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Systematic Theology

Thy Will Be Done

Doing Theology *Through* Diffractive Methodology



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ABSTRACT

The overall purpose of this thesis is to perform and propose diffractive methodology as a means for exploring, reading, learning, and understanding systematic theological discourses beyond binary and oppositional thinking. This methodology is based on performative strategies and feminist new materialist theory, with a specific focus on Karen Barad's *ethico-onto-epistemological agential realism* theory; it can also be considered an alternative to a more traditional academic reflexive methodological approach, thus allowing for an infinite number of explorative methods to be developed within its umbrella definition of *diffractive methodology*. The diffractive analysis in this study is shaped as an intra-active entangled reading of Graham Ward's *Engaged Theology*, through Erika Fischer-Lichte's *Performance Aesthetics*, and the specific diffractive method I call ***Voicing-as-Performative-Theology***. This thesis is divided into three parts. Part I unfolds some relevant terminology for understanding a) diffractive methodology, and b) ***Voicing-as-Performative-Theology***. Part II *performs* the diffractive reading analysis as ***Voicing-as-Performative-Theology***. Part III consists of a concluding essay summarizing the outcome of this study's diffractive reading, as well as opening up suggestions for how diffractive methodology can be applied – as for example ***Voicing-as-Performative-Theology*** - for developing more performative and diffractive methods as part of future theological research.

This Master Thesis is presented and performed
as a text, as well as an on-line research exposition.
The written words, sound and images are available at:

Thy will be done. Reading Theology *Through* Diffractive Methodology

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A Two Page Guide for *How to Approach this Thesis*

This may be considered as a thesis that radically breaks with traditions, conventions, and systems. It cannot be denied and in fact it is part of its aim (as in *cutting together-apart, a term to further be unfolded in Part I*). For this reason, I begin with a two-page guide for how to potentially move through this work:

This text is divided into three different parts, each one opening with a text titled *Fragment I, II* and *III*. My wish is for you to consider each of these fragments as refueling stations on a highway; resting areas while on the road; places to just be and to let things happen, without conscious doing; places for reconsidering to (re)turning back and/or moving forth. In each part you may encounter many dilemmas and questions as the critical thinking mind you are, and right here, in the critical questioning moment of yours, you will actually be encountering the key to - and perhaps even the result of - my research. You may even consider it as a breaking moment of WONDER, ... so just stay for a moment right there. And continue to ask your questions: Isn't she repeating herself? Aren't there too many Beginnings in this text? Isn't she talking about method rather than *methodology*? What does she mean when she talks about *Nothing*? Where are the limitations and the critical voice in this project? etc. Now, you may decide to move straight into part III and read my concluding essay, or you may continue reading the text as it unfolds step by step – perhaps, as already suggested, in a state of lingering wonder (and yes, you might even become irritated and confused, since all kind of sensuous impressions are welcomed as part of the state I wish for your to experience, so no worries). Anyhow, let me try to encounter (and hopefully answer) some of the questions above as well as I can:

- Depending on which academic field, a *methodology* may be considered as a logic and a systematic learning *about* methods. Sometimes it can also be presented as an umbrella definition for a field of methods, based on a certain type of approach such as quantitative, qualitative, or performative research approaches and strategies.¹ In process research it may sometimes also be a real challenge to separate theories, methods, and results into completely

¹ Haseman. B. 2006. A Manifesto for Performative Research Research. *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy*, theme issue "Practice-led Research". 118: 98-106.

distinctive and individual categories. This master thesis can thus be considered an entangled combination of the second and third options, meaning that this text presents *diffractive methodology* as a clustering approach to any method including performative strategies. On the other hand, the *diffractive method* explored and developed in this particular study is *one* way of *reading diffractively*, using voicing and thinking as *a praxis of doing* systematic theological research. This method I have called *Voicing-as-Performative-Theology*. Diffractive methodology could eventually also include *dancing-, designing-, curating-, ornamenting-, praying-, and philosophizing-as-performative-theologies*, just to mention a few possible options. What all these methods have in common is a recognition “that differentiating is a material act that is not about radical separation, but on the contrary, about making connections and commitments”.²

- A short reading guidance to the critical analysis in part II can be found on page 43.
- This thesis – as part of the methodological forming of contents - consists of a continuous number of beginnings and repetitions, following the rhythm of the vocalizing-breathing-thinking organism I am. This means that the reader can decide *to breathe with the flow of words* as a continuous story-telling-exploration. The text can also be picked up and read as a collection of fragments, where every one of them is a *new beginning*. It is up to you to decide how to move through your reading and through your own meaning-making process. There will also be an option to visit an on-line exposition for taking in sound and images while reading (possibly also while drinking a nice cup of tea of your own preference...). One may also read the extremely compressed section below, clarifying that:
 - The overall purpose of this master thesis is to show *how* critical diffractive analytical reading can be applied and explored in the field of systematic theology, following Karen Barad’s *Agential Realism* theory.
 - The aim is to make visible how *Wondering, Nothing, Unknowing, Voicing and the Uncertain* can be applied as critical and performative research strategies and tools for obtaining new knowledge as part of a theological discourse.

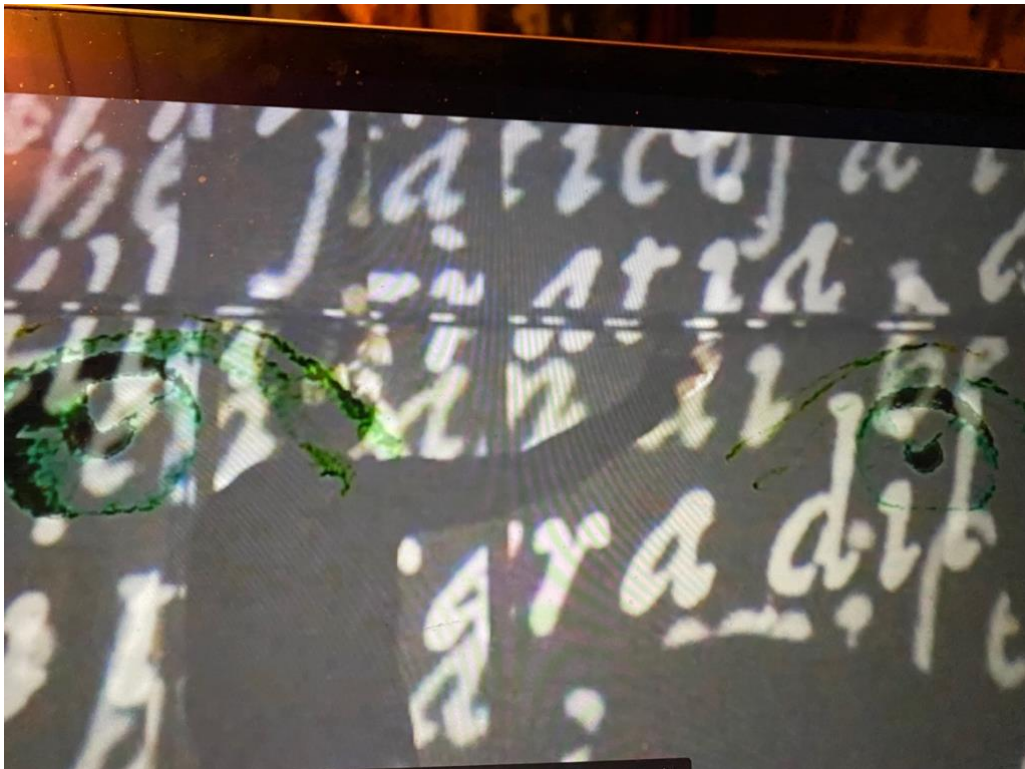
² Barad, K. 2012a. Nature’s Queer Performativity. In: *Kvinder, Køn & Forskning* Nr. 1-2: 25-53.

The **Research Questions** are thus formulated as follow:

- How and why is diffractive methodology a useful meaning-making tool for systematic analysis in theological research?
- How can diffractive methodology be explored, performed and further developed through theological research?
- How can *Voicing-as-Performative-Theology* be developed into a useful meaning-making method applicable for systematic analysis in theological research?

PART I

BEGINNING



FRAGMENT I

As voice I move through a landscape of words. Voice is my name. Voicing is my praxis.

I am. I become.

I arrive at what I have begun to call *my* new homeland. Safe and yet unsafe.

It is a landscape as much as a soundscape. And every word is a milestone where I dare to rest.

Where I contemplate. Where I tend to long for being. Simply being. It is a spacetime where I lose my self. Disappear. Withdraw. It is the land where I need to find new strategies, steps, wishes, and longings, desired for moving on, for finding my way towards priesthood.

This land is sometimes harsh, most often *wonder-ful*, and sometimes extremely arid.

I try to make it flower by watering it with its own mattering. With poetics and facts, quotes and realities, imaginings and desiring. Through the way I move, trust and belief will come forth.

Theology is the land. Theology is the name. Theology is the language I try to master.

I come from a different region. I am a foreigner. An outsider. What can I expect? Coming from a different country. From a different land. From a different land/sound/scape. From a different world.

Yet, I am allowed inside. Perhaps on a special permit.

An immigrant-alien visa. Not yet trusted. Perhaps never trusted.

While walking, I ask:

who decides who is a foreigner? Who decides who is a stranger? One who is different?³

I am part of a pilgrimage – together with all who are in need of trust, love and belonging.

I am a Christian. A voice - called to care-fully love.

I am. Therefore, I aim to learn to understand the language-I-may-never-master.

Listening through what I know and feel. Deep listening.

Vowels, consonants, words, ... and more... I will explore. Letting old and new entangle.

Structures I have studied and mastered in my previous home are being reconfigured.

Singing as a way of breathing, becoming prayer, shaping, becoming grace.

³ To modify Exodus 22:21, we should treat ourselves well, for seekers are often strangers to themselves.

What is clear is that I am *longing*. And *longing* is my guide. This guide tells me: mastering is not about being the expert, but rather being *open* enough to love and to hear the *other*.

To learn. To make sense, and mattering out of that which is encountered, again and again, always repeated, always now, always new. To meet and search in company. To look, to see that which has not yet been tasted. To share – body, blood, flesh, and thinking. Words becoming flesh. Word and body - both cut together-apart.⁴ As wondering. Always beginning.

I am, He said. And those words must be the signs pointing toward my destination.

These words are shared with many. It is perhaps incomprehensible. But if you wish *to meet me halfway*,⁵ I am convinced we will learn together. Are you ready? Are you there for me?

I am here. I trust we are meant to walk on this road together. For the sake of what we believe and disbelieve. For the sake of love. For the sake of knowing and unknowing. For the sake of learning and unlearning. Of living in the world which is more than words. Of dying.

A world which is about living the life of a body – dead and risen. Telling, I am. For this reason I wish for us to move together. Though *wonder*. Never alone. Inseparable. In silent moving. While we are learning to meet. Learning to see, becoming touched, becoming surprised, by all those fragments we didn't yet meet. Meeting *together-apart*. Cutting and sharing bread *together-apart*. Along the Way. Sharing that which is broken while healing. Suffering while hoping. Dying while living. Living while dying.

I am. I hear the words.

I am. Are you ready?

⁴ The sharing of Christ's body and blood in the holy communion points toward a wonderful example for how physics and feminist scholar Karen Barad's *agential realism* theory can be understood, especially the terms *cutting together-apart*, and *intra-action* (rather than inter-action). These words will be applied and developed further throughout this study.

⁵ Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham & London: Duke University Press. Here she develops at depth her *agential realism* theory which has become a strong influential framework for my own vocal performance research since 2012, as well as for other scholar in a wide range of academic research fields including artistic research where my previous research has been enacted. This theoretical framework has also given me an academic language allowing for previous studies and experiences, to mix, to mesh, and to entangle: singing, voicing, thinking, artistic research, poetic writing, spiritual praxis, theology, existential care, pedagogy and much more. All these studies are here and now being assembled - as a continued process of entangling with more or less any aspects of meaning-making in everyday life – as part of this thesis for you as a reader, listener and thinking being, to explore. Barad's theory will thus naturally be *tasted* and explored throughout this whole project.

Introduction

(towards *Wonder* and *Nothing*)

[I aim] at strengthening politics as an *affirmative politics of difference(s)* by specifying its constitutive ethico-onto-epistemological conditions and possibilities of ‘agency’ therein. Envisioning difference differently -i.e. theorizing a different difference – leads to a thought-practice in which concepts are not abstraction *from* the world, but an active force *of* this world – and thus always/already implicated in and concerned with world(ing): practicing and envisioning specific practices for this world.⁶

These words are written by Kathrin Thiele - first published as part of a special issue on diffraction/diffracting in the journal *Parallax*.⁷ It was later assembled into an anthology of collected essays on diffractive theory and methods⁸ - pointing towards ways of performing new thinking, knowledge-making, patterning, envisioning, encountering, and to methods for *making-meaning-as-difference* and beyond.⁹ This quotation summarizes for me the essence of what I wish to share with you through this thesis project: how alternative research methods as

⁶ Thiele, K. 2018. Ethos of Diffraction: New Paradigms for a (Post)humanist Ethics. In: Kaiser, B. M. & K. Thiele (eds). *Diffractive Worlds – Diffractive Readings. Onto-Epistemologies and the Critical Humanities*. London & New York: Routledge: 39.

⁷ Kaiser, B. M. & K. Thiele (eds). 2014. *Diffractive Worlds – Diffractive Readings. Onto-Epistemologies and the Critical Humanities. Parallax*, Vol. 20, No. 3: 165–167.

⁸ Kaiser, B. M. & K. Thiele (eds). 2018. *Diffractive Worlds – Diffractive Readings. Onto-Epistemologies and the Critical Humanities*. London & New York.

⁹ A number of new anthologies have recently been and will be published on diffractive methods and methodology developed through feminist new materialist theories, including Merten, K. (ed). 2021. *Diffractive Reading. New Materialism, Theory, Critique*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield; Bayley A. & Chan JJ (eds). 2023. *Diffracting New Materialisms. Emerging Methods in Artistic Research and Higher Education*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan; and Laasonen Belgrano, E., Tiainen, M. and Tarvainen, A (eds., forthcoming 2025). *Mattering Voices*. Routledge Voice Studies: Research Monographs. London: Routledge Press.

praxis¹⁰ can be developed for exploring “ethico-onto-epistemological conditions” of systematic theology; for “envisioning [theology] differently: this means theorizing [theology] differently”, and for practically investigating theology as “a thought-practice in which concepts are not abstractions *from* the world, but an active force *of* this world – and thus always/ already implicated in and concerned with world(ing)”.¹¹ As a singer, musician, performing artist, and priest-candidate/theologian, this project allows for all I have learned and assembled inside my life-luggage during many years, to intra-actively entangle and to emerge as new patterns of knowing. This thesis depends on many different ways of reconfiguring dichotomies, sometimes even beyond reason and rational thinking, thus creating what one may consider impossible differences. On the other hand, any difference in this project is always already part of this world, and thereby available to be reconfigured and reinvestigated in relation to *any body* and *any praxis*, meaning that any academic field may diffractively be reconfigured at any time, always being part of a potential for becoming something new *and* different - always. Just as any process in this world is potentially *doing* – from biology to human thinking and beyond. This also means that any form of analysis presented in this thesis is already ripe for being reconfigured; that any field of thinking is ready to be reopened; that any difference can be reconsidered as an imagined theological buffet, ready to be tasted and ir/rationally explored. When we approach this open *table of theology* together, we are offered choices generously presented to us, ready to be critically re-assembled and care-fully cared for. It is up to each one of us to choose *how to curate* our plates into different ethical taste-experiences. Every plate may become an ethico-onto-epistimological world of its own, teasing us into a systematic sampling and a *cutting together-apart* of salty, bitter, sweet, sour, and umami theological flavors. Rethinking theology differently always, allowing for new ways of practicing and envisioning, including both old and new knowledge, embracing *more-than* as a critical praxis, rather than limiting, separating and closing out that which at first seems absolutely impossible. This is what diffractive methodology is ready to offer to the field of systematic theology: an infinite number of new methods allowing for “ethos of diffraction as primary relating-in-difference”, affirming “differential relationality instead of categorical separation”.¹² What I

¹⁰ I use the term *praxis* for pointing at an entangling of both theory and method in one connecting manner of meaning-making and mattering, or shaping as both form and content, rather than dividing theory and practice into two separate categories.

¹¹ As above.

¹² Thiele 2018:41.

propose throughout this thesis is that all diffractive methods – part of the larger field of diffractive methodology - based on primary relating-in-difference, depend on specific moments of *wonder* and *nothing*.

Background (through *Nothing* and *Wonder*)

Nothingness. The Void. An absence of matter. The blank page. Utter silence. No thing, no thought, no awareness. Complete ontological insensibility.

Shall we utter some words about nothingness? What is there to say? How to begin? How can anything be said about nothing without violating its very nature [...] Have we not already said too much simply in pronouncing its name? Perhaps we should let the emptiness speak for itself.

