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Title: Gestures and their role in restoring a singer's performance-focus.

Research question: How can the embodiment of gestures help me to increase my performance focus with the aim of eradicating meaningless gestures during singing, and is it possible to create a step-by-step study plan that incorporates my findings?

Abstract: The goal of this research was to find a solution to my problem that my gestures don't always contribute to the lyric's meaning when I'm singing. I was looking for a way to eradicate meaningless gestures. I carried out my research by examining the history of singing, scientific papers and articles regarding the connection between speech and gesture, and writings by experts in the field of acting, singing and body movement like Fajo Jansen, a body-movement teacher who helped help me analyse some of my old video recordings. I also used a questionnaire and created a study plan incorporating these findings, and recorded myself multiple times under the guidance of Fajo in order to test their efficacy. I discovered that a disruption in my performance-focus during singing was causing my gesticulation problems. By creating a deeper physical connection with a text's meaning, I sought to re-establish and strengthen this focus, which I tested with my study plan for the embodiment of gestures. My work with Fajo showed that, next to this approach, another layer should be added: namely, the body should feel grounded and experience a feeling of flow in order to create free gestures which contribute to a text's meaning. With Fajo, I concluded that by not only working on the embodiment of gestures but on the whole body as well, my gesticulation problem can be remedied more effectively.

Biography: Dutch mezzo-soprano Aimée Sophie Hautvast graduated in 2018 from the Royal Conservatory in The Hague as a student of Maria Acda, Frans Fiselier and Catrin Wyn-Davis. Currently she continues a master study in singing at the Royal Conservatory with Catrin Wyn-Davis. Aimée participated as a soloist or choir member in productions of the Dutch National Opera Academy, New Generation Festival in Florence, Royal Conservatory of The Hague and of the Pelagian Opera Festival in Sandwich. Furthermore, she sang in two concerts as a choir member with Het Groot Omroepkoor led by Bernard Haitink and Giancarlo Andretta.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Rationale and formulation of my research question

After six years of intense training at one of the best Dutch conservatories, I am convinced that my process of personal learning with regards to how to become a balanced professional in opera singing is still ongoing. One of the aspects I would like to improve is my credibility as a performer. Throughout the years, I became more and more aware of the power an artist's physical and vocal expression can have, and how it can affect audiences in both a positive as well as a negative way.

During my studies I have received different comments on my performances from audience members. One of these comments became a repetitive issue: namely, my physical credibility. It has been frequently mentioned that my physical movements do not always contribute to the meaning of the lyrics. With physical movements I mean in particular those I make with my hands and arms, which I will refer to as 'gestures' in my research. I have heard people calling them 'meaningless' and 'a disturbing factor for the audience'. Realising that this problem will obstruct my development in becoming a classical singer, with both agreeable vocal capacities and an appealing physical performance, I decided to make it the object of investigation for my Master study in classical singing, with the ultimate goal of finding a solution. Based on my assumption that unwanted meaningless gestures during singing can only be eradicated if I am able to develop a technique for focusing on only contributing gestures during speech and singing, I came to formulate as a research question for my Master Study project in Classical Singing:

How can the embodiment of gestures help me to increase my performance focus with the aim of eradicating meaningless gestures during singing, and is it possible to create a step-by-step study plan that incorporates my findings?

1.2 Outline of the study project

In my second chapter I will give a definition of the term 'meaningless gestures' and describe when they occur and what they look like. Several videos will illustrate this. I also will explain the cause of meaningless gestures and under which external circumstances they tend to emerge. Subsequently I elaborate a method by which I can eradicate them. This method is aimed at becoming physically more involved with the text. In the world of singing there are two opinions on how to create a stronger physical connection to the text. I consciously choose the one that allows the arms to move at all times. I argue its effectiveness and in chapter four I give neurobiological evidence to support my arguments.

The method I developed implied that I should rehearse my gestures step-by-step. I was wondering if my gestures had to be forethought (or fixed) or not for my method. To find an answer to this, I studied the history of singing and neurobiological research, all of which is reflected in chapter three. I concluded that the gestures for my method should not be fixed, but ought to have a spontaneous character. Based on my findings I created a study plan and tested its efficacy under the guidance of movement teacher Fajo Jansen. You will find a documentation of the process I went through in chapter five. Chapter six reflects my conclusions regarding the efficacy of my study plan. In addition, I describe what my collaboration with Fajo Jansen has taught me.

2. The problem: Meaningless gestures

As I explained in my introduction, my research is about finding a solution to the problem that I tend to make meaningless gestures when singing. In order to get a better understanding of what my problem is and how to solve it, I created a few sub-questions: 1) 'What is my description of meaningless gestures?' 2) 'What do meaningless gestures look like?' 3) 'What causes meaningless gestures?' 4) 'Are meaningless gestures dependent on certain circumstances?' and 5) 'What should I do in order to eradicate my meaningless gestures?'

2.1 What is my description of meaningless gestures?

In order to give a balanced answer to these questions I consulted my own ideas as well as those of others in the field of classical singing. I created a questionnaire (see pdf 1) filled out by 15 experts in this field, who are gratefully acknowledged for doing so. Amongst them were students in classical singing, voice teachers, co-repetitors, body work movement teachers and dramaturges. It intrigued me to find many similarities but also differences in their answers. I would like to note that in the questionnaire I did not use the term itself, but rather I gave a description of 'meaningless gestures'. This is: "excessive, coordinated and unwanted movements of the hands and arms". I gave several descriptions of the term 'meaningless gestures' in order to achieve a better understanding of what I meant with this.

The term 'meaningless gestures' is defined here as gestures which do not contribute to the meaning of the lyrics of an operatic piece or Lied. The term originates from comments I received in the past about how I gesticulate while singing. People in my audience mainly described the movements of my hands and arms as "meaningless" and as "a disturbing factor for the audience". They commented that my gestures were not contributing at all to the emotion I was expressing or to the story I was telling. For the purpose of this Master thesis, therefore, I define 'meaningless gestures' as gestures which don't contribute to the meaning of an operatic piece or Lied.

2.1.1 Why I understand the comments I received on my gestures

When we look at how humans communicate in daily life, we notice that their hands and arms are always moving. The arms can be moved downwards to emphasise a word, or the hands can make certain shapes contributing to a word's meaning. All these movements we create to emphasise our statements, make our stories more convincing, and our ideas more clear [a]. What I learned from various teachers is that it is desirable for a singer to be as physically involved while singing as they are while speaking in order to act in a believable way. I think this means that gestures should be initiated from an impulse coming from a physical sensation triggered by the motivation behind what we say. This implies that gestures during speech are expressively closely related to the emotional component of what is being said. For example: a sung dialogue, or recitativo, often looks more real when a singer sings to his opponent as if it is a real-life conversation. For a Lied it can mean that a singer describes the character's thoughts as if they are telling a story to the public. Hence, I understand that in situations where my gestures were not in accordance with the meaning of the text, audience members perceived this as "disturbing", "not credible" or even "funny". For reference, in daily life I probably would not wave my hands in circular motions when I say: 'I love cheese'. I would rather make a shape with my hands as if I am praying or put both hands on my chest [13]. In other words, the gestures in my singing should be coherent with the meaning of what I am singing.

2.2 What do meaningless gestures look like?

I concluded, based on the answers of question one in the questionnaire, that meaningless gestures can appear in two forms. They can be: 1) energetic or 2) lifeless.

Concerning the first, we find: "conducting, drawing or painting, circular, swimming and arm-flapping movements", whereas for the second we find: "stiff hands or arms which get stuck in one position next to or in front of the body and move in a robotic way". Other examples people gave of these positions where: "ballet arms, penguin arms or crossed arms". As an illustration I refer to examples in video recordings from my own performances.

Video 1: between 00:00 -00:25 and 03:10-03:25 you can see an example where the hands and arms get stuck in a sort of robotic position. The arms stay most of the time in an angle of 90 degrees and the fingers stay spread. From 00:52-00:58 you see also an example of penguin arms.

Video 2: Between 04:16- 04:20 you see that I make a sort of circular motion with my right arm.

Video 3: Here you see an example of 'prayers arms'. They are glued together and held in front of the body. I continue doing this during the whole video.

Video 4: Also here I hold my arms almost the whole time in one position and in a weird angle.

Video 5: Between 00:42-01:14 and 02:19-02:44 you can see another example of prayer hands, hands which get stuck in one position, and some conducting movements are made around 01:09. Between

04:17-04:38 my right arm gets stuck in a weird straight line. This is another example of penguin arms.

During my studies I have seen similar movements of the hands and arms with fellow students. Therefore, I assumed that there must be an underlying, universal, reason for it.

2.3 What causes meaningless gestures?

I am wondering what the main reason is for why singers make meaningless gestures. Is it just randomly occurring or is there a reason for it? Apparently, according to most people who filled out the questionnaire, these meaningless gestures appear when a singer is too focused on their singing technique instead of on their acting. (see pdf 1: question 2) A student gave the example that in order to maintain her flow of breathing in singing her hands start to make circular movements. (see pdf 1: question 8: Student 7) Furthermore, someone mentioned:

“I think the unwanted movement usually has to do with singers being busy with singing technique. Because singing is abstract, the instrument is not visible, it needs suggestion of flow, direction and movement (up, down, front, back). Physical movement is a way to suggest and understand this.” (see pdf 1: question 2: Dramaturg 1)

I agree with this. I remember attending private and public singing classes in the past where singing teachers sometimes would guess correctly what crossed a singer’s mind, only by reading their body-language. A circular movement of the arm(s) could for example mean that a singer wants to have more spin on their notes or, in other words, wants to let their coloratura run by managing the flow of breathing. (see pdf 1: question 8: Student 7) Drawing long lines with the arm(s) in the air can mean that a singer wants to sustain his or her breath to create more legato. (see pdf 1: question 1: Voice Teacher 3) Furthermore, stiff or stagnated movements also serve a purpose. They can suggest that a singer is trying to connect to their support system.

It is clear that the meaning behind our thoughts, which we do not necessarily need words for, and the things we say, trigger a certain physical reaction in the hands and arms. But more importantly, the findings above show that meaningless gestures are the result of thinking technically while singing.

