

Please note: This is not the performance. This is an assemblage of materials that made up the performance.

YOU AND ME – AS VOCAL MATERIAL – WHERE AND HOW DO WE MEET

Øystein Elle & Electa Behrens

Props:
coffin like thing
2 chairs
2 mics + stand
Øystein's sound equip

PERFORMANCE SCORE

Prelude in the dark: Material World by Madonna, from 2.25 to end

Part 1: WHO AM I - AS VOCAL MATERIAL?
10.45 - 11.00

SOUND CUE: RECORDED VOICE

ADD HYPERLINK

Welcome to this talk titled: “you and me – as vocal material – where and how do we meet”...

LIGHT CUE: LIGHTS SLOWLY FADE UP TO ATMOSPHERIC LOW LIGHT BY END OF FIRST PARAGRAPH.

Øystein is visible lying on a coffin-like box. He has on a black spandex bodysuit with strap on dick..

I am an Associate Professor of Voice at the Norwegian Theatre Academy. I have a BA in theatre and anthropology, a practice as research MA with the title 'Negotiating Presence', I have played a fairy, prancing around and throwing glitter at people. I have a practice as research PhD with the title 'Vocal Action'. I like long walks on the beach. My article published in Theatre Dance and Performance Training, will soon be a book chapter in Phillip Zarrilli's new book on Intercultural performance trainings.

I have played a woman who wants to sleep with her son, step-son, and kills herself when he rejects her, classic.

I am part of this research team, exploring what it means to think of myself, as a thing among things, as material. I have flashed my pussy in fake orgasm in the anonymous soaked fields of Ex-yugoslavia, because Marina Abramovic asked me to. I have two kids.

Birth was harder than I thought.

CUE: Electa comes out on the stage and stands next to the coffin, looking out. She is wearing a long metallic orange skirt, floor length, and no shirt. Hair down over the face.

My body did not do what it was supposed to do. There were scissors. Thread became body. I am the Madonna and child. I am a broken machine.

PHYSICAL ACTIONS:

Electa approaches the table with equipment that is at the front of the stage.

Electa takes up breast pump, puts it on breast and starts to pump.

Øystein gets up stands up next to her.

They both step up to the microphones and sing a lullaby.

Text in the video:

I am an associate professor of music and voice at Østfold University college. I am an artist performing, writing, composing, and directing works, mostly for stage. I have a BA in classical western vocal music and composition, I have an MA in baroque singing, and I have an artistic driven phd where I researched and created works questioning gender, social norms, the other and the concept of meaning through a variety of artistic expressions.

I am drawn to ideas of liberating the human voice's timbre from being pigeonholed according to gender or age. This motivations has led me to artistic movements and traditions, such as: Dadaism, Surrealism, experimental literature, sound poems; the notion of extended vocal techniques; and subsequent avant-garde directions.

I combine philosophical and aesthetic approaches in my research which might be described as 'ungrounding' the voice.

Attempting to assemble a sonically and linguistically nomadic rootless voice that that picks up from the traces of the past debris of lingual sounds, words and crumbles of words, melodic fragments and textures; an inaccurate sweep through history of diverse traditions and cultures. I collect sonic characteristics, sounds, phrases textures and linguistic sounds. I add them to my collection of sounds, and process them for use in new constellations.

In the research project "Material strategies" I am interested in how new materialistic thinking may change or increase an understanding of me and the other, how voice can be material with its own body, and its own ability to interact, and **touch** other voices and bodies and objects. Can object oriented ontology strengthen an understanding of ephemeral objects.

- I am often asking myself how to ethically navigate in the possibilities of use and re-use of vocal material.

PART 1 - section 2:

THEORY: WHO AM I AS VOCAL MATERIAL? (THE SOUNDER)

Electa has sign of this which she tapes to her chest at beginning of section

PHYSICAL ACTIONS:

Electa leads transition.

E+Ø put on shirt/trousers and sit/take mics.

ELECTA:

We have 5 sections to this presentation, around 5 questions we have. Each section starts with a performative moment and then a theory moment. **These are not finished performances or theory that gives an answer.** These are **experiments, stunts**, where our aim is to provoke questions by **pushing our material to its borders**. In theory and practice, we are trying to go to the difficult places...

OUR FIRST QUESTION: WHO AM I AS VOCAL MATERIAL?

What are the consequences when we think about this? What is unique about the voice as material - different than when we think about a table as material.