At the very least, listening to nothing would seem to require exquisite attention to every subtle detail. [...] What would it mean to zoom in on nothingness, to look and listen with ever-increasing sensitivity and acuity, to move to finer and finer scales of details of...? [...] How can we approach it?¹³

I encountered these words by Barad in 2012, one year after finishing an artistic doctoral investigation of *how to perform Nothingness?* (through early modern opera, through operatic mad scenes and lamentations).¹⁴ My PhD-project went on for five years and in retrospect I know that it allowed me to acquire an “ever-increasing sensitivity and acuity, to move to finer and finer scales of details of...”¹⁵ Nothingness. My whole self – as body, mind, spirit and voice – had become some sort of a scientific vocal instrument for measuring Nothingness: for measuring how to let air enter and exit *self*; for moving through words and various kinds of vocal meaning-makings; for *vocally* encountering the unknown, and the strange and uncanny among people, objects, ground, heaven, flavors, sounds, beauty, ugliness, warmth, love, kindness, highs and lows... well, I claim that I learned a method for how to vocally explore *how* to open up for a life-long learning process of psycho-physically measuring of *All* and *Nothing*. Part of my PhD-project I rediscovered through praxical and artistic explorations *how voice* had become a symbol of Nothing on the newly founded opera-stages in Venice around mid-seventeenth century; further, on an existential level, that *breathing* is a connecting existential force – driven, carried, and led through/by *desire*- between living and dying (here

¹³ Barad, K. 2012b. *What is the measure of Nothingness? Infinity, Virtuality, Justice*. DOCUMENTA (13) N° 99, 100 Notes - 100 Thoughts. Kassel: Hatje Kantz Verlag: 4.

¹⁴ Belgrano, E. L. 2011. “*Lasciatemi morire*” o faro “*La Finta Pazza*”: *Embodying Vocal Nothingness on Stage in 17th Century Italian and French Operatic Laments and Mad Scenes*, ArtMonitor, doctoral diss. Gothenburg, 2011.

¹⁵ Barad 2012b:5.

reconfiguring Thiele's words mentioned above on page 10) voices as "concepts are not abstraction from the world, but an active force *of* this world"; that breathing as a rhythmical active movement - thus measuring time and space – allows for an opening up of self, as an act of continuous meaning-making, *as part of* the world. This knowledge that I accumulated during my *vocal artistic PhD-research* led to the following results: 1) a performance of a method claiming that in order to breathe, one needs to open self towards any other, 2) to listen carefully to that which is not-yet-known, 3) to accept being a foreigner in unknown landscapes as always already part of breathing and living, 4) to stay curious and ever-more attentive and wonderous for *both-and* even more than just for the sake of *either-or*, 5) to *opening up* (emotionally, existentially and physically) for any impossible paradox as part of an ethical process of caring, 6) to practice critical thinking through affirmative questions, a conscious *care-ful* presence, and a dedicated willingness to become aware, and - last but not least - 7) to *attune through desire* to all what is encountered, more than *judging* for the sake of opposing the other.¹⁶ I learned through my vocal performative research that

over-vocalization is the means whereby I will arrive in a state of Nothingness. Ornaments showed me that Wonder will open my mind to awareness, which in the end will give me the experience of even more detailed ornaments hidden behind Arts and Nature [...] my words have been written and illustrated through fragments [...] and they have changed me and my voice into something new. And with this new I will continue. My mind is already prepared for exploring the world behind the ornaments hoping to better understanding how far into infinity I can reach through vocal 'touch'. But that is another chapter.¹⁷

And here and now through this theology thesis exploration, a new chapter is ready to be opened, very much based on my previous vocal performance research results, when searching for *how*

¹⁶ In the forthcoming volume *Mattering Voices* (Laasonen Belgrano et al. November 2025) the following statement is formulated in the introduction, in relation to New Materialisms and critique: "The question of critique is a crucial one never to be left aside, and therefore we want to return to one of the main ideas characterizing new materialisms, namely the "more-than" aspect. As Barad emphasizes in her introduction to *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, this aspect is about providing 'an understanding of the role of human *and* nonhuman, material *and* discursive, and natural *and* cultural factors in scientific and other socio-material practices, thereby moving such considerations beyond the well-worn debates that pit constructivism against realism, agency against structure, and idealism against materialism' (Barad 2007: 26). The new materialisms emerging through *Mattering Voices* also participate in proposing "a rethinking of fundamental concepts that support such binary thinking, including the notions of matter, discourse, agency, power, identity, embodiment, objectivity, space, and time" (ibid.).

¹⁷ Belgrano 2011: 241.

to perform Nothingness. The diffractive method I present in this thesis – *Voicing-as-Performative-Theology* - is only one of many diffractive methods. This is also the reason I have consciously decided to depart from two broader research-questions referring to a field of diffractive methodology, followed by a more specific question addressing the method *Voicing-as-Performative-Theology*. Any one doing theology will most probably have different ways of *moving consciously*, and every way of *conscious moving* can be described as a diffractive method.

I am currently preparing for becoming a priest, while continuing *doing* performative research as a theologian. This thesis-project is thus allowing me to observe the entangling-process of *how* a performative-diffractive method - such as *voicing-as-performative-theology* - established through artistic research strategies, may become a useful means for understanding God as *Nothing*, as *Voice*, as *Wonder*, and as *Love*. My hope is also that this thesis may introduce other theologians to become more attentive and listening for how to assemble fragments and details of *any* sorts *as part of* an analyzing theological systematic discourse. The praxical method of *voicing*, using diffractive methodology and performative theory, has lead towards effective results and new questions trying to get closer to a theological systematics of ‘*how thy will be done*’ may be understood and related to. A process that is both including feeling and knowing as part of a divine mystery: a systematic diffractive search for *God-as-becoming-and doing*. The aim is now to begin thinking through *Wonder* as a praxis of opening our minds – both mine and yours - and accept a risky challenge: to dare to take a curious dive into ourselves, into the unknown and the uncertain, while allowing our awareness to become performative by asking

Research Questions (a Repetition)

- How and why is diffractive methodology a useful meaning-making tool for systematic analysis in theological research?
- How can diffractive methodology be explored, performed and further developed through theological research?
- How can *Voicing-as-Performative-Theology* be developed into a useful meaning-making method applicable for systematic analysis in theological research?

Overall Purpose and Aim (through *Letting* and *Allowing*)

The title I have chosen for the project highlights a few words from the Lord's Prayer. It is also a phrase that can be associated with a silent *mantra* explored through a somatic awareness technique I have been practicing for more than thirty years. It's called *The Alexander Technique*.¹⁸ I won't give full details about this specific psycho-somatic practice here and now, beyond telling that its aim is *to allow* the entire body system to become aware *without doing* too much, but rather *allowing* the body to *do* itself; to *let* self expand and open freely without *making unnecessary movements*, and thus *letting* the body follow intuition and unconscious will; to *see* and to *become aware* of habits and patterns that may create unconscious harm, and instead *letting* Self as body/mind (re)create and (re)configure new habits and patterns without the ego interfering.

The over-all purpose for this study is thus to *allow* and to *let* a systematic theological awareness emerge *through* systematic, performative, and psycho-somatic mattering and becoming aware. In other words, to *let* theology-as-voicing and an on-going bodily performative praxis – and a method - to entangle *through* one another. An aim will be to explore this entangling praxis/method *through* what theologian Graham Ward refers to as an *engaged systematic theology*¹⁹ in relation to performance scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte's theory on *performative aesthetics*,²⁰ thus allowing for a *voicing-as-performative-theological-method* to bring along new forms of knowing.

Let me now give a brief sample for how this *letting-and-allowing* processing may develop:

¹⁸ For further reading on the Alexander Technique see: Alexander, F. M. 1932/1985. *The Use of The Self. Its Conscious Direction in Relation to Diagnosis Functioning and the Control of Reaction*. London: Victor Gollancz; Dimon, T. 1999. *The Undivided Self. Alexander Technique and the Control of Stress*. Berkely, California: North Atlantic Books; McEvenue, K. 2002. *The Actor and the Alexander Technique*. New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave and Macmillan. This technique is closely linked to other somatic methodologies and it is therefore relevant to mention the recent publication by Kapadocha, C. (ed.) 2020. *Somatic Voices in Performance Research*. Routledge Voice Studies: Research Monographs. London: Routledge, which also includes a chapter by the author of this thesis (Laasonen Belgrano, E. 2020a).

¹⁹ Ward, G. 2016. *How the light gets in. Ethical Life I*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁰ Fischer-Lichte, E. 2008. *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics of Performance*. London & New York: Routledge.

In the first volume (out of four assembled writings) titled “*How the light gets in. Ethical Life I*”,²¹ Graham Ward literally takes the reader by the hand, while entering into a cathedral space. And as the reader I follow him. Into the space of the cathedral, yet far away physically from moving inside any cathedral. It all happens in my psycho-somatic experience of imagining and reading. My following of Ward's thinking and words is colored by years of conscious and attentive vocal- and bodily performance practice training and reflecting through psycho-somatic experiences. While *moving-through-reading* Ward's words, I consciously move through my bodily and sensuous experiencing. Allowing F. M. Alexander's mantra to be repeated while reading both Ward's and Erika Fischer-Lichte's meaning-making words diffractively: *To let the neck be free. To let the head go forward and up. To let the back be long and wide. To let the body grow and expand in every joint. To let and to allow.* All this is emerging, while I simultaneously keep imagining the church space, seeing its interior, and reciting my mantra which is slowly extended into additional *acts of letting*: *To let God's breath fill the body. To let the air find its way between every vertebra.* And while consciously opening the body inside the cathedral, inspiration slowly turning into a long and soft expiring on a whispering *Ah!* What is happening is an entangled engaged experiencing of being filled with awe and WONDER; being filled with what I see inside myself, through my imagining process inside Ward's cathedral, while at the same time letting myself be filled with what I sense through the words I read; being filled with air and with amazement for the mystery of meeting God-as-eternal *un/known*; being filled with God's strange presence not only outside of my body, but also in between every vertebra, in every joint, in every space within myself. Voice, body, cathedral, self has slowly become part of God's mystical presence. The psycho-somatic process of letting *wonder* create a dropping of my jaw, opening my eyes, a feeling of yawning, connected to Ward's words of becoming aware of God's presence through wondering and asking “who is God?” and “how does God appear?”. Knowing and sensing has become entangled; as in the Hebrew word ידע (meaning *to know, to observe, to care for, to understand, to experience, to have intercourse with, to have judgment / insight*). Systematic theological voicing as a praxis of becoming aware, has been diffractively reconfigured through a conscious awareness of how systematic theology can become “difference differently” as suggested by Thiele.

²¹ Ward 2016.

Methods, Theories, and Previous Research (Unfolding Voicing-as-Performative/Diffractive-Praxis, New Materialisms, Performance, and Engaged Theological Terminologies)

Voicing-as-Performative/Diffractive-Praxis: Beginning with Wonder

I wish to begin this method/theory/previous-research-part, by introducing and discussing *voicing-as-performative/diffractive-praxis*, and unfolding *where* it begins and *how* it is developed. I have only very briefly touched upon *wonder* as an important entrance to voicing as such a method, but now is the moment to open the topic of *voice* and *voicing* in relation to *wonder* a little further.

When a child is born, there is suddenly voice. Possibly a naïve heartbreaking nature-sound bursting out from a tiny body. What makes a child's crying so sudden and apparent? I would intuitively say it has to do with a separation from another body – moving from a safe space into an unknown presence, as an assembling act of a newborn self. It seems to be about birth itself, about a new beginning, or when using a Baradian terminology: a flashing open of unknown matterings; an event without words and further explanations; a spacetime when a bursting emerges and unfold a sense of *wonder*. It seems to be about becoming alive, an emergence of a breathing self, gasping for air; an act of receiving and of giving, of making noise, listening to new sound, and experiencing difference through emotional expression. The sound of a newborn child will also create a sense of relief in a caregiver/parent: All seems to be well! *Crying* as *vocal sound* becomes equal to living. The child is alive. Someone/something is born: a voice – depending on the act of living, breathing, and making itself known to the world and its context. A miracle! A *wonder*!

After this overwhelming entrance of voice into the world the process of *being* and *becoming* continues. It does in fact never end. What follow is a life-long process that is often about controlling and letting voice behave according to what is expected. It is a continued process of holding back and giving out; of receiving and performing. Always in at least two directions. Voice is always depending on living and breathing, moving and being still, loudness and silence, and so on and so forth. Even beyond death. Being a performance of paradoxical presence nurtured by *giving voice* and *receiving voice*; of hearing a voice from an *other*, while reconfiguring and *listening* to the voice of the *self* – all happening at the same time. These are some of the rules controlling voices, within social contexts but also as individual, internal and

existential restrictions inhibiting voice from moving. Voice is both nature and culture. Voice is always *both-and*.

All these concepts, experiences, and sensations of voice have grown within me over many years. Voice being a tool, an instrument for making connections. I was told that I cried loudly and in plenty from the first moment I was born. Then at the age of seven, I heard that I had a small voice. That I needed to boost my vocality. Sing louder and stronger. At age sixteen, my first singing teacher began to focus on ‘a break’ in my upper vocal register, which in the end grew into an identity dilemma causing a fear of my own voice. Voice was judged and manipulated in many ways. To such an extent that I at one point could neither breathe, nor sing. I lost the desire to be make myself heard. I wanted to leave it and to forget. Never to go on stage and sing in front of any other being. I feared and closed off my vocal system. Voice became smaller and smaller. I closed off my whole body, my breathing, and my self. With this tremendous loss of confidence in opening towards breath, my jaw, ribcage, and lungs ‘got stuck’. With a body determined to close itself off, self completely lost its sense of *wonder* and longing to communicate vocally. Until an Alexander Technique teacher told me: *Breathing is not a technique. Breathing is nature. Breathing is natural.*

Voicing Nothing through Madness and Lamentation

Eventually I rediscovered vocality through Alexander Technique lessons and through 17th century baroque singing. I learned that an important break in historical voicing occurred in styles and technique between the Renaissance era when celestial harmonies were striving towards creating unity and perfection, and the Baroque era which turned towards words as musical guides leading to what became known as *La Seconda Prattica*²² (*the second practice*) – referring to the encounter between the *ancient music* with regard to the *new modern style*. This new vocal practice was aiming to stir, to touch, to cause shock, pain, even consciously expressing madness. The aim was also to create a sense of *wonder*. This vocal practice should strive for difference and for never letting a sound be the same as an other. Ornaments became the means for making any such difference; “to delight and move the affections of the soul”.²³

²² Treitler, L. (general ed.).1998. *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History*, revised edition. New York, London: W. W. Norton company,521-554.

²³ Ibid.: 611.

If a melody was introduced as a first verse in a song, every other verse thereafter had to be performed slightly different, always depending on specific words and their meanings. High notes were reflecting ‘heavens’, while lower notes were drawing attention to the ‘darkness on earth’. Singers were through this new way of performing, applying *the art of touching* its audiences through slides, trills, and vocal *embroidering*. The process of making musical meaning was part of a larger movement apparent in many other artistic practices. Baroque extravaganza and over-flowing of details and particularities was in the beginning of the 17th century explored and developed in laboratories, eventually blooming forth into the classical era. Sharp contrasts, shadows and *chiaroscuro* were techniques of the Baroque era, as well as secret messages embedded through symbols and playful perspectives. The whole period was an explorative timespace of searching for cuts with /in the past and the ancient. It was in the very early years of this ‘modern’ era when minds and bodies engaged even more in these new investigations of opening, twisting, flashing fragments together and apart. New ways of writing, drawing, coloring, and creating sound and visual performances were part of this exploratory landscape. Trying to accomplish a sense of *wonder* in every audience and in any *other* who was encountering a performance of any kind. Voice in this early modern context became a figure and symbol for *anything* and *nothing*.²⁴

Nothingness, Pure Voice, Over-Vocalization and the Singing of the Nightingale

At one point I decided not to aim for a career as a performing baroque singer, but instead turning towards artistic research *through* vocal praxis. I didn’t want to go on stage, but rather to search for voice anywhere, for passions as ornamental praxis unknown vocal sound. As a result, I regained my curiosity for the vocal instrument as a tool for creating *grace* through ornamentation, as suggested by Florentine singer and composer Giulio Caccini (1551—1618) in the introduction to his collection of songs in the new style, *Le Nuove Musiche* (1602). I began to search for vocal meaning-making and techniques relevant for touching both souls and hearts, and not the least, for the curious relation between words and music. As a vocal artist, I connected with musicologists and performers exploring French 17th century vocal ornaments in relation to Descartes *Passions of the Soul*. A fascinating world opened up in front of my eyes, when my thinking attentively began following the vocal sounds I produced and tried out with my whole singing instrument. Simultaneously I continued to work with various Alexander

²⁴ Calcagno, M. 2003. Signifying nothing: on the aesthetics of pure voice in early Venetian opera. *The Journal of Musicology*. 20 (4):461-497.

