaction between the expressions of my subjectivity and that of the composers. The laborious act of pouring my self into solving a problem placed before me by a composer often produces new fruits. Constricted by limitations, while performing a task of extreme difficulty and exposure sometimes extracts a performance that cannot have been reached without all that labour and difficulty. Juliana Snapper called it “Miracle Baiting” (Snapper, Interview). Still, once the experiments of the preparatory phase have concluded and the results have been probed, the ultimate decisions of realization are the performer’s own. I am the body who stands before the audience in the performative moment, and that is something I must take responsibility for my self.
Conclusion

“The voice goes out into space, but also always in its calling for hearing, or the necessity of being heard, opens a space for itself to go out into, resound in, and return from.”

(Connor, 2000, p.6)
This exegesis argues for a more conscious negotiation of subjectivity in the realization of new vocal music than has traditionally been applied. It proposes that the conversation between the subject, her context, and the musical texts with which she engages be continuing and active. It explores a number of possible methodological frames through which to parse such a practice, and situates the research within a literary and cultural framework that supports the signifying and structural understandings required to engage fruitfully with subjectivity in the vocal performance context.

There are many subjects to consider in vocal performance – the subject as it is constituted by its environment and its culture, the subject as a ground for knowledge and the subject as flesh and blood human being. The vocal subject moves in the world and is moved by the world. When this subject acts upon a cultural object, like a new piece of music, the subject and the object it acts upon are changed for having encountered each other. These interactions manifest in the realization of new vocal music in multifarious musical and non-musical decisions and unconscious habits and embodiments.

To consider subjectivity in the realization of new vocal music is to negotiate with oneself and to consciously query the relational subjectivity of everyone present when deciding how to move, where to direct speakers, where to situate listeners, how to amplify, how to make changes, how to interpret, how to frame, what to show or reveal, whether to express or contain. These decisions are affected by an agent who is both author-of and site-of her research. That agent is a vocal body that moves and breathes and digests and aches. She searches for knowledge from within her own experience and simultaneously is conscious that she will never have objective knowledge of that experience. This duality of analytical awareness with the purely phenomenal must be negotiated and embraced.

I speak, from my subjective position within the work and my milieu, from which I cannot be disentangled. In my practice this negotiation is affected mostly through the frames I place around and within the work I do. These frames are methodological structures that help to train my body, structure time, form value-hierarchies and privilege the
interrogative act within the process of realization. I never take my position within the work for granted. I am not a neutral space upon which the work sited.

My subject is formed by many repetitious background activities. These are constituted in voiced, bodily and theoretically focused actions through which I seek to strengthen and organize my practice while remaining flexible enough for transformation to occur. The embodied work is supported by an engagement with literary and cultural sources that reinforce my ability to theorize the problems encountered in musical experiences. All of these actions have been developed to make my subject a site that is fit for the purpose of performative communication.

This exegesis is a story of my narratable self and not a true mirror of the research as it unfolded. It does not seek to provide a systematic or thorough catalogue of vocal subjectivity but aims to situate the artistic research and my subject within a cultural and philosophical framework that contextualizes the knowledge produced. This context includes personal stories of how physical training and personal events have sculpted my subject towards its present state. It also gives a brief survey of some cultural and theoretical frames which have undoubtably influenced my subjective readings of musical situations: Lacanian theories of demand and desire, an interest in the foundations of European modernism, post-structural discourses on the fracturing and entanglement of subjectivity, phenomenology, electro-acoustic practices, opera, voice science, instrumentality, the professional field, interdisciplinary voice studies, the specter of Berberian and the resonant voices of Barthes, Connor and Dolar all reverberate in my mind, body and practice.

The foreground of that practice is through direct interactions with musical works. I take an active approach to negotiating with the notated scores I realize. I try to unpack the composer’s intentions, to understand how the work relates to wider cultural, relational and philosophical factors, and to challenge my entrenched musical prejudices to find the most effective course of action for me within each scenario. When I make musical decisions I scan my first impulses and impressions, then attempt to problematize them. I consider the intentions of the composer, and the milieu in which the piece functions,
and design tests to perform upon myself, that provide the necessary feedback to allow me find a solution to which I can commit.

These commitments are layered into my subject-memory as I prepare for performances of musical works and manifest in the decisions evident in studio recordings. I take these commitments and perform them for the audience, parsed through the texts the composers have provided. The audience’s perceptions are beyond what is knowable for me, but through this process of conscious negotiation I do feel better able to be present with them, confident that I have utilized the resources at my disposal to make strong choices about the vocal and extra-musical frames, signifiers and production methods which seemed to be most fit to purpose.

This research does not attempt to present a model for exact emulation, but a description of the lived experience of the researcher as she has realized these pieces and worked to deepen her practice through the doing of it. Thus I have attempted to narrate, frame and discuss, my experience in the realization of these works.
Epilogue

“the speaking subject makes and unmakes himself”
(Kristeva, 1989, p. 272)

Writing so much from the first person perspective has left me itching to tackle some in depth writing about the work of others. Sometimes when I read other people’s assessments of vocality they seem to speak with an honesty with which I cannot. To be honest is sometimes to be insensitive to the real life needs of my own safety and that of my collaborators. In some ways when we project our ideas upon those outside of ourselves we are free to tell truths we have to omit when conveying the inner narrative. And yet, to observe the other is to miss the essential information which only the artist can understand from inside their own experience. Perhaps it is not possible to reveal the messiness of subjectivity and the sharper truths of the situation simultaneously.

The future direction of this research seems naturally to open itself up to wider generalization and to examination of the practices of more vocalists. The interviews chapter from this exegesis contains but a sliver of the trove of knowledge gleaned from the fourteen interviews conducted. I wish to expand that concept into a much broader examination of vocal subjectivity that demonstrates more faithfully these singers’ great breath of experience. There are also several singers whose voices are notably absent (Meredith Monk, Laurie Anderson, Maja Ratke, Jaap Blonk, Pamela Z, Barbara Hannigan, Theo Bleckmann, Donnatienne Michel-Dansac, David Moss, Dawn Upshaw and Anu Komsi to name but a few) from this chapter. I would very much like to interview more singers, and to create a better picture of the diversity of embodied vocal practice currently employed in the service of innovative art-music. I hope this might become the basis for a book.
Now that I have fleshed out the groundings of my own practice I feel better able to shape language when responding to situations I spontaneously encounter in my teaching, performing and collaborative life. The contents of the library shelves in my mind are better in focus. Decisions of how to negotiate and frame my self and the music I interact with happen faster and more intuitively. I am getting better at telling collaborators what I need and listening to their needs more attentively. That might have been the goal of all this? Gaining better transparency and fluency? Now, having been through the process of articulating the experience, the evidence and the supporting literature, I'm not sure if I can even feel the presence of that dark cubby house that so bothered me in the prologue. It's fading into the background.
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