Vocality as / in Composition
solo and collaborative creation of new postopera works

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A thesis and portfolio of creative work
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Abstract

As a contemporary opera singer-composer, director-producer, and filmmaker, my artistic research has yielded a new body of solo and collaborative *postopera* works in live and mediatised forms. My creative work and compositional methods are centred in an embodied vocal practice and the exploration of a multi-layered meaning-making process. My theoretical frame includes discourses surrounding contemporary music-theatre practices that deconstruct and challenge traditional Western operatic forms by favouring mediatised works, an abandonment of narrative drama, and an embrace of inventive, often experimental, performance methods. My practice has led me to investigate theoretical landscapes that include the work of musicologist and performance studies scholar Jelena Novak, theatre researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann, mid 20th-century French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the Bulgarian-French philosopher, cultural theorist, and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva, and Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero. In practical application, I am committed to the distribution and sharing of *versioned* forms of creative work, and my creative, theoretical, and practical means may be particularly relevant to other creator-producers.

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Video & Images

All videos have sound. The media appears in sequence with the text. Please see additional notes on the thesis and media in 'README: About this Thesis & the Creative Work'. Full collaborative credits appear in 'Preview of Creative Work' at the end of the introduction and all collaborators have agreed to the appearance of their contributions in this thesis.

Micro-operas (2020)

The micro-operas are mediatised theoretical contextualisations and appear throughout the thesis text. Micro-operas are solo voice and video works by Misha Penton. All text quoted in the micro-operas complies with fair use copyright practices.

Visible Darkness (2019–20)

A new media monodrama by Misha Penton: a fairy tale of our ephemeral delicate bodies in a city of glass and steel, and a celebration of the magnificent transformative feminine. *Visible Darkness* is a solo work with versions featuring collaborative contributions.

Micro-operas II (2020)

The Medusa Project (2017–18)

A monodrama for soprano-composer and fixed media by Misha Penton: a re-imagining of the Greco-Roman anti-heroine, Medusa. *The Medusa Project* is a solo work with versions featuring collaborative contributions.

Threshold (2017–18)

A site-specific new postopera by Misha Penton: a mythopoetic underworld journey inspired by the Homeric Hymn to Demeter (c. 7th century BCE), featuring collaborative contributions.

README: About this Thesis & the Creative Work

My creative work herein is in the form of video with sound. All work is original and created as solo or collaborative pieces. This media is embedded in sequence with the text and the thesis is meant to be read, viewed, and heard as a curated experience. Therefore, please allow me to lead you, Dear Reader, through an integrated format wherein my creative work and its theoretical landscape is intertwined rather than viewing the entirety of the portfolio and then reading about it in the written portion of the thesis. Moreover, the creative work is not intended to function as specific expository examples of theoretical ideas but, rather, it inhabits a space contiguous to and interlaced with hybrid creative-critical-reflective writing. Throughout this PDF and beginning with the chapter, 'Vocality & Embodiment', the reader will find play-button images with figure descriptions that clearly indicate video as well as the full archival URL of the media. These play-button images are live links, and when clicked, will open an internet browser to play the media files. As noted when they appear, there are a few videos which consist of still images with sound but most of the works are films: micro-operas, process videos, live performance documentation, and dedicated media works.

All media is hosted by Bath Spa University on the BathSPAdata (figshare) data repository and is linked to in the thesis text. Library staff can provide assistance in accessing the media files if the reader is using the print copy of the thesis available from Bath Spa University Library.

In addition, the reader may access the creative work in its entirety at any point by way of the BathSPAdata Collection page: https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.c.5495409

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Introduction

Overview

I am a contemporary opera singer-composer, director-producer, and filmmaker. My work participates in expanding, redefining, and re-shaping Western operatic forms and practices. I investigate the convergence of classical singing, experimental voice, composition, improvisation, poetics, and solo and collaborative live and mediatised performance-making methods. My practice is rooted in the tension, resonance, and reconciliation of the voice and body with poetic language[1].

My practice-as-research project consists of a new body of *postopera* media works, and my projects develop through a multi-form *versioning* approach. My work is realised as in-process and performance documentation, dedicated video and audio pieces, site-specific works, installations, and creative and critical writings. In application, I am committed to a pragmatic approach to production, distribution, and work sharing. My artistic research journey has led me from being an interpretive artist to becoming a generative artist, and my research offers creative, compositional, and practical strategies especially relevant to vocal artists, singer-composers, and creator-producers.

The theoretical frame within which I work includes discussion surrounding contemporary music-theatre practices with a focus upon the ideas of musicologist Jelena Novak and theatre researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann. My research on embodied vocality and composition, the sonority of text, and poetic language has led me to investigate theorists such as the mid 20th-century French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Bulgarian-French philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva, Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero, and cultural theorists Steven Connor and Michel Poizat.

I approach theory through its poetic language. This framing influences and inspires the creative and technical sphere of my practice instead of emphasising a multi-perspective theoretical critique. My writing, herein, is woven with my applied work and is a blend of critical, creative, and informal reflective approaches. This hybrid writing explores the discursive landscape between exposition and creative work, and offers a multi-dimensional site of interactive and relational meaning-making.

My exploration undertaken includes feminist theory and gender politics as evidenced by the presence of the work of Kristeva, Cavarero, and French feminist and literary critic Hélène Cixous. This theoretical framework is implicit in my praxis, though not in a way that seeks to foreground any feminist position or statement. Rather, I limit my enquiry to the relationship of voice and body within the context of a Western art music practice that favours vocality and textual sonority as compositional tools. Likewise, although my work takes the form of audio-video, media theory and its continued unfolding in our digital era is beyond the scope of my focus on the voice and embodied poetics.

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1   This idea is inspired by Julia Kristeva (2013), when she speaks about language and embodiment: 'the poetic experience... tries to reconcile the body and the language' (37:53).

My creative and theoretical exploration asks:

- What theoretical, technical insights, and discoveries are revealed in a compositional process that critically engages with re-voicing and de-centring Western opera's traditional conventions and structures?
- In solo and collaborative performer-generated processes, how are works manifested or realised?
- What are the practical implications of a *versioning* approach to production?

The objectives of my creative work and theoretical enquiry include:

- The creation of a new portfolio of singer-composed solo and collaborative *postopera* works utilising classical and experimental vocal techniques that favour composing 'with' and 'through' the voice.
- An embodied vocal compositional practice that is based in an exploration of meaning-making driven by the sonority of text.
- A critical-creative writing approach that interlaces practice, theory, media, and hybrid writing forms.
- A *versioning* approach to creative work-making that favours a practical multi-form artistic production model.
- My creative, practical, and theoretical work may be especially beneficial to makers across artistic disciplines who are creator-producers. I hope to foster conversations regarding compositional explorations and pragmatic scale-able production efforts, which are true to artists' unique voices, creative visions, and life experiences.

Before leading the reader on a journey through my theoretical engagement and creative work, the remainder of this introduction includes details on the thesis structure and a preview of my portfolio works.

Thesis Structure

The weaving of creative work with hybrid writing forms contributes to the unconventional structure of my thesis. Text in black is more traditional academic writing and text in colour, bordered by a vertical bar, indicates critical-poetic engagements and first-person informal reflections[2]. This approach has generated a body of written work imbricated with creative media that reflects the hybrid and multi-form aesthetic of my creative practice. My intent is to create a multimedia thesis which draws attention to the dissolution of boundaries between my creative and academic contributions.

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2 In the poetic writing, citations are often repeated for clarity.

Preview of Creative Works

My creative work for the thesis consists of three primary projects: *Visible Darkness*, *The Medusa Project*, and *Threshold*. The works are connected via their theoretical contexts rather than through their production chronology. The following is a brief preview of these works which are featured as media embedded throughout the text:

Visible Darkness (2019–20)

Visible Darkness is new media monodrama: a fairy tale of our ephemeral, delicate bodies in a city of glass and steel, and a celebration of the transformative feminine. The project's *versions* include a live process performance with fixed media, an experimental film, and a music video. The live performance with fixed media was presented at *Voice and the Unknown: An International Vocal Performance Research Symposium*, Lund University, Inter Arts Center, Malmö, Sweden, 28–30 January 2019. The music video was released online on 10 July 2020. In the chapter, 'Vocality & Embodiment' which includes reflections upon *Visible Darkness*, I explore of the ideas of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty as it relates to embodiment and vocality, as well as cultural theorist Michel Poizat's concepts surrounding the voice in opera. In an engagement with my practice of composing with and through the voice, I include a look at the influence of early 20th-century expressionist vocal traditions.

> **Credits**
>
> *Visible Darkness* is a solo work with versions featuring collaborative contributions. Misha Penton: director, concept, librettist, soprano, music and film editor, filmmaker, producer, final musical work. Original music contributions: George Heathco, guitar and Chris Becker, electronic soundscapes. Cameras: Dave Nickerson. The music for the *Visible Darkness* music video was recorded at home studios. The film was shot in Houston, Texas, USA. Performance documentation filmed by Dave Nickerson and edited by Misha Penton.

The Medusa Project (2017-18)

The Medusa Project is a monodrama for soprano performer-composer and fixed media. It is a re-imagining of the Greco-Roman anti-heroine, Medusa. The works *versioned* forms include a live performance, experimental voice-based films, and experimental writing. The live performance with fixed media premiered at the *Women Composers Festival of Hartford*, Hartford, Connecticut, USA, on 7 April 2018. A film and sound installation version was created for Bath Spa University's thirty-five-foot high MediaWall in Bath, UK, which was on view 4–15 June 2018. Additional versions of *The Medusa Project* include films of varying duration released online. The project's performance, films, and writings spanned 2017–18. *The Medusa Project* and its varied forms engage with the work of philosopher and cultural theorist Julia Kristeva and French feminist Hélène Cixous. Kristeva's and Cixous' theories surrounding poetic language and meaning-making are particularly germane to my practice and are found in the chapter,

'Destabilising Language'.

Credits

The Medusa Project is a solo work with *versions* featuring collaborative contributions. Misha Penton: director, concept, librettist, soprano, music and film editor, filmmaker, camera, producer, final musical work. Original clarinet contribution: Boja Kragulj. The project audio was recorded live and at home studios. Filming took place in Houston, Texas USA.

Threshold (2017–18)

Threshold is a site-specific *postopera*. The work is loosely inspired by the enigmatic Greek initiatory rites, the Eleusinian Mysteries: an ancient biannual mythopoetic underworld journey and ceremonial retelling of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (c. century BCE). The work's *versions* include process videos and audio, a video and audio documented ensemble live performance, a music video, and experimental writings. The work premiered as a live performance on 30 April 2017 in Houston, Texas, USA, and was created for The Silos at Sawyer Yards, a mid 20th-century rice factory, now a raw industrial space offered for artistic use. In the chapter, 'On Devising & Collaborative Processes', I reflect upon the process of creating *Threshold*.

Credits

Threshold is a work by Misha Penton featuring collaborative contributions. Misha Penton: director, concept, librettist, soprano, music and film editor, filmmaker, producer, final musical work. Original voice contributions: Sherry Cheng, Neil Ellis Orts, and Michael Walsh. Original music contributions: George Heathco, guitar and Luke Hubley, percussion. Cameras: Dave Nickerson and Raul Casares. The music video version of this project was recorded at Houston Public Media. The film was shot at The Silos at Sawyer Yards in Houston, Texas, USA.

All linked or embedded creative media work listed above has been published online or publicly screened, and performances noted have been publicly presented.

Micro-operas (2020)

I include micro-vocal video works throughout the thesis. These works use cited text in an aesthetic engagement with theory. Further contextualisation regarding the micro-operas is found at the end of the first chapter, 'Disruptions & Definitions: Context'. All micro-operas in this thesis were recorded, edited, and produced by me. The video footage in the micro-operas is from my original stock collection, or that of my frequent collaborator and cinematographer, Dave Nickerson.

Postopera, the Postdramatic & New Opera Practices:
A Theoretical Framework

I set my work broadly within the context of *postopera*, a term I borrow from Jelena Novak's (2015) study, *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice Body*. I redefine and revise *postopera* as a singer-generated contemporary and heterogeneous performance and compositional practice that engages with Western classical singing technique, experimental vocal approaches, and live and mediatised theatrical forms – all of which may be considered variously modernist, historically referential, revisionist, or postmodern. My revision of Novak's term *postopera* includes the (re)centring of the singer-composer in a relational context within a performance practice of solo and collaborative works, and a reaffirmation of practice as the site of theoretical enquiry. To clarify the term *postopera*, it will be helpful to review its discursive origins as well as trace its influence upon my work.

Novak draws upon critic and scholar Jeremy Tambling's (1996) introduction of the term *post-opera*. Tambling does not define *post-opera*, but he implies that it is an artistic era *after* traditional Western opera. Novak also cites the work of theatre and performance practitioners Kandis Cook and Nicholas Till, who use the term *post-operatic*. Cook and Till (2002 and 2004) define the *post-operatic* as deconstructive re-inventions of repertoire from the standard Western canon with a concern for 'the post-life of opera in contemporary culture' (2002, n.p.), and an investigation of 'what is at stake in the social and cultural investment in opera…and in the survival of the "operatic"' (Till 2004, n.p.). Novak's (2015) departure from the ambiguity of Tambling and the canonical reworkings of Cook and Till, is in her focus upon works which do not 'refer to conventional opera and its re-workings, but only to unconventional recently created pieces' (38). Within this unconventional production approach, Novak asserts that *postopera* is in the lineage of Western music theatre and features 'pieces in which the relationship between music and drama is reinvented, and the impact of new media…is significant' (5). My work largely aligns with Novak's definition, but my practice is more closely associated with theories of the *postdramatic*, which Novak also draws upon.

In *Postdramatic Theatre*[3], Hans-Thies Lehmann (2006) explains his use of 'post', in *postdramatic*, as the maintenance of a referential relationship, however tenuous, which 'indicates that a culture or artistic practice has stepped out of the previously unquestioned horizon of modernity but still exists with some kind of reference to it' (27). In her introduction to the same volume, Karen Jürs-Munby (2006)

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3   The term *theatre*, here, loosely indicates performance practices with roots in Western live, conventional, narrative, text-based forms, but it may extend to dramatic and experimental music theatre, and traditional and contemporary operatic forms, whether live or mediatised. This is evident in Lehmann's study, as he includes contemporary operatic works such as those directed by Robert Wilson and Peter Sellars.

clarifies this fragile referential relationship in postdramatic performance practices as an abandonment, deconstruction, or renunciation of traditional 'dramatic conventions' (1). She also notes that the 'post' in postdramatic is not to be understood as 'an epochal category, nor simply as a chronological "after" drama…but rather as a rupture and a beyond that continue to entertain relationships with drama' (2). In my work as a singer-composer, I maintain a complex relationship with the historical traditions of Western opera – 'art in general cannot develop without reference to earlier forms' (Lehmann 2006, 27) – yet I abandon many of its conventional trappings as I participate in re-imagining what opera may be or may become.