2.4 Are meaningless gestures dependent on certain circumstances?

I learned by reviewing my video recordings that meaningless gestures seem to appear in circumstances of mental stress like singing exams, auditions, masterclasses, recitals and video recordings meant for large audiences or publishing. Some singers shared similar answers to question five in the questionnaire (see pdf 1: question 5). What the situations mentioned have in common is that they are experienced as stressful. I remember situations in the past where I often felt insecure, being too aware of what was happening in the audience. As a consequence, worries and stressful thoughts then also arose regarding my singing technique. Furthermore, because of the comments I received a few times about my gestures, each time I sang I was worried about people sharing the same critical opinion. In summary, I was too aware of myself and my actions when singing.

In the previous section I concluded that meaningless gestures are the result of thinking too technically. Furthermore, in this section I explained that meaningless gestures occur mostly under stressful circumstances. Therefore, I argue that stressful performance situations are a trigger for the mind to start to worrying about technique, leading to the appearance of meaningless gestures. In my case, however, stressful performance situations are not the only circumstances in which I experience a feeling of stress. In section 2.5.2. I explain how some of the coaching I have received in the past has also contributed to the level of stress I sometimes feel when I perform.

2.5 What should I do in order to eradicate my meaningless gestures?

In the previous section I discussed how stressful situations cause me to become more aware of myself

and my actions, especially as related to my singing technique, which leads to the production of meaningless gestures.

2.5.1 The first step

I realised that, with the information I gathered until now, there are three possible ways to get rid of my meaningless gestures. The first is to try to suppress the feeling of stress I experience in specific circumstances. Unfortunately, it is not possible for singers to change much about the circumstances they are in, like auditions or singing exams for example. This means I will have to dig deeper into my own psyche, for which I think an expert would be needed. My intention is not to turn this research into a psychological analysis; therefore, I leave this aspect out of consideration.

The second possibility is to force myself to not think about technical matters in a performance situation. I assume that, as a result, my hands will stop making technique-related gestures that do not obviously contribute to my physical and emotional performance. However, not thinking at all about technique may be quite rigid, because in some situations I believe it is inevitable - as, for instance, when you sing something that is technically new and difficult. Considering my current technical level, I think it is fair to say that I still benefit in some circumstances from thinking technically. However, I think it is rather important to be engaged with technical issues no more than 10% of the time when I am singing. What should I then be focusing on for the other 90% of the time?

As I mentioned in 1.1.1, it is desirable for a singer to be as physically engaged while singing as while speaking in order to act credibly. This implies that if I express myself in my singing as I do in my speaking, my gestures will become more meaningful. I asked myself whether the urge to express myself physically in my singing feels the same as in my speech. I concluded that this is not the case. My physical engagement when singing feels less than when I am speaking. This brought me to the third possibility: that in order to eradicate meaningless gestures I have to find a way to strengthen my physical connection to a text, or as I called it in the introduction, my 'performance focus'. Hence, the aim is that my expression in singing will have the same credibility as when I speak, thereby eradicating meaningless gestures while indirectly replacing them with more meaningful ones. Thus, I think my mind should stay at least 90% of the time in physical connection with my expression when I sing in order to act credibly.

2.5.2 Why a positive approach is key.

This approach of staying physically connected to my expression, is also supported by information I collected from literature regarding acting. In order to train your physical involvement in singing, dramaturges as well as voice teachers strongly advise getting into character. This means that you should get into the character's mind to believably execute their actions [16][17][18]. The most important factor in this is that your motivation behind what you say is sincere and should come from the character's spirit. This implies that by connecting physically more strongly to the text, singers tend to also stay more in character as a result. Also, it helps a singer to get less distracted by thoughts regarding other matters. The idea is to give yourself a strong task to focus on, aiming to keep the mind from drifting away towards thoughts of technique. This means that I should force my mind to do something instead of preventing it from doing something. Telling our mind what to do instead of what not to do appeals to me as a positive approach. This positive approach is in my opinion crucial for an artist's development. Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman mention in *Psychology Today*, a website, that hearing and saying 'no' or other negative words to yourself releases a huge amount of stress-related hormones and neurotransmitters [1]. As a consequence, this may be the same for negative feedback. Indirectly, I think this means that if we remind ourselves of the negative feedback we have received or given to ourselves, we relive each time the accompanying feeling of stress.

This brings me to another reason for why I make meaningless gestures. In the world of singing there are teachers who claim that you are only really connected with your body to the text when you are capable of holding your arms still during singing. They believe that physical expression comes from an inner feeling for which gestures are not necessarily needed. However, this approach never really

seemed to help me. It resulted most of the time in false tension in my upper body, a feeling of discomfort, and the sensation of being physically trapped. I thus think these ailments arise due to the fact that I've been frequently told in the past to keep my arms still. If a singer in his early development is being coached to not use the hands too much and to stand still, it may be possible that this gives negative feedback to the singer's mind, which causes stress and affects the body. Each time I perform these comments cross my mind. Thus, by being in stressful situations as I explained in section 1.4, and then by being aware of my gestures (in particular in a performance setting), I experience a sensation of stress.

As outlined in the beginning of this chapter, the sensation of stress causes my meaningless gestures. Therefore, I find it very important that, in my search to become physically more engaged with the expression of a text, I use a positive approach. In addition, I think this is something that singing teachers and dramaturges should generally aim for: namely, telling students what to do, rather than what not to do. But if the teacher still chooses the approach of giving negative feedback, they should concurrently offer constructive and practical advice. I think this was lacking in the coaching sessions where I was being told to hold my arms still: after telling me what not to do, while the teachers did explain what I should do – that is, to connect more physically deeply with my inner feelings -- they did not tell me how to achieve this. They probably assumed that how to connect physically with your inner feeling was known to me, which it was not. Therefore I often felt stupid for not understanding them. Fortunately, after having worked with Fajo Jansen, I learned that nothing was wrong with my mental capacity. Instead, I simply have not received the right tools for training my physical expression. This is something I will further explain in chapter 4.

Thus, from these experiences I learned that in my case it is probably better to involve my arms and hands in the process of finding a deeper connection to the text in order to find a deeper physical connection with my expression. I called this a positive approach.

2.5.3 How do I think I can solve the problem of making meaningless gestures while singing?

I continued my research in finding the right tools in order to become more physically engaged with my expressions in my singing. Therefore, I asked myself if my feeble physical connection with the text only appears during a performance, or whether it occurs as well in the practising room? I recalled comments I received from teachers I have had over the years to see if any detectable pattern was present. Quotes like “make it bigger” or “get even more physically into it” were frequently mentioned when I performed an aria or Lied as I would in a concert. As a result I desperately tried to get physically more expressive. However, I often felt a weird block in my body, keeping me from achieving what I had in mind. It was as if my body could not understand what I asked from it. Thus, my next quest became to find an answer to: “How can I train myself to get physically more engaged with a text, in order to get rid of my meaningless gestures?”.

Before starting to work with Fajo Jansen I constructed a theory, which may give an answer to this question. I felt that the answer lies in the embodiment of gestures by rehearsing them. These gestures have to be coherent to the semantic meaning of words in the text (see 1.1.1) Through this, the hands and arms become acquainted with a physical sensation that is linked to a specific word. This idea raised the question: ‘Should these gestures be fixed and thought out in advance or not?’ In addition, I think that the embodiment of gestures in my practicing would make me feel more secure on stage as well.

My method of vocal studying led me to the following theory. When I practice a new piece, I sometimes need to figure out in which moments I should open my mouth less in order to create more overtones. If I teach myself over and over again not to widen my mouth at certain spots, my brain and body start to remember this. Because I know what to do in order to sing beautifully, I will feel much more confident in a performance setting. In an ideal situation I will not even have to think about technique anymore, which strongly enhances my self-confidence. Rehearsing my gestures will give me a similar, or maybe even stronger, feeling of confidence in a performance, because my body then

knows what to do in order to express itself in a credible way. I assume then that the physical confidence I gain through this will make me feel less insecure and aware of the actions from my arms and hands. Therefore, my sensation of stress should become decreased as well.

By practising my physical movements (and in particular my gestures) I can create a deeper layer of physical trust, which indirectly implies that stressful thoughts regarding my singing technique and my gestures will have a less strong influence on my performances. Thus, by embodying the physical expression of the meaning of a word through rehearsal I assume that my physical connection to the text becomes stronger in such a manner that it will not become interrupted by unhelpful thoughts in a stressful situation. If this goal is reached, my meaningless gestures will diminish or even disappear. What is important, then, is to find the right shape for these physical utterances. To refer to my previous question, I wonder if they should be more fixed and designed in advance or not. In the following chapter I elaborate on the history of singing and on neurobiological research leading me to answer this question.