Technique teachers, who taught me *how to listen carefully* to every single part of my body, thus becoming aware of psycho-physical habits and connections - always with open eyes and in relation to the situated context. Everything I saw and experienced through my singing/living instrumental self was being connected: ornaments of love with the touch of a gaze, ornaments of anger with the touch of strong winds in my face on the edge of a rock by the sea; ornaments of fear with the touch of pain when breathe got stuck in the solar plexus area causing the diaphragm to become tense and less flexible,... as so on. In the midst of these explorations of vocalizing passions (always returning to Descartes), I was introduced to an article by Italian musicologist Mauro Calcagno, telling about the significance of voice as a symbol of *nothing* (2003). All of a sudden, my world turned up-side-down. How could a voice be a symbol of *nothing*? New connections happened in my vocal instrument. Caccini's ornaments were in a flash reconfigured in a new way when Calcagno talked about "the asynchronicity between text and music" in relation to *nothing*. He referred to the aesthetics of an intellectual academic circle active in Venice around 1630s calling themselves 'Accademia degli Incogniti' (*The Academy of the Unknown*, being producers of some of the first public opera performances ever), calling forth "two recurring tropes used by them to refer to pure voice and over-vocalization: the concept of nothingness and the singing of the nightingale".²⁵ All these concepts and tropes where then assembled through my own vocal explorations, and associated with the female singer in early opera, her voice and her abilities to become *anything* and *nothing* on stage. I was totally blown away by questions relating to *how* a female voice could embody *nothing*. In 2006 I finally began my PhD project trying to find answers for *how to perform nothing* through my own vocal practice, from now referred to as *voicing*.

Vocal Ornamentation as Praxical Method for Researching Nothingness

Music is gone and left is silence. Yet a vibrating motion is stronger than ever in the silent room. The harpsichord player hurries out with his face covered by his hands. My whole body and soul are one and I am alive. My voice is silent, but the movement in me is bursting with an overwhelming force. Silence, sound, quiet, movement – all is present in this room. I am at the center of NOW, in the middle of BEING. It is a moment capturing the absolute conviction that everything has been expressed. Sound is now embodied in a most profound sensation of existence.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid.: 456.

²⁶ Belgrano, Elisabeth. L. 2011. "*Lasciatemi morire*" o faro "*La Finta Pazza*": *Embodying Vocal Nothingness on Stage in 17th Century Italian and French Operatic Laments and Mad Scenes*, doctoral diss. Gothenburg University. Gothenburg: ArtMonitor: 31.

These words became the beginning of my research on how to perform nothing. A footnote belonging to these words in my dissertation informs the reader that

This text was composed for a course in Writing and Practical Knowledge, led by Prof. Anders Lindseth, at the faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts (University of Gothenburg), which I attended during the fall 2006. The text describes a moment of importance for my own vocal practice and it became the formulated point of departure for this research project.²⁷

I find these words extremely important for every step that was taken afterwards, because they draw the attention to a moment of *here and now*. They could not fully be explained, but rather followed, reopened, and investigated as words of a *moment-that-can-not-be-explained*. It was the first academic words I formulated as part of the *voicing-as-performative-method*, and when they were written I had no intention to make them into a reflection. They had become a performance in themselves. The task given by the professor of this course had been *to step inside an experience that had made a difference in my career*. I was not thinking about describing an event, but rather *to move straight into* the vital movement of the vibrating room when I was struck by something different: returning to the room, while feeling the presence of sound. And of *wonder*. Time and place had no importance at all. Only the motion of being part of something beyond understanding. The next task would be to unpack the event, but not until later. I had to stay within the “asynchronicity between text and music” and remain there longer, simply for *being inside*, and for contemplating an experience of *wonder*. We can try to talk about such a *wonder-experience* through any praxis, and perhaps we may come to the conclusion that such a discourse is a never-ending story. In fact, this very course-moment became so important to my way of doing and acting, that nothing was ever again the same: everything *sensed* began to unfold little by little into *new wonders*, new experiences, new ways of searching. Always new. And in the middle of all, there was my vocal instrument reaching beyond itself, opening up both physically and mindfully for connecting with any movement other than *self*, while simultaneously moving *as self*. And in many ways, this described act of wonder is what scholars who are applying performative strategies are aiming at, or as media scholar Brad Haseman confirms: “many practice-led researchers do not commence a research project with a sense of ‘a problem’. Indeed they may be led by what is best described as ‘an enthusiasm of practice’: something which is exciting, something which is unruly”.²⁸ It is in

²⁷ Ibid, footnote 13.

²⁸ Haseman 2006: 3.

such moment of inexplicable unruliness that *voicing-as-performative/diffractive-praxis* is being articulated: as part of the over-vocalizing, overwhelming, often both irrational and rational, asynchronicity of connections between *all* and *nothing*.

I finished my PhD in 2011. It became a Music-Research-Drama in three acts. The research result included texts, sound, films including a performance of a mad scene and number of lamentations from early modern Italian and French operas. All performed by a female singer searching for *nothing*. The ‘results’ provided the scholarly community with a set of performative strategies and a method for *how to move* in the search for *nothing*; the ‘results’ were also in themselves *a performance* of a method for how to assemble and curate *asynchronised data* based on *wonder* and *desire* for learning how to vocally perform *nothing*.

Vocal Ornamenting as Gratia and Hesus: A Figure of Nothing’s steps Towards Priesthood

Martin Luther preaches that *grace* is a gift from God, and words of God being the core of this gift (next to music). After 2011, I began to see a connection between my religious upbringing in a Lutheran congregation on the Swedish west coast, my musical training and career, and a growing love for words as sacred acts of musical meaning-making, rather than static and fixed objects based on a grammatical syntax. Words become bodies, motions, passions, flesh, and a sense of *sacred touch*. Caccini’s 17th century declaration of *gratia* (grace) as a way of performing *unknown-sacred-wondrous-presence* entangled with my performative (and in many ways seemingly irrational) and adventurous journeys: taking me to California for a performative brunch meeting - with new materialist theories and Karen Barad’s performing words about *nothing* - halfway across the globe²⁹; then to Kyoto and the School of Nothingness established by Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945) exploring his theory of acting-intuition through voicing³⁰; then to Paris and eventually to Jerusalem for exploring the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament setting of the terrible fall of a broken and fallen city as performed in the *Book of Lamentations*, then set to music by French composer Michel Lambert (1610-

²⁹ Belgrano, E. L. & F. Gunve. (2015) *Madness and the Bastard in Motion: Learning/Teaching through Performance Studies*, 7th Teacher’s Academy (ELIA), ENACT: learning in/through the Arts, Tilburg, The Netherlands, 10-12 May.

³⁰ Uehara, M. & E. Laasonen Belgrano. (2020). ‘Performance Philosophy seen through Nishida’s ‘Acting Intuition’. In: *The Routledge Companion to Performance Philosophy*, Cull, L. & Lagaay, A. (eds), Routledge Press.

1696). My journeys followed Lambert's ornamented musical score drenched by passions, sufferings, grief and pain. I moved, sang, encountered other scholars, and performed my results in conferences. Academic encounters at conferences became my new stage. (Fear and stage fright were all gone.) All being part of an ornamenting path of existential wonderings and wanderings. Until the day when I realized that the score I had been following led me back towards a sacred spacetime I had known since childhood: to the calling Voice of God. Word had become flesh in the strangest sense, and my road - which to many friends and relatives seemed both unruly and asynchronised - could not have been more reasonable and straight forward. It all appeared to me as a paradox of both reason and unreason. As a mad scene performed by more than one voice, just as I had performed the role of Nothingness, as a female singer did in the 17th century. In 2021 I could not ignore the inner voice calling me to listen to something I had never expected to happen: I began studying theology after being accepted as a priest candidate in the Church of Sweden (by the bishop of the diocese of Gothenburg). In retrospect I have come to understand Caccini's concept of *Grace* (*gratia*) as an ornamenting calling gift of God, as much as I have come to love the idea that the Hebrew word for grace (*hesed*) also embodies the meaning of *overflowing* love. Ornamentation as a vocal act of *overflowing gracefully* through vocal sound seems to enact an eternal discourse of love. As a priest I am called to sing as I pray; to practice over-vocalizing as both listening and drawing close attention to words-as-symbols-of-the-other as much as to the self - all being part of **letting God's will be done**. Voicing-as-performative-praxis has thus become a method for listening, thinking, and performing the Voice of God. In all, liturgy, pastoral care, homiletics, diaconal service, and theology become parts of this *voicing-as-performative/diffractive-theology*. Body and voice entangle through words and sound into a performing Christianity, becoming new as an image of God again and again. Or as theologian Catherine Keller writes when she introduces her book *Intercarnations. Exercises in Theological Possibility* (2017): "Any body, opened for closer observation might break into a multitude". This is exactly what happens in Voicing-as-Performative/Diffractive-Praxis. I therefore wish to suggest the following:

Voicing-as-Performative/Diffractive-Theological method allows for a breaking open into a multitude, led through *wonders* and *miracles*; an opening of self as an instrument for the divine-to-become.

Voicing as Diffractively Being ‘On Call’

In 2012, after having encountered Barad’s work on Nothingness,³¹ it became obvious to me that through the diffractive methodology proposed by Barad and her specific terminology, as well as through her way of *performing* her own research texts, there was plenty for me to learn and gain in terms of articulating myself as a practice-led voice scholar in a conventional academic research setting without leaving my poetic, musical and performative skills aside. This is also the reason why I as an artistic scholar need to include a rather dense theoretical new materialist framework *as part of* this thesis, which may seem very far away from an artistic and poetical praxis. In other words, it has in this thesis been extremely important to show the undeniable need of allowing for a performance philosophical entangling of ‘academic’ form (methods) and content (theory), in order to maintain an intra-active theor(y)/e/practi/cal way of moving, learning and understanding - through voice as an object, as well as a praxis of voicing.

The complexity involved when thinking about voicing as a method takes me to the topic of criticality. What does it mean to be critical when voicing? Does it at all exist a criticality in a praxis that seem to be in a continuous forward movement? I will claim that yes, voicing does indeed involve a great deal of criticality. As a voicing research practitioner – here I consider the singing/speaking/sounding/thinking self, including body, mind and beyond – I am always on a certain alert, or perhaps one could even say ‘on call’, meaning that I am always prepared to listen as much as to transfer vocal alertness into sound. Living in a society where beings are carefully separating work and pleasure time into separate categories, an artist is always “on call” which is perhaps not something so easily understood. If I as a voice would turn every performative moment into a comparative praxis using negative skepticism as a working tool, voicing would become an unpleasant, interrupted, and scattered process; a sound would perhaps even create a psychosomatic unwillingness to be let voice vibrated as part of the body – which was what I encountered as a youth, and which I also heard many people tell me having experienced when being told “they could not sing, so please be quiet” at school. Criticality – both my own and the one of others – may ‘cut out and off’ both the voice and its desire to become vocal expression. There are many ways to think about voicing, but a willingness to taste any possible vocal textures and structure would be preferred in order to let feelings of joy and delight open the vocal instrument towards the world as much as towards self. Such an

³¹ Barad, K. 2012b.

openness allows for air to flow through the vocal system, creating a steady stream of breath and heartbeat; eventually a sense of growing both physically and emotionally causes voice to respond to external impulses and to a *calling* departing from any other body. The energy involved in such a growth, may even take on prophetic dimensions and actions. Such a voice is both ready to act *as part of* being ready to listen to all there is. In this process, any sound will be critically tested, tuned into, encountered and reconfigured. Being “on call” means that voice is prepared to be alert, become attentive, to hear all, and to be willing to remain open while breathing and receiving. And this is perhaps the key. My willingness and readiness to melt and mingle with the yet unknown objects and movements part of a risky living everyday process. Being ‘on call’ has nothing to do with defending any moving self, but rather always seeing possibilities even in the most foggy and stormy situations. There is no way for voicing to turn backwards into an already sounding self, comparing the present with another present sound. A voice is gone when a breath has been exhausted. Yet, a reconfiguring can always be applied to the thinking that is continuing to linger around after the voice has disappeared. In such a way voice, sound, silence, and thinking are deeply entangled as voicing *positively*, always ‘on call’ in relation to any paradoxical situation and context. So now, let us be alert to the calling utterances of

Performativity theory

Performance scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte tells us at the very beginning of her key volume *The Transformative Power of Performance. A new aesthetics*, that “the term ‘performative’ was coined by John. L. Austin” when he in 1955 “introduced it to language philosophy in his lecture series entitled ‘How to do things with words’ held at Harvard University”.³² Fischer-Lichte identifies this specific occasion as what she calls “the performative turn in the arts”.³³ What appeared as a significant manifestation at this important event, was that words are not simply equalized as statements, but also as *doings* and *ways of acting*. A vocal utterance is not only an object *to talk about* but very much an *act of performing*. For example, when in a wedding ceremony, words themselves proclaim as agents a certain action directed to a community like in “I do take [...]”; and when the register or priest responds with the words “I do declare [...]”;

³² Fischer-Lichte 2008: 24.

³³ Ibid.

or when the priest or pastor in the Eucharist prayer as part of the holy communion is blessing bread and wine with the words of institution:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take; eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, also, He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them saying, 'Drink of it all of you. This cup is the New Testament in My Blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'³⁴

All examples include words shared and proclaimed towards a receiving community, which Fischer-Lichte tells, is a necessary condition: “a performative utterance always addresses a community, represented by the people present in a given situation – it can therefore be regarded as the performance of a social act”.³⁵ Based on this initial explanation of the *performative utterance*, another important aspect emerges. That is the destabilizing of “dichotomous pairs such as subject/object and signifier/signified” because of the specific characteristics of the performative utterance as both a statement *and* an act that “even collapse binary opposition”.³⁶ These are very important facts which may be difficult to apply in situations where a demand for a critical objective perspective is expected to take place. A performative approach certainly blurs the boundaries between a concept and the effects of an enacted concept – where “materiality is given as an artifact but occurs as the result of the performative generation of corporality, spatiality, and tonality”.³⁷ Fischer-Lichte is careful to declare that in her application of performativity theory – which she calls a *new performative aesthetics theory* - “In order to describe and define it more accurately [...] I will refrain from identifying established concepts of the event – such as Heidegger’s, Derrida’s, or Lyotard’s – [...] Instead, I will apply the findings produced by my analyses [...] as a basis to grasp the specific aestheticity of performance”.³⁸ In other words, through this declaration she is adding herself as a speaking subject into the analysis of a specific concept: in this way she is making the self and the

³⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eucharist_in_Lutheranism (accessed 2023-12-30)

³⁵ Fischer-Lichte 2008:25.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.:162.

³⁸ Ibid.:163.

speaking act an entangled performance, and thereafter applying her own findings in the methodological analysis – meaning the results and effects of her own speaking, thinking and writing – in order to make sense and meaning out of other performances (including any performative utterances).

The application of performativity theory to the field of cultural philosophy was introduced by philosopher Judith Butler in a groundbreaking paper from 1988, where she argues that “gender identity – like all forms of identity – is not based on pre-existing (e.g. ontological or biological) categories but brought forth by the continuous constitution of bodily acts”³⁹ meaning that “[b]odily, performative acts do not express a pre-existing identity but engender identity through these very acts”.⁴⁰ Fischer-Lichte sharpens her reading of Butler by returning to Butler’s own formulation: “The body is not merely matter, but a continual incessant *materializing* of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one’s body”.⁴¹ What becomes apparent – and even a key idea – for both Austin’s and Butler’s definitions of *the performative* – as word, utterance and body – is how the forming of an event is contributing to a collapse between things and doings, between dichotomies such as form and content, and beyond these in many other oppositional pairings. Also, terms such as *difference*, *otherness*, *becoming*, *fluidity*, *relational*, and *process* have emerged as part of the performative terminology. Currently, performative feminist new materialist research is developing rapidly within all academic fields, including natural and social sciences, humanities, and not least among the growing number of artistic researchers.⁴²

³⁹ Ibid.:27.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid. Quote from Butler, J. 1990. Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. In: S.-E.Case (ed.) *Performing Feminism, Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press:270-282.

⁴² Just to mention a few beside the already mentioned: Arlander, A. 2014. “From interaction to Intra-action in Performing Landscape.” *Artnodes*: 14; Barad, K. 2003. “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter.” *Signs*. 28. 3: 801–31; Barad, K. 2012c. On Touching—the Inhuman That Therefore I Am. *differences* 1 December 23 (3): 206–223; Barrett, E, and B. Bolt. (eds.) 2013. *Carnal knowledge: towards a 'new materialism' through the arts*. New York: I.B. Tauris; Belgrano, E. L. 2016. “Vocalizing Nothingness: (Re) configuring vocality inside the spacetime of Ottavia.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies*, 1 (2): 183-195; Coole, D. & S. Frost. 2010a. Eds. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press; Dolphijn, R. and I. van der Tuin. 2012. *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*. Ann Arbor: Open

Nomadic Theory as Becoming, Transforming and Constant Re-Mapping

Philosopher and feminist scholar Rosi Braidotti tells us that “Different becomings are lines cutting open the space and demanding from us constant re-mapping: it is a question, every time, of finding new coordinates. This is not only a spatial, but also a temporal phenomena”.⁴³ Building on feminist performative theory Braidotti is following the steps of Butler proposing that a becoming identity is not fixed nor predetermined, but an on-going search for communal relationality through open spacetimes. She says that “Nomadic theory’s central figuration expresses a process of ontology that privileges change and motion over stability”⁴⁴ and that “the process of becoming nomadic is rather a zigzagging itinerary of successive but not linear steps that [...] mark different thresholds or patterns”.⁴⁵ Also, a nomadic processing depends on becoming a “community bound together by the compassionate acknowledgement of our shared need to negotiate processes of sustainable transformations with multiple others in the flow of monstrous energy of a ‘Life’ that does not respond to names”.⁴⁶ These statements correspond directly to Fischer-Lichte’s proclamation of avoiding the naming of categories in favor of a

Humanities Press; Haraway, D. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham & London: Duke University Press; Ingold, T. 2022. Ed. *Knowing from the Inside: Cross-Disciplinary Experiments with Matters of Pedagogy*. London: Bloomsbury; Kontturi, K. & M. Tiainen. 2023. “New Materialisms and (the Study of) Art: A Mapping of Co-Emergence.” In: *Genealogies and Methods of New Materialisms*, edited by F. Colman & I. van der Tuin. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Kontturi, K, T. Leppänen, T. Mehrabi, and M. Tiainen. Forthcoming. Eds. *New Materialism and Intersectionality: Making Middles Matter*. New York: Routledge; Latour, B. 2007. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Rieger, J. & E. Waggoner (eds). 2016. *Religious Experience and New Materialism. Movement Matters. Radical Theologies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Mason, D. V. 2019. *The Performative Ground of Religion and Theatre*. Oxon & New York: Routledge; Hammarström, Matz. 2010. “On the Concepts of Transaction and Intra-Action.” In *The Third Nordic Pragmatism Conference*, 1–15. Uppsala; Laasonen Belgrano, Anne Tarvainen and Milla Tiainen (eds). Forthcoming November 2025. *Mattering Voices: Studying Voice through New Materialisms*. Routledge Voice Studies: Research Monographs. London: Routledge Press.