Thus far, Novak's theoretical frame relies heavily upon significant aspects of Lehmann's work, and provides a suitable structure within which to contextualise my practice. However, Novak also asserts that postopera is both postdramatic and postmodern – and this union of theoretical frameworks, which are not necessarily congruous, complicates my relationship with the term postopera. Now that Novak has conjured the spectre of postmodernism, I am compelled to, at least briefly, pause over this complex and ambiguous term. From the purview of literary theory[4], postmodernism suggests a kind of scepticism, suspicion and deconstruction of form, content, and context. Postmodernism's subversion, transgression, or questioning of the integrity of structures, hierarchies, boundaries, disciplines, authority-authorship, gender, social constructs and roles, et cetera – as Paul H. Fry (2012) notes in *The Theory of Literature* – casts 'doubt about the grounds of knowledge' (195). This deconstructive engagement is done 'differently' across artistic disciplines – from architecture to performance, to film and media. However, its lens is contingent upon an 'eclectic orientation to the past' (194), functioning largely as a referential, often contrarian, framework to what has come before, with its gaze regularly expressed or exemplified in media and the arts via paradox, irony, parody, or pastiche (Richter 2007).

Along a similar theoretical trajectory, literary and performance studies theorist Linda Hutcheon (2004) argues that 'postmodernism is a contradictory phenomenon' which simultaneously 'installs and then subverts, the very concepts it challenges' (3). Although Hutcheon's sphere is Western literary and cultural phenomena, and Novak's work is centred in contemporary Western operatic forms, both scholars assert that postmodernism is 'inescapably political' (Hutcheon 2004, 4 and Novak 2015, 9). Within a creative context, this politicisation suggests the possibility of, or desire for, a kind of quantifiable or effective social action which creative work may somehow offer or produce. However, my thinking on the socio-political dimensions of artistic practice is more closely aligned with theatre theorist and feminist scholar Jill Dolan (2005), who writes of the power of the collective imagination as a utopian performative:

Perhaps instead of measuring the utopian performative's 'success' against some real notion of

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4 I will return to literary theory later in the thesis when I engage with philosopher, psychoanalyst, and cultural theorist, Julia Kristeva.

effectiveness, we need to let it live where it does its work best—at the theater or in moments of consciously constructed performance wherever they take place. The utopian performative, by its very nature, can't translate into a program for social action, because it's most effective as a feeling... perhaps such intensity of feeling is politics enough for utopian performatives. Perhaps burdening such moments with the necessity that they demonstrate their effectiveness after the performance ends can only collapse the fragile, beautiful potential of what we can hold in our hearts for just a moment. (19-20)

And so, with Dolan's astute expression of the ephemeral and fragile nature of the creative impulse, I diverge from Hutcheon, Novak, and postmodernism. Instead, I focus upon (re)centring the individual artist within her practice, and although my work may not be completely apolitical, I do not highlight its political scope[5]. With this in mind, rather than viewing the artist through a Romantic lens, which emphasises a reductionist individualism, my ideas more closely resonate with philosopher Adriana Cavarero who writes of the 'narratable self' (Cavarero 2000). Cavarero defines the narratable self as *who* someone is through their multifarious life story as reflected by, and woven into, the singular stories of others (Kottman 2000, vix). This 'unique and unrepeatable' existent self (Cavarero 2000, 71) transcends the limitations of universality imposed by Western 'traditional philosophy and politics', and in doing so, exposes a 'new sense of politics' – that is, an alternative understanding of 'human interaction, as the interaction of unique existents' (Kottman 2000, ix). Thus, Cavarero resists 'the volatile fragmentation' of a postmodern subject and affirms 'the living uniqueness of a self that is generated through plural, concrete and corporeal relationships with other human beings' (*Institute for Cultural Inquiry* 2010, n.p.).

I suggest Cavarero's ideas support the journey of an artist as an expression of a unique creative story and its resultant works. For example, in my work, solo pieces emerge as a reflective song that the 'poet sings for [her]self...but [her] song is heard by others' (Cavarero 2000, 94). These works act as a kind of interplay with, or riff upon, my personal 'biographical knowledge' as an 'unrepeatable identity' (13); that is, the *who* that is me, however hidden my life details may be within my work. Alongside my solo pieces, co-operative works are entwined with the personal and artistic paths of collaborators, wherein our creative relationships reflect each other: members of a collective are 'unique and unrepeatable' existent selves.

Along these theoretical lines, in *The Limits of Critique*, cultural theorist and scholar of feminist, postmodern, and aesthetic studies, Rita Felski (2015) explores the boundaries of the often suspicious, disenchanted, and fragmented postmodern milieu. She muses that in attending academic talks one 'has learned to expect the inevitable question: "But what about power?"' and she posits that new questions are in order, such as '"But what about love?"' (17). Felski does not see her viewpoint as an abandonment

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5 I might assert that the medium and methods, themselves, within which I work (conjuring Marshall McLuhan, 1967) serve as a destabilising and confrontational model in an often male-dominated Western new music scene: e.g. I am a female composer-singer-producer-director and that, alone, continues to be transgressive. I acknowledge that the domination of men in the new music industry has lessened considerably in the last ten years and there are now more women, non-binary, transgender persons, and more persons of colour in the contemporary music landscape.

of politics for aesthetics, rather she contends that the creative and possibility-embracing connectivity and interface of art and politics are a 'matter of connecting, composing, creating, coproducing, inventing, imagining, making possible: that neither is reducible to the piercing but one-eyed gaze of critique' (17-18). Considering this, my theoretical engagement is in the spirit of inquisitiveness, creativity, and constructive interface with my work and its context(s), rather than as a practice designed to comment upon, bring into question, or deconstruct extra-aesthetic socio-cultural fields of enquiry.

This focus upon the artistic work and its processes, rather than upon an explicit highlighting of a self-conscious, referential, or socio-political artistic *response*, again, more closely aligns my creative practice and my revision of postopera with Lehmann's (2006) concept of the postdramatic. While Lehmann embraces the social and relational framework of theatre practices, he views the postdramatic as not necessarily postmodern. He contends that contemporary theatre and its performance practices, which are often thought of as postmodern, are more accurately an abandonment or disavowal of traditional dramatic form:

> [A]ny traits of theatre practice that are called postmodern – from the seeming to the real randomness of means and quoted forms, to the unabashed use and combination of heterogeneous styles, from a 'theatre of images' to mixed media, multimedia and performance – by no means demonstrate a renunciation of modernity on principle. Yet they do show a renunciation of the traditions of dramatic form. (26)

In addition, Lehmann is sceptical 'towards the concept of postmodernism, which claims to achieve the definition of a whole epoch' (26) with its various 'keywords and catchphrases': e.g. ambiguity, 'celebrating theatre as process', non-textuality, subversion, perversion, deconstruction, 'considering text to be authoritarian and archaic', and resistance to interpretation (25). Along these lines, Jürs-Munby (2006) clarifies that the postdramatic resonates 'with many aspects of postmodernist and poststructuralist thinking' (13) including the desertion of grand narrative and the eschewing of traditional dramatic form, but she adds that scholars and practitioners have often 'expressed unease about the fact that these discourses [surrounding postmodernism] originated outside of theatre and performance' (13).

In essence, then, postmodernist thought in performance practice, that is, the 'application of postmodern and especially poststructuralist discourses to contemporary theatre and performance' (13) seems unable to bear in mind the particular landscapes and unique disciplinary characteristics of the creative process itself. Theatre scholar Johannes Birringer (1991) notes precisely that discrepancy when he clarifies that postmodern theories (e.g. literary theory, philosophy, psychoanalysis, sociology, et cetera) have seized performance practice as a site for a rhetorical interrogation of representation and power structures (42) and, thus lack a 'concrete historical understanding of the complex and conflicted relations of text and language to performance and space in the theatre' (43). Taking Birringer into account, Jürs-Munby (2006) asserts that Lehmann centres theory within the creative process, providing 'the

"missing link" by tracing a trajectory from within theatre aesthetics' (14), thus affirming that the critical exploration of aesthetics, form, and content occurs from *within* a practice rather than as a response to, or a superimposition of, postmodern theory *onto* practice.

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New expressions of opera may abandon the customs and structures of the historical form; however, akin to the relationship of narrative drama to the postdramatic, a connection to a complex traditional genre endures. The primary aesthetic element that connects my work to historical operatic traditions is my favouring of classical singing technique[6] – this technique, and how I expand it, forms my tenuous and ruptured relationship to opera. The renunciation of traditional dramatic form – or in the case of my work, a disavowal of traditional operatic, narrative-based music-theatre forms and accepted vocal aesthetics – allows new kinds of practices to emerge. Like Symonds and Karantonis (2013), the editors and contributing authors of *The Legacy of Opera: Reading Music Theatre as Experience and Performance*, I am interested in 'ways of working creatively that may seem materially similar to "opera" but ideologically form a productive distance from the cultural apparatus of its legacy' (20). My work in exploring ways to recreate, reinvent, or re-imagine opera as a singer-composer is in keeping with the possibility for new operatic forms to emerge 'in interesting efficacies of an interdisciplinary music theatre' (23).

One of these emerging forms is mediatised postopera, a form with which I extensively engage. Although opera has a long relationship with film, new forms of digitised and online operatic works are now more frequently produced[7]. In *The Legacy of Opera*, theatre and media researcher Bianca Michaels (2013) contends that 'media operas' – audio-visual forms of opera – are new ways of engaging with the genre that complicate what 'the term "opera" actually means' (29). This supports my idea of a post-genre, often mediatised, operatic form, and I echo her assertion that new operatic practices challenge the idea that 'liveness' is integral to opera. In abandoning the 'conventions of the operatic stage' and favouring a mediatised practice, like Michaels, I question the notion that 'the theatrical stage' is 'the natural location of opera' (35).

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6   My primary classical voice teachers have been Lois Alba, a *bel canto* specialist who is based in Houston, Texas, USA and who studied with soprano Rosa Ponselle (1897–1981); and Katherine Ciesinski, an opera singer and classical voice pedagogue at Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, New York, USA.

7   It is worth noting that my work in creating music videos and recording projects predates the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, an ongoing public health risk as I write this, which has turned the international arts community upside-down. Many artists and arts organisations are now driven to creative media and online works due to the uncertain future of live performance.

Vocal Lineages

Vocality is the extensive range of sound of the human voice – from singing to conventional speech and extra-vocalic expressions: 'a spectrum of utterances broader than lyrics-based singing' with a focus upon the 'bodily aspects of vocal utterance, beyond its linguistic content' (Karantonis and Verstraete 2014, 4). Within the purview of musical practice and singer-generated work, vocality focusses upon 'all the voice's manifestations' (Dunn and Jones 1994, 1).

My vocal practice is based in Western classical singing technique (*bel canto*)[8] – a technique I favour because I have an affinity for its aesthetic sonic quality and because it is an effective means to meet the technical, compositional, and genre demands of my own compositions, as well as works in the Western contemporary canon. I acknowledge influences ranging from the early 20th-century German expressionist theatrical vocal tradition, *Sprechgesang* (spoken-song), to the ground-breaking mid 20th-century classical and experimental singer, Cathy Berberian, and the indirect, yet ever-present influences of contemporary art pop, jazz, progressive rock, and cinema. I have studied with experimental vocal pedagogue Richard Armstrong of the Roy Hart[9] vocal lineage who emphasises a physio-vocal approach: a connection to breath originating deep in the body, and a freedom and pleasure in vocalisation. My voice work ventures into the domain of 'extended' vocal techniques pioneered by Berberian and Joan La Barbara. Berberian wrote of an expansive and unfettered voice practice as a 'New Vocality':

> What is the New Vocality that appears so threatening to the old guard? It is the voice which has an endless range of vocal styles at its disposal, embracing the history of music as well as aspects of sound itself; marginal perhaps compared to the music, but fundamental to human beings. (Berberian; trans. Placanica 2014, 51)

Berberian's New Vocality was infused with 'a spirit of inventiveness' and her work embraces 'all vocal genres and expands the horizon for performers in search of their own voice' (Placanica 2014, 58 and 63); it is this 'spirit of inventiveness' that I seek in my practice. With this perspective, I investigate the voice-body relationship and explore the characteristics of a 'freed' voice, one that is less habitually patterned yet capable of executing technical musical demands. I ask, how might I take words 'beyond meaning', using the voice as a vehicle? As Karantonis and Verstraete (2014) note in *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality*, this way of working is largely credited to Berberian with 'her own compositions and collaborative projects…that questioned the centrality of language as the primary carrier of meaning

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8   The term 'classical singing' in Western art music is often used interchangeably with the Italian phrase *bel canto* (beautiful singing), in reference to the Italian vocal training method of the 17th and 18th centuries that favoured seamless vocal register transitions, *legato*, and virtuosic florid singing. In the thesis, I occasionally use the term *bel canto* in place of 'classical singing'.

9   In 2013, I attended a two-week workshop and residency facilitated by Richard Armstrong at The Banff Centre in Canada. This intense period of work with Armstrong proved highly influential and, in part, set the trajectory for my current practice. Roy Hart, the prominent mid 20th-century vocal artist, studied with the German singing teacher Alfred Wolfsohn (1896–1962) who specialised in exploratory vocal methods. Before his untimely death in 1975, Hart became well known for his 'extended' vocal techniques and avant-garde work with *Roy Hart Theatre of the Voice* (Crawford and Pikes 2019).

in artistic practice' (9). Berberian's extensive oeuvre was rooted in classical vocal technique but not limited by it. She explored the totality of the voice with 'non-speech vocal sounds' and with a 'seamless transition between speech and singing, onomatopoeic scatting and beautified belting' (9). In her compositional practice and collaborative works, Berberian 'wrote' with the voice, employing a 'vocal writing' or a 'writing aloud, an *écriture sonore*, where the vocalist is composing with the voice at the instant of singing' (Verstraete 2014, 71)[10]. This approach is an encounter between practised vocal technique and new '"ways of being" for the voice—towards a musical integration of possibilities' (Berberian; trans. Placanica 2014, 47). It is with this in mind that my compositional practice explores improvisation and concert pitched elements to create a blend of *écriture sonore* and planned (composed) vocal lines. Vocality, then, becomes an engagement with an embodied physicality of technique, as well as a means by which to challenge and break open established practices and accepted artistic norms.