3. Gestures suitable for my method

3.1 The history of gesture: Its evolution and use in the baroque and classical music period

The effects and use of gestures in singing have been explored for decades. In the field of playwriting, gesticulation is mainly found in the operatic 17th century Baroque, and 18th and 19th century classical music. The use of gestures was (and still is nowadays) a frequently discussed and used topic in the field of rhetoric in these centuries. In the 17th century in France, gesticulation was a fundamental part of a scholar's competences, and was necessary to becoming a lawyer, diplomat, priest, playwright or actor. Teaching institutions (often Jesuit colleges) divided the concept of rhetoric in five parts: *inventio* (creativity), *dispositio* (arrangement), *memoria* (memory), *eluctio* (style or diction) and *actio* (using body movements, such as gestures). It was common for these institutions to have students perform a play in Latin accompanied by music and ballet by the end of the year. These public performances aimed to help the students to train and display their rhetorical skills before starting a career in one of the above professions, where these skills were needed. In French Baroque opera, the use of 'actio' served as a tool to enhance one's expressiveness on stage, clarifying and enlarging the emotional state of the character. César-Pierre Richelet (1626 - 1698) describes the definition of gesture in his dictionary as: "*movement of the hand confirming to things one says*" [2]. It's interesting to note that the word 'hand' is used in singular and not in plural form. French academics believed that the right hand was primarily involved in gesturing. Although in some descriptions, like this one from Bretteville, the left hand seems to be involved as well:

"The movement of the right hand must suit the nature of the actions of which one speaks. For example, one must say "attract" while drawing the hand into itself; "repel" while pushing the hand away; "tear away" while separating the hands; "unite" while joining them together; "open" while opening them; "tighten" while clasping them together; "to raise" while raising them; "to lower" while lowering them, etc. . . ." [2]

In addition, there was consensus among French academics that the imaginary frame, in which gestures could be made, should not extend its size by going lower than the stomach or higher than the eyes, as exemplified by the actor Jean Poisson

"To raise the hands higher than the head, to strike fists together or one hand inside the other, to put the two fists on one's sides, to point with fingers, to spread them apart, to stretch out and cross the arms, to gesture too much, to gesture with regular action (which is called to gesticulate), and to gesture first with one hand then the other alternatively—these are all vicious gestures which will not be put up with on the tragic stage, and which can be suitable only to comedy, and which, consequently, cannot be accepted in a serious orator." [2]

I personally do not agree with the assumption that gesturing above the eyes and below the stomach is

inappropriate for stage situations except for comedies today. Of course, gestures should be coherent with what one says, but I believe it depends on the character's personal nature what fits to his style of communication.

John S. Powell mentions in his research that by observing the frontispieces of printed plays (by for instance Molière and Thomas Corneille) we can get an accurate image of the typical stage gestures that appeared in those days [3]. These pictures depict a descriptive dramatic moment in the play, in which it seems like the action is frozen in time. The pictures served as an informative description of what the storyline of a scene would look like. These snapshots needed to convey the right atmospheric setting only through the right hand and/or arm position, body posture and facial expression. Therefore, it is conceivable to assume that these sketches or 'paintings' were created with the utmost care, so that the audience would get a glimpse of the right impression of the piece or scene. Knowing this, I would like to remark that the portraiture of significant gestures on frontispieces also could be seen as an exaggeration of gestures used on stage (because of its extreme accuracy). Assuming this to be true, gestures probably were created in a slightly more natural way during real life performances. I added some of the most common gestures I found iconic just to give an overall impression (see images 1- 6)

In Italian Baroque opera, the counterpart of the French baroque, cultivation of gesturing was minimal. Critics, French as well as Italian, often mentioned that the dramatic integrity of a piece was affected by the fact that singers were not really acting or portraying the character and were only displaying their vocal techniques. These critical opinions were mainly expressed towards the castrati whose outward appearance in particular raised questions, because of the contradiction between body and voice. Whether these assumptions are justified is difficult to determine. However, it seems that the castrati's personal characters on stage were considered as more problematic than their vocal abilities, which were often praised and admired [2].

Regarding the 18th and 19th century, the findings of Gilbert Austin (1753-1837) in his book on *Cheronomia** (1806) provide a clear overview of how gestures should be used in a correct way to improve verbal persuasion. Despite the fact that theatrical singers employ a more passionate or stronger form of action, he is nonetheless convinced that both oratorical and theatrical singers move their audiences by using a common set of gestures. In singing, action encloses all the movements we can observe in the body. This also includes the position of the feet. In those days it was suggested that singers should place their bodyweight on one leg, allowing the other limb to stay relaxed so that it was prepared for an immediate change to occur. This caused a continuous movement in which the bodyweight shifted from one leg to the other. Furthermore, Austin stated that the hands and arms are making motions in a vertical and horizontal direction (see exposition 4) from the position of rest (see exposition 3). These motions are created with common hand positions (see exposition 5). The raised hand(s) performs the principal gesture, whereas the retired hand(s) performs a replica of this gesture with much less energy (see exposition 6). Whether one or both arms are raised, expressing the intensity of a gesture depends on how strong the emotion is. Transitions of hand gestures should be created with ease and simplicity and not contain any form of rigidness. Also, the motions should be appropriate for the right emotional atmosphere, which means that e.g. sudden movements are only appropriate when the intensity of the emotion asks for a rapid expression. Horror and aversion are emotions for which this rapid change of motion could be of use to amplify their urgent message (see exposition 7). The audience expected differing gestures from the singer. The gesture should be slightly different than the one(s) previously made when repetitions of words occurred. Austin described these hand gestures, positions of feet and even correct facial expressions into four texts, of which have I added one (see exposition 8), serving as an example of his system. Until today there are individuals who claim that a gesture has to be found which corresponds with the emotional message that is conveyed. [4][14]

As I stated earlier, the embodiment of gestures in the process of learning a new piece helps me to create a stronger physical connection with the text, which should diminish and ideally eradicate my meaningless gestures. Although the idea of practising gestures, like they did in former times, intrigues

me, I am not in favour of the idea of making universal agreements on gesture use in singing. In my opinion all these pre-fixed gestures are too static, impersonal and too universal. Every person has a different way of expressing themselves. There are various ways of gesticulating, ranging from wide to subtle movements, or none at all. Although humans arguably use the same type of gestures during speech its expression can take many shapes or forms when we communicate [5]. I believe if we would impose a clearly defined idea on singers of what specific universal gestures should be used for a corresponding type of emotion, the spontaneous facial and bodily expressions or sincere connection with the meaning of the text will fade to the 'background'. For my own method I thus sought a way to incorporate the aspects of 'freedom', 'spontaneity' and 'authenticity' as much as I could in order to avoid losing a singer's individual expressiveness.

3.2. The character of my gestures

As mentioned earlier in section 1.1.1 it is advantageous for a singer to be as physically involved in their singing as in their speech in order to act credibly. This made me realise that the gestures I seek to incorporate in my method can only be authentic if they look similar to the ones I use in my daily speech. Therefore, I started reading scientific papers regarding 'gesture and speech'. My methodology is thus also based on the findings and conclusions of these articles.

In neuroscience and psychology, it has been found that the movements of our hands and arms can be divided into the following categories: gesticulations (movements of the hands and arms which are idiosyncratic and spontaneous, i.e. individual, and made during speech), language-like gestures (these are more grammatically integrated than gesticulations in their expression), pantomimes (movements without speech used in theatre for telling a story), emblems (e.g. used for praise or insults) and sign language (e.g. the communicative linguistic system for deaf people, which is used in the absence of phonated speech). Gesticulations are for humans, on a daily basis, the most frequently used types of gesture. Although the hands and arms are mostly involved, nothing impedes the participation of other body parts. Use of the head, legs and feet is also common especially when the hands and arms are immobilized [5]. However, for my research I only focus on the movements of the hands and arms. Speakers of various cultural backgrounds produce these movements, usually manually, although they vary in their typology and extent. For most manual movements, speech is often associated with their production. On a frequent bases, speakers form symbols with their hands which represent the words coming from their mouth. On the other hand, emblems, pantomimes and the gestures used in sign language are mostly produced in the absence of words [15].

David McNeill, a researche psychologist mainly specialised in psycholinguistics, states in his research "Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal about Thought" (1992) that there's no such thing as 'body language'. Gesticulations aren't seen as a 'language' on their own, but they are created to complement speech. Both aspects belong to each other [5]. He also states in this same research that a division in types of gestures could be made [5][6]. He divided them into four types of co-speech gestures named: iconic, metaphorical, deictic and beat gestures [5][7].

1. **Iconic (or representational) gestures** (McNeill 1985) are hand gestures that "represent meaning that is closely related to the semantic content of the segments of speech that they accompany". An example used by McNeill is: "'And she [chases him out again]' [hand appears to swing an object through the air]" [8] You can also think about how you would gesturally describe a wide river or a tall person [b]
2. **Metaphorical gestures** are created when "people use physical space to represent abstract ideas that have no spatial instantiation in the world (e.g., gesturing upward to indicate high intelligence)" [9]. They're helping by giving concreteness to an abstract idea e.g. making a shape of a heart on your chest with your hands can indicate the abstract words 'love' or 'affection' [b].
3. **Deictic gestures** are meant to "direct attention through their handshape, which consists of one or more fingers extended in the direction of a concrete or abstract entity (e.g., pointing to the wrist, where a watch is worn, to indicate the time) [7]. They are also named pointing gestures. Another example could be: 'when you're talking to your neighbour about someone across the room and

might point at the addressed person to strengthen the attention of your interlocutor or to be clear in your correspondence' [b].

4. **Beat gestures** of which the name already reveals the reason of its use. "They are simple rhythmic movements reflecting speech prosody or emphasis (e.g., finger taps produced on stressed syllables of an utterance)" [7]. They are not carrying any semantic content whatsoever. Think about great world leaders who give speeches and emphasise rhythmically with their fingers and hands words by laying emphasis on them (e.g. Bill Clinton, who was always wagging his thumb during his speeches) [b].

Iconic and metaphorical gestures are both part of another group named 'representational gestures', because they share a common ground with regards to how and why they're used. Representational gestures are referring to persons, locations, objects or events and can be created by body or hand movements and facial expressions [c]. In other words, they "depict attributes of meaning through their handshape or articulation" [7].

The following overview provides a clarification of different types of hand and arm movements:

Categories of Movements
Gesticulations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Iconic gestures (also: Representational) * Metaphorical gestures (also: Representational) * Deictic gestures * Beat gestures
Language-like movements
Pantomimes
Emblems
Sign language

These five groups can furthermore be differentiated due to their 'spontaneous' or 'non-spontaneous' character. In my perception, pantomimes, emblems and sign language belong to the category of non-spontaneous. People can teach themselves sign-language as well as they can teach themselves the craft of pantomiming. These are in my opinion conscious ways of learning certain physical movements to communicate and express oneself.

Gesticulations on the other hand seem to have a more spontaneous character, because they accompany our words often beyond our conscious control [5]. Information about 'language-like-movements' appears to be only sparsely available. However, because of its resemblance with gesticulations I assume they will rather have a more spontaneous than a non-spontaneous character.

In conclusion, if I want to create gestures in my singing which look similar to those in my speaking, they thus should have a spontaneous character in order to be perceived as credible. This also supports my previous opinion that universal or fixed gestures are not of use for my method.