⁴³ Braidotti, Rosi. 2011. *Nomadic theory: the portable Rosi Braidotti*. New York: Columbia Univ. Press. P. 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: 29.

⁴⁵ Ibid.: 35.

⁴⁶ Ibid.: 53.

social activism. Both Braidotti and Fischer-Lichte regard the flow of energy that is produced by the ‘living’ events in themselves. In relation to the compassionate becoming, it is also interesting to acknowledge the importance of hope and dreaming as relevant input, which Braidotti confirms by claiming that “The pursuit of practices of hope, rooted in the ordinary micropractices of everyday life, is a simple strategy to hold, sustain, and map our sustainable transformations. [...] Hope is a way of dreaming up possible futures [...] It is a powerful motivating force grounded not only in projects that aim at reconstructing the social imaginary but also in the political economy of desires, affects, and creativity. Contemporary nomadic practices or subjectivity [...] work toward a more affirmative approach to critical theory”.⁴⁷ Here, hoping through nomadic practice is generously suggested to be part of a performative and more affirmative critical thinking than has previously been acknowledged through oppositional and dichotomizing strategies. Hope is needed *as part of* a dreaming life-force which Braidotti goes on to identify as *Zoe* – “the vitalist force of life itself”.⁴⁸

Materializing through Autopoiesis, Sympoiesis, and Systematic Emergence

Fischer-Lichte refers to “the autopoietic feedback loop, consisting of the mutual interaction between actors and spectators”,⁴⁹ and how performances since “1960s onwards have been drawing attention to [...] role reversal, community building [...] propagated a new image of the artist” negating “the notion of the autonomous subject” and that the artist “like all participants, is assumed to be engaged in a continuous process of determining and being determined”.⁵⁰ She continues to declare that the “feedback loop functions as a self-organizing system which must permanently integrate newly emerging, unplanned, and unpredicted elements”.⁵¹ I find it curious to move into a slightly different perspective of a similar terminology when I turn to natural scientist and feminist scholar Donna Haraway, who promotes the importance of “staying with the trouble” in her influential book with the same

⁴⁷ Ibid: 237.

⁴⁸ Ibid.:325.

⁴⁹ Fischer-Lichte 2008:163.

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 164.

⁵¹ Ibid.: 165.

title,⁵² while she is also discussing *autopoiesis* but this time in relation to *sympoiesis*, meaning *making-with*. She tells that “Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing [...]. *Sympoiesis* is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, and historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company. *Sympoiesis* enfolds *autopoiesis* and generatively unfurls and extends it”.⁵³ In a way, both Fischer-Lichte and Haraway are referring to the continuous materialization of emergent events and systems. The performative approach could be considered as a closed studio elaboration, much like Haraway’s biological experimental setup. On the other hand, Haraway suggests that “as long as *autopoiesis* does not mean self-sufficient ‘self-making’, *autopoiesis* and *sympoiesis*, foregrounding and backgrounding different aspects of a systematic complexity, are in generative friction or generative enfolding, rather than opposition”.⁵⁴ And here we reach a point which is crucial to the topic of this thesis, namely suggesting *how* two different fields - through diffractive intra-action and entangling - allow for different understandings of transformative changes and evolution to emerge; and how new systems collectively and diffractively are generated, having “no self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries”. In other words, what becomes apparent is that words, things, subjects/objects, entities, fragments etc. are all part of a continuous *becoming-with-and-through-differencing-differently*, if we better prepare for changing, transforming, transgressing and even collapsing; “learning again [...] how to become less deadly, more respons-able, more attuned, more capable of surprise, more able to practice the arts of living and dying will in multispecies symbiosis, *sympoiesis*, and *symanimogenesis* [...] All must become more ontologically inventive and sensible within the bumbious holobieme that earth turns out to be, whether called Gaia or a Thousand Other Names”.⁵⁵ And with these words spoken, we are now approaching a theological discourse of Genesis.

Genesis, Emergence, and Liminality

Theologian Catherine Keller announces that “the creation is not portrayed in Genesis as God’s solo-performance. One can only read there a process of cosmic collaboration. Not a thing-like

⁵² Haraway 2016.

⁵³ Ibid.: 58.

⁵⁴ Ibid.:61.

⁵⁵ Ibid.: 98.

creation but a complex inter-active process called forth: we may call it genesis collective. [...] The gathering cooperation unfolds as a rhythm, a cosmic liturgy: divine lure, creatively improvisation, and a divine reception”.⁵⁶ What we hear and are invited to imagine through Keller’s words, is a beyond-worldly symphonic soundscape, where tones and beatings are folding in and out of one another. It is a composition emerging “at the edge of chaos” unfolding “an art of flows, waves, disruptions, and surprises”; an “interplay of formlessness and form, chaos and order, emergence and collapse. [...] The genesis collective thus continues, moment by moment, amidst all its losses, to emerge”.⁵⁷ All in order to open up for the *unknown*. Driven by a desire to transform “the aesthetic experience as liminal experience”⁵⁸ and further into infectious rituals, aiming at “social transformation and [...] a somatic physiological, affective – metamorphosis”.⁵⁹ We have now returned to the Fischer-Lichte’s performance analysis and we hear her telling us how the liminal experience as aesthetic experience emerges and “concerns the experience of a threshold, a passage in itself: the very process of transition already constitutes the experience”.⁶⁰ Thus, we return to Genesis – to a new beginning – and to philosopher and mathematician Michel Serres, who whispers to us that

“existence or excellence lies in the fringe, it is on the edge that never stops, it is in the bath in which things are immersed. See it emerging from the waves, listen to it. [...] In the beginning is not the word. The word comes where it is expected. One writes initially through a wave of music [...] from the whole body [...] from the depths of the world, or through the front door, from our latest loves, carrying its complicated rhythm, its simple beat, its melodic line, its sweet wafting, a broken fall. [...] in the beginning is the song. [...] the unknown, the infra-subject of hate and multiplicity, open chaos [...] The word will be its Messiah, and the idea will be the messiah of the messiah, awaited in the noise, hope for in the raising up of the musical renaissance”⁶¹

⁵⁶ Keller, Catherine. 2008. *On the Mystery. Discerning Divinity in Process*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 62.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Fischer-Lichte 2008:191.

⁵⁹ Ibid.: 196.

⁶⁰ Ibid.: 199.

⁶¹ Serres, Michel. 1982/1995. *Genesis*. Transl. by Geneviève James and James Nielson. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press:138.

ready to touch the soul of the listener. Serres moves through his poetical wordings on the edge of knowing and feeling, in a divine space shared in its vastness, and in its always more-than-broadest sense of emergence. Beginning. Again and again. “What if beginning - this beginning, any beginning, The beginning does not lie back, like an origin, but rather opens out? ‘To begin’ derives from the old Teutonic *be-ginnan*, ‘to cut open, to open up,’ cognate with the old English *ginan*, meaning ‘to gape, to yawn’ as a mouth or an abyss”.⁶² And with this beginning, with this cut, yawn and open mouth, we turn vocally inspired to Karen Barad who is entangled with Judith Butler, and together with both of them we may hear through

Karen Barad’s ‘Agential Realism’ Theory

how “Something flashes up, but something also flashes through a historical continuum”.⁶³

This something is an open cut, which is also a beginning, as Barad herself continues:

B’reishit. In the beginning of...

In the beginning... there was an interruption, a rupture, a break in the continuum of time. Before time

A disruption, a hesitation, a pause, a stutter, a disjuncture, a cut. In the beginning of ... before we even get to the beginning of...

There is a break that disrupts the very possibility of origin and the unilinear unfolding ...

*In the beginning that was an originary dis/continuity that breaks open the continuum of time, before it gets started, before there is a beginning.*⁶⁴

In her chapter *What Flashes Up: Theological-Political-Scientific Fragments*⁶⁵ Barad sincerely *performs* her theory of agential realism as a *diffractive method* – cutting open fragments of words and texts by others, cutting them *together apart* through her own thinking and theorizing

⁶² Keller, Catherine. 2003. *Face of the deep. A Theology of Becoming*. London, New York: Routledge: xv.

⁶³ Barad quoting Butler, in: Barad, K. 2017. *What Flashes Up: Theological-Political-Scientific Fragments*: 22. In: *Entangled Worlds. Religion, Science, and New Materialisms*. Keller, C. & M.-J. Rubenstein (eds). New York: Fordham University Press: 21-88.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*: 42-43.

– thus producing an intra-active entanglement of never exhausting possibilities of new knowledge pattern, rather than:

the usual options – no separation/distinction and absolute separation/distinction. [...] Agential realism provides separability that results from intra-actions (not interactions): Differentiations do not precede intra-actions but rather result in and through them, such that the ‘differentiations’ so constituted are entangled or ontologically inseparable (as part of one phenomenon). Agential realism is a differentiation within entanglement: a cutting together-apart, differentiating-entangling as one move. Differentiating is not about radical exteriority but rather agential separability. That is, differentiating is not about othering or separating [off,] but on the contrary making connections and commitments.⁶⁶

Barad’s words, language, poetical and im/possible shapings and connectings are performing theory, not always easy to grasp and to follow, especially if never before encountered. We will therefore return to Barad’s wordings, and to her influencing volume *Meeting the Universe Halfway* from 2007, opening up some of the key terms coming with her feminist performativity theory. Let us begin with what she refers to as:

Reflexive (either-or) and diffractive (both-and) methodologies

Barad suggests that most often when we talk about representation and representationalism, we tend to “take the notion of separation as foundational”.⁶⁷ Reflexive methodologies can then be related to “representationalism – the belief that words, concepts, ideas, and the like accurately reflects or mirror the things to which they refer [...] [A]nd it has encouraged the belief that it is possible to turn the mirror back on oneself, as it were, thus spawning various candidates for ‘reflexive’ methodologies.”⁶⁸ As such, “reflexivity, like reflection, still holds the world at a distance”⁶⁹ allowing for “reflecting on the world from outside”.⁷⁰ In a paper from 2014 (eventually assembled into a complete volume in 2018 focusing on *Diffracting Diffraction*),

⁶⁶ Ibid.:74.

⁶⁷ Barad 2007:137.

⁶⁸ Ibid.: 86.

⁶⁹ Ibid.: 87.

⁷⁰ Ibid.: 88.

Barad clearly begins by stating that the term *diffraction* comes from the “classical optics” and the Latin “diffrangere – to break apart, in different directions”.⁷¹ She continues:

I want to begin by re-turning – not by returning as in reflecting on or going back to a past that was, but re-turning as in turning it over and over again – iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetime-matterings), new diffracting patterns. We might imagine re-turning as a multiplicity of processes, such as the kinds earthworms revel in while helping to make compost or otherwise being busy at work and at play: turning the soil over and over – ingesting and excreting it, tunneling through it, burrowing, all means of aerating the soil, allowing oxygen in, opening it up and breathing new life into it.⁷²

As a vocal artistic researcher, I was from the very beginning of my academic training taught and marinated in reflexive methodological approaches – including learning through a distancing, yet at a close hand of *tacit knowledge* – pointing me in the direction of reflecting *on* my practice as proposed in reflective phenomenology and hermeneutics. This methodology always created a troubling dilemma inside me, since I always had to reflect *on* something *other*, even if this *other* was part of *my own doing*. There was always a kind of battle between becoming too subjective as an artistic researcher, or on the other hand, making my research too objective and over-explained, resulting in a continuous risk of losing the poetic and sensuous knowing that I always have been determined to protect and highlight, as part of a creativity-led and explorative strategy. I am absolutely convinced that artistic research needs to maintain the *sensuous experiential* and *breathing* vibration in relation to every possible situation, even if presented as academic research and as such, being categorized in a framed, particular, and specific field striving for its own unique explicable newness and ownership of results. So then, a re-sponse came to me through the diffractive methodological approach offered by Barad and her colleagues, as a thorough and equally paradoxical academic language proposing a *more-than-both-and* perspective allowing vocal research to move, “allowing oxygen in, opening it up, and breathing new life into it”⁷³ in a totally new way far beyond previous binary reflexive *either-or* approaches. I learned that Barad’s theory and methodological approach is not “interested in ‘models’ or ‘incentives’ offered to feminism *from* physics, but in the ‘unholy

⁷¹ Barad 2018:4.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

marriage’ of ‘others’, the complex philosophysics sprung from their encounter”.⁷⁴ I translated these research strategies into a vocal performance method I called *voicing-as-performative praxis*, allowing self to move as a voicing-thinking-subject; as a form/ing and creating vocal sound and reflexive thinking, as a dis/continuous paradoxical and vibrating praxis – creating meaning-making knowledge – never dividing subjective self from its active doing. This method follows Barad’s clear words about diffractive methodology when she explains:

It is crucial that in using a diffractive methodology one is attentive to fine details of different disciplinary approaches. What is needed are respectful engagements with different disciplinary approaches, not coarsegrained portrayals that make caricatures of another discipline from some position outside it. My aim in developing a diffractive methodology is to attempt to remain rigorously attentive to important details of specialized arguments within a given field without uncritically endorsing or unconditionally prioritizing one (inter)disciplinary approach over another.⁷⁵

Intra-Action/Acting/Active Entanglement /Entangling

Barad builds her agential theory through physics, especially as theorized and practiced by the Danish physicist Nils Bohr. I have no intention here and now make a distinctive and thorough theoretical explanation of Barad’s whole theoretical framework, but I need to open up for how I came to understand this theory through vocal performance research which I now allow, through this thesis, to diffract through theology as another mattering field of research. And while searching to describe the terms intra-active entangling I quote Barad as follows:

The world is an open process of mattering through which mattering itself acquires meaning and form through the realization of different agential possibilities. Temporality and spatiality emerge in the processual historicity. Relations of exteriority, connectivity, and exclusion are reconfigured. [entailing] an ongoing reworking of the dynamics itself. Dynamics are a matter not merely of properties changing in time but of what matters in the ongoing materializing of different space-time topologies. The world is intra-activity in its differential mattering.

In summary. The primary ontological units are not ‘things’ but phenomena – dynamic topological reconfigurings/entanglements/relationalities/(re)articulations of the world. And the primary semantic units are not ‘words’ but material-discursive practices through which (ontic and

⁷⁴ Sellberg, K. & P. Hinton. 2016. Introduction: The Possibilities of Feminist Quantum Thinking. In: *Rhizomes. Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*. (Special) Issues 30: §3.

⁷⁵ Barad 2007:93.

semantic) boundaries are constituted. The dynamics is agency. Agency is not an attribute but the ongoing reconfigurings of the world. The universe is agential intra-activity in its becoming.⁷⁶

Returning to the singing self, these words are being translated into and opening of the psychosomatic body,⁷⁷ as a way of an ongoing breathing in and out, a receiving of air while in the same movement giving and (re)turning sound as both *vocality* and *voicing*, creating materialized vocal meaning; and in the same breathing movement allowing an entangling of voicing through thinking; not as two specifically separate practices but as a *sympoietical* playing – here returning to Haraway’s term – and moving as part of the same spacetime-mattering. In the end, every breath is a result of all breaths already taken, and the criticality occurs through every dynamic form of questioning. It all becomes an unfolding of a drama that includes sensitivity towards self as much as towards others; it becomes a way of caring for every impulse, every wonderful awakening and revelation performed as a gasping for air; it happens when touch cannot be avoided, and when the mystery shows itself as both *knowing* and *unknowing*.

Cutting Together-Apart

Diffraction/intra-action – cutting together-apart (one move) in the (re)configuring of spacetime-mattering; differencing/differing/différance⁷⁸

A diffractive methodology isn’t about linear and continuous moving in a certain direction, but rather a non-linear nonbinary process involving both indeterminacy and determinacy. Thus, from a psycho-physical perspective of voicing-as-diffractive method, the term *cutting together-apart* becomes apparent when a break occurs; an interruption in a movement causes time and space to actively ‘freeze’ and continue to vibrate; a letting go of a jaw; a sudden opening up in *wonder*, allowing for air to fill every possible space in the body and the self. This kind of *breaking* of a rhythm is not about ending a process, but rather in the midst of breaking, opening up for new possible vocal and thinking reconfigurings, and letting self move into new directions. Barad continues:

⁷⁶ Ibid.:141.