My creative processes, vocal compositional methods, and investigations of varied live and mediatised performance forms suggest a relationship to historical dramatised musical practices (e.g. opera). However, I aspire to participate in reinventing or redefining opera as a site that centralises the singer-composer as I create post-genre, postdramatic, music-theatre media works. My exploratory theoretical approach is always undertaken within my work's processes and landscape, and within an ever-evolving operatic discipline with a complex past, a dynamic present, and an unknown yet malleable future. The resonating tension, or possible dissolution, of theoretical and creative boundaries between the disciplinary setting of the past, practices of the present, and an unfolding future, between aesthetic forms, devices, structures, and deconstruction, between 'high' art and pop art, between the perceived limitations of musical genres, and between offline live performance and online mediatised forms, is a tension that simply exists and cannot be resolved but, rather, must be held. Creative work is one such container for contradictory, irreconcilable, and pluralistic *ways of being*.

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10 Verstraete's reference here of 'writing aloud' and 'vocal writing' is attributed to Roland Barthes and Roland Havas in *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art, and Representation*. Translated by Richard Howard, 2nd edition. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991.

A Note on Influences & Singer-Composers

The body of my thesis is a process-led engagement with my practice rather than a cursory overview or relational engagement of works by others. However, to broadly set my work within the context of Western art music's contemporary vocal field, I will take a moment to include a brief reflection upon artists and genres that have guided my work. My musical influences are wide ranging and include traditional Western opera and contemporary vocal music, present-day opera composers who embrace technology such as Tod Machover and Michel Vander Aa, progressive British art rock of the 1970s, (historic) metal, American jazz vocal standards, Golden Age Hollywood musicals, American musical theatre works, early MTV music videos, and pop icons such as Lady Gaga, Madonna, Kate Bush, and Annie Lennox. Other non-musical influences weigh heavily, if indirectly, upon my practice: science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction writers like George MacDonald, Angela Carter, Anne Sexton, Margaret Atwood, and Susanna Clarke; pop cinematic literature such as the work of Jim Henson in *The Dark Crystal* (1982), Angelina Jolie's *Maleficent* (2014 and 2019), and the surreal production of Tom Hardy's BBC limited series, *Taboo* (2017) (an example, I would contend, of the operatic impulse in cinema).

A number of singer-composers have drawn me into their work and influenced my creative journey. In the body of my thesis, I name Cathy Berberian and briefly mention Joan La Barbara, Björk, and Meredith Monk. To contextualise my practice with the field, I include the influence of female singer-composers (and a few who are not composers themselves) who have impacted my practice, whether directly or peripherally, and whose work, in spirit, aligns with my own: singer-composer and performance artist Diamanda Galás; voice artist and electronic musician, Pamela Z; opera singer and conductor Barbara Hannigan; composer and vocalist Jennifer Walshe; Finnish singer and composer Anna Fält; singer-composer Elaine Mitchener; soprano and artist researcher Elisabeth Belgrano; contemporary singer and interdisciplinary performing artist Fides Krucker; Malian musician Fatoumata Diawara; and Faroese singer-songwriter Eivør Pálsdóttir. Of relevance to the centrality of vocality and sonority in my research, the work of the aforementioned artists largely aligns with my own in its embodied poesy, theatricality, and activation of the subconscious dimension of language. The work of these diverse singers speaks to the temperament of my compositional and aesthetic approach, and my own work aspires to a kindred artistic ferocity and 'spirit of inventiveness' (Placanica on Cathy Berberian 2014, 58). So, I will simply leave these broad and sometimes non-musical influences here, as a relevant if anecdotal note, and move on to the remaining sections of this chapter before leading the reader on the continued journey through my practice.

Methodology and Hybrid Writing Forms

My research methods are practice-based, process-oriented, exploratory and experimental, and my creative projects steer the trajectory of the theoretical framework. I engage in an approach in which theory and practice are united. *In Practice as Research in the Arts*, Robin Nelson (2013) writes of 'theory imbricated within practice' and 'an iterative process of "doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing"' (32-33). In this activity of 'knowing-in-doing' (9), I discovered reciprocal 'resonances' with my creative work rather than attempting 'to grab at a theory to justify the practice' (32). My methods form a circular, nonlinear process and my work often surprises me with insights gained during all phases of a project, with meaning and understanding echoing long after a work is complete. I espouse an artistic theory thoroughly enveloped in process and practice, and only arrived at through the work itself (Schechner 2000, Nelson 2013, and Barrett and Bolt 2007).

I embrace the ideas of Estelle Barrett (2007) who writes in *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, that 'artistic research demonstrates that knowledge is derived from doing and from the senses' (1), an idea that fits within my approach to vocal work and applies to my often-intuitive creative practice. Barrett advocates for a 'way out' of the duality of a practice that is either a 'valorisation' of the creative work or a 'mere description' (130), and instead, suggests a shift away from 'the evaluation of the work as product, to an understanding of creative enquiry *and* its outcomes as process' (130). This kind of enquiry in which practice, process, and outcome are integrated is illuminated by performance studies theorist and theatre artist, Richard Schechner (2000) in 'Post Post-Structuralism?' Schechner calls for artists to 'generate theories based on performance' and for these theories to affirm a 'disciplinary independence' (4). Although Schechner's article dates from over twenty years ago, artist-researchers continue to struggle with a largely unquestioned theoretical canon that relies 'heavily on the thinking of a relatively few persons whose works are more often cited as "authorities" than criticised or revised' (5). Schechner advocates for artists to develop practice-based 'new theories' that are rooted in observation, historical context, and which are 'inductive and fluid—always being updated' (7).

In addition to an engagement with these theories of practice as research, I draw upon poetic and experimental writing approaches through self-reflection and hybrid creative-critical enquiry. The poet, teacher, and essayist, John Hall (2013) advocates for 'performance writing', a slippery form with varied characteristics including writing that may be 'out of', 'after', and *from sound composition or words that lurk near music*' (35). Hall's embrace of the musicality of language is central to my creative practice and my exploration with embodied vocality, as well as my hybrid creative-critical writing. His ideas on textual encounters, noted by Larry Lynch (2013) in the forward to Hall's *Essays on Performance Writing, Poetics, and Poetry (Vol. 1)*, puts 'the idea of performance to work, releasing it from the strictures of disciplinary specificity' – writing and reading then become 'things that are done (in bodies and contexts)…that take place in material time and space' (20). This focus on the *doing* of writing opens pathways for my

dissertation to function not as an expository commentary but, rather, as writing centred in, with, and as creative work. Hall approaches texts and reading with an 'openness to the discursive productivity of knowing and working with that which is unknown (and in some cases unknowable), and to taking on an expanded set of arts concerns as absolutely part of the fabric of a text' (18).

This 'fabric' of the text is central to my compositional approach and my exploration of the work of Bulgarian-French philosopher, cultural theorist, and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva ([1969] 1980; [1974] 1984; and 2002). For Kristeva, poetic language is centralised and the concept of the text becomes expansive: a text may be any device or element in a creative work as well as a work in its totality; it may be a site of historical reference, a personal psycho-narrative, or an interaction within an aesthetic disciplinary tradition. Texts are fluid sites of interconnectivity, enquiry, and meaning-making. These sites speak to the imbrication and relationality of traditions and disciplinary *loci* that echo or resonate within writing, a creative work, or creative working process. Within my practice, this textual historicity and its relationship to the contemporary is expressed through hybrid writing forms, vocality, experimental performance approaches, and media practices.

It is through a poetic lens that I engage with theorists, accessing their ideas via the musicality of their writing. This engagement with sonority and the nonverbal expressivity of words is in keeping with my vocal compositional methods. In *Desire in Language*, Kristeva ([1969] 1980) writes that encounters with writing and art may become 'a passion for ventures with meaning and its materials (ranging from colors to sounds, beginning with phonemes, syllables, words)…where meaning functions as a restructuring' (x). This fluid meaning-making process emerges through aesthetic sites that privilege sonority, and which embrace the varied devices of a given work. As Leon Roudiez (1980) notes in his introduction to the same Kristeva volume, poetic language is a 'language of materiality as opposed to transparency', and it is a site of (re)discovery where expository engagement is decentred and 'the writer's [or artist's] effort is less to deal rationally with those objects or concepts words seem to encase than to work, consciously or not, with the sounds and rhythms of words in transrational fashion' (5). In my work, this transrationality centres a creative-theoretical exploration that is realised through hybrid writing in an interface with the creative work. It is with this perspective that my thesis writing is at once poetic and critical. I aim for my writing and portfolio to be a pathway for specialists and non-specialists, alike, to engage with complex ideas alongside my creative work. In blurring the boundaries between my creative and academic contributions, I advocate for a type of written engagement which is critically rigorous yet creative and sometimes informal, with the purpose of being true to my voice as well as reaching a broad audience[11].

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11   In part, I am provoking a discussion of the limits, boundaries, and spaces between creative work and academic discourse. My work is in keeping with other emerging creative-academic formats such as video articles of the *Journal of Embodied Voice Practice* edited by vocal researcher and pedagogue, Ben Spatz; the 'Research Catalogue' of the online practice-based publishing platform and conference convener, *Society for Artistic Research*; the 'Theatre, Dance and Performance Training Blog', an online platform and companion to the print journal of the same title; as well as conferences being presented in flexible and varied media formats such as the Royal Musical Association 2020 conference which took place entirely online.

About the Micro-operas Herein

In addition to the primary creative portfolio media previously outlined, I include short micro-vocal video works throughout the thesis, beginning in the chapter, 'Vocality & Embodiment'. The genesis of these micro-works is my thirteen-part *Micro-opera* project and *(micro)Requiem* released over the course of 2020[12]. This way of working has proved to be a valuable compositional sketch pad, an almost-daily practice, and has developed into a body of work in its own right.

The micro-operas in this thesis use cited text in an aesthetic engagement with theory. Inspired by theorists' writing, I felt compelled to create vocal works of *their* work – that is, using the writers' own words. As I was writing and reading, I continued to get ideas about how to directly express theoretical concepts via vocality. The micro-operas reiterate and reinforce my theoretical investigations, embrace the destabilising and restructuring effect sonority has upon language, and directly engage with the inseparability of form and meaning. These pieces serve, in part, as access to challenging philosophical ideas as well as a way to reflect upon theory; in effect, to bring these ideas to life. As I wrote-read-created / created-read-wrote, I continued to come upon theorists' writing which, in their linguistic beauty, seemed to ask for vocalisation. I engaged in this way with the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty; the 19th-century French symbolist poet, Stéphane Mallarmé; Julia Kristeva; and cultural theorists Steven Connor and Michel Poizat.

The experience of creating the micro-works resonates with Nelson's (2013) ideas on practice as research, which I previously quoted, and I repeat here – that theory and practice are imbricated as 'an iterative process of "doing-reflecting-reading-articulating-doing"' (32-3). The micro-works speak directly to Nelson's elucidation of the nonlinear 'hermeneutic-interpretive model' in practice as research: a circular form of research, thinking, and practice where enquiry is 'figured as circles, spirals or networks with many points of entry' (52). This circle allows entry at different points, honouring the 'non-methodical' and often 'chaotic iterative journey through a process', as well as recognising that 'knowing is a matter of multiple perspectives' (52-3). The circular and 'emergent nature' of my work, where thinking and creating 'unfolds through practice…and engenders further practice' (Barrett 2007, 9) is indicative of the way I understand the creative process.

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12   These two works are not included in my submitted portfolio of creative work for this thesis.

Versioning: Practical Matters

Versioning[13] is a term I use to describe my approach to creative work-making which emphasises flexibility of form. It is a process whereby variations of performance and media works are developed and shared. My production methods came about from the desire to create complex theatrical music performance pieces without the heavy burden of production resources and pre-production time investment. Moreover, I wanted a given piece to live beyond a single performance yet honour a constancy to the original concept. This applied process yielded work-making strategies that are improvisatory, devised, modular, and versioned. What I call *versioning* is a production method in which a performance or media work is realised in multiple forms: live, digitally documented, and dedicated audio and video versions. These forms may then be presented in varying durations: abbreviated and full-length. Versioning offers an opportunity for increased audience engagement beyond one-off, short-lived, resource-gobbling (thus impractical) live performance.

This commitment to practicality is a concept I borrow, in part, from a modular approach. In 'Modular Music', composer James Saunders (2008) cites Anna Ericsson and Gunnar Erixon's volume, *Controlling Design Variants: Modular Product Platforms* (1999), which outlines the benefits of modularity in the production industry, including 'the more creative benefits such an approach provides: greater flexibility, improved quality, and independent development of a product and production system' (3). If modules, sections, pieces, or elements of a project can come together quickly, whether from pre-planning or improvisational skills, this 'greater flexibility' in the creation of work offers an opportunity to ease the burden associated with traditional production practices.

The words *iteration* and *version* are often used interchangeably. However, *iteration* is from the Latin *iteratio* (repetition) and *itero* (repeat, do again), and *version* from *versio*[14] (a turning, a change,) and *verto* (turn, revolve). *Iteration*, then, implies small incremental changes through repetition. Works in the Western classical music canon may be considered iterative due to evolution in performance practices: e.g. changes in *cadenze* traditions over time, the development of vocal technique, advances in musical instrument fabrication, pitch stabilisation, and changes in edited and published score editions over centuries. Contemporary classical works, which are often painstakingly notated, change slightly from one performance to the next, particularly when a composer works with musicians through the process. I have experienced this personally, as a work is developed through the rehearsal process with the composer present.

I chose the word *versioning* because it is related to the development of subsequent variations in

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13 The word *versioning* is borrowed from computer programming and software development, and refers to the numbering of subsequent versions of computer-operating systems and software.

14 *Versio* is, interestingly, related to *verse*: a furrow or row – a word which evolved to indicate a line or section of poetry and poetic language plays a central role in my work.

form, rather than an iterative process of repetition as the impetus or mechanism for change. Iterative works suggest a process of ongoing small changes over time; but in my concept of versioning, versions are definitive: each version possesses its own function or place in the whole of the project. Within a versioning process, an array of forms may be developed for any given work. These forms may change depending on the performance, media application, presentation, or sharing format. From its inception, if a work is meant to have a number of versions based on concept, function, and distribution, then the entire process is impacted. Each of the creative works presented herein are examples of versioning, whether through varied durations, documented live performance, in-process videos, or dedicated media works. Within this approach, my work has gravitated toward what I think of as final and definitive versions: e.g. the *Visible Darkness* music video (Fig. 9) in the chapter, 'Vocality & Embodiment'; the film, *Digital Medusa (mise en abîme)* (Fig. 19) in the chapter, 'Destabilising Language'; and the music video for *Threshold* (Fig. 28) in the chapter, 'On Devising & Collaborative Processes'. However, other versions of these projects may continue to be distributed in their individual and varied formats, depending on production or sharing parameters.

The advantages of multi-form works may be particularly beneficial to self-producing artists, across a variety of creative disciplines, who are self-funding, soliciting funding from patrons, or accessing state-funding resources on a project-to-project basis. Although I might argue that large arts-presenting organisations would benefit from versioning, my area of focus is on independent artists.

Why create versions of work?
Why version?