What struck me after concluding this, was that 'singing with the same physical involvement as in speaking' and 'creating spontaneous gestures' are actually in alignment with each other. In our speech we are not thinking about what our arms and hands are doing. In a split second they can move in accordance to what we think and say. This gives them automatically their spontaneous character, because they are created in the moment and not thought-out in advance. Thus, spontaneous gestures emerge automatically when your physical involvement in singing is the same as in your speech.

4. The intertwinement of gesture and speech: Why a singer should be allowed gesticulating at all times.

I stated earlier in 1.5.2 that in my case it is probably better to involve my arms and hands in the process of finding a deeper connection to the text, in order to find a deeper physical connection in my expression. I found neurobiological evidence which supports this theory and therefore substantiates my believe that preventing the hands and arms from contributing to one's expression is not the most effective way to connect in a physically deeper way with the meaning of a text. Hence, creating a method allowing both arms and hands to move in order to connect more intensely with the lyrics will provide a more convincing and natural performance on stage.

In the 18th century philosophers already tried to find a connection between gesture and speech. They had their theories about how gesture and speech came into existence. Giambattista Vico, an 18th century philosopher, formulated in his *La Scienza Nuova (1744)* the theory that humans in their early beginnings communicated through gesture and not by speech. Condillac (1746), a French philosopher, had the similar idea that language evolved not from animal calls, but from manual gestures. Later in the 1960's and 70's, studying gestures was part of 'non-verbal communication research', because gestures were seen as a form of non-verbal behaviour. This line of research, which is still active today, mainly focusses on the expression of bodily behaviour that speech cannot express. It also includes the study of other bodily behaviours (e.g. body-posture, gaze and facial expression). From 1980 onwards another field of research (called 'gesture research') developed, focussing more on how close gesture and speech are intertwined in creating word-meaning [10]. During the last decade other theories emerged forming two different ideas regarding the motoric systems in our brain, responsible for speech and gesture production. The first (older) theory declares that the communication systems of gesture (motor and premotor cortex [11]) and speech (left perisylvian 'language regions' including Broca's and Wernicke's area [11]) are different systems operating separately. According to this, gestures serve as a helping mechanism in moments where verbal expression for a short moment is interrupted or where the retrieval of words is difficult. These theories assume that gestures occur mainly when we encounter problems in our word production [15][a].

However, recent neuropsychological and neurophysiological research reveals (the second theory), that speech and gesture actually form a single communication system. This due to the fact that they are both linked to the same process of thinking, even if the modality of the expression differs. [15][13] Püllvermuller (2005) gives a brief description of the theory that, between the cortical motoric system and language system, pathways for collaboration are created by neural connections (according to experiments on monkey brains) [11]. In other words, the primary language pathway (see figure 1 [purple lines] and 2) starts in the area of Wernicke where auditory and visual information is received and attribution in language comprehension takes place. The bundle of nerve fibres called the 'arcuate fasciculus' connects the area of Wernicke with Broca's area [d]. This area is responsible for (meaningful) language production and also plays a part in language comprehension [12]. Output from this region goes to the motor complex where complicated movements are created that are necessary for speech [d]. This observation makes it obvious that the motoric output of our speech (e.g. forming gestures) is part of the whole comprehension and utterance mechanism of words.

With the simplified explanation above, it may seem as if gesticulation only happens when Broca's area sends impulses to the cortical motoric system. However, in theory the interaction between Broca's area, the motoric system, and other parts of the brain, is much more complicated. There are many interactive connections between brain parts, creating a magnificent communication system. These connections and their function are still being discovered to this day.

Based upon these findings, however, the method of holding the hands and arms still in order to become physically more engaged with a text preferably should not be used by teachers. It seems to me that this approach counteracts the natural impulse of human expression. Gestures accompany our speech and both should be considered as integrated in one's way of communicating. If the brain works best according to this system, this should not be counteracted by training.

My method for finding a solution to the problem of making meaningless gestures during singing is thus based upon the assumption that speech and gesture are naturally integrated in human communication. They are of great value in emphasizing emotional expression. Therefore, seeking the right movements in practicing lyrics and melody strongly contributes to a convincing and credible performance in singing, rather than a static posture by not moving the arms, hands or any other body part.

5. My study plan

What I concluded until now is that for my method, which is my ‘study plan’ and will be termed as such, I must use my arms in order to connect physically to my expression. Also, I concluded that the embodiment of gestures by rehearsing them could help to find a stronger affinity with the text. These gestures should be coherent to the semantic meaning of words in the text (see 2.1.1). Furthermore, through historical and neurobiological findings I stated that the gestures for my method should not be designed in advance but rather have a spontaneous character. This can be accomplished if my physical involvement is the same in my singing as in my speech. With these findings I made a study plan.

5.1 The structure of my study plan

When I study a new piece I usually take the following steps:

- 1) If the piece is not written in my native language I make an accurate translation
- 2) I practise the words
- 3) I practise the rhythm and the melody
- 4) I speak the words in the rhythm
- 5) I sing the words in the rhythm

If I want to physically engage more with a text, I have to incorporate this aspect from step 2 onwards. The question I want to answer with my study plan is: “How do I have to practise the words in order to become physically more engaged with the text?”

To strengthen the physical connection to a text I formulated five steps with the assumption that when my gestures are appreciated as being spontaneous, physical involvement in my singing has to be as strong as in my speech. Therefore, the first step is to speak the words without singing to create a physical connection based only on the text and not on the musical intent of the piece. I think that expressing myself without speaking makes my physical connection to the text’s meaning even stronger. This is what I do in step one. I speak the lines in my mind and try to explain through my body language what I am feeling and what I am talking about. I build up my physical connection by adding each time another layer. The second step is the addition of speech, without all word repetitions. The third step is the addition of singing, and the fourth and last step is to perform my piece in a stressful situation to see if my physical connection stays strongly associated with the text and does not get interrupted. Once this is accomplished, my method has proven to be successful, resulting in erasure of my meaningless gestures, and the replacement of these by more meaningful gestures and movements that contribute to my expression.

Furthermore, I need to rehearse my gestures in order to create the layer of physical trust, which I mentioned in section 1.5.3. To avoid my physical expression looking too rehearsed, I make focus points. These are moments in the text that I mark in order to remember that I made a gesture. I do not rehearse all the details of the gesture, only that I moved with my arm in a certain way or direction (see 5.4.2) By reviewing what I did I could get a better sense of this. During my collaboration with Fajo Janssen he pointed out to me that these gestures should not be produced strictly in the same way each time. I should more have an idea of what my arms and hands are doing at certain moments in the text. This will prevent me from focussing too much on the gestures, which will enable me to stay focused on the text.

Below you see the steps of my study-plan.

1) Speak out the words in your mind and seek a way for your body to express it.

* Analyse your gestures. What can you see?

2) Speak out the text. Speak out the words as if you are having a conversation with someone. Do this at least two times. It is important to be aware of the character's attitude in here as well. Is the character angry, happy, convincing, seductive et cetera? Incorporate these aspects into the way you speak your text. Check if your physical connection is as strong as you felt in step 1. If it feels less, then find the reason for this. If it feels as strong, then you are on track.

* Analyse again your gestures. See what gestures you repetitively use on which words. Use those as focus points in your speaking (and later in your singing).

3) Speak the text in the rhythm. Can you physically stay connected to what you are saying?

* Analyse again your gestures. Incorporate the new gestures you use in the word repetitions.

4) Sing the text in the rhythm. Do the gestures you use as focus point help to become more engaged to what you are saying? Do you feel physically more secure and free? Do your gestures still look spontaneous or do they look too static?

5) Sing in a stressful performance setting. See what happens. Can you stay physically connected to the text or do stressful thoughts still interrupt your mind?

I worked on each step with Fajo Jansen in a private session and took his comments and suggestions into account during the process.

5.2 Observations from body work dance teacher Fajo Jansen

In my first session with Fajo I explained my gesticulation problem and I showed him my study plan. I made a summary of the conversation in which I included the most important things Fajo and I discussed (see pdf 2). I want to refer to a specific part in this conversation.

AIMEE: "In my research I mention that I would like to find a way to physically express myself in the same way as I do in my speaking in order to act credibly. I assume that the amount of gestures I make in my singing, and the urge to make them, have to do with how I express myself in daily life (which is with lots of gestures!). I should embrace the fact that I want to make gestures in my singing instead of going against it. However, I wonder how to do this without them becoming funny or distracting for the public. I clearly do not use the right gestures in my singing. Otherwise the public would not be bothered, right?"

FAJO: "To answer your question, you have to go a few steps back. It could be that in daily life you already place your gestures incorrectly. If you do not experience a feeling of physical freedom, then it is likely that your gestures are created from out of one or only a few places in the body. Instead, they should be created by the whole body. For example, take someone who has bent forward shoulders. This means that the impulse for his or her gestures does not find a free passage through the body. The tension in the shoulders blocks the inner flow. During singing this for sure then causes for an obstruction in a singer's physical expressiveness.

AIMEE: "Ok, If I understand you correctly you say that in order to find answers I should also look to the way I speak in daily life?"

FAJO: "Yes, this could be helpful. However, this takes time because you should observe yourself many times and we do not have that amount of time. But I think I can get a good sense already of your inner flow if we start to work on your study plan."

This assumption of 'placing gestures incorrectly' indeed occurs in my singing. Fajo confirmed this after he went through some of my previous video recordings. He mentioned that my gestures can be perceived as a bit too forced, not free, and a bit unnatural. This was his description of what meaningless gestures look like. According to Fajo, meaningless gestures occur when a singer is not

grounded enough. Therefore, he or she can become more easily distracted by nervous thoughts (e.g. regarding their singing or their actions), because there is no focus or stability in the body.

FAJO: “You experience grounding when there is a strong connection between the soles of the feet and the ground. The energy you need in singing is drawn from the ground through your feet into your body and should flow through the body into each body part. From out of this flow your gestures are created.” He mentioned that this flow should have a vertical centre. I can help myself in this by imagining that my spine is the long vertical line through which the energy flows.