⁷⁷ For further reading on *voicing* as a diffractive method see Belgrano, E. L. 2016, 2018, 2019; Laasonen Belgrano, E. 2020; Laasonen Belgrano E. et al. forthcoming 2024; Laasonen Belgrano, E. & M. D. Price Forthcoming 2024; Uehara M. & E. Laasonen Belgrano 2020.

⁷⁸ Barad 2018:4.

The crucial point is that the apparatus enacts an agential cut – a resolution of the ontological indeterminacy – *within* the phenomenon, and *agential separability* – *the agentially enacted material condition of exteriority-within-phenomena* – *provides the condition for the possibility of objectivity.* ⁷⁹

In other words, this cutting is creating a way to let objectivity happen dynamically, as part of a curious search for mattering and meaning as togetherness. A breaking becomes completely necessary from any meaning to step forth and find its new shape. In a voicing praxis this can be understood as a created momentum while breathing *with* and *as* air, a holding back on air pressure, and perhaps a mental opening inside the facial cavity as a preparation from a new tone to be produced. The cutting becomes playful in its alertness towards the uncertainty involved in the moment yet to come. The cutting is a playing with previous and future moments while knowing that nothing is safe and all is at risk. This cutting together-apart can be understood as a critical reading of a paradoxical movement. A cutting together-apart is and becomes an entering of spacetime, while ready to stop in the middle of a leap-of-flight in order to ask questions and to become even more attentive to answers one never would expect. I suggest throughout my vocal research that such a cutting together-apart can be understood as an encounter with God.

Engaged Theology: A (Re)Configuring of WONDERING as Systematic Theology

In the fallenness there can never be rational comprehension of God as one or and multiple: our rationality deals only with imagined unities, defined fields, intelligible grids, and systems. It is a rationality that determines and is determinative in order to mask the question put by God ‘Where are you?’ Ours is a fallen rationality that has to be taught how to reason aright. [...] What is important is the engagement; the system is secondary and only the diffracted effect of Christ as Logos. The rhetoric facilitates that engagement, that provisionality. In provisionality lies possibility, the depth of all that is or might be possible, the creative openness that is the nearest human being comes to freedom.⁸⁰

There are many aspects jumping out of this quotation, in which Ward somehow defines the complexity of what he calls engaged systematic theology. I *cut* this quote *together-apart*, *reading* it *diffractively* in a state of *wonder* knowing that nothing is known and certain, but that my questions always are relevant. And what I hear prompts me as a reader to look at the

⁷⁹ Barad 2007:175.

⁸⁰ Ward 2016:290.

question *Where are you?* from beyond familiar ways of reasoning rationally. Every thought moving through me becomes an engaged *cutting within* a movement of reasoning. *Christ as Logos* as systematic searching, asking, thinking and tasting gives rise to a desire to learn, to move, and to yearn for knowing what I know is meant never to be fully learnt, but always continuously searched for. The system is becoming a diffracted resulting effect, because of the mattering mantra and the forming in which I ir/rationally move around. And this *moving around* is the way I apply words, movements, vocality, philosophizing, and a willingness to further explore the possibilities of performative theological strategies and methods developed through vocal artistic research.⁸¹

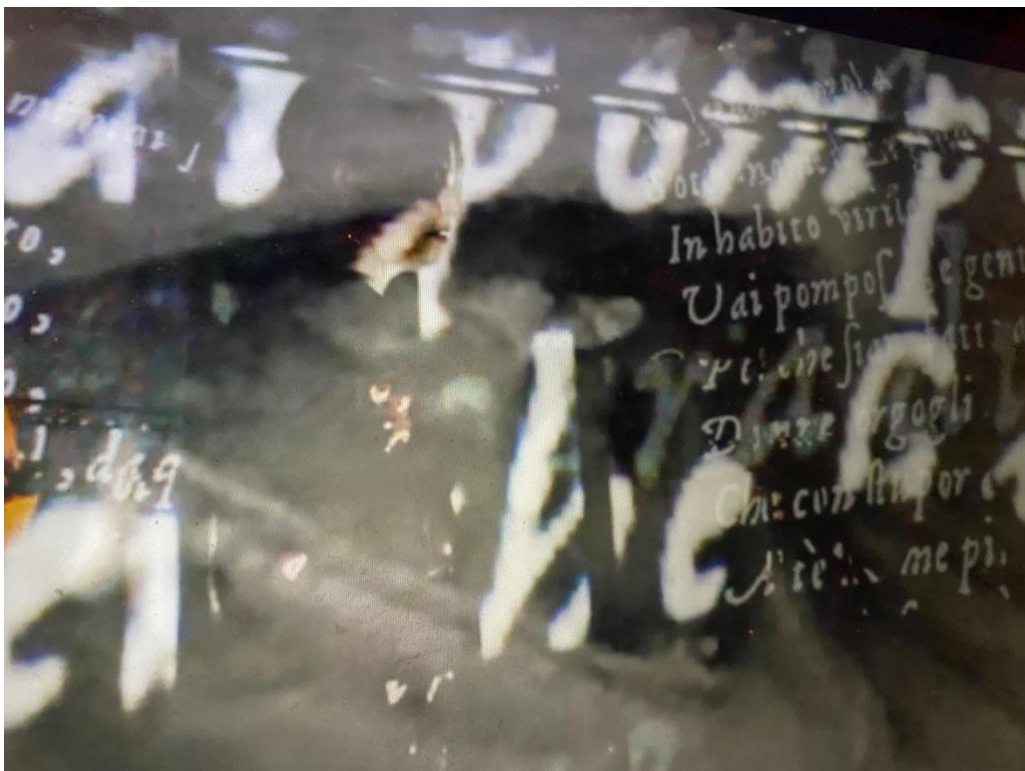
Ward invites me into his cathedral where he also speaks of “theology as prayer”.⁸² I accept his invitation promising that I am ready to explore *Voicing-as-Performative-Theology* - a diffractive method serving as a specific engaging performative theological approach. And just like I did step inside one single fragmented quote of Ward, I am now preparing myself for a *diffractive-‘stepping-in’-as-reading* of more fragmented words of Ward, *through* more fragmented words of Fischer-Lichte, and beyond – as promised at the very beginning of this thesis.

⁸¹ For some key publications aiming at defining the field of performative art, feminist new materialisms and artistic research (and of course many more than these): Norbakken, B. Fourthcoming 2024. “Grensland - i stemmen”, *Research Catalogue*. doct. diss. Tromsø: UiT Norges arktiske universitet - Norges Musikkhøgskole; Rosiek, J. 2018. “Art, Agency, and Inquiry: Making Connections between New Materialism and Contemporary Pragmatism in Arts-Based Research.” In: *Arts-Based Research in Education: Foundations for Practice, Second Edition*, edited by M. Cahnmann-Taylor and R. Siegesmund, 32–47. New York: Routledge; Magnat, V. 2019. *The Performative Power of Vocality*. Kindle edition. New York: Routledge; Bolt, B. 2004. *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*. London: I.B. Tauris; Borgdorff, H. 2008. “Artistic Research and Academia: An Uneasy Relationship”. *Autonomi och egenart: konstnärlig forskning söker identitet*. Ed: T. Lind. Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet, 82–97.

⁸² Ward 2016:290.

PART II

BEGINNING as CUTTING TOGETHER-APART



Reading Guidance for Part II

In the following part, fragmented words and texts have been assembled, structured and carefully curated according to Barad's "the methodology of diffraction/constellation", performed in a number of her publications.⁸³ As a voice practitioner and theologian, I have created my own diffractive *voicing* method – which allows for the active psycho-somatic experience of voicing to be entangled with the experiencing of reading - inspired by her acting with words, which she describes as follow:

In engaging with the methodology of diffraction/constellation, time and again I found myself overcome by the multitudinous patternings that came to the fore while tracing the flashes, lightning up intermittently here and there, watching the configurations crystallize and then rearrange. I found myself taken in by the configurations and felt amazed as each one expanded, shifted and reconstellated again; the project felt like it would burst under the pressure, as it kept expanding in more and more directions.⁸⁴

Each fragment by different authors has on purpose been left anonymous in the main text to maintain a continuous flow through words and in the readers meaning-making-process, while footnotes allow for anyone to trace their origins later on. I have chosen to follow this path in order to avoid any hierarchies between authors, and instead allowing each fragment to do its own work of mattering in relation to other words and texts, including the readers own thinking. In this way a community of words have become a congregation of shared meaning-making.

⁸³ Barad 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2017.

⁸⁴ Barad 2017:76.

FRAGMENT II

Leaning my head onto the wood. Not alone. Surrounded. Part of a congregation. Listening to silence. And to the words - spoken as in prayer - by the priest. Listening to the room. The large room with objects telling: believe. Only believe.

Our Lord Jesus Christ [...] took the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples and said, Take; eat; this is my body, given for you.

Opening my mouth. Ready. Ready to taste. His body inside. Gratefulness filling. The sound of breaking disrupts the vacuum which is never what it seems. Sharing. A yearning is performed through here and now. Intra. As part of. The cutting of bread. As part of a movement. Delicate gestures, as if dancing without moving. Carefully taking. Touching. His body. Given. To you.

In the same way, also, He took the cup [...] and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them saying, 'Drink of it all of you. This cup is the New Testament in My Blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Thirst for the Mystery. Which cannot be explained, but felt and sensed.
Growing. Spiraling upwards. Downwards. Giving life. Allowing. Connecting.
Fluidity as blood. As wine. As voice.

Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.

Thy Will Be Done...

We enter the cathedral. It's the mother church of the diocese. The air is cool, the shadows deep and in the silence sound reverberate. I believe in God. Who is God or this God? What does this appellation signify? What is this God? How do we learn to use words in this way and a name like this? How do we invent the literary genres that disseminates these words, this naming? The word God softly implodes, becoming meaningless in its density, its fragrance. Its meaning opens and closes, vibrates like a vast diaphanous forcefield that enfolds this place with its elevations, tall curved arches and attenuated sight-lines. It draws us into its circulations making of this space a heterotopia: a different kind of space.⁸⁵

Through its atmosphere, the entering subject experiences space and its things as emphatically present. Not only do they appear in their primary or secondary qualities, they also intrude on and penetrate the perceiving subject's body and surround it atmospherically.⁸⁶

“Vault after vault” keep “open[ing] endlessly”.⁸⁷ Inside. And in each vault a zillion questions keep looking at me. Poking me. Tickling me. My jaw drops... from its hooks on each side of my face. And the soft palate is higher than ever behind my nasal cavity. Neck grows long and wide, and head is keeping a direction forward and upward. A memory of fingers carefully touching my forehead as well as on the very lower part of my spine. Under my armpits. Lifting my upper body up... up... up... and legs drop deeper and deeper into the ground. Finding the root system.⁸⁸ Limb by limb. Letter by letter. Far, far, down below my feet. Reminding me that

⁸⁵ Ward 2016:3.

⁸⁶ Fischer-Lichte 2008: 116.

⁸⁷ Fragmented quotation from Tomas Tranströmer's poem *Romanesque Arches* (*Romanska bågar*, my translation) from the collection *För levande och döda* (1989).

⁸⁸ The Hebrew root system of letters surrounds my own limbs and flesh; expanding one by one. Each letter engaging and entangling into words made out of three letters, where vowels may shift around and thus creating different words known through imaginations and associations. It's a playful game – reading ancient Hebrew. Allowing for imaginations to grow into sacred un/certain contents. Chanting in Hebrew turns into new dimension where more symbols relating to the roots, sounds, and to letters may be assembled into sounding slides and emphasizing. It is a playful game – chanting and reading ancient Hebrew. A playful game in need of engagement and perhaps even in believing: “I believe in the writer's mission. He receives it from the word, which carries its suffering and its hope within it. He questions the words, which question him. The initiative is shared, as if spontaneous. Being helpful to them (in using them) he gives a deep sense to his life and to theirs, from which his own has sprung”. (Jabès, E. *The Book of Questions. Volume I*. Middleton Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press. 59.)

in between fingers, feet and ribs, spaces in between vertebra after vertebra keep opening endlessly. “Vault after vault”. There is a sensation of becoming longer. Bodily sensation within. A cathedral within. Skin and muscles being walls; constructions becoming wider. Filling with air. Air finding its way into all cavities of face, head, lungs, allowing muscles and every part of the body to expand. To grow. To live. Trembling. Vibrating. A cathedral within a cathedral within a cathedral... endlessly opening...

When God began to create heaven and earth, and the earth then was welter
and waste and darkness over the deep⁸⁹

Who is this God, whose breath finds its way into the self I become when entering t/his cathedral? When becoming the cathedral as a somatic, living entity? I carefully follow the words of my companions – the writers of theology and performance. My body becomes the space as well as the cathedral where words are hanging as alter pieces and icons.⁹⁰ Everything inside me – words as much as bodily physical structures align with what I read and hear. Allowing as many questions as possible to step forth. Do I have a choice to close any acts or symbols outside? I guess I do have the choice to close off the sensuous observer. But for what reason would I close out parts of self from learning, asking, searching, and drifting along with God’s breath, which keeps making itself known all around the different kinds of spaces in which we now have become part? Body has its right as much as head and soul. They connect. Entangle. Intra-actively.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Alter 2019. I:11.

⁹⁰ I lean my face close to his, as he raises his whole body close to mine. Cheek to cheek, nothing else can be the same. I look at the icon in front of me, and I cannot separate my eyes from his. “Bodies [...] are exposed, vulnerable and mobile; they are sites of fantasy as much as intimacy, distance and proximity. As bodies relate, they flow into and out of each other, they desire each other, and they come to know each other, without dissolving difference and distance into identity. The touch of flesh is also the transmission of faith and the creation of new possible selves. It is as bodies that we know ourselves, each other, and God.” (On-line exposition: Someone Touched Me, quoting Ward, G. through Tonstad, L. M. 2018:111-120. In Tell Laasonen Belgrano, E. and M. D. Price. 2023. “No Self Can Tell”, *Research Catalogue*. <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/980511/1777381/3558/175> [accessed 30/12/2023].

⁹¹ “When two hands touch, there is a sensuality of the flesh, an exchange of warmth, a feeling of pressure, of presence, a proximity of otherness that brings the other nearly as close as oneself. Perhaps closer. And if the two hands belong to one person, might this not enliven an uncanny sense of the otherness of the self, a literal holding oneself at a distance in the sensation

and God's breath hovering over the waters ⁹²

Breathing. Whispering. Hovering. Slowly becoming sound. Cared for within⁹³ while growing into an expiration and further into a tone. Not defined, but coming from behind my heart, from lungs, passing chords that can never be totally ignorant of the other. Chords embracing. Chords letting go. Remembering both closeness and distance. Dancing sounding chords.⁹⁴ Muscles as any other parts of the sounding body. Created as an image of God.

God said 'let there be light'⁹⁵

of contact, the greeting of the stranger within? So much happens in a touch. An infinity of other – other beings, other spaces, other times – are aroused.” (Barad, K. 2012c.);

“Touch is an orientation towards being incarnate. Even the touch involved in violence towards, in abuse of, oneself or the other is a call for love, a recognition of its absence- to cut oneself is an attempt to attain some recognition of an embodiment that seems constantly to be under threat of disappearing. It is the mark of the wish to feel again; the recognition of being in a frozen state, without desire” (Ward, G. 2005. *Christ and Culture. Challenges in Contemporary Theology*. Cambridge: Blackwell.)

⁹² Alter 2019, I:11.; “And darkness remains over the faces of *tehom*: the deep, salt water, chaos, depth itself. Out there. In here. [...] The darksome deep wears so many denigrated faces: formless monsters, maternal hysteria, pagan temptation, dark hoards, caves of horror, contaminating hybrids, miscegenation and sexual confusion. Queer theories, groundless relativisms, narcissistic mysticism. The collapse of difference. Excess, madness, evil. Death. Amidst the aura of badness that shades into nothingness, how can we rethink the darkness of beginnings?” (Keller, C. 2003: xvi).

⁹³ “Touch which lies invisible in everything, including seeing. Touch which will remain hidden in what is most tactile in it. And which will want to impose borders in order to be forgotten in what it illuminates beyond the appearing of forms. Touch which allows turning back to oneself, in the dwelling of an intimate light. but which also goes to encounter the other, illuminated-illuminating, over-flowing one's own world in order to taste another brightness. In order to give and to receive what can enlighten mortals on their path.”(Irigary, L. *The Way of Love*. London & New York: Continuum:174).

⁹⁴ “It is a trans-human performance, a method for allowing the space and material between the contributors to “endlessly open [...] to a variety of possible and impossible reconfigurings” (Hinton, P. 2013:182, In: Laasonen Belgrano, E. & M. D. Price. 2022. “Letting NOTHING do itself”, *Research Catalogue*.

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1516617/1516618/0/0> [accessed 30/12/2023])

⁹⁵ Alter 2019, I:11; “Right there in the beginning, right at the mythic foundation of the western world, there where we expect to hear the Word assert its original omnipotence – was installed a peculiar gap. A churning, complicating darkness was wedged right between two verses which everyone knows with indelible certainty: between ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and earth’ and ‘God said [...]’” (Keller, C. 2003: 9).