Considerations

Presentation and production limitations significantly impact the final form of a work, and these considerations create a motivation for versioning. Calls for work, proposal formats, presenters' submission guidelines, and independently produced pieces may each possess restrictions, such as time constraints, site limitations, and specific personnel requirements. Constraints nudge an artist toward a flexible approach to work-making. If a project is planned with an eye on how the work operates in and interfaces with the world, it may find a wider audience through versioning.

Flexible projects may be presented in a range of formats and under varied conditions. Rather than composing, creating, or having a number of works on hand for submittal to various calls – for example, works that span durations of five minutes to thirty minutes – artists may consider creating *one* work which may be presented in five minutes *or* thirty minutes. This is versioning. How might a work be presented in a festival in which the duration of each performance is restricted to under ten minutes? Might a longer work alter in form to meet these constraints? For instance, a work envisioned as a thirty-

minute piece be may be reduced in duration. Conversely, a shorter work may be expanded for inclusion on a more time-generous evening of performance. A creative approach to the final forms of a work may make the difference between a piece being seen or heard, or not presented at all. Often it is the 'vision' or demands that the artist, herself, has put on the concept from the beginning that restricts the potentiality of the work's final form and, ultimately, its capacity for sharing, audience reach, and impact.

Remediation may come to mind here, that is, the theory of the relationality between older and newer forms of media, espoused by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000) in *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. In Bolter and Grusin's influential research, they write that remediation is 'the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms' (273) and 'the way in which one medium is seen by our culture as reforming or improving upon another' (59). Bolter and Grusin assert that the two parts of remediation are *hypermediacy*, which is a 'style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium', and its opposite, *immediacy* or *transparent immediacy*, wherein the viewer 'forgets' the medium (272). However, my versioning approach is not necessarily focussed upon the development of new media forms, the analysis of a medium's emphasis or transparency, nor its historical precursors (though the subject matter that inspires my work is arguably relevant in this regard, given its origins in the Western literary canon with which I often engage). Bolter and Grusin do point out the term most closely aligned with versioning: *repurposing*.

Repurposing is a commercial entertainment industry strategy for 'pouring a familiar content into another media form; a comic book series is repurposed as a live-action movie, a televised cartoon, a video game, and a set of action toys' (68). It is a method of spreading content and accruing profit in the commercial marketplace (89). As an applied strategy for artists, Bolter and Grusin acknowledge the efficacy of repurposing 'in microeconomic terms as the refashioning of materials and practices' (89). Repurposing broadly aligns with my versioning concept, and the 'refashioning of materials and practices' is an aspect of this work. However, profitability in the commercial marketplace is not my focus. Versioning is a tactical mindset and an effective framework for production and sharing, particularly relevant for independent maker-producers engaged in the non-profit arts sector.

Be flexible

Honour resourcefulness

Casts & Collaborators

Planning and designing works with flexible casts or collaborators is another aspect of versioning. For example, a piece may feature two performers rather than a sixty-person chorus. Moreover, works may take any number of forms at inception, from pieces designed for audience participation or community engagement, to devised collaborative pieces, works for orchestral players, electric guitarists, a laptop

orchestra, or a community symphony. Within these hypothetical performance situations, how might a composer / artist-producer allow personnel flexibility within a given work? What is realistic? For instance, a choral work might be for four singers rather than forty; a laptop orchestra might consist of three instruments instead of twenty. I often ask myself, 'What do I have at my disposal, right now?' rather than, 'I need seven countertenors and a goat, or I cannot realize my creative genius!' (Penton 2018, n.p.). In *The Creative Habit*, choreographer Twyla Tharp (2003) writes of her early experiences making work with very few resources:

> For my first dance, the seven-minute-long *Tank Dive* performed in Room 1604 at Hunter College in New York City in 1965, l had no money, no scenery, no music, no stage to speak of. How limited is that? In fact, for my first five years I choreographed to silence. And yet those impoverished circumstances forced me to discover my own dance vocabulary. Dizzy Gillespie once said of Louis Armstrong's giant influence on jazz, 'No him, no me.' l feel the same way about my years of extremely limited resources: No deprivation, no inspiration. No then, no now. (133)

I have experienced the tight restrictions of making work with few to no resources. Over the years, my work has spanned busking on street corners and playing in bands in dive bars, to producing and performing evening-length theatrical new music and new opera works in concert halls, museums, galleries, and alternative spaces; having music films screened at film festivals and, recently, directing a web opera for Houston Grand Opera. However, my primary creative focus continues to be producing my own work and I usually do so with few resources. Due to a long personal history of making work under a variety of (often adverse) circumstances, I believe I've achieved a level of proficiency in not only making do but creating refined work with very little.

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Due to its collaborative nature and the creative input of others, what makes my work 'mine'? It may be best to illuminate my idea of authorship in reverse, that is, how I view participation in other composers' works and what makes those works *not* mine, even though I may contribute creatively to a project. For example, a composer generates a work via a conceptual framework, through artistic leadership, or through a scoring process – the work would not exist without them. Due to the initiation and originality of their concept, I would not claim shared authorship of the work, regardless of my creative input. I am simply contributing or lending my personal and artistic experiences, skills, and creative responses to another musician's vision. My relationship to this process is completely different from when I am conceptualising, instigating, shaping, spearheading, and producing my own work.

I might add that I am cautiously revealing my views on what I think collaboration actually *is*. In the arts, there is a long-standing utopian ideal of collaborative work, one which seeks to represent

egalitarian or democratic principles in action by enacting or revealing social and collaborative resonances and tensions. Sometimes such works are scored by a composer who designs the work to embody these principles with authorship and the presence of the composer intact; and sometimes these ideals are present in the structure of an ensemble that shares authorship and production responsibilities.

However, what I am describing is a model in which an artist realises her work through the input of collaborators, but these collaborators, themselves, also make their own work that requires the input of other artists. The artist who conceptualises, spearheads, and produces the work maintains authorship with appropriate credit to collaborators. In all instances, there is little micro-management of creative contributions. For this process to be effective, many variables must be negotiated, often tacitly, through project design and through trusting collaborative relationships. This is what I call reciprocal collaboration. What follows are three examples of my reciprocal participation in other composers' works.

Composer Steve Gisby initiated a project wherein he asked friends, colleagues, and family members to record two words and send the recordings to him with a brief explanation of why the words were chosen. I was delighted by this idea and I sent Gisby two words and recorded them in several ways using a speech-singing approach. I have no idea what Gisby will ultimately do with the recordings I sent to him, and I have no idea what the final project will be – this, of course, is all part of the fun. It is also a project which is, decidedly, not mine.

Composer Chris Becker is another artist with whom I often work. He has created rhythm tracks for my recorded pieces (including *Visible Darkness*) and I have contributed voice tracks to his works. He often gives me too much credit as an equal collaborator – when I send him a collection of recorded voice tracks, he is free to use, transform, or discard the tracks, as he sees fit, to realise his vision.

Dancer, choreographer, and dance scholar Meg Brooker, with whom I have often collaborated, conceptualised and spearheaded *Kassandra*, a dance-based live performance project to which I contributed voice. This work was performed in Austin, Texas and London, UK, in the summer of 2019. The initial idea was Brooker's and would not have existed without her. My presence in the piece was at her invitation. Brooker and I previously collaborated on a number of projects, including one of my own conception, inspired by *Klytemnestra*, another Greek anti-heroine in the same mythological family as Kassandra.

It may be obvious by now that these types of processes, whether artists are contributing to my work or I to theirs, require an enormous amount of trust in the collaborative relationship.

Production & Scale

Producing concerts, media projects, and hybrid theatrical-musical performances is time-consuming and resource-demanding. No matter how simple or complex the work, production timelines are always extremely tight. How might an artist take advantage of pre-production time restrictions and maximise resources? Creative work happens best within constraints, under pressure, and in a metaphoric hothouse or alchemical crucible, '[l]imits are a secret blessing, and bounty can be a curse' (Tharp 2003, 132).

Versioning includes considering the technical potential of a work and its scale. A composer-producer might reduce or expanded a piece, adding or subtracting media, amplification, or electronics from a given performance. The constraints of a venue may impact the development and realisation of a work. A piece may be presented in a gallery, alternative space, or specific site rather than a traditional theatre or concert hall. For example, it is less expensive to mount a work in a dance studio than a large proscenium theatre space. Moreover, re-using, re-combining, and revisiting already-developed material for use in current or future projects is a form of versioning, and another pragmatic way to approach work-making. All these considerations effect the level of resources needed to produce the work.

Some production and presentation constraints may not be flexible or may be undesirable to an artist's concept. However, flexibility is fundamental to work production: what may be done with very little? And how simply? Robert Fripp (2017), the English progressive rock guitarist, has an extensive online diary with a multitude of aphorisms that date back to the 1970s. These condensed insights shed light on his process. One of my favourite Fripp aphorisms is, 'The simplest is the most difficult to discharge superbly' (n.p.). Similarly, Tharp (2003) writes, 'Make it easy on yourself' (20).

Don't be afraid of something because it is easy.
What characteristics of a work cannot be ceded to flexibility?
What characteristics of a work are essential or universal?

Voice is a universal characteristic of my work. That I am the performer in my own work is also a universal, at this time. Some of my chosen aesthetic and technical parameters are inflexible when it comes to versioning. For example, I choose to keep the voice unamplified because I want the acoustics of a given space to interact with my voice, and I often choose spaces for live performance based on their acoustic properties. This restriction – an unamplified voice[15] – establishes the parameters of the 'game' or the framework, for my live performance pieces. However, this constraint pushes me to find alternative spaces that will suit my aesthetic vision, and that also fit production resources.

Another motivation or characteristic of my process is to create improvisational work which *seems*

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15   The paradox here is that in recording voice and creating media works, I directly use the technology that I often eschew in live performance.

to have been pre-composed, notated with complexity, and rehearsed with staging – and then to present that work as a 'polished' performance. In essence, the goal of much of my work is to make pieces which are neither notated nor rehearsed (or lightly rehearsed), yet the work appears to the audience to have been subjected to a lengthy workshopping, rehearsal, and pre-production process. I believe I achieve this aim by utilising improvisational methods and working with collaborators with whom I share a significant personal and creative history, and who possess particular skill sets sympathetic with my own. Therefore, I avoid the often-lengthy time commitment of individual music preparation, substantial rehearsal time, and elaborate pre-production demands.

There is a certain amount of efficiency, and an honouring of pragmatism or practicality, built into the way I envision and create works; as Fripp (2017) writes, 'Honour necessity' (n.p.). Efficiency may seem unartistic, but it is often necessary. How does an economy of approach effect, expand, or transform the work? Versioning is not a compromise nor a limitation. Versions are not lesser substitutions of shorter works for longer works. Versioning is an expansion. By all means, an artist ought to push to realise the vision of her two-hour symphony, but might this artist also create a three-minute dedicated music video of the 'same' work? Or an eight-minute version for three players? In our global digital culture, it is nearly guaranteed that more people will be exposed to a three-minute work than a two-hour one. This flexible perspective encourages objectivity and detachment in the process of planning and creating. It is in the work's best interest that an artist detaches from an inflexible dedication to a vision or pre-conceived notion, and that she avoids the self-imposed limitation of what a work is 'supposed' to be, before it may reveal what it is. Tharp (2003) writes that detachment allows an artist to edit, to 'become selective' (55), and to exert significant discernment throughout the process. On rehearsing work with her company, she notes, '[i]f I could watch from farther away, from outside the theatre in the street, I would. That's how much detachment I need from my work in order to understand it' (44). The work becomes a teacher:

The creative process leads the form and substance of my practice
I am taught by the process itself

Versioning is marked by an inclusive perspective focussed upon creatively constraining or expanding a work and magnifying its reach, giving it 'legs', and a longer 'shelf-life'. Versions become intrinsic creative traits of a piece. From the beginning of a project, I am already planning to expand or edit the work depending on its versioned application. For example, as well as creating multi-form works of varying duration, the libretti for my pieces each exhibit flexibility in initial design, and applied flexibility in performance and mediatised versions. Flexibility is the overarching framework, foundation, and concept. In knowing this from the very beginning of the process, I create adaptable structures from which I generate versions.

Though too numerous to name, there are many other examples of versioning: live recordings of concert tours released as albums, music video versions of songs, books and operas[16] made into movies, and audio books (full-length and abridged). The Open University (2019) produced a series of ingenious animated shorts of Greek tragedy, including a brilliant animated adaptation / version of *Antigone*. The work is meant to draw in an audience, not act as a substitute for the experience of seeing or reading the full-length play. The long-running West End comedy, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged)*, by Adam Long, Daniel Singer, and Jess Winfield (1987) is another well-known versioned work. Many versioning approaches seek to abridge, yet there are examples of works that are significantly expanded in subsequent versions. Poems made into films, such as Edgar Allen Poe's *The Raven* and Tim Burton's (1993) *Nightmare Before Christmas*, are radical expansions and re-expressions of the original works.

Each of the previous examples overlap versioning ideas with theories of remediation, repurposing, and adaptation. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon (2006) notes that adaptations usually exhibit a 'fidelity' to an original, culturally recognisable textual source (6-8). Adaptations are often transposed from one medium to another, from genre to genre, and are centred in '(re-)interpretation' and '(re-)creation' (7-8). Hutcheon's ideas on form may or may not be true for a versioning approach; however, a versioned work does exhibit substantial fidelity to its original. Hutcheon also notes the 'mosaic' (21) of referential and relational texts within a process of adaptation, citing Julia Kristeva's concept of *intertextuality*, a theory I explore later in the thesis.

Media & the Internet

Posting work on Vimeo, YouTube, and social media platforms is not a panacea in terms of audience reach, but it is generally agreed that having work online is desirable for artists in all disciplines. There are many ways to format work for the internet. Live performance documentation may be edited to varying durations. If a performance is an hour long and has been documented (video and audio), an artist may consider posting a three- to five-minute video edit and / or audio edit as well as the full-length work, giving viewers or listeners options for engagement. Shorter, internet-friendly media samples may become works in their own right (versions), whereas longer videos or full-length live performance documentation may target an audience more deeply interested in the work. Dedicated live performance streaming, studio recordings, artistic films, and music videos may be created in the same way, with shorter and longer media works designed for online viewing, sharing, and distribution.[17] My views echo Saunders' (2008) in this regard:

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16 Of note, Franco Zeffirelli directed several opera films including Giuseppe Verdi's *La Traviata* (1983) and *Otello* (1986).

17   Process blogs, vlogs, social media marketing, and platforms such as Patreon have been omitted here because they are beyond the scope of my work with versioning. My piece, 'But What I Really Want to Do is Direct!' (2017) published online by NewMusicBox USA, outlines a number of strategies and technical approaches for artists to consider in creating their own music video works.