I said in 3.2 that the character of my gestures in my study plan should be spontaneous. They should be similar to those in speech. I would now like to add to this, after I heard Fajo’s analysis, that I also do not want them to be forced. They should be free and look natural. Thus, in order to carry out my study plan I should first learn how to place my gestures in a correct way. Therefore, I have to improve my grounding and inner body flow in order to create the right gestures for embodiment.

5.3 Exercises for grounding and inner body flow

Before we started working on my study plan Fajo gave me tools in order to help me to ground better and to find my inner flow. He suggested that I should do a few of them each day and especially before I practise vocally. I recorded two sessions wherein Fajo gave me tools for grounding and inner body flow.

5.3.1 Grounding

In order to ground strongly, it is of paramount importance that the soles of the feet are in full contact with the ground. With this I mean that all sensors in the feet should be active. Every part of the soles of the feet should feel the ground. This is not a natural connection everyone makes automatically. I have had surgery on my right foot, for which I never had any rehabilitation. This caused improper development of the right foot, resulting in a disturbed balance of my body weight on my feet. This was discovered after consulting a podiatrist only recently. Although I was aware of this, I had no clue of its impact on my body flow. Fajo explained that in order to create body flow, helping me to place my gestures, I need to work on the sensory part of my foot soles. In our first work session Fajo gave me several different exercises to do at home or in the practising room in order to create more sensitivity in my feet. We recorded everything, but due to the extreme length of the video I did not put it on the Research Catalogue. In trial 9, which you find in section 5.4.3, I execute some of the exercises.

5.3.2 Inner body flow

In the next video, Fajo hands me tools to create a stronger inner body flow which will help me to find a deeper physical sensation. The aim is to create a sensation of a stream running through my body. As I mentioned before, this flow should have a vertical centre. In other words, I should feel a bundled line of energy flowing through my body. It may be of help to imagine that my spine is the long vertical line through which the energy flows. To create this inner sensation, I must first know how to align properly. In video 1 Fajo gives me some exercises to help me with this.

VIDEO 1:

00:00-00:40 : Firstly, Fajo corrected my posture. I tend to lean too much forwards with my pelvis.

00:40-08:40 : Then he helped me to find a proper alignment to make me go down in a straight line. I tend to push my weight into my knees when I go down, which is wrong. Fajo explained me how to create a correct straight line by giving me instructions such as: ‘Glue your head to the ceiling’ (which helps the shoulders to relax and the upper body to remain in an active stance), ‘Go straight down with your centre’ (this is the middle of the pelvis).

*** The centre gives our movement direction. Our bodies move from out of the centre. The centre goes first, then the rest of the body follows (see Image 1 and Explanation image 1).

The inner body-flow will serve as the fuel for my physical expression. It will help me to strengthen and direct the inner experience or sensation I associate with the meaning of the words when I sing. If this sensation flows through my arms, they will start to move and create gestures contributing to what I say, which results in my gestures becoming more natural and free. Therefore, it is important to know how the hand and arms can translate this inner energy.

In video 2 Fajo gives me an exercise to let my inner flow continuously stream from my foot soles to my finger tips where the energy then leaves the body. The full stretch of the arm is initiated from out of the soles of the feet. Through this exercise I train my body to create gestures which are supported from out of the whole body and not only from out of the shoulders or the hips. What I mean with this is that the impulse for my gesture would then only be initiated from out of these single places in the body. In this case other body parts are left out, because the inner flow for singing goes up and not down, as Fajo said. If the impulse comes from the hips, which Fajo noticed happening in my gestures, the legs are left out, which means that my body can't get the energy it needs from the floor and therefore is not grounded, thus unstable. This mostly results into a tension in the upper body part which affects the muscles needed for singing.

However, it should be noted that in order to create a strong foundation with the floor there should be a stream also going down into the floor. This stream does not come from the top of the head but from the centre of the body which is located in the pelvic area (see Image 1 and Explanation image 1). To help this flow, you can imagine yourself as a tree with its roots in the ground. The upward flow is your energy fuel from the ground, just as with trees. The only difference is that this flow goes through the spine and divides into the arms and the top of your head. Fajo mentioned that eventually I will develop this flow to not only leave the top of my head and my fingertips, but also through the skin of my whole body as well! This is still difficult to understand, so for the sake of this research we did not go deeper into this.

It is important that during singing there is a continuous feeling of an upwards and downwards moving stream. To train the awareness of this feeling, I can use my breath as well. Each time I inhale I suck my energy from the ground and each time I exhale I give a tension back to the ground. By alternating this in a continuous way and practising this for a long time, I eventually feel the streaming through my body in both directions at the same time. In the exercise in video 3 I remind myself sometimes of this feeling by breathing out strongly. I noticed that otherwise my breath tends to hesitate.

VIDEO 2:

01:00 - 01:39: Fajo asked me to slide with my feet over the floor, like ice skating, to keep the connection strong between the soles of the feet and the ground. He mentioned that the sliding movements should each time be initiated out of the centre. In addition he said to make my hips soft, which should help to make the ice-skating movements softer as well.

01:39 – 02:00: This movement of the arm going up should stay initiated from the soles of the feet. I need to feel a continuous stream flowing through my body from out of the ground into my finger tips.

02:00 – 2:30: Fajo mentions that he can see something vocally happening. With this he means that the upgoing flow I create passes the vocal cords on its way to leaving the top of the head. The energy of the flow activates the vocal cords and prepares them before they start to vibrate by a flow of air.

2:30-3:07: I say that the ice skating movements are becoming a bit heavy. Fajo advises me to imagine the feeling of ice skating. He says this stimulates the same sort of sensation in the feet.

11:30-13:05: Fajo asks me to sing some lines from the Habanera from the opera Carmen (George Bizet) without speaking the words. "Feel free" he said to me before we started, "Do not think about what you are going to sing". The idea of this was just to let the flow go through my body to see what already happens with the arms.

VIDEO 3:

4:36-8:30: Here I am completely free to sing whatever vocal line I prefer. Fajo also let me be free to move.

Personal comments:

The overall experience this has given me is great. I felt more and more free and indeed experienced a flow through my whole body during the 2 hours I worked with Fajo. Also, my vocal sensation was pleasant. The only issue I felt somewhat disconnected from was my breath support. The support for my higher notes did not feel the same as it usually feels. However, I probably was so much focused on the feeling of 'inner flow' that other aspects were forgotten a bit. To combine all aspects together, further practise is mandatory.

Conclusions:

Thus, in order to create a natural feeling in the placement of my gestures I should continue with the exercises Fajo gave to improve my grounding and inner body flow. Fajo assured me that if I continue to carry out these exercises on regular basis my gestures will become more free and more natural. In the coming sessions before we start to work on my study plan I will use the exercises Fajo has given me as a preparation for my gestures.

5.4 Execution of my method

Now that I have better a sense of how to place my gestures better, I can start to work on my study plan. Fajo and I did two sessions. One of an hour and one of two hours. I will evaluate both sessions by explaining what we did (see videos below). I will refer to the first session as 'first SP-session' and to the second session as 'second SP-session' [SP stands for 'study plan']. The session for inner body-flow (see VIDEO 1,2,3) was done after the first SP-session. It would have been wiser to put the session for inner flow before this first SP-session to begin with the basics. However, I wanted to use the longer two hour session to work on my inner flow so I could take more time to really understand things well.

5.4.1 First SP-session: Testing my method

TRIAL 1 – STEP 1 method: We tested the first step of my plan: 'Speaking the text in my mind and expressing it physically. Fajo mentioned that it looked like I sang the text in my head instead of speaking it.

TRIAL 2 – STEP 1 method: Fajo asked me to do STEP 1 again, but in addition I had to feel the back of my neck more and I had to breathe more naturally. Fajo had the feeling that my breath was not connected to what I said. It was a little bit shaky and it did not feel grounded (as a low breath should feel). The neck should feel long, as if a stream comes out of the top of my head and relaxed.

Fajo mentioned about the first and second trial that I am too focused at the front side of my body. As a consequence I lean too much forward on my feet. Fajo said that this also causes my gestures to look a bit forced and less free. He noted that I mostly express myself with the upper body (arms, face and eyes). He said that this gives a high breath and therefore a less strong connection with the floor. After this he explained that the next step for me should be to find again the centre in my body through which the energy can flow (as I mentioned in section 4.3.2.). Becoming more aware of the back of my neck can be useful, because it helps take away the attention at the front side of my body.

In conclusion: Fajo noted in the first and second trial that I am too focused on the front side of my body. As a consequence I lean forward on my feet. Fajo said that this also causes my gestures to look a bit forced and less free. He noted that I mostly express myself with the upper body (arms, face and eyes). He said this gives a high breath and a less grounding. After this he explained that the next step for me was to find again the centre in my body through which the energy can flow (see 4.3.2.). Gaining awareness of the back of my neck helps to subside focus at the front of my body.

TRIAL 3 – STEP 1 method: Fajo asked me to close my eyes. The eyes, he said, are one of our strongest senses. It could be due to the eyes that I am leaning forward. Before I started to express myself with my eyes shut, I had to imagine that I pulled up an empty cylinder around me from out of the ground, through the soles of my feet. My skin was the outside of the cylinder. This should help me to get a sense of my body volume; feeling the front, the back and the sides of my body. It creates a

physical three-dimensional feeling. By this, the sensation of inner flow ought to be felt throughout the whole body. And not, as I felt it, only at the front of the body.

TRIAL 4 – STEP 1 method: Here I try with my eyes open to feel that same three-dimensional sensation. I had to stay aware of the back of my neck. Fajo said that I should feel free to move as I like (back, forth, sideways et cetera).

TRIAL 5 – STEP 1/2 method: Fajo came up with the idea to make a step in-between STEP 1 and STEP 2. He asked me to speak the text only when I felt a strong physical connection to what I said, so the motivation behind my speaking came from a deep inner impulse. This sensation should give a warm feeling in the body, as Fajo calls it.

TRIAL 6 – STEP 2, 3 method:

00:00 – 01:00 : Here I speak the complete text, keeping in mind the three-dimensional feeling, the cylinder, and to speak from a warm feeling in the body.