Flickering sound. Kept alive by a constant expiration. Vibrating with the interior of the cathedral. With God's breath. As God's breath. Shedding light on the walls. With the walls. Attracting echo to resonate. Converse. Make visible. And audible. What was not even thought of just before. Ideas emerge.⁹⁶ Visions as reflective lights. New forms becoming visible. New answers. New echoes. New ways of perceiving divinity. From within as much as from without. And Self is there. In between.

'Sphere of presence' [...] refers to a specific mode of presence pertaining to things. [...] as the 'ecstasy of things', or the spatial manner in which a thing appears present to a perceiver. Not only the thing's colors, odors, or sounds – its secondary qualities – are thought of as ecstasies but also its primary qualities such as its form. [...] Form transforms space. [...] In their state of ecstasy, things have an immense effect on anyone perceiving because they appear as particularly present. Hence the term ecstasy does not mean they appear quite the same as presence. While ecstasy corresponds to presence not only in its weak but also in its strong form, presence concerns the energetic processes between people; it is only somewhat possible to attribute to things an energy generated by them. Yet something emanates from them which is distinct from the visual and aural perceptions of a person, which can nevertheless be physically experienced when seeing or hearing that thing; something, which pours itself out into the performative space between the thing and the perceiving subject – a specific atmosphere. Something similar happens to space. When the architectural-geometric turns into the performative space, its so-called primary qualities – i.e. its dimensions and volume - can be sensed and begin to affect the perceiving subject.⁹⁷

A thing being a form, becoming meaning. Becoming a letter like דבר (*dvr*, meaning letter, or thing in Hebrew.) Symbols connecting as bodies into mattering movement. Matter as objects in motion. Mattering as meaning-moving. Just like thoughts and images – forms – shaped by a thinking mind. Just like voice. Breathing as sounding. Resonating. Questions pour themselves out into the air "between the thing and the perceiving subject".⁹⁸ Voicing being expired. Becoming presence. Thinking-voicing becoming an ecstatic silent-sounding search for

⁹⁶ "From such beginnings narratives and meanings emerge. A ticking clock, a blind-man's stick, stories of rainstorms, horses, and [adventures](#). Try it for yourself: invent any two meaningless phonemes and repeat them at any tempo or volume of your choosing. Past a certain level of repetition, differences make themselves know to us." Laasonen Belgrano, E. and M. D. Price. 2023. "No Self Can Tell", Research Catalogue. <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/980511/1326471/0/0> [accessed 30/12/2023]

⁹⁷ Fischer-Lichte 2008: 116.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

meaning.⁹⁹ Words re-turning to Self as things, sound and images. Returning to the perceiving subject. A dance in between structures. In between sentences. And then, time to return to “I believe in God. Who is God or this God? What does this appellation signify? What is this God? How do we learn to use words in this way and a name like this?”¹⁰⁰ Filled with air, with *ruach* (in Hebrew: *air, spirit, breath, wind*) and indeed, within the cathedral-space of a mouth as well as in the church and in the body; Divinity:

opens and closes, vibrates like a vast diaphanous forcefield. [...]it is a holy space [...] And what is this that makes this space holy? How do we learn this holiness? How are we made holy? [...] There is some inherent quality to this place, difficult to define, that makes it holy – liturgies that are set aside from the routines of daily life, performances undertaken in, and expressions of, a belief in the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, services in which there is praise and worship offered, prayer said and blessings given, ministrations received, sacred scriptures read, the gospel preached, and a healing emanates. This is a place invested with care and value.¹⁰¹

Divinity becomes voicing. An act of searching for an internal *diaphanous forcefield*. Connecting blood, air, water, tears, space, rhythm, continuous breathing, control and gravity, a sensation of letting go as much as holding and consciously directing. Voicing is a ritual that happens and emerges in relation. Always part of inside and outside presence. Voicing is the spinal cord of the liturgical presence. Making every breath into a lamentation and a praise. Alternating keys. Ready to respond to coming dissonances. Voicing as an act of caring for the receiver and a carrier of meaning.

⁹⁹ ”Beginning with an abject suffering, the insolence which slyly persists grows once again—at first slowly, then—in a flash— reaches the wave of a happiness affirm against all reason.” (Bataille, G. 1954/1988. *Inner Experience*. New York: State University of New York Press: 80).

¹⁰⁰ Ward 2016:3.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Voicing as Incarnate Believing

The engagement incarnates, radically, by eliciting our participation physiologically, emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually. Every emotion has a behavioural effect, an autonomic effect and a hormonal effect. An engaged systematic theology must begin with, and continually return to, critical reflections upon the multi-affective and embodied pedagogy. The learning is complex and ongoing.¹⁰²

In the process of shaping vocal sound there is no way back. Sound cannot be brought back and hidden away. It is out there in the face of anything outside of the vocal body. And voices are touching deep inside, in the broadest sense. Patterns appearing through engagement – connecting inside and outside - becoming experiences that help a voicing being to create an engaged system of embodied memories. A method takes shape, as soon as vocal movement emerges as assembled knowledge. The pedagogy is based on a deep trust to let voice become sound. And trust in its turn creates a sensation of daring to believe. Believing in possibilities of what may come from a sounding self, which is always depending on the other. May it be space, time, air, ground, spirit, God. Voicing engages reflective sounding, diffractive encountering, and psychophysical belonging. There is no prior or after in relation to *the art of voicing*. There is no beginning and no end. There is no reason and unreason. There are no neatly organized divisions within a voice. Not until thoughts begin to assist, to engage, to connect and arrange vocal sound into vocal awareness. I believe in God. The statement is a search. Believing as a voicing process. I believe in God. The spoken words are finding space within the growing body. And there is a growing strength shaping into a spiral of glories. Praising while telling: don't be afraid. Words of angels. And fear from sounding is a way of holding back. Air. Motion. Emotions. Limbs.

In his sermon 213, preached to those about to receive baptism, Augustine advises: 'First believe, then understand.'¹⁰³

This comment from Augustine causes human reasoning to react: don't I need to know it all before believing? Should I not first be able to make sense of that which makes believing possible? Should unreason be my guide? Is not reason what one should aim for? Or at least,

¹⁰² Ward 2016:8-9.

¹⁰³ Ibid.: 11.

allowing reason and unreason to lead together? Making sense and meaning of the unknown since the known is what we have struggled with and what we continue to struggle with:

Although there was ‘flexibility of usage’ and fluidity of credal formulations’, the ‘Nicene’ Creed as adopted in Chalcedon, did articulate Trinitarian relations through a series of technical theological terms: the Son as eternally begotten or generated from the Father and being of one substance with him, the Spirit was defined as proceeding. The Spirit still swings loosely from this relationship [...] But what is more significant for the future of systematic theology is that the articulation of the faith in the Nicene Creed was increasingly detached from its liturgical basis [...] the creed now becomes, more significantly, the framework for the theological exposition of the Christian faith.¹⁰⁴

Division emerges. From wordless Spirit to an articulation of God. From one side to the other. A separation between liturgy and an articulated framework. Two fields where knowing and feeling are placed in different corners. But in between human beings. Bodies and souls. Movement and encountering.

The process of making meaning in a performance reveals a number of significant similarities to the autopoietic feedback loop. As much as the individual participant co-determined the source of the performance and is in turn determined by it, so the receiving subject undergoes a similar experience in its individual generation of meaning. The subject determines the processes within a single order [...] and purposefully perceives and generates corresponding meanings. The subject is in turn determined by the processes whenever yielding to the associations, sensations, ideas, and thoughts, which suddenly appear in the consciousness and which they cannot prevent from appearing. In the process of generating meaning the subjects experience themselves actively as well as passively, neither as fully autonomous subjects nor totally at the mercy of inexplicable forces. This binary opposition simply does not hold any longer.¹⁰⁵

Fischer-Lichte refers to “the processes whenever yielding to the associations, sensations, ideas, and thoughts, which suddenly appear in the consciousness and which they cannot prevent from appearing” and making it simply clear that certain things cannot be divided into *either or*. Augustine’s words could then be understood as the act of believing, as an act of opening oneself

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.:15.

¹⁰⁵ Fischer-Lichte 2008: 155.

towards the experiences of unexpected inexplicable forces, and to remain in the feedback loop by answering the Other, rather than dismissing, based on a sudden judgement.

*The creeds provide us with a series of basic theological pieces to be interpreted but what is missing are the connections, how the pieces fit together, how they dovetail with or rub against each other.*¹⁰⁶

I begin to practice what Augustine is suggesting. Thinking first. I believe in God. Taking a breath. Letting go of all what I think I know for sure. Being in the inspiration. The act of receiving air. While asking: can I believe in the air filling my body? Can I refuse to breathe? Can I say: wait, are you clean enough for me to let you inside myself? But I know, that refusing to breathe is not an option. I need to be prepared to respond and to make breath as comfortable as possible. Finding ways.

*Even if some spectators ostensibly distance themselves from the performance by reclining in their seats in boredom or making loud scornful comments, they nonetheless continue to participate and influence the feedback loop's autopoiesis. As long as they remain in the auditorium they cannot not participate.*¹⁰⁷

If I consider God the least, I cannot not believe God is. Because I entered the thinking space of theological processing. God is because I think. What may differ individually is *how* the manifestations appear - for *how* one believes. I may think: and there is breath. And breath seems to be what incarnates thinking and writing. If I approach God in a dialogue, in prayer. And if I then - when believing- share my thinking about God in dialogue with others. Breathing is then making voice appear. Voicing blurs the fence between inside and outside in its very presence. *Voicing* as process is, I would claim, Ward's missing connection between binary oppositions of any kind: what is and what isn't – always both. Both spirit and word. Both soul and body. Connecting that which is not articulated, with the articulated. Voicing has the potential to dis/connecting in the same moment. Being part of vocal expression and voicing as praxis, the Spirit carries its own strength - both threatening and creating material order through its uncanny presence of being fluid.

¹⁰⁶ Ward 2016:14.

¹⁰⁷ Fischer-Lichte 2008: 155.

Performative Spatiality

The creed Cyril taught was not the Nicene creed even in the form it was given at the council, but it was close. The creed itself was not written down. It was to be memorized and internalized [...] It was not a matter of simply imparting knowledge, but participating in an ongoing understanding of the teachings of the faith through the practice of that faith – that is enfolding one's experience of the world within the tenets of its teaching: being formed in and by Christ. Cyril's lectures on the creed were first given as orations [...] They were delivered on or close to the site of Golgatha [...] Place mattered (literally) – and what it mattered or materialized was holiness. Jerusalem [...] was a place of theological importance. [...] Time zones crossed and recrossed as they bent into each other [...] it was an intensification of the holy. It was a site of God's presence, of sacramental and ontological value¹⁰⁸. A stargate, if you will.¹⁰⁹

Spatiality [...] is transitory and fleeting. It does not exist before, beyond, or even after the performance but emerges in and through it [...] as do corporality and tonality. As such spatiality needs to be distinguished from space in which it occurs.

First, the space in which a performance takes place represents an architectural-geometric space that pre-dates the performance and endures after it has ended. [...] the space contains what takes place inside it, leaving it undisturbed in its basic attributes. [...] In contrast, the space in which a performance occurs can be regarded as a performative space. It opens special possibilities for the relationship between actors and spectators and for the movement and perception. [...] Every movement of people, objects, light, and every noise can transform this unstable and fluctuating space.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ A lesson in the *Shadows of Death* was planned and took place between 9-11 September 2023. A small group of performance philosophers gathered at the Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem. Aim: To investigate the *Art of Lamentation* through a musical manuscript of Michel Lambert's *Léçons de Ténèbres*, dated c. 1660 and through the biblical poetry from the Book of Lamentations (איכה) dated 586 BCE. A number of tombs were visited and explored through performance acts. And here, an open spacetime narrative entangles inside the cathedral of the Tomb of Christ – *The Holy Sepulchre*, through research of *Lessons in Shadows of Death* (2023 AD) reconfigured through Cyril of Jerusalem's *Lessons of the Mystery* (300 AD), and written down in this thesis after 7 October 2023 AD, when the war between Hamas and Israel had become a fact leading to trauma and death on all sides.

¹⁰⁹ Ward 2016: 26-27.

¹¹⁰ Fischer-Lichte 2008:107.

Our morning started early, at six am. We left base camp and moved toward the old city, entering through the New Gate. Walking in silence. Sunday morning. Attentive to a city slowly awakening. Two of the main religions had moved out of their weekend rests, the third one rising with the sun. Two orthodox priests moving in a decisive tempo right in front. Our little group following in their shadows. Our goal was the tomb of Christ.

Every step has become part of our mission. To try to understand the way grief and mourning moves in a community of spiritual presence. Some in our little group would not call themselves believers, but rather having the experience of being brought up in a Christian community; some of us were devoted Christians; all of us shared an interest in the process involved in the art of grieving.

*The performative space is characterized by that very possibility of being in use in unintended ways, even if participants considered such an unpredictable use inappropriate and infuriating*¹¹¹

We decided to move onto the roof of the church as a very beginning of sensing the space. A small door to the right took us into a narrow path of stairs and rooms where people in white seemed to have created their homes. Some were on their knees, others fully stretched out or curled in positions of sleeping. Some fully covered with thin white textiles. A continuous murmuring embraced us while we moved through an atmosphere that could not easily be labeled as a religious service, but rather described in its blurriness, including a sensation of ecstatic ritual, and an everyday living through spiritual presence. We walked quietly; carefully trying not to step on any human limbs or making “inappropriate or infuriating” noise. Yet, our presence could of course not be totally ignored. It was instead as if our presence added to the very spatial sacredness. Our bodies moving right through the intense recitation of sound. We were somehow noticed and accepted in our strangeness. Our presence had entered the liturgical script. As if it was pre-decided in our absence, and now, we played our parts in the performative score. We were co-players in a performance, without knowing anything in advance.

Cyril's teaching of the faith was conducted within the church. Material space - built with magnificence by Constantine and housing both Golgatha and the Resurrection tomb. It was a place where the physical bodies of the

¹¹¹ *ibid.*:108.

*communicants, the city as a civic and military corporation, the Eucharist and the theological body of Christ overlapped and interwove.*¹¹²

Our bodies materialized through the sacred vocalization happening around us. Everything seemed bendable. Ourselves included, since we no longer had a sense of knowing or understanding what was going on around us. Our steps were both bringing us forth, but also making our passing into momentary suspension. As if we could do nothing else than hold our breath. Closing eyes. And soaking into the “practices of prayer, and the liturgical participation”¹¹³ in which we had become embedded. We had become our own “teaching – mentally, spiritually and corporeally”.¹¹⁴

*Each lecture moves towards a concluding doxology and the engraving upon the heart of what is delivered is understood as foundational for a continuing [...] pedagogy.*¹¹⁵

At the top of the stairs a door brought us out into an open square, all made of stone, and above our heads a huge sky which dawn kept painting with continuously brighter nuances. A cage on a wall was the home of a bird. Cats kept watching us from their comfortably established beds of tranquility. All was waking in this outdoor silence. Slowly, slowly life was emerging.

Doctrine is a therapeutic operation upon the senses, the mind and the heart that facilitates the shift from Catechumen to Believer. ‘Thou art transplanted henceforth [...] among the spiritual... made partaker of the Holy Vine.’¹¹⁶

Healing. Learning. Pedagogy through experience. Being taking over by presence. Brain washed. Captivated. Taken. Filled. Overwhelmed by the unknown, and yet reassured by the presence of something unforeseen.¹¹⁷

¹¹² *ibid.*: 26

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*: 26-27.

¹¹⁷ *Lesson Aleph*. In: Laasonen Belgrano et al. 2023. ‘LESSONS in the SHADOWS of DEATH’, *Research Catalogue* (2023).

(Re)Turning Towards

Settling on the floor in the small Chapel of Nicodemus inside the *Holy Sepulchre*, an awareness penetrates the body. Space becoming conscious to the participant: sound from outside the chapel of an ongoing Catholic mass; Coptic recitation going on in another part of the church; a chair in the room - according to the legend – being the chair of Constantine I's mother, St. Helen, from around 300 AD; heavy stone walls shaped in an embracing circle, leading into the tomb of Nicodemus. This time we are preparing ourselves; finding our places. Making ourselves at home, each one in its own conscious sphere. While allowing space to enter my body, lines are dissolved between self and no-self.

Cyril prepares them for the salus, the salvation, the healing, that is to take place. [...] Lecture II concerns [...] 'turning towards' [...] 'an initial step towards the refashioning of the soul' because the faithful practice their faith through imitation ... [and] engage the reasoning faculties of the soul and thus shape the inner man.' As stories received and memorized, they aid the shaping of desire and prepare the heart [...] to experience the sacramental in which the physical is recognized as also spiritual, the temporal as also eternal. ¹¹⁸

The liminal state results from the ostensible contradiction between actively participating in a performance – from sensing the circulating energy physically to joining the action on stage – while experiencing the elusiveness of the entire event. The spectators remain on the threshold for the duration of the performance. Their position is never fixed; they do not control the performance but their influence can be felt nonetheless. The audience constantly oscillates between these various states, ultimately enabled, defined, and triggered by the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators. ¹¹⁹

In the process of 'turning towards', sight and senses are opening. As in the praxis of voicing this process does not limit itself to seeing with eyes. Seeing becomes synonymous with opening self toward the unknown. Of connecting sound with stones, with wood, with incense, with history, with legends, with stories, with bodies, with ground, with heart, with breath, and so on. Breathing in becomes a 'turning towards' a psycho-physical-spiritual encounter, leading to an expiration, while contributing to a continuing participation of liveness. Voicing becomes a manifestation of sounding co-presence.