Each version should therefore be musically self-sufficient and avoid the requirement to have experienced other versions. So for some listeners the sole version they have heard is the piece, for others the knowledge of the project transforms their view, while for a smaller group of listeners, hearing more than one version allows them to contextualize this knowledge through experience: they can make actual comparisons between versions. (35–6)

My creative work is made with the flexibility of versioning in mind. Because I often feel that I am a producer above all else, my practical methods focus upon limiting production demands in order to continue to effectively share work, creating flexible structures for an artistic practice to flourish, and honouring adversity as a condition that shapes creative processes.

'Turn a seeming disadvantage to your advantage.

The greater the seeming disadvantage, the greater the possible advantage'.

(Fripp 1999, n.p.)

Vocality & Embodiment

In this chapter, I explore the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty as it relates to my work with embodiment and vocality. Woven throughout the text, the reader will find micro-operas that reflect my theoretical resonances. Additionally, in an engagement with my practice of composing with and through the voice, I include a look at the influence of early 20th-century expressionist vocal traditions as well as reflections upon my creative project, *Visible Darkness* (2019–20).

Sonorous Beings

> Vocality in music is understood today to indicate a spectrum of utterances broader than lyrics-based singing...we can appreciate that vocality has continually been reconfigured...to include a regard for the purely sonorous, bodily aspects of vocal utterance, beyond its linguistic content and beyond the appraisal of voice as merely an object of the listener's desire. (Karantonis and Verstraete 2014, 4)

Vocality[18] ... the lineage of singer-generated work, with a focus upon

'all the voice's manifestations' (Dunn and Jones, 1994, 1)

– the 'spectrum of utterances broader than lyrics-based singing'.

(Karantonis and Verstraete, 2014, 4)

Fig. 1   *Vocality...* Video (00:45 seconds). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14892594

The sound of the human voice – from what may be recognised as 'singing' to vocalisations that include conventional speech as well as extra-vocalic gasps, whispers, ingresses, tongue clucks, coughs, laughter, et cetera – reveal a sonic world driven by the bodily presence of the voice. This bodily presence and 'spectrum of utterances' conjures Barthes's (1977) 'grain' of the voice and his assertion that there is something 'beyond (or before) the meaning of the text' (181). He embraced the idea that meaning is inherent in the expression of physicalised vocality. Through an embodied experiential and experimental process of composing with and through the voice, I explore a meaning-making process that is deeply connected to vocal production and to the corporeal manifestation of the sonority of a text.

This work with the voice-body is related to Merleau-Ponty's theories of embodiment which focus upon perception as a direct experience of *being* a body, that is, we are not separate mind-entities *inhabiting* bodies. As modern French philosophy scholar Eric Matthews (2002) notes in *The Philosophy of Merleau-*

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18   A version of this micro-vocal work was published as part of my audio-video engagement, 'Many Micro Worlds' (2019) on the *21st Century Music Practice Research Network*, University of West London website curated and edited by Simon Zagorski-Thomas.

Ponty, we are subjects that are '"in-the-world"' and we are 'necessarily embodied, for only a subject that is inseparable from a particular body can have a place in the world' (25). This inseparability of body, mind, and experience is central to Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of phenomenology, an elusive and often ambiguous term for which he is famously known[19]. In my voice work, there is an inseparability of the experiential, embodied phenomenon of vocality, voicing, and singing: 'I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it' (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002, 173).

> I am not *in* my body
>
> I *am* my body
>
> And so, I am my voice:
>
> voice & body united
>
> voice-body-body-voice
>
> 'The world is not what I think, but what I live through'.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002, xviii-xix)

A central tenet of Merleau-Ponty's thought is the concept of 'relearning to look at the world' (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002, xxiii) by approaching 'perception as we actually experience it, before we begin to theorize' (Matthews 2002, 25). Perhaps it is Berberian's lineage of expressive and expansive vocality that is most exemplary of this pre-theorisation concept. Berberian espoused a vocality that flourishes outside the confines of style, genre, 'technique', and language. In other words: *free*. In part, this freedom is accessed through the sonority of poetics. This vocalised poetry supersedes, overcomes, or expands signified (quotidian-denotative) meaning. The timbre of language *is* its essential meaning and poetry 'is a creation of language, one which cannot be fully translated into ideas' (Merleau-Ponty [1948] 2004, 100). Why sing if one can simply speak? Because it is the form that is paramount and not the function: 'poetry's first function...is not to designate ideas, to signify (100)[20]. If singing is an expression of embodied poesy, then singing's first function is also not to 'designate ideas'. As the post-symbolist poet Paul Valéry wrote in the early 20th century, 'If a bird could say exactly what he sings, why he sings it, and *what*, within himself, is singing, he would not sing' (Gilbert 1970, 18). Vocality, then, is its own radical signification; its own sonorous landscape wherein functional meaning and linear narrativity is exceeded.

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19 Merleau-Ponty's work was a response, in part, to Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), the *fin de siècle* German philosopher credited with establishing the school of thought known as phenomenology.

20 Here, Merleau-Ponty refers to remarks about poetry made by French scholar Henri Brémond and the French poet Paul Valéry.

Merleau-Ponty conjures Valéry as well, writing that

'language is everything, since it is the voice of no one,

since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests'. ([1964] 1968, 155)[21]

Fig. 2   *Language is everything.* Video (00:20 seconds). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14892723

For Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero (2005), this resonant sphere of language is 'pervaded by a musical rhythm, in which vocality explodes through the linguistic signifier, comes to the surface, and commands the meaning' (137). She asserts that sonority 'disturbs the system of reason' (118) and 'disorganizes languages' claim to control the entire process of signification' (132). Cavarero clarifies my views on vocal composition and its potential to subvert denotative meaning. Her theories speak deeply to my creative process and the resulting works:

> The voice...in fact turns out not only to organize poetic song, but also the poetic text...The voice appears this way, not so much as the medium of communication and oral transmissions, but as the register of an economy of drives that is bound to the rhythms of the body in a way that destabilizes the rational register on which the system of speech is built. (11)

It is with this approach that I set text for my own voice, allowing vocality to drive the trajectory of a creative project.

'Like crystal, like metal and many other substances, I am a sonorous being'.

(Merleau-Ponty [1964] 1968, 144)

Fig. 3   *Like crystal, like metal.* Video (00:17 seconds). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14892768

In keeping with this sensory or sensual experience, musicologist Nicholas Cook (2001) notes Baroque and Renaissance music specialist Päivi Järviö's work with embodied voice practices. Järviö embraces an autoethnographic methodology through reflective observation of her singing and the voice-body relationship. For Järviö, a singer 'connects to the whole of her singing body' and the piece she is working on 'becomes flesh in her living body, thus blurring the split between theory and practice, between mind and body' (311). Järviö (2015), herself, writes in 'The Singularity of Experience in the Voice Studio' that singing is not about the 'concrete, physical movement of body parts', nor is it about the

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21 Merleau-Ponty references Paul Valéry but does not directly cite his 1921 poem, '*La Pythie*' (The Pythia). The end of the poem reads, 'Holy Language… / Behold a Wisdom speaking forth, / A Voice, stately and resonant, / That knows itself, as it rings out, / To be the voice of no one now / Except the forests and the surf!' (Nathaniel Rudavsky-Brody translation, 2020, 466).

sound leaving the singer's body for that of a listener but, '[a]bove all, it is about the live movement in the singer's body' (25).

> In the studio, I breathe, release my body to gravity, and roll, oozing across the bamboo flooring. I slip a physio ball under my belly and back, it becomes a tool for releasing breath-sound. Breath-sound eases out of my body as I glide over the ball.
>
> As cultural theorist Steven Connor writes,
> 'All voice is shaped breath'. (2007–08, n.p.)
>
>
>
> Fig. 4   *All voice is shaped breath*. Video (00:10 seconds). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14892780
>
> 'I inhale and hum time and time again, each time inspiring new, yet unfound parts of my body to vibrate. I am this sound' (Järviö 2015, 25).
>
> I focus on the flexibly and opening of the rib cage by leaning into the ball with my back, sides, and torso. I breathe with, and into, my side-body and back-body. I sense my breath deep in my belly, emerging from what I call the 'pelvic crucible'.
>
> 'Breathing moves me, and makes me sound, forms a unity with the music I sing, with the score, with the space, and with all the knowing and experience that is me. My presence is filled with the music I sing. My presence is the music I sing' (Järviö 2015, 22).
>
> I resonate when I vocalise, like when the nearby piano strings ring in sympathetic vibration with my voice. The expressive resonance of language and its non-representational voicings are 'ways for the human body to sing the world's praises and in the last resort to live it' (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002, 218).
>
> Whether live or in the recording process, it is through the sonority of the text and its transference from my body to sound, to digital archival media, that I experience the directness of embodied vocal expression –

> 'poetry…is essentially a variety of existence'.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002, 174)

Fig. 5   *Poetry is a variety of existence.* Video (00:12 seconds). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14892813

Merleau-Ponty's ideas have been applied to a wide range of artistic disciplines and practices. He felt art (and phenomenology) was part of '[l]earning to see the world differently' (Matthews 2002, 275) – and that '[p]hilosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing truth into being' (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 2002, xxii-iii).

Isn't it a beautiful idea that art is a kind truth? –
a truth that an artist may envision and share with the world.

This practice or 'doing' of phenomenology, and its possible poetic revelatory 'truths', may lead to an experience of 'the world that was not simply a reflection of what was there anyway' (Matthews 2002, 275). It may follow, then, that through a creative practice, art becomes 'our contact with the world in *living* it, rather than thinking about it' (Matthews 2006, 138) – a weaving of body > art > world. Merleau-Ponty presents the idea that an artwork is its own world with its own characteristics, layers, and richness. A practice becomes a space created by the artist that an audience enters into: 'as embodied beings-in-the-world we perceive the world not as something that is "presented" to us, as a mere object of thought, but as the milieu in which we exist' (Matthews 2002, 271). A creative practice or artwork, then, becomes a world of its own through which we engage with our world, and in its highest aspirations, art summons us to engage with the world newly or differently:

> The world of perception consists not just of all natural objects but also of paintings, pieces of music, books and…the 'world of culture'. Far from having narrowed our horizons by immersing ourselves in the world of perception, far from being limited to water and stone, we have rediscovered a way of looking at works of art, language and culture, which respects their autonomy and their original richness. (Merleau-Ponty [1948] 2004, 101)

The idea that art is 'not simply a reflection of what was there anyway' points to new ways of knowing, being, and perceiving that are intrinsic to a creative practice. For Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2002), an artwork's 'expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed' and the work's meaning is 'accessible only through direct contact' (175). The aesthetic form of a work may be 'the brush strokes in a painting, or the notes in a piece of music, or the events narrated in a novel' – these varied characteristics, intrinsic to

a given piece 'cannot be isolated…from the structures to which they belong, and so cannot be expressed except in that form' (Matthews 2002, 280). It is the *form* of the work which creates the experience to be entered into – 'its nature is to be seen or heard and no attempt to define or analyse it, however valuable that may be afterwards as a way of taking stock of this experience, can ever stand in place of the direct perceptual experience' (Merleau-Ponty [1948] 2004, 95). Through my creative work and writing herein, this latter quote is the essence of what I am getting at: there simply is no explaining the creative work – there is no adequate exposition – there is only experience. I imagine that my work is a realisation of a world that 'does not imitate the world but is a world of its own' (96) with its own aesthetic landscape. Central to this landscape is a sonorous vocality in which the 'acoustic register reigns sovereign' (Cavarero, 2005, 102).

> 'The meaning is not on the phrase like the butter on the bread,
>
> like a second layer of "psychic reality" spread over the sound:
>
> it is the totality of what is said,
>
> the integral of all the differentiations of the verbal chain;
>
> it is given with the words for those who have ears to hear'.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty [1964] 1968, 155)

Fig. 6   *The meaning is not on the phrase*. Video (00:32 seconds). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14892819

Liminal Spaces: Singing & Speech

> Words spiral their sound around my body
>
> My arms and legs are entwined in a swooping lasso ascent and descent of elongated
>
> vowels: eeeeeeeeeeehhhhhh
>
> aaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh
>
> *ooooooooooooooooooooohhhh*
>
> *Voiced consonants buzz across my scalp:*
>
> *mmmmmmmmmmmm*
>
> *vvvvvvvvvvvvvv*
>
> *zzzzzzzzzzzzzz*
>
> *Fricatives! / Ssssssibilants!*
>
> *Plosives explode and prick my skin*
>
> *p-p-p-p! t-t-t-t-t!*
>
> *Swirling, swooping* and *whirling,*
>
> *Improvisational & free-form*

My voice work straddles the past and present and exists in the slippery spaces between speech and singing. Although my influences are wide ranging, my practice likely owes a debt to the German expressionist vocal lineage of *Sprechgesang* (speech-song). Therefore, I feel it necessary to acknowledge composer Arnold Schoenberg's influential work in this style, *Pierrot lunaire* ([1914] 1994), which features a theatricalised hybrid form of speech-singing[22].

In *Inside Pierrot lunaire: Performing the Sprechstimme in Schoenberg's Masterpiece*, authors Bryn-Julson and Mathews (2009) explore this work for voice and small instrumental ensemble, in which Schoenberg set selections from Albert Giraud's poetry cycle of the same name. The terms *Sprechstimme* (spoken-voice), *Sprechgesang* (speech-singing), and *Sprechmelodie* (speech-melody) are ambiguously defined within musicological discourse and performance practices. These terms are often used interchangeably by musicologists: '[a]mong English writers, *Sprechstimme* is commonly used to mean a technique of vocal production. German and French authors tend to preserve the original meaning of *Sprechstimme*—a part in the texture—and use *Sprechgesang* or *Sprechmelodie* for the sound and technique' (xvi). This 'sound and technique' is the aforementioned stylistic fusion of speech and singing.

Pierrot lunaire is positioned within the *melodrama* tradition, a 19th- and early 20th-century music-theatre style in which a speaker recited or declaimed the text along with the music. In a melodrama

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22 Early examples of speech-singing include the recitative or *parlando* style of the 19th-century German operatic tradition including works by Richard Wagner, Engelbert Humperdinck's melodrama *Königskinder* (1897), and some of the vocal notation in Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* (1925).

score, 'the text was simply written above the music' (x). In contrast, *Pierrot lunaire* requires the singer to go further than recitation and to create or execute vocal lines that exhibit characteristics of speech *and* singing:

> In *Pierrot lunaire,* the text is not quite spoken and definitely not sung: it is *set* as a *Sprechstimme*. That is to say, the performer is presented with notation that resembles the notation used for singing, with each syllable of the text fixed for definite duration and at a definite pitch...However, instead of singing the text (except where otherwise noted) ...the performer is instructed to transform it into a Sprechmelodie (spoken melody): the rhythm and pitch are to be observed, but the character of the vocalization should reflect the nuanced sound of speech. (xi)

Musicology and performance practice scholars have historically asserted conflicting viewpoints regarding the vocal production of *Sprechstimme* in *Pierrot lunaire*. Arguments have been made that Schoenberg meant for a practice that exhibited more speech than singing; for more singing than speech; and for absolute pitches to be employed on initial vocal attack and then falling off (Stadlen 1981). It is often noted that *Pierrot* was written for the unconventional performance style of the German singer and commissioner of the work, Albertine Zehme, who developed 'her own method of combining poetic recitation and music' (DuMouchelle 2005, 2)[23].

