Concluding Remarks

> *If I try to give an account of myself, if I try to make myself recognizable and understandable, then I might begin with a narrative account of my life. But this narrative will be disoriented by what is not mine, or not mine alone. And I will, to some degree, have to make myself substitutable in order to make myself recognizable. The narrative authority of the "I" must give way to the perspective and temporality of a set of norms that contest the singularity of my story. / We can surely still tell our stories, and there will be many reasons to do precisely that. But we will not be able to be very authoritative when we try to give account with a narrative structure.*
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> Judith Butler[1]

The research project *Monsters I love* culminated in the solo performance *Moving Tongues, Playing Space* featuring voice, strophonion and video, presented in three parts. It showed possibilities for extending the voice today by either applying vocal extended techniques and/or technological means, such as gesture-controlled live electronics, namely the *strophonion*. The first part of the performance, called *The Oral And Vocal Material*, presented vocal as well as mouth-produced material to gain a deeper understanding of the potential and the capacities of one singular voice. A broad range of contemporary vocality and its defining materiality was displayed, illustrating how vocal performance art can open up today. The voice's sonorities as well as the question of the poetics of vocal soundscapes were brought into focus. Rather than asking what it represents, the question was addressed to what today's performance art voice could offer. The integration of video works and the interaction not only underscores and complements the exposure of a contemporary and unique vocality, but also demonstrates pathways how to expand the field of vocal performance art at the present time. Furthermore, through the presentation of the third part, *The Manifesto for the Multivocal Voice*, principles, premises and politics of the extended voice as well as philosophical and social-cultural implications have been laid out and elucidated in the form of a lecture-performance pursuing the display of knowledge and insights by means of *performing*. Through the presentation of a variety of different techniques, the display of challenging and paradoxical tasks, and the transgression of the main categories of the voice that the contemporary vocal performance artist has at her disposal, including the speaking, the singing, the extended and disembodied voice, a 'discursive solo performance act' was unfolded aiming to instigate the discourse on the voice in both artistic and philosophical regards. *Moving Tongues, Playing Space* can be regarded as distilling the overall artistic research project *Monsters I Love* to present its findings and insights gained throughout the four year-process.

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[1] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), p. 37.

An important thread of the project is to indicate that the notion of *extending the voice* has historical roots tracing back more than one hundred years and were re-intensified during the 1960s and 1970s. My suggestion was and is to embark on the journey of exploring vocal potentialities by posing the question of *what is possible* and thereby describing a practice that aims to integrate different practices taking into account the given forms of articulation as the four voice paradigms—spoken, sung, extended or disembodied—provide. To some extent, the terminology of *extending the voice* implies that there is a centre from which the vocal performer is supposed to start off. Over the course of a few centuries, the *belcanto* and its derivations has become the standard in the West. My proposal is not to exclude this technique, but to tackle vocal explorations from different angles aiming to include all kinds of imaginable sound possibilities while, at the same time, questioning historically grown and culturally imbued preconceptions *or*, if bypassing seems difficult, at least addressing those. Therefore, based on this line of thought, I introduced the term of the *multivocal voice.* In so doing, light is shed on the varied possibilities that the contemporary vocal performance artist can take hold of including the notion of many voices residing in one vocal mechanism as well as the concept that each single voice provides a number of registers for the performer to draw on, if one allows to integrate this approach into the practice. Furthermore, it has been shown that the *multivocal voice* as term reflects both the layering as well the multiplication of vocal sounds. The first aspect, on a purely vertical line, points to the possibility of implementing *multiphonics*, that is, an acoustically produced sound event that consists of more than one pitch, mostly of two or three pitches at the same time. The second aspect, on a vertical *and* horizontal line, refers to those possibilities that open up when technological means are applied. The practices of live sampling the voice and the use of custom, gesture-controlled live electronics based on sensor and computer technology revealed the necessity for the vocal performer to elaborate on technological skills just as well as on pianistic techniques and practices concerning the whole body, all of which are equally important to be considered in order to fully master the approach of intensified human-computer interaction (HCI). The performance practice I have come up with, when rehearsing and performing with the strophonion in combination with the voice, is what I call *voice-induced* or *vocal sound dance*. The disclosed æsthetics of such a practice ranges between the extremes that the concrete material of the human voice and its various forms of abstractions as generated by the computer provide. In the essay *'Intercourse with Ghosts': 'Haunted Territories' revisited* it has been demonstrated that, when the logics of vocal performance (*vocalogy*) meet those related to technology and bodily practices (*corporalogy)*, the ensuing performance situation is both complex and complicated either creating affordances and possibilities to develop a variety of different and unique performance modes *or* generating obstacles that the performer inevitably has to deal with, not only in advance and preparation of, but also during the actual performance presentation. In addition, by integrating video into the vocal performance art, the term as used in *multivocal arts* even undergoes a metaphorical signification indicating that the concept of a