01:00 – 02:10 : Fajo asked me to make my gestures bigger. He goes a step back to STEP 1 again. I should say the text in my mind and make big gestures to express myself.

02:10 – 03:10 : Fajo asks me to do it again, but to make my gestures even bigger. The idea behind this I will explain later in the second SP-session.

03:10 – 04:15 : Here I had to speak the text again and discover what felt different from before the big gestures.

04:15 – 06:50 : I had to speak the text with repetition. I forgot to do STEP 3 of the process. I went straight into speaking the text with rhythm. I interpreted the rhythm as ‘free’ and ‘moving’ so that my speaking did not become too rhythmical.

TRIAL 7 – STEP 4 method: Here I sing the Habanera (without piano accompaniment).

TRIAL 8 – STEP 1/4 method: Fajo wanted me to sing again only if I felt a strong physical connection to what I said.

Personal comments:

In trial 2 it was helpful to think about the back of my neck. By doing so, I felt less tense at the front side of my upper body. The closing of my eyes in trial 3 was a good way to connect deeper with my inner physical sensations. Here I tried to conduct a flow of energy through my whole body. It was harder to find again an inner physical sensation with my eyes open in trial 4. However, I experienced more calmness in the body in comparison with trials 1 and 2. Also, there was a better balance in the body; I leaned less forward.

I found the exercise Fajo gave me in trial 5 quite hard to execute. I noted that instead of allowing my body to speak spontaneously my mind constantly dictated: “Stop...go...stop...et cetera”.

After I reviewed trial 7, I noted that my arms were less expressive as compared with the trials before, maybe because old habits resurfaced. It seemed to me that my arms were more involved here in my singing than in the text. Two moments illustrate this: at 00:35 minutes you see e.g. ‘prayers hands’ and at 00:50 minutes you see ‘ballet arms’.

In trial 8 the approach of Fajo already seemed to work better than in trial 5. The interruptions in my singing helped me to reset my focus with the text. Here the arms and hands appear more active and engaged with the message I am conveying than in trial 5.

There is one crucial point I forgot in trials 5 and 6: ‘To speak the text as the character would do’ (see STEP 2 in my method). I think I am overall not connected strongly enough to the character of Carmen. My physical expression seems to me a bit too sweet and too dreamy. For my next session with Fajo I would like to incorporate Carmen’s attitude in a stronger way.

5.4.2. Physical focus points in the Habanera

I mentioned in 5.1 that for my study plan I choose focus points in the text to avoid my physical utterances becoming too rehearsed and therefore less spontaneous in my singing. These focus points are moments in the text that I mark in order to remember that I made a gesture. In pdf 3 you can see some highlighted words in the Habanera, an aria from the opera 'Carmen' by George Bizet. The aria is sung by Carmen, the lead character of the opera. By reviewing the trial videos in the first SP-session and by rehearsing the text many times at home by speaking, I could map out the moments when I felt the urge to use my arms. I do not further rehearse all the details of the gesture. I only remember that I moved with my arm in a certain way or direction.

5.4.3. Second SP-session: Testing my method

Two weeks later Fajo and I explored for a second time my study plan. Fajo made some new observations which are of great value. Unfortunately, not everything is recorded, due to technical issues. Also, we skipped the in-between steps we did in trial 5 and 8 due to the lack of time.

TRIAL 9: Before we started to work on my method, I warmed up my body with some of Fajo's exercises, making this my routine. I explained in my own words how each movement should be executed. Fajo gave me the instruction to explain everything out loud, so he could see if I understood the execution and purpose of each exercise. Fajo was happy with the result.

TRAIL 10 – STEP 2: We began accidentally with STEP 2 (physical expression with speech). I wanted to show the character of Carmen more in my expression than in the previous session with Fajo.

In trial 10 I mention: 'I want to show the character of Carmen'. According to Fajo I do this too literally. I really 'show' how Carmen moves. Fajo believes that I have too much an idea of what I want; how things should look. This is something he already noticed when we started our sessions (see also his comments in VIDEO 2 in 5.3.2.). Fajo realised that this probably is the reason that my upper body becomes tensed and wants to express itself too much. In trial 10 Fajo noticed some of the same aspects he saw before in trial 1 and 2 (too much focus at the front of the body; starting to lean forward). However, Fajo mentioned that my physical alignment and sensation of body flow already improved since our first SP-session.

I learned from my previous SP-session and the present session that the hindrances I just mentioned happen due to the fact that my breath cannot be released through the legs into the ground. Next to this, they occur because my connection with the soles of my feet and the back of my body is not strong enough. In order to fix these hindrances I should bring my focus to my feet and back of the body. To shift my focus these places in the body a sensation should be felt. This sensation can be trained, which is something I already did extensively for the soles of the feet (see the exercises in video 1). Only, for the back of my body the only exercise until now was to imagine as if I pulled up a cylinder around myself, to get a feeling of three dimensions (see trial 3). In trial 12 Fajo gives me another clue to create more sensation in the back of my body.

TRIAL 11 – STEP 2: Before we did trail 12, Fajo gave me an exercise which we unfortunately did not record. In this exercise I had to speak the text of the Habanera aloud and at the same time I had to act as if I was doing the dishes. I was amazed by the effect this had on my speaking voice and the way I spoke the text in comparison to trial 10. It can be noticed that, in trial 12, the speaking voice sounds much richer than in trial 10. The reason for this, as Fajo said, is because the body gets a task to do: something physical, making it feeling free. Therefore, the voice becomes more free as well, because restrictions in the muscles of body diminish (including the muscles you use for singing).

TRIAL 12 – STEP 2: Fajo asked me to focus on: 'Giving the breath back to the floor'. Here I should instantly feel the soles of my feet better. In addition, I had to scratch my shoulder, back and buttocks against an imaginary wall. This in order to get more in contact with the back of my body.

TRIAL 13 – STEP 2: Fajo noticed in trial 12 that my eyes were focused on the ground or closed. He knew of course that this happened because I was focussing on the sensation in my back. However, in a performance I of course cannot shut my eyes. I should involve the public in my story. The next exercise he gave was to involve the public by looking at them, but to keep at the same time my attention with the back of my body. I had to imagine I was scratching an imaginary wall. I was allowed to move a little bit, but not as much as in trial 12.

TRIAL 14 – STEP 1: We went back to STEP 1 (expressing the text without speaking). Again, I had to instruct myself to focus on something else (the feet or back of my body). Here I focus mainly on my back.

TRIAL 15 – STEP 3: I went on with STEP 4 (speaking the text at the rhythm of the music).

Personal observations until now:

Compared to my first SP-session I felt in the second SP-session already much more grounded. Other observations were that I leaned less forward, there was a sensation of more space in the body and a stronger sense of inner body-flow, while my arms looked more connected to the soles of my feet. When I focused on the back of my body or to the soles of my feet, the urge of using my arms became reduced. Therefore, my gestures became less frequent and also smaller. We both agreed that they became more nuanced and more pleasant to watch than the ones before. If trial 1 until 5 is compared with trial 14 and trial 6 with trial 10 until 13, this difference is obvious. Furthermore, I experienced that in trial 12 and 13 there was not really as much of an urge to remind myself of all the physical focus points (see 5.4.2.) as compared to trial 10, 14 and 15. This results from the exercises Fajo gave me: I had to focus on other things. Lastly, it felt pleasant to do not all the STEPS in the original order (1 until 5). I experienced that by doing STEP 1 after STEP 2 that I had a stronger physical sensation than in trial 1 until 4. It was nice to notice this difference.

TRIAL 16 – STEP 3/4: Fajo asked me to speak and sing rhythmically alternately aloud the text in the rhythm while I made funky movements with my body on the rhythm.

TRIAL 17 – STEP 4: Eventually we came to STEP 4 and Fajo ordered me to imagine making these funky movements while singing without actually doing them, and we did this two times. After the first trial Fajo additionally gave me a hint to focus more on my feet, because I tended to forget them a bit.

I concluded after both trials that my body felt much more free and that I had a stronger physical sensation with what I said than I experienced in trial 7 and 8. Fajo confirmed this observation and explained the theory behind it: the purpose of the exercises we did in trial 6 (making big gestures), trial 11 (doing the dishes), trial 12 and 13 (scrubbing the back against a wall), and trial 16 (making funky movements) was to 'broaden my margin'. As Fajo says:

“By doing different physical actions when you speak out or sing a the text, you create different physical sensations with it. Subsequently you can access these physical sensations during singing by thinking of the action belonging to it. In this way you create a wide palette of physical sensations your body can always lean on when it gets stuck or when you need inspiration for a certain character. You almost never access all the physical sensations you studied when you perform, because you probably will not need all of them to express your text. This is why I call it ‘broadening of the margin’. The margin is only the physical sensation (or sensations) you need in an aria or Lied. By broadening your margin, you become less fixed on the physical sensations only needed to express a text. If you would only focus on practising the physical sensations needed in your piece there is a fair chance you become too much fixed on what you are physically doing (or think of what you physically should do). As I concluded earlier in your case, when you think too much about how you want to execute something you create physical tension and thus less freedom in the body. Therefore, I think it is important for you to broaden your margin as much as you can in order to feel physically free and as I assume also to feel much more secured in what you do on stage. I know for sure this will have a positive effect on how you place your gestures.”

Fajo advised me to create scenarios in my practising room like: ‘Carmen handing out flowers to everyone; Carmen walking towards men and seducing them; Carmen sitting down and helping the other women with their work et cetera’. Fajo said I can also broaden my margin with this. I would like to add that these actions are not always coherent with the content of what I am singing about. I never thought that it would be important to practise all these different actions, because I would not sing the Habanera in a recital and mime handing out flowers. However, Fajo showed me that it is important to train these elements in the practising room.