Pre-dating her performance of Schoenberg's *Pierrot*, in 1911 Zehme performed composer Otto Vrieslander's settings of a selection of Giraud's poems from the *Pierrot* cycle. The songs are traditional musical settings, but it is unclear how Zehme performed the text, and her programme note for the recital, 'Why I Must Speak These Songs', is particularly intriguing (Bryn-Julson and Mathews 2009, 34). In the note, Zehme advocates for a freedom of tone and expressivity (literally, 'tone freedom': *Tonfreiheit*) implicit in the infant's cry. She writes, '[m]eaning should be conveyed not only by the words we speak; the sounds should also participate in relating the inner experience.' She encourages a kind of communication that transforms both poetry and music, that is, '[t]o communicate, our poets and our composers need both singing as well as the spoken tone' (Zehme cited in Bryn-Julson and Mathews 2009, 35). Zehme's ideas suggest a vocal performance which expresses meaning beyond the fusion of singing and speech: a vocality that is not bound by the discursivity of words.

In his 1912 essay, 'The Relationship to the Text', Schoenberg (1950) recounts how his experience of meaning is carried entirely by vocality and music. In a musical setting of Stefan George poems by

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23 I am equally intrigued by singer and scholar Jennifer Goltz's (2005) research which argues that *Pierrot lunaire* was highly influenced by the style of French cabaret of the time (rather than German cabaret) – namely the work of the era's famous *diseuese*, Yvette Guilbert. Goltz's compelling hypothesis is that Schoenberg attempted to emulate or allude to Guilbert's vocal style in his score, and simultaneously was conflicted by his desire to exert control over the composition – that is, to limit the artistic contribution, influence, and interpretation of a given singer – in effect, to restrict a singer's creative freedom and contribution to the work (130). This restriction of creative input has broader implications within contemporary practice and discourse surrounding the composer-performer relationship. The volume, *Cathy Berberian: Pioneer of Contemporary Vocality* (2014), addresses a number of issues regarding the composer-performer divide in works which feature performer-derived contributions from singers.

Franz Schubert, Schoenberg writes that he 'had absolutely no idea what was going on in the poems on which they [the songs] were based' (4), yet this aural phenomenon of seeming unintelligibility did not hinder his understanding of the work. Schoenberg 'completely understood the Schubert songs, together with their poems, from the music alone, and the poems…from their sound alone' (5). This admission by Schoenberg is an example of the effect of vocality on meaning – meaning that is carried solely by the voice and textual sonority.

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A large number of recordings exist of *Pierrot lunaire*, with a wide range of interpretations, from the 1940 record conducted by Schoenberg, with Erika Stiedry-Wagner singing, to Yvonne Minton's interpretation from 1977 conducted by Pierre Boulez[24], to Jane Manning's 1978 rendition conducted by Simon Rattle. YouTube is rife with independent releases and performances of the work. It is worth noting that Joan La Barbara (the singer who, arguably, took up the mantle of Cathy Berberian[25]) never recorded the work; and the avant-pop artist Björk performed selections from *Pierrot* conducted by Kent Nagano at the 1996 Verbier Festival (Pytlik 2003, 110), but no professional recordings of her interpretation exist.

The long history of misunderstanding and uncertainty regarding the notation and vocal style of *Pierrot* contributes to confusion about the work amongst musicologists and performers. It is applicable to the liberties I take within my own work that Schoenberg, himself, did not appear to make up his mind about the vocal style he was after in *Pierrot lunaire*, his 'description of the sound he wanted changed almost immediately and continued to change for the next thirty years' (Bryn-Julson and Mathews 2009, xii). Yet, this diversity of performance styles and ambiguity regarding execution of the vocal part allows contemporary singers to freely interpret the work, as well as in my case, to make an argument for the artistic liberties taken in harnessing, transforming, and continuing its legacy in contemporary vocal practice and composition.

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24   Boulez was interviewed by soprano Jane Manning (2012) regarding *Pierrot lunaire*. He asserts that '[p]itch accuracy should now certainly be the norm – (actresses who cannot attempt accuracy should not be engaged). The aim is to do what Schoenberg wanted, though his instructions in the Preface are ambiguous and unclear' (n.p.). I find Boulez's firm assertions about pitch and the hiring of singers coupled with the admitted ambiguity of *Pierrot*, to be humorous but appropriate, given the continued enigmatic status of the piece.

25   Although it may seem an obvious choice of repertoire for Berberian, she avoided performing *Pierrot* until debuting her version in English in Stockholm in 1969. According to Meehan (2011), Berberian seemed to shy away from performing *Pierrot lunaire* (233-237). Candace Smith (2014), who was a student and assistant to Berberian, notes that Berberian performed *Pierrot* over the course of her career, often from memory (215-16). However, sadly for posterity, there is no extant recording of Berberian's interpretation of *Pierrot*.

> Words drift, expand and explode from speech to singing
>
> from indeterminate and approximate pitch to concert pitch
>
> Sprechgesang! — 'Life can no longer be played out with only beautiful sounds'.
>
> (Zehme cited in Bryn-Julson and Mathews 2009, 35)

> *My Pierrot*: *Moondrunk*
>
> a solo voice interpretation of the first movement
>
> of Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*.

Fig. 7   *My Pierrot*. Video (01:52 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14892831

Visible Darkness: Operatic Possibilities

Visible Darkness, a new media monodrama, is closely aligned with the theories of poetics and vocality that I have explored above. The work is an expansion and transformation of the *Sprechgesang* lineage into a contemporary vocal practice. *Visible Darkness* investigates the extension of the natural inflections of theatrical recitation[26] as well as utilising traditionally notated compositional techniques. This exploration of the liminal space 'between singing and speaking' (Bryn-Julson and Mathews 2009, xi) draws upon the tension between music and language. In *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, psychological and social science researcher Michel Poizat (1992) writes of this tension which 'increases as the voice draws closer and closer to the edge of the cry'[27] (79). Poizat refers to the compositional work of Schoenberg and Alban Berg who 'developed a new formula of spoken declamation to musical accompaniment', and who explored a new musical or operatic 'locus where…compromises between the language and music cohabit, comingle and vie with each other' (79).

These compromises are evident in my practice where the tension between voice and poetics is highlighted. Much of my work is unnotated due to its improvisational elements; however, for *Visible Darkness*, the vocal part is a hybrid of traditionally notated phrases that link to, and peek in and out of, unnotated improvisational and semi-improvisational expressionistic voice lines. By 'semi-improvisational', I am referring to vocal lines developed from improvisation but then, through repetition

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26   The Russian formalist Boris Eikhenbaum was particularly interested in the intonation of poetic recitation and the relationship of literature and music. Eikhenbaum wrote of the tension between spoken poetics and musical composition text setting: '"melody is built on precise intervals. In poetry we deal with elements of a different scale and a different nature, namely, speech intonation, which cannot be reduced to such intervals…Lyric poetry of the melodious type treats speech intonation as raw material for reworking"' (Eikhenbaum cited in Sergay 2015, 197).

27   For Poizat, the 'cry' is the infant's cry of its separate-yet-inseparable-ness from the mother. It is also the cry of *jouissance*: a difficult-to-translate term often used in mid 20th-century French psychoanalytical and philosophical discourse to refer to the concept of ecstatic, erotic, unbounded, and embodied joy.

and rehearsal, become refined, solidified, and thus repeatable. This repeatability is not a design intent nor a methodological approach, but has emerged from vocal exploration, performances, and recording processes, themselves. In essence, then, my practice – through repetition, refinement, and response to the process itself – produces works which become composed, set pieces: '[p]oised before his empty staves, what does the composer do if not improvise? The composer merely has the additional advantage of being able to revise' (39).

In the process of improvising, revising, composing, and singing *Visible Darkness*, one of the challenges is to quickly re-establish concert pitch when coming into and out of speech-singing. A number of my works employ a similar approach but adhere to approximate or indeterminate pitch, and do not re-enter concert pitch. Initially, this approximate-pitch approach was intended as, and became, a very freeing vocal practice. However, the jumping into and out of concert pitch is something specific to *Visible Darkness* and to my current compositional works. On the one hand, with the use of concert pitch or *aria / arioso*, it is a way to anchor my vocal work in Western art music practice and classical vocal technique; and on the other hand, the presence of *Sprechgesang / quasi-parlando / recitativo* allows a freer exploration of vocality – an exploration far less defined by, and burdened with, classical vocal technique and standard tuning. Thus, my work possesses a tension between the improvisational *Sprechgesang* and the composed *aria*[28]; a tension that points to Poizat's (1992) elucidation of the 'camps' of opera. Poizat posits that there are those who espoused (and espouse) a 17th-century desire for a vocality that is orderly, heterogeneous, and rooted in a pleasure indicative of the tamer *recitativo*, and those who welcomed the more untamed vocality of the aria in an embrace of *jouissance*: the ecstatic pleasure and impossible reach of 'the cry' in opera (6).

'the tension between the poles of speech and of music' with 'speech and its law' on one hand and 'on the other pure voice—insofar as music and singing…function so that the word is separated from the voice that utters it until it literally dissolves in the jouissance that emanates from the separation'. (Poizat 1992, 44)

Fig. 8   *Music and singing*. Video (00:29 seconds). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14892855

Poizat highlights the distinction between these two camps: one is focussed on a homeostatic 'pleasure', e.g. *recitative* and 'the mastery of music by speech', and the other is transgressive, with a 'sensory upset and emotional turmoil' that is related to the *aria* and its embrace of sonority and the

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28 This tension between music, language, speech, and singing alludes to Julia Kristeva's ([1969] 1980 and [1974] 1984) concept of the subconscious drives in language (*genotext*) and the conscious or denotative aspect of language (*phenotext*). I engage with these theories in the subsequent chapter, 'Destabilising Language'.

unbridled infant's cry (6). The former camp envisions art performing 'a function of social integration' and maintains 'a given social and psychological order', describing pleasure as an Aristotelian '"moderate agitation"'; whereas, the camp of *jouissance* embraces '"emotional upheaval"' (7). Poizat theorises that the camps exhibit a tension between a regulated pleasure, and an extreme, transgressive experience that becomes 'a quest for the impossible, for pure and complete gratification, or, quite simply, for jouissance' (7). Although my work with *Sprechgesang* and the *aria* does not fit neatly within Poizat's thesis, I feel my commitment to an expansive vocality is closely aligned with his concept of the 'cry' and *jouissance*. In practice, I reverse Poizat's premise in my work: the 'cry', *jouissance*, and the transgressive aspects of my compositions are in the freer and wilder *Sprechgesang*, while the more restricted concert-pitched vocalism resides in the *aria*. Poizat asserts that this quest for the impossible accounts for the devotion and fanaticism opera has engendered over the centuries.

Along similar theoretical lines, Cavarero (2005) describes the sonorous vocalic 'cry' of the Greek Sirens[29] as the 'lethality of a pure, harmonious, powerful, and irresistible voice that is almost like an animal cry' (103). The Sirens are half-human, half-beast, 'monstrous singers' (104). However, what is relevant to my exploration of speech and singing, is the erasure over the centuries of retellings, of the *words* of the Sirens' song. The Sirens were not always depicted as a deadly embodiment of a pure melismatic sonority. The Sirens 'sing words, they vocalise stories, they narrate by singing. And they know what they are talking about. Their knowledge is, in fact, total: "we know all"' (105).

Cavarero compares the Sirens' descent into this pure sonority to their physical descent into the depths of the sea: they began as half-woman, half-bird creatures and morphed over the centuries into half-woman, half-fish beings (106). According to Cavarero, this sonic and physical transformation cemented a kind of dualism which emerged in theories of a patriarchal society – a society which splits communication into the semantics of a transcendent masculine and the sonority and peril of the embodied feminine (107-8). Although my work largely abandons traditional narrative forms, the source material is there for interested audients. The poetics I sing, or speak-sing, are *words*. My interest is in the aesthetic resonance of the words, rather than their denotative meaning or the purity of the voice carried by a melismatic vowel sound. Perhaps my own impossible quest is in the search for that compelling and elusive *something*: the inexpressible and intangible meaning which inhabits the liminal spaces between words, speech, vocality, and song.

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29   My own work inspired by the Greek Sirens, *Siren on the Sabine*, is not part of my thesis portfolio but, nonetheless, is relevant to my continued engagement with the emblematic female mythos of the 'western imaginary' (Cavarero 2005, 103). *Siren on the Sabine* was presented at the Menil Collection in Houston in the spring of 2016 and was part of the University of Houston's annual *Dionysia*, a week-long festival of arts and literature.

Visible Darkness is a fairy tale of our ephemeral, delicate bodies in a city of glass and steel, and a celebration of the transformative feminine. Its versions include a live in-progress performance with fixed media, an experimental film, and a music video. The live performance with fixed media occurred at *Voice and the Unknown: An International Vocal Performance Research Symposium*, Lund University, Inter Arts Center, Malmö Sweden, 28–30 January 2019. The music video was released online on 10 July 2020.

The text for *Visible Darkness* is imagistic. It is loosely inspired by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki's (1995) essay 'In Praise of Shadows', an exploration of chiaroscuro in architectural spaces (including spider references which appear in my project's text and films). *Visible Darkness* also incorporates an allusion to the Greek myth of Arachne who, according to Ovid, is transformed into a spider for her boastful offence against the Goddess Athena.

> ### *Visible Darkness* Libretto Excerpt
>
> A thunderhead churns in slow motion, its high clouds billow white against a darkening blue expanse. Bats chirp a chorus under a bayou bridge and a falcon circles a slow descent. Thousands of grackles gather on powerlines to watch the end of day: the last rays of sun move across the city as it rises from the desert plain. Her abdomen hovers above the sparkle of twisted skyscrapers and her thin, long legs easily navigate between metallic buildings: one furry claw here on the pavement (barely missing a sidewalk crack) and one claw there, next to a man asleep on a bench (he doesn't wake)… / She ascends a slick glass tower. A shimmer of silk spools out from her spinnerets and wafts high on the breeze, sticking to the steel building across the street. One glimmering thread at a time, she crafts a magnificent web. At last, she settles in its centre and starts to work on the shattered bowl: with silk and gold, she adheres each broken piece to its match and makes what was once broken, whole.

- *Visible Darkness* Music Video (2019).

  I think of this video as the final version of the work. Released 10 July 2019.