ELECTA:

So, thinking about objects has a history...

Once upon a time there was an OOO conference. On the website of the conference they made an algorithm to show a new “object” randomly taken from the internet every few seconds. It kept showing playboy bunnies....

As Katherine Behar says:

“it is all very nice to think of everything as co-mingling objects that work on each other, but there are other histories at work which make the idea of a flat-ontology a bit difficult to swallow.”

Personally, OOO is nice to think about, but when I start to ‘take it personally’ to think about myself, it gets more complicated.

Katherine Behar founded OOF (Object Oriented Feminism)

She writes that there are 3 main areas of focus when thinking about objects: PEE

- **politics**, engaging with histories of treating certain humans (women, people of color, and the poor) as objects;”
- **erotics**, possibilities of “employing humor to foment unseemly entanglements between things;”

- *this is connected to strategies of dis-identification, from gender studies.*
- **ethics**, *refusing to make grand philosophical truth claims, instead staking a modest ethical position that arrives at being “in the right” by being “wrong.”*

Maybe Electa said: Behar mentions that in new materialism there is the desire to animate objects, which is, in a way, not going away from anthropocentrism at all. It still privileges the “activeness” in something, be it person or thing: so it is really just anthropocentrism in an expanded sense. Behar argues instead for getting interested in the ‘thing’ in us. Can we flip our heads and see ‘passivity’ as power?: She wrote an article on botox.

So what I want to put out there for our discussions today is:

How do politics, history and erotics complicate notions of materiality + are necessary areas to consider when we consider the human, and voice, as material?

STRATEGIES I EXPLORED IN THE SMALL PERFORMANCE MOMENT YOU JUST SAW -- these represent some of my responses to the question I ask:

- **THE INAPPROPRIATE:** In writing my “bio”, I was thinking about **inappropriate material**, the shadow side of material - how to subvert the material of “what we think a bio is” via including personal and sometimes uncomfortable facts together with the sterile professional facts, distorting the voice to sound like a man’s and having a male present on stage although after a while you realize the person ‘speaking’ is female
- **THE VOICE IS ALWAYS SPECIFIC and NON-NEUTRAL:** in being half-naked on stage and pumping my breast, I wanted to explore including sensual elements of my self in with my vocal material of the bio - so that I could not be ‘heard’ without the sensuality of my body being part of it, in order to provoke reflections on what we ‘listen to’ when we listen to women
- **THE DISRUPTIVE:** I wanted to explore pushing the border between technology and the human bodyvoice -- specifically in how technological objects can give agency and disrupt expectations.

PART 2: WHO ARE YOU AS VOCAL MATERIAL? (THE LISTENER): 11.00 - 11.15

Øystein leads the transition.

In this section, Øystein leads an exercise with the audience where they sing a song they remember from their childhood. First they sing all together, then they sing to their partner.

This is framed as a kind of introduction of the audience - to us, to each other. Making us all aware of them together with us in the room as active material also.

Part 2 section 2: Theory: THE LISTENER AS MATERIAL

Electa leads transition.

Electa has sign of this which she tapes on the table they are using at the beginning of the section

ØYSTEIN

Through the event we just experienced together I wanted to point at other factors of the vocal material than solely the sound of it. More than pitch, gender orientation, timbre, melody and text - rather the material surrounding the very sound itself - the sender, the receiver, the hidden stories. Perhaps imprints of who we are and what we share.

Through the song we shared, and through the songs we did not share.

In the introduction chapter of her book “sensing sound” the researcher Nina Sun Eidsheim, professor of Musicology at the University of California in Los Angeles says: Through reconceptualizing the voice as an object of knowledge - and relatedly, through investigating voice and music as intermaterial practices - we may begin to understand that voice and the states it has to offer are multifaceted and sometimes contradictory. Thus I suggest that through the insights gleaned from taking the voice seriously as an object of knowledge, we may release music and sound from its containment within a limited set of senses and fixed meanings. Hence, music's ontological status can be changed from an external, knowable object to an unfolding phenomenon that arises through complex material interactions.

ELECTA

said something about:

AURALITY STUDIES

The materiality of **the performer's voice** has a lot to do with the **materiality of the listener**.

Both in terms of physical vibration + how we interpret/give meaning to what is said - is just as much about YOU as it is about ME.

Konstantinos Thomaidis talks about **the vocal in-between**: meaning is made not in the sounder or the listener, but the space in between them.