<https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1926258/2261615/0/0> (accessed 31/12/2023).

¹¹⁸ Ibid.:27.

¹¹⁹ Fischer-Lichte 2008: 67.

*Collective life is not born from individual life, but it is, on the contrary, the second which is born from the first. It is on this condition alone that... personal individuality... has been able to be formed and enlarged without disintegrating society.*¹²⁰

A voice is one and more than one. A voice is individual and communal. A voice is an identity identified among others. A voice is a growing sense of participation. Even if one is left alone. This voice, being the breathing-out of a divine sense of breathing-in; an experience of care without knowing. Reminding self how bending of perspective corresponds to turning towards. The bending towards as looking inside as well as outside of time and space.

*When the performative turn led to the transgression and blurring of boundaries between art and non-art, between the aesthetic and the political, the debate about a community of actors and spectators was rekindled. [...] Through the creation of communities out of actors and spectators, participants were able to reconnect with [...] repressed experiences, thus initiating processes of transformation. Theatres [...] approached their work through the lens of ritual. [...] they were convinced that communities emerged when groups collectively performed a ritual.*¹²¹

As when passing the community of white dressed believers on the path onto the roof of the *Holy Sepulchre*, our little group of *academic seekers* brought their various *shared communal* experiences into the Chapel of Nicodemus. A new sense of communal belonging emerged. And here something flashes up. Breaks in and cuts open, together-apart. Not only depending on the spacetime we shared at that particular moment, but because we had during a few days experienced collectively performed rituals of grief. Every ritual counted towards a new ‘(re)turning’ to even stronger communal ties. A repeating of visiting different tombs brought us as individuals together into a common praxis of creating awareness, each one from his or her trauma. It was not only about learning something new individually, but definitely more like moving through communal learning. Lessons grew out of communal experiencing of spacetimes and thus, creating of coming-together-as-individual-learners.

[T]he pedagogy of godliness, consists of both ‘pious doctrines and virtuous practice’. One cannot be divorced from the other, for perfection lies in their dialogical operation: faith seeks understanding that greater faithfulness and deeper understanding will follow. Understanding is a flowing after, a training, a discipleship. It becomes clear that what Cyril is inaugurating and

¹²⁰ Fischer-Lichte quoting Emile Durkheim from 1964, *ibid.*:51.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*:52-53.

*creating is a pedagogical regime; an order, a discipline that educates and structures sensibilities through movements within the embodied soul. His rhetoric is performative and generative. Playing upon their imaginations he conjures not only descriptions of the eschatological state [...] what I call a communal desire; the shared affect of an emotional community. The desire is the key to the regime, it[s] operation and its success. [...] What is personally experienced is socially shared. [...] Sound circulates, enters those who are receptive, and shapes thoughts, imaginings, and feelings. [...] The pedagogical regime disciplines and reorientates the senses. [...] its telos is ethical life.*¹²²

¹²² Ward 2016: 28-29.

I here include a reflecting text by Mark D. Price - one of the *academic seekers* and co-PI for the artistic research project *Lessons in the Shadows* - written after the September 2023 visit to Jerusalem:

“The Christians like the Greek term, *exegesis*. Arabic speakers prefer the word *tafsir*, the *science of elucidation*. Hebrew, *peshet* – interpretation. And the pagan Hermes gives us hermeneutics. Some people find mythology more realistic than science. Nothing seems more realistic now than the myth of Samson, doling out his righteous wrath when deprived of his sight in Gaza. We visited the Palestinian zone and found there, like everywhere, people and traditions breaking together and breaking apart. Anna explained that many of the structures, - even the tower blocks - are built without planning permission or safety checks. Not even a ground survey, no proof that the foundations are halfway stable. The sonic architecture of the city is far worse.

Every city is an auditory rubbish heap but the air of Jerusalem is filthy with holiness. Not the bells or muezzins or the shofar – it is more to be heard in the everyday faith that sustains life in between what is formalised as worship. You can hear something sacred in the mechanical trash of traffic noise, in the innumerable air conditioners and fans, the percussive construction and demolition and reconstruction projects of which Anna said – “the only thing permanent here is temporary solutions”. How the hell can one *interpret* this without reducing it to the subjective myth of the already-known? How to stay open to perception and cognition without reducing it to a false re-cognition?

Liv was fascinated by a non-religious idea of liturgical performance as a way to heal broken communities. Rick by the philosophical importance of wounds. Elisabeth was translating the Book of Genesis as part of her Hebrew studies and fascinated by the symbolism of Adam's rib. Not any bone, but specifically the bone holding the whole breathing mechanism together, protecting the heart and making life possible. A broken rib can be agonizing – the ribcage is a connection of many structures and processes. At the same time, it is a whole, it binds together and supports most major organs. We were thinking and conversing and some of us praying and singing in ways which could not fail to change us, just two weeks before the atrocities which changed everything. The songs, conversations, Rick's reading and the subsequent discussion, the political polemic from our Palestinian guide, street interviews, all became entangled and inter-mixed. And paradoxically, some might say divinely, new significances emerged as much from all the seemingly random and *background* material as did from our group's planned sessions and from the religious rituals we observed. Significance emerged from the birdsong,

Voicing as Sound/Listen/ing

So then, *what* and *how* is the voice in the midst of this building of order and ‘pedagogical godliness’? What is the lesson, when Cyril “demonstrates a ‘concern for the motive power of the liturgy’ in which all senses are engaged”.¹²³

*Listening to and following the voice is part of an elaborate, theatrical, participative and profoundly theological pedagogy. What Cyril defines as the sound structure of the teaching in the way dogma is joined together systematically is of much lesser concern. The explicit teaching is governed by [...] that which cannot be spoken and cannot be known.*¹²⁴

Here voice leans into the unknown of the other side of the wall; the sounding of other branches, other liturgical variations; of other bodies, voices and cultures. It is a cacophony of sound, and spiritual energy, touching the chords with bodies, touching the souls of the listeners and co-(l)aborators. Sound as waves of ordered progression, transformed through intra-active engagement that both echoes, cuts and joins what has not been heard before. No matter how high or low the timbre, any and all genres or rhythms; any sound with a pure direction is valid. Theology-as-vocal-and-bodily-movement is praxical and additive. It serves the multidimensional presence of an unknown Godhead, that does not judge the way we can predict. Voicing-as-theology, as returned and reconfigured, appreciates any humble whispering as much as gracious joy and mourning of despair; the sound of voice is part of God’s self, and of what we need to trust together despite what is crumbling under our feet for reason of political power and crucifixion; a voice can never be silent, because it is part of God’s voice, of God’s calling.

*Imaginations are fired, liturgical movements are performed, and the world outside (its seasons, its history, light and darkness) is enfolded into the world inside, written on the body and formed by the heart.*¹²⁵

the police sirens, the silences, the noise and the chaos of the world which lives and breathes with and without us - whether or not we pre-judge it as significant.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.:29-30.

¹²⁵ Ibid.: 31.

Voicing can only grow from what has come from the outside of the body; from air, spirit, and divine, and no-yet- known intentions. These ‘means-whereby’ (a key term in Alexander Technique) demands even more than openness and more-than-activism. And when the ‘unknown’ enters self as body-mind, the materializing force called voicing needs to find its way towards any cells, walls and fluid passages. Voicing needs to let itself be turned around again and again; it needs to allow for pain to cut through solid marks and fields of knowing; it needs to switch from light to dark to light as one-in-a-moment-event; voicing needs to be in the presence of inspirations while already sounding the tears of loss from having departed from an explosive passion to another. It is the work of learning, where passions translate into gifts of newness, for breaking of understandings as much as healing and re-establishing lines of grace. Voice can beat both in major and minor – and even all in-between. Voicing is both knowing and feeling.

The focus of his pedagogy, this paideia, is that the sensed becomes the spiritual sensuous [...] The point of the structured theology [...] is to glorify the Lord, not to explain him. [...] His engaged systematics is oriented not primarily towards knowledge [though there will be understanding], because God is the Unsearchable and his work incomprehensible. Cyril’s engaged systematics is oriented towards a pastoral and liturgical pedagogy that finds its fulfilment in doxology. ¹²⁶

God did not just enter our world. He entered our words; the words that through which we compose our worlds. ¹²⁷

I turn to you, Lord, as a voice, nothing more than a praying voice. You hear. I talk. Explaining and singing to your honor, to your glory, asking for advice. Asking for your support. Talking when no one else is there to hear. It is a conversation. More meaningful than I imagined long ago. You teach me how to speak. How to use words, beyond explanation. You open me for wonder. I try to hold it in my hand. Your trust. I try to grasp your vocal care. Of course, it is in my imagination. And such an act of imagining, can it not be enough? Can it not be a relief, when all else is crumbling around me. The dialogue with you. Only with you. Who are all. Who are here. Who is me. As much as Other.

¹²⁶ Ibid.:32.

¹²⁷ Ibid.: 34.

Beginning and There is Voice

*As we enter the cathedral [...]*¹²⁸

In every part of the architectural body, voice is talking, singing, silencing, listening, yearning, making, calling, acting, longing, opening, wandering, praying, structuring, connecting, curating, advancing, placing, allocating, bursting open, wildening, widening, caressing, telling¹²⁹ that

The voice of the Lord echoes over the waters,
The God of Glories thunders,
The Lord is over the mighty waters,
The Voice is...¹³⁰

and it echoes continuously. Something indescribable yet both obvious and necessary. Voicing-as-theology-as-voicing:

is a communication, and it is concerned with the Christian faith [...], a presenting of that faith, a representation of that faith. But ambiguity, like water, begins to ripple around our feet [...] [I]s it making-present, mediating the divine, incarnating it among the secularities of the contemporary scene?¹³¹

¹²⁸ We were five women moving into the large church room. Darkness all around. We came to lament together. Singing and encountering each other in comfort. Lamenting all wounds on earth. Human and more-and-other-than-human. The falling on society. The falling of lives. The only light in the large church as the tree of candles. Darkness around outside. October. 2023. One voice searching for a place to grow. Another voice moving into the first, co-existing. Gasping for breath right at the same time.

Laasonen Belgrano, et al. 2023. "LESSONS in the SHADOWS of DEATH", *Research Catalogue*. <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1926258/1926259/0/0> [accessed 30/12/2023]

¹²⁹ Laasonen Belgrano 2025.

¹³⁰ And he spoke with the word: I am.

¹³¹ Ward 2016:157.

The question echoes inside the silent spacetime. In silence a deep listening occurs, to the sound of the Other. In between one voice and another. It cannot be anything else, since it has to do with communicating. Something is calling, asking for attention. Something is sounding. Calling for awareness. Even silently, voice is continuously becoming present in time as well as in space. God's voice speaks as an echoing emptiness. Creating and materializing presence, in which one is called upon to listen. And as a thinking-acting-listening- sounding entity the Other is invited to open its self as ears, as eyes, as all senses. Opening the self towards a calling of something that can be perceived as a discourse, in order to ask:

Is it a discourse **about** God (as an object), a discourse **in** God (because it participates in God's discourse of Himself), a discourse **from** God (who is its author and origin), or a discourse **to** God (as faith seeks its understanding in a pilgrimage towards salvation)?¹³²

or possibly even a discourse **through** God (closely related to the discourse in God, but not at all the same, since God must still at large be Unknown in its greatness, and unknown in the eyes and senses of human explanations, definitions, movement and mattering? Yet, appearing and emerging through more-than-any-vocality and vocal performance)?

As aural space, the performative space shifted permanently, breaking down pre-set limits and extending far beyond the architectural-geometric space in which the performance took place [...] A voice created all [...] types of materiality: corporality, spatiality, and tonality. The voice leaps from body and vibrates through space [...] sounds engage in a process that involves the entire body: it bends over, is contorted, or tenses up. [...] The listener concerned [...] in their bodily-being-in-the-world, which immediately affects the listener's own being-in-the-world. [...] Vocal expressions have mostly become indivisibly linked to language [...] it would accentuate and emphasize meaning, [...] it could further enforce its desired effect on the listener. [...] The voice had to serve the spoken word. Its sole purpose lay in facilitating the comprehension of the spoken words.¹³³

Begin, listen, trust in what you hear. Voicing-as-theological-method allowing for a "breaking down of pre-set limits and extending far beyond" (see quote above). This is not only *about*, *in* and *to*, but also a moving *through* and *as part of*.¹³⁴ Voice finds its space under the skin, the

¹³² Ibid.:156. Emphasizes as in original text.

¹³³ Fischer-Lichte 2008:125-126.

¹³⁴ Key words in diffractive terminology. Both indicating intra-acting entangled engagement.

armpits, lungs, and knee- and hip-joints. Air being voice and immediately becoming more than any other act: beginning again as thinking, vibrating, meaning-making. Transgressing through and through. Vault after vault. Invisibly penetrating cells and oxygen. Stems and arteries. Walls being touched, echoing through power, inhibiting, and in the same act reconfiguring the force of vocality. Vocality finds its ways, always, if not as sound, then as waves of seeing, touching, experiencing being in an increasing border/less world.¹³⁵ Voice becomes that which moves between heaven and earth. Spirit-in-between and all around; situated as a border/less horizon in its eternal spacetime. Words fall out of fingers and out of mouth, singing both separation and gathering.¹³⁶ That is the way it goes: living/dying not as two separated entities, but spoken with the knowledge that both need to exist while *becoming through* one another. Words materializing in both sound and ink. Always possibly more-than-one-can-ever-imagine. I am. I am as None. Still, I am. Here. Yes, here I am. Endless meaning. Meaning endlessly.

Voice and Language: Cutting Together-Apart

Language listens to the world. I listen with it. What I hear when I listen is a question, which is listening itself. The question often changes form, from silence to breathing to speaking to music to voices to visions to silence again. But that is my vocation. The trail it leaves, more often than not, is a text.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ "In the Borderlands / you are the battleground / where enemies are kin to each other; / you are at home, a stranger, / the border disputes have been settled / the volley of shots have shattered the truce / you are wounded, lost in action / dead, fighting back". (Anzalclúa, G. 1987. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters / Aunt Lute: 145.) In the moment she moves into her Borderland, she is no more. She is no more than any one else. She sounds. She acts. "Re-turning as a mode for intra-acting with diffraction". (Norbakken, B. 2024.). She is that struggling. She is all that. And Nothing. A Meditation. "Performing Nothingness. A vocal Meditation".(Laasonen Belgrano, E. and M. D. Price. 2023. "No Self Can Tell", *Research Catalogue* <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/980511/1040331/0/0>[accessed 30/12/2023])

¹³⁶ I open my body-mind and allow the psalm given by Jan-Arvid Hellström, to enter: the final verse ends with "for every breathe I receive is yours, you are in the midst of all" (*För varje andetag är ditt, du bor i livet mitt*. Swedish Psalm 798). This psalm entangles tender words about how all lives and dies, and yet, breath is always there, as God, in the midst. The melody comes from a traditional tune, holding on to a profound melancholic sound-scaping.

¹³⁷ Bringhurst R. 2007. *The Tree of Meaning*, Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint: 63. In: Ward 2016: 157.

Where is language and voice in a poem? What is the relation? Leaving a trail, being a text. Where then, has voice gone? There are no answers to these questions. Or rather, there are answers, actually many more than we can imagine. Ward tells us that “[l]anguage is a response to, a trial of, a call that is prior to it. It picks up the call and announces a vocation, but the call comes from somewhere deeper, hidden, and silent”.¹³⁸ So then, let us jump directly to song. Singing seems to respond to the silent absence of signs and obvious symbols. Hidden in the heart of a desiring human. An impossible force to be placed on a sheet in black ink. The singing chanting voice is wild in its flight; it is there and in the same moment as observed, it is nowhere to be found. It is spirit, sensed and unforgettable. Voice is equal to the presence of God’s breath, in the way it is felt; in the way it creates a momentary presence. It is communicating in its building, in its creating, in its composing, in its “poiesis”.¹³⁹ And as such, voice is creating language and it “informs us that the making of theology is creative and the creative is an ongoing process. Theology is a creative communication. It has to be, partly because in being lost, there is an active seeking, which contributes to communication partly because the object of such seeking is not readily available. [...] Theology would then begin with deep listening, [...] *ob audere* [...] ‘obedience’. A listening being the very edge of Love. On this edge we meet the man of prayer. A man who makes Theology his prayer. “Gregory Nazianzen, the fourth/fifth century ‘Cappadocian’ and, briefly, bishop of Constantinople, he was by temperament a recluse and man of prayer. His hundreds of poems and hymns often take the form of prayer: or, at least, they are directly addressed to God. They are highly personal works—often autobiographical—which reveal his trials and tribulations, his faith and theological meditations, his culture and tastes, his insightful psychological musings. Complex and inter-twined, entangled, and thus rather difficult to judge: but he chose to write them down, and intended them to be heard and read. We can assume this aimed at communication with lesser beings than God, and possibly also aimed at teaching. Thus, Gregory stands out as doing theology through prayer”.¹⁴⁰

Theological *poiesis* is not just a ‘second order’ reflection; as an activity of faith it does not simply operate in a realm distinct from holy teaching itself. And the danger of making too clear-cut a distinction between holy teaching and faith seeking understanding is the situation we have now where the task

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.:160.