If I describe in my own words what I learned regarding training myself to create different sensations in order to shift focus to the regions I should feel in order to create natural gestures, I would name this ‘the training of the physical imaginary’. You train the body to become acquainted with physical sensations by imagining the corresponding action. This physical sensation of the action becomes even stronger if the action itself also has an imaginary component into it. Take for example the exercise where Fajo asked me to rub my back and buttocks against an ‘imaginary wall’. Fajo could have also asked me to do this literally. I think that by adding already this component of imagination into the action, which supports a physical sensation, you already help the mind to strengthen its imaginative capacity. Based on my own experience, this idea of physical imaginary is not used by voice teachers in the way Fajo taught me. Often voice teachers ask a singer to feel their back or feet more in order to ground themselves better or to create more air in the lungs. However, I never experienced a teacher giving me exercises like Fajo's in order to help me achieve what they asked for. I think it would be interesting for voice teachers to incorporate this idea of the physical imaginary into lessons to create new ways of helping students become more aware of the parts in their body while singing.

Conclusions from SP-session 1 and SP-session 2:

After our second SP-session Fajo and I discussed what I learned from everything we did until now. I said I learned that the embodiment of gestures only works under two circumstances: 1) you need to know how to place your gestures correctly. I learned by working on my grounding and inner-body flow that my gestures should be initiated from the soles of my feet. The energy for my gestures must be pulled from the ground. In addition, there should be a stronger connection to the back of my body to experience a feeling of three-dimensionality. This three-dimensional feeling helps to relieve the tension in the upper body (especially at the front side) and therefore makes my gestures less forced and freer. They become more natural and pleasant to watch. 2) I realise that the structure of my study-plan is one-dimensional. I should add to each STEP different physical sensations to broaden the margin when expressing the text. Feeling physically more secure on stage and creating a stronger physical sensation with the text will not be enhanced by speaking or miming the text each time with the same physical sensation (as I do in my study plan). By focusing in my STEPS each time on almost the same physical focus points (see 5.4.2.) I narrow my margin instead of broadening it.

Fajo agreed with my observations and added the following to this conversation:

“Keep in mind that my exercises are not the only ones to can broaden your margin with. You can also do this by speaking the text in different rhythms, in your mind, out loud, soft, hard, fast, slow et cetera. Furthermore, you can also do this by singing a piece in different ways. For example, by singing it more jazzy, fast, slow, in a lower or higher key et cetera. You even told me yourself in the second SP-session that singers broaden their margin when they train their coloratura. They sing coloratura in different rhythms to get technically more stable and therefore they create a feeling of trust with what they are doing. Some of the elements I mentioned you incorporate already in your study plan. Especially in step 1,2 and 3. With these steps you broaden your margin in speaking the text in different ways. However, these actions do not immediately create a strong physical connection to the text. Therefore, your gestures are not as free as you want them to be in your method. In your method you incorporate only one element in finding a stronger physical connection with the text and that is by using physical focus-points. I think that if you keep doing the exact same steps in your method over and over again for a longer period of time and do not add a deeper layer of physical sensation to each step, your gestures will not entirely free up. My advice to you is to make deeper physical associations with the text in each of your STEPS in order to create a strong affinity with what you are saying. The more access you have to various and different physical sensations, the more you can fall back on them

which gives a feeling of security and also ensures that you stay physically stronger connected to a text.”

Thus in order to strengthen my physical expression, I need to broaden my margin in every step of my study plan. I can do this by creating various scenarios in which I for example speak the words and make physical movements at the same time. The result of this is that my body becomes more free and secured in what it does. Therefore, my gestures also will become more free and natural.

In addition, what I discovered until now supports what I mentioned in 2.5.3: ‘I think that the embodiment of gestures in my practicing would make me feel more secure on stage as well’. Due to what I have learned from Fajo I probably would change ‘embodiment of gestures’ to ‘embodiment of various physical sensations with the text’.

In addition, I would also like to come back to something I said in Chapter 4. I stated that seeking the right movements when practicing lyrics and melody strongly contributes to a convincing and credible performance in singing, rather than a static posture by not moving the arms, hands or any other body part. Although Fajo did not deliberately work with me on keeping my arms still, some of the exercises resulted in a reduction in my arms' tendencies to move, while still feeling free in the body. Even though my arms were hanging next to my body doing nothing, Fajo still saw 'life' in them, as he called it, because he could see that I conducted the energy from my inner body flow into my arms. Therefore, I would now like to add to my previous statement that when the arms and hands are held still it does not necessarily have to mean that they become static. If the energy in my body is right and also directed into my arms, my arms still can look alive. I wonder if this is maybe what teachers actually hoped to achieve when they asked me to hold my arms still in order to find a deeper connection from within my body with the text. If this is the case, then I think that holding the arms still when singing could be achieved by some of the tools Fajo handed to me during our collaboration. Although, I still do not think that this supports the idea of teachers who proclaim that you are only truly connected to a text if you are able to hold your arms and hands still while singing, because I did not feel a strong difference between the moments when I did not use my arms, or when I did, in my speaking or singing. I think that it does not make a difference whether or not you can hold your arms still while singing. I would suggest instead that as long as you can create and conduct an inner energy you automatically create a stronger physical affinity with the text.

5.4.4. Execution of Habanera in a stressful situation (STEP 5)

The only step of my study plan I did not execute yet until now is STEP 5. I believe this to be the most crucial step in order to give an answer to my research question. I arranged a pianist (Johannes Asfaw), booked a room and asked some students from the Royal Conservatory to come and watch, to create a situation which looks in a way similar to e.g. a recital or masterclass. Fajo was also present to watch and observe. The results of the recording from this session (see Habanera 2) were compared with an older recording of mine (see Habanera 1) which was meant for an audition. I remembered that in Habanera 1 I felt a bit tense and the pianist and I had to do more than five takes until I was happy with the result. In Habanera 2 we did some warming up with the singing, but the recording with audience we did only once.

Observations from Fajo in Habanera 1:

“In the beginning of the video your body looks quite stable. I see you try to ground. However, to me it seems that the energy you try to use for your singing stays in your feet. You do not have the tools yet to pull the energy from out of the ground to make your singing more credible. Especially from 02:00 minutes I see a feeling of discomfort in the body. The arms become a bit more tensed. Also, the 5th position of your feet (that is how we call this position in dancing) gives you a feeling of instability. They look glued to the floor, but without vividness or life in them. The way your feet stand and how you divide your weight on them makes that your lower back becomes more locked. You need to use the space from your lower back in singing, am I right? From the centre to the ground there is also no energy. The legs seem a bit detached from the rest from the body. However, compared to all other

video's you showed me, your posture here is the most relaxed one and it definitely improved already over the years!"

Through the knowledge I gained these past few weeks I now have a better understanding what Fajo means with these comments. I indeed can create more space now in my lower back if I change the position of the feet to a first position as they call it in dancing (the feet are parallel, facing forward). Throughout the years, singing teachers also wanted me to stand like this while singing, but at that time I felt it locked my body instead of helping me to open it. Now that I am further along in my development I am starting to feel how this position could be of benefit for my singing.

In addition, I would like to add that now that I have experienced the benefit of standing solidly on both legs it enhances even more strongly the idea that performance practices for physical expression in the Baroque may not be the best ways to create a strong inner connection to what one says in singing today. I mentioned in section 3.1 that *"it was suggested that singers should place their bodyweight on one leg, allowing the other limb to stay relaxed so that it was prepared for an immediate change to occur. This caused a continuous movement in which the bodyweight shifted from one leg to the other."* Although I do not completely reject the idea that in singing you can shift your weight from one leg to the other, I think that in order to create free movements with the arms it is better to feel as grounded as possible by standing solidly on both legs. Of course, because gestures were not individual but more universal and pre-rehearsed in those days it is also understandable that one was not seek a personal experience in grounding and inner body flow.

Observations from Fajo in Habanera 2:

"The differences seem to me not extreme big in comparison to Habanera 1, but that is because Habanera 1 was already of quite good level. However, I do see you have more freedom in the body! The arms move more organic, they contribute in a natural way to the content of what you sing about [thus they are meaningful]. Also, there is a stronger energy in the body. Sometimes you forgot your feet [grounding] and head [attachment to the ceiling] a little bit which caused that the shoulders came up slightly. Your eyes were much more alive than in the Habanera 1. You have a better sense of space and of the public, which you always should pay attention to! This is a very important aspect to incorporate in your practising. Never directly look at them but show with your physical presence that you know they are there and that you sing for them. In this way you also train yourself to invite the people to look at you; you become more confident. This you already do way much better in Habanera 2 than in Habanera 1. In the 1th Habanera it looked like you held back a bit; that you did not dare to let go. However, in the Habanera 2 I still recognise this a little bit. I think you can even go out more; loosen up your body, but to get to this point it takes time and practise! Do not forget we only worked on this for a month! Keep up the good work!"

Observations from the public:

"The movements you made with your hands and body seemed just fine! Not too much not too little. You showed just enough to give us a hint about what the character of Carmen is. The overall performance was pleasant to watch." One little clue they gave was: *"Do not lose the energy in the eyes when you have a pause in your singing. It did not happen all the time, but sometimes the energy became a bit less. This caused that your presence was a bit weaker. However, the body did not collapse. You kept an active posture throughout the whole piece".*

Personal observations:

Comparing how I felt when singing Habanera 1 and 2, I notice quite a big difference. Habanera 1 was recorded on 19-12-2019. This was not so long ago. However the difference, due to Fajo's exercises and my study plan, feel quite big. I experienced a warm feeling most of the time throughout my whole body. I felt I could also shift my focus from the frontside of my body more to the back side, so that I felt a stronger centre line. Of course, some old habits came back. Like Fajo said, the shoulders became a bit locked sometimes and I also went back now and then to the 5th position with my feet. But overall,

I felt much more free than I usually feel when I perform for an audience. Also, I experienced a deeper inner feeling from which the urge or impulse to express myself came. Furthermore, normally my arms would become tensed if I wanted to express myself better. As Fajo called this: *“You want to show in your arms too much about what you are telling”*. By shifting my main focus to a sensation in my back, I could conduct my energy better into my arms whereby they became softer in their movements and more relaxed. I prepared physically with the exercises of TRIAL 9 before we recorded Habanera 2. In addition, I spoke the text while rubbing my back and buttocks against an imaginary wall (see TRIAL 12). Furthermore, I made funky and swinging movements with my arms and body while speaking and singing the text. During the recording, I reminded myself of the actions I warmed up with, which therefore triggered a physical sensation in certain body parts. This made it easier for me to direct my focus to these areas.