One of the challenges of **New Materialism**, is how to think about the ‘always becoming’ nature of material - or that we can ‘never fully know a material’. In the West, I think it is so easy to

think of materials, of things, as fixed and finite. Sound offers us an interesting area to explore because it is, by its nature, so moving/changing.

Sound is unique from other objects in that its borders are very fuzzy.

Where does my sound stop? Objects you can look at, but sound envelopes you. You are immediately ‘part of me’ when I sound.

Lynne Kendrick writes about in her book on Theatre Aurality, philosophy has historically connected KNOWLEDGE with VISUALITY

it was the emergence of vision in ancient philosophy that forged an inextricable link between sight and object, as our eyes were established as the chief means by which we cognate the difference between ourselves and the world... This primacy of sight has produced the notion that the world is only fully known when it is visually evident, therefore sight... became something of a meta-sense. (Kendrick 2017 Kindle 379).

Visuality functions: You see something outside yourself, you can point to it, you can analyse it, know it.

Sound, on the other hand surrounds you, envelops you, penetrates you. You are immediately intermingled with sound. How can you know what is “it” and what is “you”?

This co-mingling of the object that is sounding and the object that is listening, a sense of mutually affecting each other, rather than a subject controlling an object: these ideas parallel the ideas put forth in New Materialism about what materials are and how they interact.

In terms of exploring the voice/sound as material - **strategies of INTERACTIVITY AND SENSUALITY, I think are key.**

PART 3: SONG AS MATERIAL?: 11.15 - 11.30

ØYSTEIN: Cold song morphs into a something like a joik

ADD HYPERLINK

Electa interrupts Øystein after a while - “I think that is enough now Øystein”

Part 3 section 2: Theory: Ethics and appropriation of song

Electa puts sign on table: Song as Material (what does this mean?)

ELECTA:

Our question is: who 'owns' vocal material - who owns a song?

Who can sing what?

Does Øystein have the 'right' to sing 'Cold song', (a song which is originally part of an opera by Purcell but which was made popular in a version Klaus Naomi made) more than the right to sing a joik - something like a joik?

Could he teach joik if there were no joikers around, but it is inappropriate here with Niko, a Sami joiker, in the audience?

Is not the materiality of the song its notes, its melody? Why is this not 'free material' for anyone to use?

Is sampling a practice that is ethically OK in some contexts but not others?

Is there something in New Materialist thinking that can help us think about this?

ØYSTEIN:

Who is the owner a melody? Who is the owner of a melodic ornament, or a vocal timbre?

When we express something vocally, we are influenced by a wide range of experiences. What is our vocal identity if not the entirety of vocal impressions we have absorbed, consciously and unconsciously?

ELECTA:

DO WE HEAR CULTURALLY? – can we really hear the other?

Eidsheim writes:

“does any music exist...independent of that which a culturally structured and informed sensory complex gives rise to...? Or...is the music we can sense in any given cultural moment merely a reflection (or indeed a confirmation) of our limited ability to perceive that moment?”

This haunts me. Do we even have the possibility to hear something, hear the materialities that are beyond what our culture has conditioned us to? If not, how can we really meet materials from other places?

I think there is hope...

McAllister-Viel writes about body knowledges 'comingling'

principles and practices inside of my body/voice can be understood in reference to each other; each tradition becomes an embodied context for learning the praxis of another tradition. Through trial and error as well as strategically designed interactions, the different trainings inside of me can interface. These combinations create different body

knowledges from which I am able to develop alternative methods and models for training my voice. (2009a:174)

In my own teaching, I use the **STRATEGY**: I rarely teach a song - I never teach a melody as something that can be copied, recorded, taken away as a fixed object. Instead, I employ teaching strategies that are holistic, multi-sensory and create in the learner a sense of survival - being in the learning moment is not about receiving a singular isolated “thing” that is being taught, but rather is an experience of which the song/text/sound is an inseparable part. (Ditte Berkeley-Schultz and I wrote about this in our article “Songs of Tradition as Training in Higher Education?”)

ØYSTEIN:

Yvon Bonefant writes in his article "Voice, Identity, Contact" (Journal of interdisciplinary Voice Studies Volume 3 Number 2) Our cultures, languages of origin, second/third/fourth languages, life histories, genetic inheritances and bodily configurations, culturally constructed embodiments, aesthetic interests, subcultural identifications, regions of origin and their dialects, our ethnicities, our races, - or the racializations projected up on us, social classes, genders, sexualities, sexual orientations, ages, etc. All dance together and intertwine in what we might produce and receive as vocal identity.