multivocal thinking, as developed and practiced in and through the voice, not only enriches the field of the vocal arts, but more importantly expands it by going beyond and disclosing new terrains from other disciplines. Therefore, the notion of multivocality, to its full extent, isn't just a synonym for a broad range of specific techniques, be it vocal or live technology, but also houses and offers a generic artistic thinking that provides the grounding for that kind of artistic transdisciplinarity that allows future projects to emerge across diverse disciplines of the performing arts merging and dissolving into one another, all of which, in their entirety, create new practices in the performing arts.

If venturing an outlook into the future, a way to further develop and advance the idea of using video beyond the purpose of mere documentation is to translate and apply the insights into the visual domain of motion pictures, as previously gained in the sonic and musical realm by means of sound modulation and transformation. In other words, how might video could be controlled during the performance act using an existing live technological system? The idea of integrating video as co-player or, to be more precise, the content of the video as *alter ego*, forms the basis for an area that I have already been touching upon if looking towards works such as *Mönche am Meer* or *Whistling in Lidingö,* both of which are part of *Moving Tongues: Playing Space*. The possibilities for the performer to interact with the moving image, similar to the manipulation of sound samples as applied when playing the strophonion, await to be further explored. But the question arises: What are the parameters to be altered in the visually dominated area? What can be transferred from experiences made through developing and playing the strophonion as musical instrument and what cannot? Of course, it is possible to use the strophonion to generate and control video images, but what are the implications of such a practice for the performer onstage when competing with the powerful and overwhelming discipline of the moving image? It raises an important question in the field of HCI: How can we exploit technological possibilities without delegating to the computer those questions that the performing artist is actually concerned with? Do the artist's questions change when using state-of-the-art technology? The core question in that case becomes: how can we use technology to the artist's advantage without getting lost in the process of developing, adapting, refining, adjusting, reconfiguring, etc.?

One way to avoid these kinds of issues and complications, as I have shown in the article *Designing and Playing the Strophonion*, is to form a team of experts each of whom is responsible for one field only: one specialist develops hardware and assembles electronics, another one programmes the software, one is in charge of ergonomics and fabricates housings, and finally one up to three or even more persons should be field-testing the resulting devices. This thought might appear self-evident. But when economical resources are lacking, artists tend to realise their ideas anyway and solve the challenges on the basis of their own labour. I do have great admiration for those who develop instruments in the manner of do-it-yourself (DIY). DIY æsthetics can be idiosyncratic and, at the same time, can yield meaningful results. In

any case, when developing custom instruments that are supposed to work under *real world* conditions, implying that the musician today has practically no time to set up for a concert, then I prefer to bring together a small team of experts distributing the responsibilities to make sure that the devices developed will work later on under all circumstances. When the strophonion was developed at STEIM I was given the opportunity to do exactly that, collaborating with a team of experts each of whom was specialised in the field in question. This was also the case when the software environment for the second version of the strophonion was developed from scratch and implemented by instrument maker Sukandar Kartadinata. During the past three years he programmed an intricate network of patches on the basis of the audio processing software Max. Commonly used all over the world, the application of this programme ensures, to some degree, that the further development of the instrument won't be at stake. Three years of an intensive process of developing a new software configuration were needed to eventually have on hand a functioning instrument that will work at any location at the present time and in the future.