Fig. 9   *Visible Darkness* Music Video. (04:50 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14892906

Although largely beyond the scope of my research at this time, in my music video work, I often playfully engage with a diva or pop diva persona: *a me who is not me*. This façade serves as a kind of reflection of, or humorous, self-conscious commentary upon self, identity, pop images of women in the mainstream music industry, and the myth of the operatic diva. It also serves as a performative avatar that I enact, embody, and impersonate on social media. This persona speaks to Cavarero's (2000) idea of the 'narratable self'– that is, one's desire to hear one's own story retold by others, and the subsequent transformation of the self from hearing the retellings (32). In this regard, a diva persona might be compared to the epic hero(ine) whose 'spectacular scene of exhibition' assures 'a high probability of narration', and whose 'hyperbolic figure of uniqueness' belong to both acting out one's story and leaving behind a story (32). The diva narrates, crafts, or weaves (like Ariadne) an identity / persona that is a fabricated and unstable biography: a *who* that is real, unreal, hyper-real, and ever-creating and re-creating the self. This performative and textual way of being – enabled by the internet – is a way to partially conceal myself through the creation of an avatar or 'narratable self' who lives out the role of the artist in cyberspace.

———

For *Visible Darkness*, the improvisatory voice work became refined during the process, as I worked with sections of approximate pitch and sections of composed concert pitches. I created a score as a mnemonic device to be used for the vocal recording process and for communication with my collaborators. For the score, I invented a *Sprechclef,* the working name for a musical clef that functions in a notational system as an indicator of approximate pitch and creative freedom on the singer's part. Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg experimented with notational systems that indicated *Sprechgesang* practices for the singer, but I did not find their ghost note system nor their system which features a single staff line, to be effective for what I am communicating in the *Visible Darkness* score. Poizat (1992) writes on the limitations I encountered in scoring, '*Sprechgesang* marks a kind of culmination point where the distinction between speech and music becomes so tenuous that conventional musical notation proves incapable of transcribing it unequivocally' (79). The following three score excerpts feature Schoenberg's ghost note and single staff line notation in the vocal part (Fig. 10 and Fig. 11). The third score example is my *Sprechclef* from *Visible Darkness* (Fig. 12).

Fig. 10   Arnold Schoenberg ([1914] 1994), 'Mondestrunken' from *Pierrot lunaire*, Op. 21, featuring ghost notes in the vocal part.

Fig. 11   Arnold Schoenberg ([1942] 1944) excerpt from Ode to *Napoleon Buonaparte*, Op. 41, featuring a single staff line for the vocal recitation.

Visible Darkness

Misha Penton
Music & Words

(siren)

Ah...

a thun - der he - ad churns in slo - ow

mo - tion___ its high clouds billow white against a darkening blue (ex)panse.

Bats chirp a chorus under a bayou bridge and a falcon circles a slow descent.

Thou - sands of gra - ckles gather

on power lines to watch the end of day the last rays of sun move across

C

the city___ as it rises from the desert plain.

Her abdomen hovers above the sparkle of twisted skyscrapers and her thin, long legs easily navigate between metallic

buil

- dings:

one furry claw here on the pavement (barely missing a sidewalk crack), and one claw there, next to a man asleep on a bench (he doesn't wake).

Visible Darkness score page 1

Fig. 12   The *Sprechclef* in a score excerpt from *Visible Darkness*, 2019.

40

For the recording that was used for the music video, I recorded the vocal tracks first. Then, I added electronic musician Chris Becker's rhythm tracks which, in their native state, seemingly refused to fit with the vocal tracks. I digitally 'cut up' the rhythms so that the tracks ebbed and flowed with the voice: emerging from and receding into the multi-tracked voice layers. I then sent this draft mix to guitarist George Heathco to add his guitar tracks, which was a seamless step in the process. In working in this way with multi-tracked audio, I am, somewhat paradoxically, creating an archival piece that neither possesses the spirit nor the flexibility of improvisation once recorded, although the process itself retains a free-spiritedness. The music video of *Visible Darkness* reflects the chance operations employed in the creation of the audio. The happenstance revealed in the overlay of moving images mirrors a similar kind of synchronicity present in the creation of the music.

There are two significant advantages to making work through improvisational practices and exquisite corpse-like[30] methods in which I possess little control over the input from my collaborators. Firstly, this approach is freeing because chance, indeterminacy, and happy accidents are delightfully unpredictable, and secondly, it is a practical method of making work in a relatively short period of time, with limited resources, and with skilled and simpatico collaborators who are, themselves, juggling many projects and professional obligations. At first, I thought these work-making methods would be 'easier', but after creating a number of projects using these compositional tactics, it is clear that this is not an easier way to make work, it is simply a different approach to composition. I do assert, however, that there is an increased ease in creating a polished project when my direct control is limited and time commitments from collaborators are minimised.

—◆—

Additional Versions of *Visible Darkness*

The live performance with fixed media was presented as a work in progress at *Voice and the Unknown: An International Vocal Performance Research Symposium*. Lund University. Inter Arts Center, Malmö Sweden, 28–30 January 2019.

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30 The 'exquisite corpse' is a visual art parlour game attributed to the early 20th-century surrealists. It derives from the game 'Consequences' in which individual players write contributions on a single sheet of paper, which in turn, each player conceals from the next, until the final reveal of the collective work (Gotthardt 2018, n.p.).

- **Live performance excerpt (2019).**

Fig. 13   *Visible Darkness* live performance excerpt. Video (05:17 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14892933

- **Live full-length performance (2019).**

Fig. 14   *Visible Darkness* full-length live performance. Video (14:46 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14892990

- **A film version** of the work that stands alone and was also used as fixed media in live performance (2018).
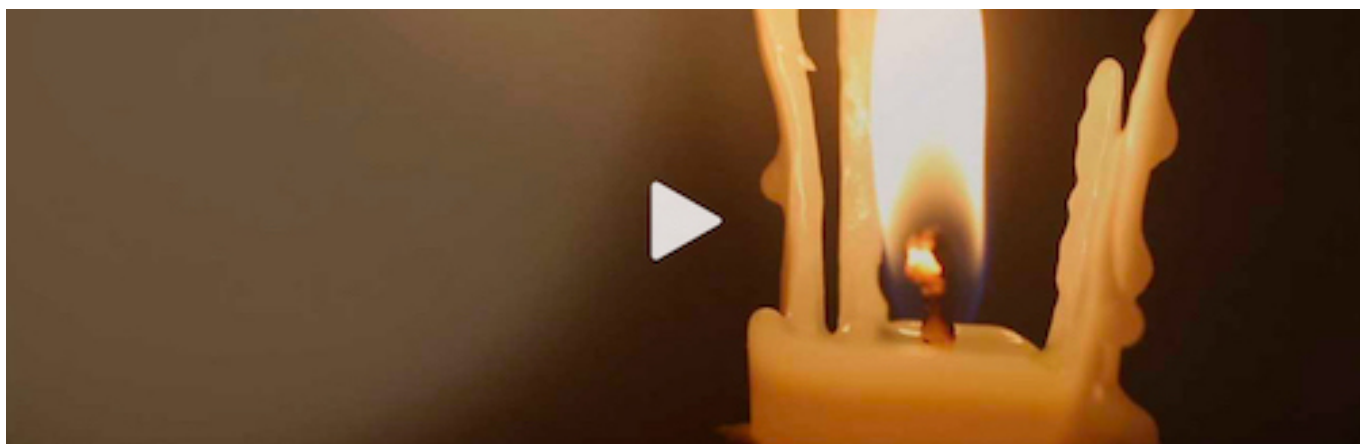
Fig. 15   *Visible Darkness* film fixed media. Video (14:44 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14899932

- **The full score and libretto** for *Visible Darkness* may be found in 'Scores & Libretti'.

'To call music a performing art, then, is not just to say that we perform it;

it is to say that music performs meaning'.

(Cook 2001, 9)

Destabilising Language

This chapter engages with the work of philosopher and cultural theorist Julia Kristeva. Her theories surrounding poetic language and meaning-making resonate with my creative work, *The Medusa Project* (2017–18), which focusses upon the voice in digital realms. Throughout this chapter, the reader will find micro-operas inspired by Kristeva's work.

Irruption & Revelation

Vocality's sonorous and poetic landscape destabilises language, exceeds signification, and becomes a site of radical or renewed meaning-making. Cavarero (2005), via Kristeva, points out that the poetic text is any text in which the subconscious dimension of language 'erupts into the symbolic system…inundating it with phonic pleasures' (137–38). In this way, 'verse and prose flow together in the musicality of the poetic text' (137). It is with this in mind, that I engage with the theoretical strands from Kristeva's complex oeuvre which compel my practice[31]. Of particular interest are her ideas on the *genotext* (the bodily, subconscious dimension of language) and *phenotext* (the conscious social sphere of language), the nature of poetic language, and the expression and re-imagining of multi-voiced texts as *intertextuality*. Before I proceed, a recapitulation of my reading of Kristeva's concept of the text may be helpful. The writing below, bordered by a vertical bar, is my poetic 'riff' upon Kristeva ([1969] 1980 and 2002):

> the *text* is expansive –
>
> it may be any device or element in a creative work
>
> or a work in its totality
>
> a *text* may be a site of historical reference
>
> a personal psycho-narrative
>
> an interaction within a disciplinary tradition
>
> *text* may be the imbrication and relationality
>
> of traditions and disciplinary *loci*
>
> an echo or resonance within writing
>
> a creative work
>
> or an artistic working process –

---

31   My focus is upon Kristeva's theories that are closely aligned with my compositional practice: the sonority of language, the relation of sound to meaning-making, and the theoretical work which influenced Kristeva's concept of *intertextuality*. However, her influences are wide-ranging and her work spans many decades, variously navigating literature, the arts, feminism, culture, and psychoanalysis. Kristeva's notable influences include the philosopher Edmund Husserl, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, philosopher Martin Heidegger, Jacques Lacan, the psychoanalyst who is known for his work on the subject-object divide in child development, as well as cultural theorists such as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Her work is also rooted in theories of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who focussed upon language systems and the parts of speech-language as he described them: the *signified* (concept) and *signifier* (sound-image) – positing that sound and meaning have an independent and arbitrary relationship (Allen 2000, 8).

texts become fluid sites of interconnectivity

enquiry

meaning-making

and *being*

Kristeva's linguistic theories explore the relational meaning-making processes embedded in the conscious and subconscious drives of language. According to Roudiez (1980) in his introduction to *Desire in Language*, for Kristeva, the *semiotic* is the subconscious dimension of language, the 'disposition, within the body, of instinctual drives' (18); and the *symbolic* is the mundane, literal, or denotative meaning of words which exemplify the social sphere and its restrictions (7). These two intersecting conceptual threads form the *genotext* (semiotic-subconscious) and *phenotext*[32] (literal-conscious). When these strands are 'woven' together, Kristeva's idea of *significance* emerges: a multi-layered meaning-making process beyond an obvious surface meaning (18).

For Kristeva, 'the work performed in language…enables a text to signify what representative and communicative speech does not say' (Roudiez 1980, 18). This ability for language to expand beyond ordinary meaning is most present in 'poetic language'. Poetic language favours the genotext, and fosters complex communication (e.g. the interactive and relational communicative dimensions of art) that transmits meaning other than what is expressed in representative speech. The presence of the genotext is found in the 'physical, material aspect of language' (Roudiez 1984, 5), that is, in the sound of language itself. When sonority is privileged, poetic language (genotext) is activated.

> Poetic language…is almost an otherness of language. It is the language of materiality…a language in which the writer's [or artist's] effort is less to deal rationally with those objects or concepts words seem to encase than to work, consciously or not, with the sounds and rhythms of words in transrational fashion…Poetic language includes the language of Shakespeare, Racine, or Mallarmé. (Roudiez 1980, 5)

As the voice wraps around and shapes constants and vowels, it becomes inseparable from the text – the 'otherness of language' is an entanglement of meaning with sound. Breaths, gasps, whispers, wails, plosives, fricatives, long and short vowels, and the dissonance of consonants are the musicality of the embodied voice: '[i]n the poem, as in the perceived object, form cannot be separated from content' (Merleau-Ponty [1948] 2004, 100-1).

---

32 Roland Barthes (1977) notably cites Kristeva's concept of the *genotext* and *phenotext* in his essay, 'The Grain of the Voice'. He writes, in part, about the singing of German baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and the voice's communicative aspect (*phenotext*) in tension with the physicality of the voice and its subversive, embodied expression (*genotext*). Barthes uses the terms *geno-song* and *pheno-song*.

> '"the Word presents itself, in its vowels and its diphthongs, like flesh;
>
> and, in its consonants, like a skeleton to dissect"'.
>
> (Mallarmé cited in Cavarero 2005, 134) [33]

Fig. 16   *The Word presents itself*. Video (00:22 seconds). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14899962

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Kristeva borrows the concept of 'poetic language' from the early 20th-century Russian formalists (Roudiez 1980, 5), a circle of literary theorists concerned with the study of the devices, elements, and form of literature – who professed to be 'exclusively concerned with the way literature is *put together*' (Fry 2012, 84). In his essay, 'Art as Technique', formalist Victor Shklovsky ([1917] 2007) writes that sonority 'roughens' language (783) and slows down perceived time, taking the reader (or, I would say, the viewer and audient) out of an ordinary, automatic, or habitual mode of perception and into a strange and defamiliarised aesthetic perception (781). Being a time-based art, music does this *slowing down* beautifully. Theatricalised dramatic music or opera, whether live or mediatised, adds an additional visual-sonic experience through production design (*mis-en-scène*) which contributes to this slowing down or re-perceiving of time. In my work, the fusion of vocality, poetics, and imagistic mediatised expression is a 'roughening' of language. This 'impeded language' (781) halts ordinary perception and 'gets in the way of our arriving at meaning' (Fry 2012, 83), aspiring to change an audient's perceptive experience from an ordinary and familiar time-place-being to an *extra*-ordinary and defamiliarised time-place-being.

Kristeva's work with poetic language is tied to her concept of *intertextuality*, her theory influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin[34]. With roots in the formalist tradition, Bakhtin theorised a relational and multi-voiced meaning-making process within a text. He was primarily concerned with the idea that a text is no longer a 'separable entity' but rather a relational sphere of social engagement and interactivity (Fry 2012, 207-8). This multi-voiced relationality is expressed through Bakhtin's term *heteroglossia* which, as David H. Richter (2007) explains in *The Critical Tradition*, is 'the notion that the meaning of language is socially determined, that utterances reflect social values and depend for their meaning on their relation to other utterances' (576). Kristeva adapts Bakhtin's *heteroglossia* as *intertextuality*. For Kristeva (2002), intertextuality becomes the relational multi-voices within literary, artistic / creative, personal-psychological, or social contexts. Kristeva reframes Bakhtin's idea of 'textual plurality...as a mental activity able to open a psyche to the creative process' (2002, 8-9). Kristeva asserts that intertextuality may act as a '"frontier"' or '"threshold"' –

---

33   Here, Cavarero cites the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé from his work *'Les mots anglais'* in *Oeuvres Complètes* ([1877] 1996, 901). In relation to the Mallarmé quote, Cavarero (2010) writes that 'speech [I would say, voice-vocality] is always a question of bodies, filled with drives, desires, and blood' (134).