I experience “extended vocal techniques” a natural way for me to express stories more fully, and to be able to allow my vocal identity to be materialized. The transformative power of the extra normal vocal body leads me to a diversity and co-existence of voices; metaphors, known and unknown languages, fragments of stories, text... all in which can diverge, and seemingly contradict each other.

However as a response to the question if I am more free to express a song, - a vocal story through a piece like Cold song. - Since this song is connected to the tradition of Bel Canto singing, (also when Klaus Nomi sang it) it might be understood as stylized in such a degree that it becomes more of an open source than other vocal expressions.

Still I experience the counter tenor voice, as a vehicle for the sound of the castratos, (and probably also belongs to what we usually refer to as extended vocal techniques) -As such a voice that might be searching for the “the other” The child, the woman, the mother, the angel...

PART 4: TEXT AS MATERIAL?: 11.30 - 11.45

Comment: we’ve never done this before...

These texts were spoken into the mics and were eventually morphed into a rhythmic looped composition with live improvisation.

ADD HYPERLINK

Electa:

You walk into an emergency room or whatever
and you walk in thinking that you are a magic
ecosystem, and you walk out completely
barren and empty. It is that taboo kind of thing
and no one wants it to happen to him
or her. So people shun me as if I was the plague. I
try to speak to friends and they shy away with a
hostile look in the eyes. Mis-carriage. What is left
for me to carry?

Good nice pause

Øystein:

Something that really hurts is the lack of support from my friends or family. It's too uncomfortable for them to talk about. Whenever I bring it up they just stop talking and look at the ground and won't talk again until I change the subject. Nobody really wants to listen because it makes them feel bad. You know what's more uncomfortable than talking to your friend about her rape? Dealing with being raped. Alone. Or seeing the relieved look on your best friend's face when you shut up.

Good nice pause

Looped rhythmic texts begin

Electa:

It was the day we saw an educational video in health class.
I thought what they did was so ridiculous. Why would people do that? To themselves?
I thought it was funny.
I told my mother.
Yes, this is my story.
I cannot remember if she was in the shower or I was in the shower but someone was wet.
I do remember she grabbed my arm, dripping. She never grabbed my arm.
She took me outside the house and we sat on the doorstep. In a towel.
She looked me in the eye, different eyes I had never seen before.
She said I should not laugh.
She said she had done that, to herself, since she was 13.
She said that a friend taught her how one day when she was over playing.
She said she did it when I was a little baby.
She said it was not until she was over 30 that someone told her it had a name. A diagnosis.

By that time it was a pretty well established habit, bulimia. She told me she sometimes did it still. She did not know how to stop.

Øystein:

If your home or business has been the scene of a crime, death, or accident that has left behind blood and/or other bodily fluids, you may be in a rush to simply wipe away the visible signs that the event took place. The health threats that these fluids pose are probably not among your first thoughts in the wake of such a traumatic experience, but as professional providers of blood cleanup services, we urge you to take time to understand the dangers that may be present. Merely cleaning up with normal household methods and products is not enough: To make the scene safe again for occupants, thorough disinfection and decontamination is imperative.

Here's what you need to know about why it's so important to take extensive measures when cleaning up blood and how Advanced Bio Treatment's expert blood cleanup team can help

Øystein

There's one reason to call an experienced blood cleanup company that stands above all others: Bodily fluids and blood can harbor lethal viruses, such as Hepatitis C and HIV. Because it's impossible to identify what types of hazardous pathogens may be in blood or bodily fluids found at the scene, every precaution must be taken with the assumption that pathogens are present. Simple cleaning of visible blood, such as using household bleach and paper towels, is not enough to ensure that every trace of biohazards is being removed. According to the National Institutes of Health, pathogens can survive for months and remain a source of transmission if the area isn't properly disinfected.

Øystein

The makers of Barbie, Mattel used to sell a doll whose breasts grew when her arm rotated. She was called "Growing up Skipper" When you rotated her arm she grew an inch taller, and her small breasts grew out of her plastic chest. She could return to her pre-pubescent self by simply rotating her arm back the way it was.