I would like to make a small comment regarding why I choose the recording of Habanera for this research. Of course, I could have picked many other videos, some of which show even greater problems in my physical expression. For example, in VIDEO 4, which I recorded in the beginning of 2019, my physical problems are much more apparent. Here you can see a good example of ‘penguin arms’ or ‘flapping arms’. I remember how stressed I was in this recording regarding my vocal technique. Some elements did not go the way I wanted them to go. Also, I felt deeply nervous because it was important that the recording would be successful. In this past year I developed technically in such a way that the body also became more solid and free. This is why the Habanera 1 is already a much better example of how I should move and stand in my singing. However, as I discovered with Fajo, there are still elements I can work on. My theory was that if I would pick a more recent recording to use as comparison the effect of my study plan could be tested even better. If I could not find any differences at all between my first and second recording this would already say a lot about the method itself. Although, I could have said in that case: ‘The amount of time I used in order to see effective results was too little’. However, fortunately, even though Fajo and I worked for a short amount of time together, there were already some visible improvements in my second recording of the Habanera. I am very happy with the result.

Of course, it must be said that I cannot conclude from my findings that my study plan itself is solely responsible for these improvements. All the elements Fajo brought into it should not be forgotten! I think that especially due to his contribution the results of my study plan became positive.

Thus, the results of the comparison between the recordings of Habanera 1 and 2 are positive. There is indeed a visible difference in how I express myself physically in Habanera 2 (my most recent video recording). Therefore, I conclude that the work Fajo and I did together these past few months was fruitful. I managed to create meaningful gestures and, if I believe my audience, I also did not create any meaningless gestures. Also, the fact that I only made one video in the session where I recorded Habanera 2, compared to the amount of recordings I had to make for Habanera 1, shows that there is also a difference in how quickly I now can get into the right mode for singing when I have to perform well on the spot.

6. Discussion

Although I did STEP 5 with an audience, I am aware of the fact that the environment for the recording of Habanera 2 was less stressful than how I would normally feel e.g. on a big stage, with more people and under different circumstances. In Habanera 2 I did feel aroused because of the fact that there were people present and that they were sitting really close to me. Also, I was nervous because I knew that the result of this video recording would give me an indication of whether or not my study plan with Fajo’s input could make a real difference at such short notice. Even though the results of STEP 5 were positive, I think to be one hundred percent sure of the fact that my new way of practising prepares me for stressful experiences in an exam or audition I should really get myself in a situation like this to test it. In the future, I would thus do things a bit differently. I would give myself a year time to develop my

physical skills. In addition, I would test the results of my work with Fajo three times spread over the year in settings like recitals or auditions. In this way I think the overall results could give me a better idea of what already works and what I should still work on.

Also, for my research I only tested the differences between two recordings of the same aria. It would have been interesting to, for example, compare six recordings of three different arias from different operatic periods. This could have given me a better idea of whether or not the exercises Fajo gave me would be applicable for each character, or whether different exercises should be created for each of them. Next to this, I could have tested if, for example, the training of a physical sensation in my back would give the same effect on my singing and gestures if I e.g. would sing fast coloratura lines. Furthermore, I only tested the effects of my study plan on an aria. It would have been also interesting to see if differences would arise in the training of my physical imaginary and sensations in a Lied. Lastly, in my questionnaire I deliberately did not include Fajo's answers because I was dealing with them anyway in my research. However, it would have been interesting to see how other body-work dance teachers would have answered my questions. If these teachers thought differently about what Fajo taught me, their answers could have led me to new questions and ideas.

7. Conclusion

My aim with this research was to find an answer to my research question: 'How can the embodiment of gestures help me to increase my performance focus with the aim of eradicating meaningless gestures during singing, and is it possible to create a step-by-step study plan that incorporates my findings?'

In order to answer this question, I investigated what meaningless gestures are, what causes them and when they appear in my singing. I found out that meaningless gestures are movements related to vocal technique which occur in stressful situations like singing exams or auditions. I wondered what I could change in my practising in order to stop producing meaningless gestures in my performances. The answer I found was to become more physically involved with a text. To train this I created a method based on how I practise my singing. The assumption based on my findings was that by embodying the spontaneous physical expression of the meaning of a word through rehearsal, my physical involvement with the text became stronger in such a manner that unhelpful thoughts (regarding my singing technique) could no longer penetrate my mind in a stressful situation. I stated that if I could reach this goal, my meaningless gestures would therefore diminish or even disappear.

The effectiveness of my method, which I referred to as a study plan later in chapter 5, was tested, coached and supervised by body work dance teacher Fajo Jansen. We did two sessions where we went through all the steps until STEP 4 and one session where we executed STEP 5. Through the evaluation that Fajo and I did after both SP-sessions I concluded that the study plan I created was one dimensional. The desired result of my study plan could only be reached if I implemented two aspects into my practising: 1) The practising of placing my gestures correctly, and 2) The broadening of my margin by adding various physical sensations in each STEP of my study plan. Thus, embodiment of gestures as described in my study plan is not sufficient for increasing my physical connection with a text (or as I personally call it: my 'performance-focus'). Therefore, I need to incorporate both aspects Fajo taught me into my study plan in order to eradicate my meaningless gestures.

Furthermore, I concluded that in order to become more physically involved with a text, not only movements of the arms or hands should be rehearsed in accordance with the text, but the movement of the whole body as well. Therefore, I concluded in 5.4.3. that my research question should be altered to: 'How can the embodiment of various physical sensations with a text help me to increase my performance focus with the aim of eradicating meaningless gestures during singing, and is it possible to create a step-by-step study plan that incorporates my findings?'

In addition, the instruction Fajo gave me to practise different scenic scenarios in order to broaden my margin (see 'Carmen is handing out flowers to everyone' et cetera) taught me that in order to create

free and natural gestures they do not only have to come from the motivation behind our words. This means that the physical movements I make in order to create different physical sensations do not necessarily have to be coherent to the words' semantic meaning, which I previously thought to be important for my study plan (see 2.5.3.). When the body rehearses actions that are not necessarily coherent to the content of what I sing about, my gestures (or physical movements in general) also can look meaningful and natural if I am reminded of the actions I studied. By this, the body remembers the corresponding physical sensation, hence creating a safe feeling that causes the gestures to become more free, less forced, more organic and calmer. As I explained at the end of 5.4.3, I formulate this as 'training your physical imaginary'. I feel strongly, with the knowledge from my own experiences, that this should be incorporated in singing lessons and the personal practise of students much more than it is now. At least I will from now on incorporate this aspect of the physical imaginary into my practising.

Finally, the comparison between Habanera 2 (STEP 5) and Habanera 1 gave positive results. There were clear differences in how I physically expressed myself. Therefore, to give an answer to my research question regarding how the embodiment of gestures can help to restore my performance-focus with the aim of eradicating meaningless gestures, and to the question of whether a step-by-step study plan could be made that incorporates my findings I can say: Yes, a study plan can be created. However, as I already mentioned here previously, the embodiment of gestures alone is not sufficient for getting physically involved in a text. Elements like the 'placement of gestures' and the 'physical imaginary' should be added in order to strengthen performance-focus with the aim of eradicating meaningless gestures. The positive results of STEP 5 showed that my gestures were meaningful and in accordance to the content of what I was singing about. This means that I did not create meaningless gestures. Therefore, I conclude that my study plan with Fajo's additions can be effective enough to eradicate my meaningless gestures under stressful circumstances—especially if I continued doing what I have been doing until now on a continuous level for the coming months or even years.

Further research

The findings of my research raised new questions. A first interesting avenue for further research is how quick someone's progression would be in comparison with how things are now if he or she received four years of weekly coaching in physical training with a body work dance teacher. In addition, a question that arises is what further exercises there are to explore in increasing my physical imaginary and in better placing my gestures. Third, is it necessary to follow my study plan from STEPS 1 – 5 in my practising or can I also start for example with STEP 3 and then go to STEP 1 et cetera? Would the effect still be the same, worse, or even better? Fourth, is there a difference between training your physical imaginary for a Lied versus an aria? Lastly, is there a difference between training your physical imaginary for singing long lines versus fast coloratura lines? In my opinion, the aforementioned questions all contribute to a better understanding of the body in relation to singing.

8. A personal note

I learned from working with Fajo that I have to continue my body-work exercises in order to improve my grounding and inner body flow. In my first and fourth year at the Royal Conservatory I had weekly lessons with Fajo Janssen that were already focussed on the assets of grounding and body-flow. However, as he said during our collaboration: "*In the beginning of your training you are, as a singer, not yet enough aware of the role your whole body plays in singing. Creating awareness of this can only be achieved by doing my exercises every day. Students should at least get body-work-lessons every week during the four years of their Bachelor training. Only then they start to understand after a while that the intention of my exercises is to make them aware of their whole instrument, teaching them how they should use their sensory abilities to move through space and helping them to become more expressive with their bodies.*" I totally agree with this, because in my first year I could not understand the purpose of each exercise Fajo gave.

In Fajo's own words: "*Singing students mostly do not understand in the first few years of their training everything a voice teacher teaches them either. There is a lot of time and steps to take before a student is a Master in singing. Therefore, it seems difficult to explain that body-work-lessons are not scheduled weekly in a student's curriculum. Even so, you cannot expect a conservatory student to sing technically perfect with only one singing lesson per week for 1,5 years, with a gap of 2 years not having any lessons. The muscles in your vocal tract need many years to understand how they should move in order to create space for the voice. The muscles in your body need exactly the same amount of time to develop. To understand how to use your whole body in singing, to understand what grounding is and how it should feel, to understand how to physically express yourself in singing needs time and coaching from as well voice teachers, dramaturges as body work dance teachers on a regular base*".

I cannot agree more with this. Therefore, I strongly recommend incorporation of body work dance lessons at least weekly in the curriculum of singing students in the first four years of their training.

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