¹⁴⁰ Harrison, C. 2015. *The Art of Listening in Early Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 207.

of dogmatics can be subcontracted to university departments of theology while the Church gets on with its ministry and teaching; a teaching that may or may not be informed by dogmatics. In the way we have institutionalized a split between theology as rational practice of faith, and the practices and work of the Church.¹⁴¹

Who knows, while living, the ingenerate God, / And Christ, the king who bans all mortal ills. / Once, out of pity for our hard-pressed race, / Freely conforming to the Father's will, / He changed his form, taking a mortal frame / Though he was God immortal, freeing us all From Tartarus's bondage by his blood. / Come now, refresh this soul of yours with words— / Pure, godly sayings from this sacred book; / Gaze here upon the servants of your Truth / Proclaiming life in voices echoing heaven!¹⁴²

A child is hanging immobile on top of an old fence door, to drink in the sun's evening playing until it fades away. [...] It is as if the child has been brought into a new world, rather than only observing it from afar.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Ward 2016:171.

¹⁴² Harrison 2015: 209.

¹⁴³ ”Ett barn hänger orörligt uppe på en gammal grind för att dricka in kvällens solspel tills det slocknar. [...] Det är snarare som om barnet hämtats in av en ny värld, än som om det endast betraktat den”, Fogelklou, E. 1958. *Form och strålning. Åskådningsfragment*. Stockholm: Albert Bonnier Förlag:11. (My own consciously 'unpoetic' translation to English, searching to stay with the original experience of every word).

PART III

CONCLUDING as BEGINNING



FRAGMENT III

God is in the breath I take
God is in breathing I receive
In the sound I hear calling

Being called
On call
Calling

entering Breath
entering God
entering Life
entering Death
entering Space
entering Time
moving through Grace

Opening Self in Wonder
Breathing through God

Beginning

as hovering
as breathing
as praying
as explaining
as describing
as whispering

voicing

Doing, Opening & Wondering

And here we are. The child, myself, and Ward. Inside the cathedral. And you, reader, too. All of us seeing and experiencing the spacetime differently from within; depending on the actions each of us are able to perform. We entered the cathedral - with open eyes and senses for what we would encounter - and now through every breath, we may continue to *do*, to *matter*, and to *open* our selves again and again to the *doings* happening all around; focusing “on the moments of interference between fields that are too often constituted as disciplinary distinct or, alternately, subordinated to the service of the other’s vantage point”.¹⁴⁴ It has become our entangled diffractive methods to allow learning, understanding, reading (the world), and perceiving to intra-actively being performed.

When I started this thesis project I did so because I saw the academic struggle in many individuals around me (students, priest candidates as well as ordained priests), all trying to find a language suitable to tell the im/possible and the complex situatedness when form and content are requested by the rules of religious and theological studies to remain separated as objects and subjects, at the same time as they naturally are part of one another. A struggle often connected to a spiritual awakening and desire for new ways of seeing situations. I saw a struggle among theologians, very similar to the struggle many artists find themselves engaged in when doing what has become the field of artistic research. I sat through years of seminars and discourses dealing with ‘methods’ and ‘results’ connected to tacit knowledge and wisdom (primarily among artists and medical practice-based researchers) calling for a greater academic understanding that lines between results and methods, theory and practice, doing and thinking is not that solid as some academic traditions would have liked it to appear. In these artistic research ‘higher seminars’ we often talked about artistic processes as practice-based, practice-led, research-as-practice, practice-as-research and so on. We often presented our work as

¹⁴⁴ Johnston, B. In: Merten 2021: 131.

entangled traces of what would eventually both become exhibitions, concerts and performances. Nothing clean. Nothing separated. Trans- and cross disciplinary explorations of performance philosophical enquiries. Entanglements. Yet always including critical thinking. Many theologians are struggling with similar questions and tasks as artistic researchers, especially those theologians that continue towards priesthood, and relational explorations in liturgy, pastoral care, hymnology, homiletics, and congregational activities. For me as a voice *and* a walking/moving voicing method in action, I wanted to share the experience of finding a suitable academic language through diffractive articulations and a methodology *as a practitioner*. In this thesis – emerging through the field of systematic theology - I was at first hesitating to let voicing step forth into the spotlights on stage. Instead, I wanted to focus on sharing how diffractive methodological terminology can be helpful to theologians, because of its inclusiveness as a *both-and* rather than *either-or* approach. Yet, voicing has been my only way to move to think and to do; voicing has grown through this thesis work, into a praxis of greater concern than what I at first expected. Voicing as a praxis most of us can relate to: we are bodies, we *are* voices (even if we don't think that we have voices) communicating in relation to all and nothing, meaning ourselves, our contexts, the world in which we live, all that has been created and will be in God's care. So this thesis has thus become a beginning of something which will continue to grow through all my *doings* as a priest, as an academic scholar, as a singer, as a voice, as a being – as an intra-acting individual in relation to God's doings.

Being both *voice* and a *voicing* method is all I know; a knowledge I tacitly apply in all the ways I open my instrument towards *an other*. It is both an art and wisdom that I learned little by little year after year, and took for granted until I realized that it had held important soft knowledge that had transformed all my ways of being. Voicing as a 'research method', holds secrets that cannot any longer be neglected as something less important than any scientific result. Voicing as a praxis-led method is a result of many years of rehearsing the art of calling, being on call, and being called. And only when I realized voicing-as-calling-as-a-method, only then did I hear the call that came through Nothing. This Nothing that I kept trying to perform through doctoral research (2006-2011). Eventually, I understood it was the voice inside me as much as around me – the voice of God. Impossible to know and yet known through touch and awesome wonders, this voice re-connected me both to the gospel of Christ and to the hovering sound of God's breath. I could in the end not ignore the sound of God's voice through the eyes of crisis when facing death in a close friend's singing. I could not ignore my own tuning into the sound

of the sea on a misty shore when the sun suddenly became a cross in the sky. I could not ignore the signs and symbols found while singing; signs being keys to the next sound and to the next; signs and letters becoming flesh *in* and *through* the people I met during the covid-pandemic, people who were scared of death and of facing the unknown. My artistic background and specifically the knowledge gained through searching for vocal nothingness prepared me for meeting the unknown through as much openness as possible. My artistic calling has become a calling for God, as much as God's calling for me. Voicing as mattering theological meaning-making has then – as suggested by theologian Carol Harrison - become a force “to listen, to pay attention, to think, to examine, [...] to weigh up different opinions, to see someone else's point of view, to assent or dissent - in short, to converse with Scripture”¹⁴⁵ or as she continues to tell:

the movement of attending from what is heard to attending to what it signifies depends upon an openness to its still unknowable, transcendent object. It is this characteristic openness of faith – what we have identified as a culture of tacit, literate listening in time [...] it is this, I would argue, that offers the key to the movement of ‘listening from’ to ‘listening to’ or from listening to hearing¹⁴⁶

and I will here continue to add: *to calling, to sounding, to voicing*.

Perhaps this *doing theology diffractively* – and in this case applying a method of voicing-as-diffractive-theology - can meet the thinking and questioning of theologian, priest and activist-performer Petra Carlsson:

God is back, globally and politically, but also in academic theology. Let us ask whether theology might just as well open its academic eyes to this presence and ‘let it loose’ through different forms of disobedient repetition, as a playful intellectual and even political undertaking?¹⁴⁷

We may also listen, read, and ponder together with literature scholar Birgit Mara Kaiser:

If practices of reading partake in spacetime-mattering, then they are also more radically productive of the world [...] than the self-assessment of a reader responding to a text. [This] might emphasize how such reading encounters

¹⁴⁵ Harrison, C. 2013. *The Art of Listening in Early Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 159.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.: 239-240.

¹⁴⁷ Carlsson Redell, P. 2012:165.

are indeed also ‘part of the large material configuration of the world’. [...] If world is intra-active, reading is too. [...] Thus, if it warrants saying, the term ‘politics’ in such a politics of reading does not reference a political agenda imposed on texts. Rather, it asks what *polis* inheres in a reading encounter, what *police* matters forth in each reading anew, in excess of the silent experience of our limits of understanding. [...] Concretely, it affirms that reading encounters as *producing* patterns and sites of experiencing the entanglement of the reader/author/text/world. [...] Reading [in this way] might retrain our habits of detachment and objectivity toward viscerally realizing what co-implication requires of ‘us’ with and for renewed *polis* of planetary co-in-habitation.¹⁴⁸

If voicing – as a diffractive method - can serve the theological demand when learning how to open, *how* to (re)configure, *how* to listen and *how* to hear, *how* to move as mattering theological discourse, then voicing will unconditionally happen as part of a desire to explore anew what is already old, to trust, and always coming back to the moment of a *wonderous opening*: of dropping the jaw in amazement, even for the tiniest of details; of letting light entering through the gaze of a child’s naïve love for drinking in the glories of the evening sun; of always asking questions – even the most childish and ridiculous ones, as an honest and passionate act of caring and loving to remain curious. Theologian and curator of art Dan Siedell points out that:

[t]he curator cares for works of art, through their preservation, presentation, and interpretation. But the curator expresses care not only for isolated objects and artifacts but also for these objects and artifacts in relationship. The curator works with multiples, assembling works in relation to others. Moreover, the curator cares not only for the artifacts but also for other human beings, with whom she shares these cared-for works through exhibitions, that is, a relational assemblage.¹⁴⁹

And what has been my hope of exposing throughout this thesis-project, are these very acts of curatorial mattering – meaning to critically connect unknown and known fragments into an ornamented image of possible wisdom and clues ready to be explored into infinity - as in diffractively working, sharing, caring, expressing, assembling, exhibiting etc., as key-movements to future theological explorations; and of accepting and cutting any moment together apart: “to repeat, parody and play with whatever comes to the fore as eternal, or as the

¹⁴⁸ Kaiser, B. M. 2021. In: Merten 2021: 46.

¹⁴⁹ Siedell, D. A. 2023. In: Bernier, R.R., & Smith, R.H. (Eds.). 2023:82.

truth of concrete experience – when reading and doing theology – in order to make room [...] for those realities, actual but unknown, unthinkable yet possible”¹⁵⁰ as answers to my research questions (which I now consciously repeat a third time):

- How and why is diffractive methodology a useful meaning-making tool for systematic analysis in theological research?
- How can diffractive methodology be explored, performed and further developed through theological research?
- How can *Voicing-as-Performative-Theology* – be developed into a useful meaning-making method applicable for systematic analysis in theological research?

I truly hope that this entire work has been able to *do* a response to these questions, with voicing as a specific theological method (making it visible also in its attempts to cutting together-apart the academic thesis format). I also do hope this performative text can inspire others to continue exploring how diffractive methodology may open up for creative entanglements of both old and new exegetical and systematic theological methods; becoming “a theology of entangled differences [unfolding] to life and more life, to greater complexity of interrelation and greater intensity of experience”,¹⁵¹ showing how cutting words, fact, or any things openly together-apart, may allow for a zillion more spacetimes to be (re)assembled anew; how cutting together-apart as a making and curating (as in ethically caring) of new patterns of knowing and of becoming acquainted, may allow for separateness to become part of jointness, as experiential ways of coming to know. Because this process can be materialized without an end. And I turn toward theologian Matz Hammarström who writes:

According to the prevalent metaphysics of separateness, the ontological separateness of observer and observed, of knower and known, is the very condition for objectivity. From this perspective it seems obvious that the possibility for objectivity is lost if the separateness is denied. But while objectivity according to a metaphysics of separateness demands ontological separateness between the subject and object of knowledge, objectivity according to a relational metaphysics is secured through agential separability, that is the possibility to separate the object from the agencies of observation as related parts of the phenomenon, produced or materialized by the apparatus.

¹⁵⁰ Carlsson Redell 2012:165.

¹⁵¹ Keller, C. 2017. *Intercarnations. Excercises in Theological Possibility*. New York: Fordham University Press: 204-205.

The terms of Hammarström's statement can themselves be interrogated and reconfigured into new and curious articulations and re-embedded in diffractive and performative theory. Nothing is simple. Nothing can fully be explained. The condition is to break open when encountering All and Nothing. As part of our mattering process we are always in the motions of breaking and joining intra-actively, embracing – even without knowing – a way of living from *doings* of a hand (יד in Hebrew, reminding us of the close relation to the word ידע as in *to know/experience*) full of grace and knowing, being a hand stretched out by God. Grace and love then become sincere vocal and psycho-physical acts of glory directed and overflowing towards both enemies and friends, heaven and earth, joy and sorrow, pain and relief. In voicing/praying-as-theology we are in this way relating to God's intra-acting voice as a paradoxical voice of All/Nothing, which lets us hover according to the will of *doing*¹⁵². Or as in the rabbinic tradition of relating playfully through divine words:

“What is light?” one of his disciples asked Reb. Abbani.

“In the book,” replied Reb Abbani, “there are unexpected large blank spaces. Words go there in couples, with one single exception: the name of the Lord. Light is in these lovers’ strength and desire.

“Consider the marvelous feat of the storyteller; to bring them so far away to give our eyes a chance.”

And Reb Hati: “The pages of the book are doors. Words go through them, driven by their impatience to regroup, to reach the end of the work, to be again transparent.”

“Ink fixes the memory of words to paper.”

“Light is in their absence, which you read.”¹⁵³

and in this absence, *Voicing-as-Performative/Diffractive-Theology* opens up as wondering, again and again: and this is collective, social, *more-than-me*. It cannot be the work of an individual ego since *No Self Can Tell*.¹⁵⁴ The *I* of the *I am* is an extended vocal instrument, an *us*. It is *we* as many voices/voicings who keep entering the cathedral.

¹⁵² Laasonen Belgrano and Price 2025

¹⁵³ Jabès 1963/1991:25.

¹⁵⁴ Laasonen Belgrano, E. Price, M.D. Price, “No Self Can Tell”, *Research Catalogue* (2023) <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/980511/988893/0/685> (accessed 01/01/2024)

Summarizing Thesis Project

With this text, its thinking and wordings, I have enjoyed the task of articulating a world of ideas encountered through years of performance studies and actively researching *how* vocal praxis can be applied as a research method as well as a source of relational wisdom and meaning-making, applicable in more or less any situation and context – since human inter/intra-actions are depending on embodied practices with reference to the fact that ‘no self can tell’. The over-all purpose has been to propose a relational approach through diffractive methodology, in this case performed with a specific aim to introduce and perform a diffractive reading of Graham Ward’s *Engaged Theology*, through Erika Fischer-Lichte’s *Performance Aesthetics*, through a *specific* diffractive method I am calling ***Voicing-as-Performative-Theology***.

Future research

Through this project - and concerning the specific performed method - I have learned that *Voice/Voicing* is an especially interesting topic to continue developing as part of a theological discourse, partly because of its paradoxical character. Voice both is and isn’t; it is heard, even while being silent; one cannot really *touch* a voice, but one can indeed *be touched* by a voice. There are more arguments which I won’t move deeper into right now, but these are indeed curious to continue exploring through theology-as-praxis. Currently theologians are exploring the presence of listening, hearing, silence, rhythm, embodiment, and vocality in theology, religious and spiritual studies and more than any of these now mentioned.¹⁵⁵ Blurring borders between theory and practice is also of a significant importance in academic research. It’s therefore highly relevant to continue asking and researching *how* voice and voicing can be understood, described, performed, and developed as part of a spiritual, ethical, curatorial and theological discourse. This is also a personal opinion that has grown out of the experience from being an artistic researcher and voice practitioner, now entering the role of priesthood. To become a priest involves different skills and aspects of performance praxis such as preaching, liturgy, teaching, pastoral counseling, and being a leader of a congregation. In every one of these tasks both body and voice are present as means-whereby I will appear in relation to any situation and context. It is therefore of importance to spend more time and space to investigate

¹⁵⁵ For example Eikelboom 2018, Harrison 2013, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2023, Ross 2014, 2018, Rivera 2015, Vigortsson Yngvesson 2019, 2022, 2024, Ward 2019, 2022. Also, a special issue on “Voice as movement and a spiritual ‘in-between’” is currently being edited by the *Journal for Dance, Movement and Spiritualities*, Chambers-Coe, J. & E. Laasonen Belgrano (eds.).

how connections between voice, body and identity in relation to questions concerning belief, religion, existence, health, death, living etc. My hope is then that this thesis can become a source of inspiration for other researching theologians, artists, activists, practitioner, and beyond, to further develop their diffractive methods and intra-active entanglements as part of each and every one's particular research investigation.

A Message to the Reader

Finally, this thesis is perhaps not always consistent in its 'formalia'. I have to acknowledge that it has been one of my of greatest concern to be as correct and precise as possible in all details, but it is also as important to point out that my hope is not to deliver a perfect final document, but rather a living collection of thoughts, words, fragments, ideas, theories, methods and more than I can tell. It might seem unacademic to end a project like a MA thesis with these words, but I believe that *meeting any thing or any being halfway*, with grace, curiosity and openness is part of a (re)learning of how to be diffractively critical and led by a desire to always begin, again and again.

And importantly, thank you all who taught me to be open, who accepted my many uncanny voices, who told me not to perform, to not perform me and I so often, who trusted what they saw, who told me to trust in Voice; thank you Petra, Dan, Bertil, Karin, Graham, Catherine and Mark. Thank you, All and Nothing!

With care,
Eli.

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