Øystein

My view of myself is very realistic. I think I'm blessed to have the body I have, and [plastic surgery] has just become something that's fun and cool. It's a way for me to express myself, and at this point, obviously there's an additional kickback from the media and I can pay for the surgeries now by selling my stories because people are interested. I like the attention that stems from it. I love how my body looks.

Overlapping

The castrato is the trinity Man woman and child. Bridging the gap between masculine and feminine, creating an unique link between God, music and mankind.

A boys throat is more valuable to him than his testicles.

PART 4 SECTION 2:THEORY - ethics and appropriation of text

Øystein leads transition.

ØYSTEIN:

As a white male man from Norway I **may** have limited voices to represent.

Is it ethically questionable to convey stories from other voices than my own?

Is there other “rules” for biographical stories than for fiction?

I like to borrow a thought, not from a scholar but from the storyteller Justin Kownacki

Each of us has a story to tell, and we have even more stories to experience from others.

Our stories comprise the fabric of our reality. So if your reality feels like it’s fraying lately, maybe that’s because your reality has been overly monochrome and you’re finally realizing there’s a whole rainbow of color that you’re not weaving in.

As for those of us who tell stories for a living, we have a double duty: to use whatever advantages we have to help those who are underrepresented find their own voices, and to represent ourselves as honestly as we can, rather than offering a plastic presumption of what others want to see from us.

It’s time to stop asking “what do the people who control the stories want to see.” Instead, ask “how can I tell my story my way.” People who recognize a part of themselves in you want to see your story succeed, because your story represents a shade of theirs.

And if you can do it, so can they.

ELECTA:

How are text material and song material different?

Something we talked about: Interesting how when we sing as song - we do not assume that the singer wrote the song, but when we say words, we assume they belong to the person who said them.

There is a reason that many contemporary art pieces shy away from text - it is so problematically tied to ideas of subjectivity.

Some thoughts:

The idea of the 'material' of text as its vowels and consonants that we can deconstruct at will offers us one range of expression, perhaps frees us from psychological realism's personhood. However, I would argue that it is also a very limited idea of how the spoken voice is material - or even how it moves the materials in our body (our heart, organs etc).

How do we consider the other materialities of the voice?

STRATEGY: explore the **idea of the immaterial material** - the backstory, context etc of where a text came from and take this into consideration as you work (I mean this differently than old ideas about 'respecting material' or 'understanding the backstory of your character'). What I am suggesting here is more layered: you have to respect the backstory of both performer and text and how they co-mingle, as Bonefont suggests.

What if, as a pedagogue or performer we encourage saying 'yes' to both the material of the text and of the person...but as material, as something that is plastic, moveable, not as something fixed or precious or purely psychological.

STRATEGY: consider that there is **no 'neutral material'**: even vowels and consonants have deep cultural histories

STRATEGY: explore the multiplicity of voice

employing strategies that disrupt the singularity of the speech act: I am not voicing myself or some singular other person. Instead I am a multiplicity, even when 'playing myself'.

PART 5: CO-MINGLING MATERIAL WITHOUT CONTROL? 11.45 - 12.00

This score was performed together with the audience.

SOUND CUE: recorded voice

ADD HYPERLINK

A Song for Margrit
For Voice

A vocal score by Pauline Oliveros written in 1997 while she was sitting somewhere.
With small alterations by Øystein and Electa for the occasion of this seminar.

Now begins the score.

Can you imagine standing before the audience in a relaxed stance with feet apart under the shoulders and with palms of the hand slightly turned toward the audience?

Can you imagine sitting in the audience looking at the stage in a relaxed position with feet apart under you and the palms of the hands slightly turned towards the stage?

Can you imagine listening for any and every sound made with awareness of the effect of each sound you hear on your body and your attitude?

Pause.

Soon we will make a song all together.

In this song, there will be three categories of material: word, sound, gesture.

Use sounds from anywhere as cues or triggers to perform single events from the categories given. Follow the sound cue as instantaneously as possible. If you don't react immediately, let the cue go and wait for another. Make each word very clear. Sounds can be of any duration with silence before and after. Gestures can be small or large.

Return to listening after each word, sound or gesture.

Here are the categories:

- One word at a time from the sentence "I am listening to you."
- A vocal sound
- A gesture

The elements can be combined.

The elements can be repeated.

This is the end of the reading of the score.

After listening for a while, we will begin this song.

At end of composition with audience

PROJECTION CUE: change orientation of Dali picture.

Open out for question and answer - Camilla moderates