The performance of *Moving Tongues, Playing Space* took place in a former nuclear research centre in Stockholm thirty meters underground, perfectly shielded, where it was impossible for the user of mobile phones to receive any signals from wireless networking systems. Under this circumstance, it was proven, that the wireless system of the strophonion works perfectly. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case, as experienced before. During the preparation and the actual presentation of the performance piece *Haunted Territories*, latency and unreliability issues in playing the instrument arose, which wasn't very surprising since a large number of Wi-Fi and mobile phone networking systems were up and running. Under such circumstances, as described in the essay *'Intercourse with Ghosts': 'Haunted Territories' revisited*, interferences appear on a continuous basis and prevent the strophonion's wireless system from uninterruptedly and smoothly transmitting data. The conclusion I can draw now, based on all the experiences made along the exploration period, is threefold. 1) If the performance, taking place in a busy Wi-Fi environment, is rather music-oriented and situated in the clear context of music performance and concert *or* if I collaborate with other musicians, I will have to let go of the idea to play the instrument in its wireless version, but to go back and use the cabled one. This way it can be assured that, like any other acoustic instrument, the strophonion is reliable and playable without any lag. But such a decision has also implications with regard to the visual component of the performance outcome. The performer then will be wired up and therefore compelled to be static onstage, unable to move freely from one place to another, which initially was an important motivational aspect to develop the strophonion. 2) If the performance is taking place in a theatre or dance-related context, then it will be preferable to play the instrument as wireless version. Neither of the two options, though, seems to lead to a satisfying solution. 3) Therefore, another idea would be to start all over again and to research the possibilities of hardware components that, in the meantime, are available in order to develop and build a new wireless transmitting system that is strong enough to overcome the

problems previously encountered. Needless to say that this kind of scenario depends on the funding and on the time needed to sufficiently research the matter, resulting in a strongly tech-based research project, a field that is not my core competence. In consequence, a few collaborators would need to be recruited to work in a trustful atmosphere, this being a prerequisite to create efficient work flows and convincing outcomes.

After the long process—nine years altogether—of developing, building, testing and playing the strophonion in rehearsals and in public, refining and reconfiguring the instrument all over again and again, I have come to know, from the very inside, the extended field of vocal performance art applying sensor and wireless technology. It has become clear that this approach is a tremendously time and energy-consuming path. For the artist, along the way of exploring and discovering new terrains, R&D can be an exciting experience, but one should also know, from the beginning, that it entails tedious procedures, for which one needs stamina, endurance and patience. The initial idea was simply this: to play wireless devices allowing me to freely move in space and, at the same time, to expand the voice's potentials and control the sound parameters like one does with any other musical instrument. It turned out that, in order to be realised, this approach is a very challenging one. I have probed and conducted field-testing in public disguised as performances, which isn't always a fun experience. In fact, with regard to public performances, the integration of wireless, sensor-based technology can become a nerve-wracking undertaking for the performer. However, it is the artist's duty to make sense of what is happening onstage. So, whenever technology failed, I needed to find ways to work around to make the show go on. This is an unavoidable premise that, in fact, the performer always has to deal with.

Irrespective of whether one is using state-of-the-art technology or not, what I learnt from this journey and what remains to be upheld, is to develop a heightened attentiveness during the performance situation empowering the performer to change directions according to the affordances and requirements as raised to the surface by the given context. My aspiration to create performances that reach out for an expanded and electrified space of vocal expression with an enhanced mode of perception, for both the performer *and* the audience, remains constant. I have shown that the boundary between the human live voice and its aural copy, controlled by bodily movements via wireless sensor technology, can become blurred. It should be taken into account that it is exactly this juxtaposition, an encounter with the unfamiliar that makes us become alert and, at the same time, attuned to vocal soundscapes that might appear unusual, but nevertheless increase our awareness of perception. In future, the audience will be invited to hear and listen, see and watch, to tune in and, by doing so, to intensify their listening capacities, all of which to experience, with deepened attentiveness and an expansive quality, the richness of the sound of the human voice.

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