34   Kristeva is often credited with introducing Bakhtin's work to the literary circles of France in the mid 20th century, thus expanding his influence which continues to resonate in the arts and humanities today (Allen 2000, 15).

here, she is referring to Bakhtin's idea of the *chronotope du seuil* (chronotope of the threshold) which she clarifies as an encounter, a change, crisis, or an 'in-between zone…and most of all a mental plasticity' (9). This threshold acts as a liminal, textural space of interconnectivity that places the creative process and audience 'not only in front of a more or less complicated and interwoven structure (the first meaning of "texture"), but also within an on-going process of signifying' (9). Intertextuality, then, becomes a site for creating and exploring this 'process of signifying'; it is a meeting point that is activated through poetic language which accesses the 'trans-verbal reality of the psyche from which all meanings emerge' (9). Kristeva writes that, '[f]or me, intertextuality is mostly a way of making *history* go down in us' (8). I understand this idea as an expression of the multiplicity of an embodied experience: a convergence and constant remaking of multi-selves and multi-histories. This is in keeping with Merleau-Ponty's concept of the ever-unfinished, unknowable, and 'inexhaustible' world (Matthews 2002, 25) within which we experience being. Creative work is, I would argue, the primary, or ideal, site for such encounters.

> the world 'stretches out beyond what [I] can perceive…
>
> the world is "inexhaustible"'. (Matthews 2002, 25)[35]

Fig. 17   *The world is inexhaustible.* Video (00:08 seconds). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14899965

As with Merleau-Ponty's theory that the form of the artwork contains its meaning, Kristeva's semiotic speaks to the landscape that the artist creates as an avenue to enter a work. In *Kristeva Reframed*, Barrett (2010) applies Kristeva's theories to artistic practices[36]. She notes that the subconscious dimension of communication 'emerges in more varied and complex forms as the result of the artist's manipulation of rhetorical codes' (loc. 202). Through this manipulation of aesthetic devices, a work is neither 'referential in function' nor a 'container of meaning' (Allen on Saussure 2002, 12); rather, a resulting work or creative practice becomes a space open to an expansive meaning-making process. The elements of creative works and the traditions of artistic disciplines become texts in a fluid, multi-voice, multi-verse, multi-era dialogue; an evolution of creative becoming.

> Intertextuality
>
> suggests a between-ness
>
> a *threshold* / a liminal space

---

35 In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty ([1945] 2002) writes, '[t]he world is not what I think, but what I live through. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible (xviii-xix). Although Matthews (2002) references Merleau-Ponty's idea that 'the world is inexhaustible', he never directly cites the philosopher. I believe the former quote is what Matthews is referring to here.

36 Barrett's work in this volume is primarily limited to the relationship of Kristeva's work to the visual arts.

a communicative, relational locus

a historical nexus: my history / your history / our histories

history within a discipline / practice

conscious / subconscious

subject / object

self / other

bodily drives / desire

interplay / interface

traverse / transform / exceed duality

vocality / poetry

devices / elements / forms

speech / singing

'poetic logic' is 'dream logic…[that] transgresses rules of linguistic code'

(Kristeva [1969] 1980, 70)

– 'the poetic experience…tries to reconcile the body and the language'

(Kristeva 2013, 37:53) –

through the possibilities of a signifying process meaning is

'an irruption, an always unstable revelation'. (Kristeva 2002, 11)

Kristeva ([1969] 1980) (re)imagines the body, itself, as a text – simultaneously an identifying subject and one that 'immediately forbids any identification; it is not me, it is a non-me in me, beside me, outside of me, where the me becomes lost. This heterogeneous object is a body, because it is a *text*' (163). This concept speaks to the embodied experience of singing: the body and voice are united. The *voice-body* is a *text*.

Kristeva's theories encourage an attentiveness to the complexity of meaning-making that is deeply interlaced with the arts and literature of our time, 'which remain alone, in our world of technological rationality, to impel us not toward the absolute but toward a quest for a little more truth, an impossible truth, concerning the meaning of speech, concerning our condition as speaking beings' (ix) – concerning the impossible truth of *singing* beings:

the 'impossible truth' of singing beings.

Fig. 18   *The impossible truth of singing beings*. Video (00:10 seconds). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14899971

Medusa: **The Voice in Digital Realms**

The Medusa Project is a versioned live and mediatised work which is especially relevant to Kristeva's theoretical framework. The following critical and poetic engagements traverse the spaces between vocality and the destabilising effect of poetic sonority upon language.

     The Medusa Project (2017–18) is a monodrama for singer-composer and mixed media, and an abstract re-imagining of the Greco-Roman Medusa myth. Like my other pieces, the work is versioned. Its incarnations include live performances, online-only original films, and hybrid critical, creative-poetic, and experimental writings. In its live performance form, *The Medusa Project*'s structure is flexible: it may be realised as a solo monodrama for voice and fixed media or additional musicians may be added to a given performance. Each version, then, is repeatable yet unique. The live performance with fixed media took place at the Women Composers Festival of Hartford in Hartford, Connecticut, USA, on 7 April 2018. A film and sound installation version created for Bath Spa University's thirty-five-foot high MediaWall in Bath, UK, was on view from 4–15 June 2018. Additional versions include films of varying durations as well as audio-only forms.

> *The Medusa Project* **Libretto Excerpt**
>
> rend and reassemble, resemble, dismember, remember, destabilise, reflect, disorganise, destabilise, reflect, destabilise, reflect / re-imagine / dismember / re-semble / remember / re-imagine / reflect

- *The Medusa Project*: *Digital Medusa (mise en abîme)* [37] **(2017).**
  This short film was the first version of *The Medusa Project*.
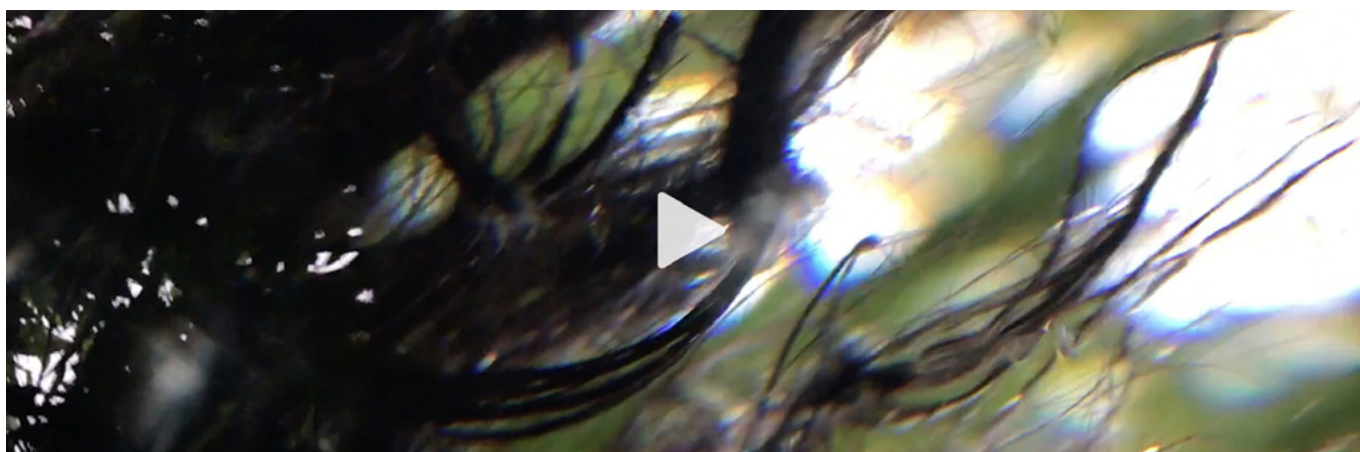
Fig. 19   *The Medusa Project: Digital Medusa (mise en abîme)*. Video (04:04 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14899974

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37 *Mise en abîme* means 'to put into the abyss'. It is an aesthetic device wherein an image is replicated and set within an image, such as a painting within a painting or a reflection of a reflection. It suggests an infinity mirror which speaks to *The Medusa Project* and its subsequent writing, herein.

Thematically and structurally, *The Medusa Project* emphasises a rending and reassembling through engaging with the concept of ritual *sparagmos*. In 'Social Dramas', cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1982) writes of *sparagmos* as a performative, ritualistic and purposeful undoing and re-creating. This re-creating is 'a transformative...self-dismemberment' wherein the subject-self is 'broken into pieces then put together again as a being bridging visible and invisible worlds' (83-4). Indicative of this undoing and re-creating are the techniques I use for layering voice and images. I recorded many vocal tracks and then, in my digital audio workstation, I randomly culled, cut and pasted these audio clips. I employed a similar process of layering with the project's music films in the video editing application, Final Cut Pro X.

The Medusa Project favours the materiality of language through assonance, consonance, and poetic rhythms built into its structure. This way of working is evident in the overlaying of multiple voices and images: *the many mes that are me but not me /* 'it is not me, it is a non-me in me, beside me, outside of me, where the me becomes lost' (Kristeva [1969] 1980, 163). Whether live or in the recording process, it is through the text and its transference from page to my body, to sound, to digital archival media, that I experience the directness of embodied vocality. Ultimately, the work that emerges and is shaped – I may say the voice then becomes sonic material – is a finished media project.

The vocal work for *The Medusa Project* is a synthesis of improvised and semi-improvised vocality fusing classical and experimental vocal techniques. This multi-technique approach is suggestive of the work of vocal researcher and pedagogue Nina Eidsheim (2015). In *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice*, she notes the work of soprano and performance artist Juliana Snapper. Snapper's views about *bel canto* technique and experiential voice practices resonate with my own:

> It is an amazing feeling to sing operatically. All of this power gushing from your center! I trust it beyond any other means of communication. It is totalizing, erotic, uncanny. Every part of you is active, your insides are turned out. That's why I center my work within operatic singing...and explore the limits of the voice by directly addressing my body. (cited in Eidsheim 2015, loc. 1033-36)

The operatic physicality of singing feels something like alpine skiing: it is exhilarating and addictive. Although Snapper's performance work is far more physically demanding than my own – her pieces include underwater singing and hanging upside-down for extended periods – like Snapper, '"I like struggling with a mastery that is no longer fully relevant (bel canto) and having to transform it into something else again and again"' (cited in Eidsheim 2015, loc. 1044-45). There is something compelling about connecting to a tradition that is beginning to be so far in our cultural past that its original intent, meaning, or purpose is nearly lost, although the techniques remain. This transformation of technique is central in creating works that favour the resonant devices of language, and emphasise ways of privileging the voice and the expansive possibilities of vocality.

To prepare for the live performance of *The Medusa Project* and to create the fixed media voice and video work, I began vocal work with my three-movement libretto. I quickly realised I needed to compose the fixed media first, so that the live voice would fit seamlessly into it. When I began rehearsing with live voice and the recorded material, it became clear that I needed more tone throughout the recorded voice audio in order for it to be present in live performance. I recorded some very quiet, low pitched voice tracks, sliding between pitches and utilising audible breath. Then, without listening, I randomly stacked these voice audio clips in sets of three or four, creating sections of tone, whispers, and low-pitched wails. I continued rehearsing live with the audio, intuitively deciding how the libretto would fit into the recorded voicescape.

Aware that improvising musicians may join me in performance, I wanted to keep enough space in the fixed media for my voice and for my collaborators. I also knew that I would have no rehearsal, or very little rehearsal; therefore, the piece needed to be 'easy' to assemble for performance. My goal was for a freely-improvised version of the work to be beautiful and satisfying in live performance. One way to ensure that – or to set the conditions for that to *happen* – was to make the fixed media an ambient accompaniment without the need for musicians to follow it when playing live. Originally, I composed the fixed media with timed intervals: sections of audible breath, tones, whispers, wails, and melodic multi-layered vocal bursts. This structure would require exact timekeeping using chronometers of some type, such as smartphones, in order to sync with the fixed media. However, I abandoned this timed and structured concept in favour of a more atmospheric sound world. This approach allowed the live performers to control the trajectory of the work, and to rely far less on the fixed media for performance structure. Chronometers are still needed, but only for the overall duration of the piece.

Additional Versions of *The Medusa Project* (2018)

- **Live performance.** Excerpt.

  Fig. 20   *Medusa* live performance excerpt audio as video with still images (edit: 06:28 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14899986

- **Live performance.** Full-length performance.

  Fig. 21   *Medusa* live full-length performance audio as video with still images (14:54 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14900025

- **Fixed media film** for live performance.
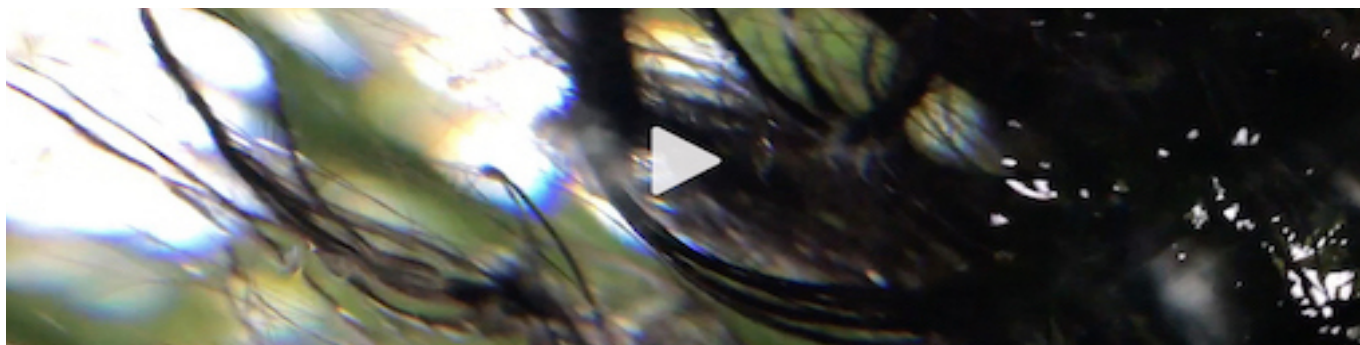
Fig. 22   *Medusa* film fixed media. Video and audio (15:13 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14909910

Below: the film version of *The Medusa Project* created for the Bath Spa University MediaWall (4–15 June 2018) was made, in part, of the fixed media used for the live performance. The seven-minute audio version for the MediaWall film looped via a posted QR code web link and could be listened to on headphones while watching the video installation. The MediaWall film below is a thirteen-minute online version of the installation. The film displays in portrait orientation due to the physical measurements of the MediaWall itself.
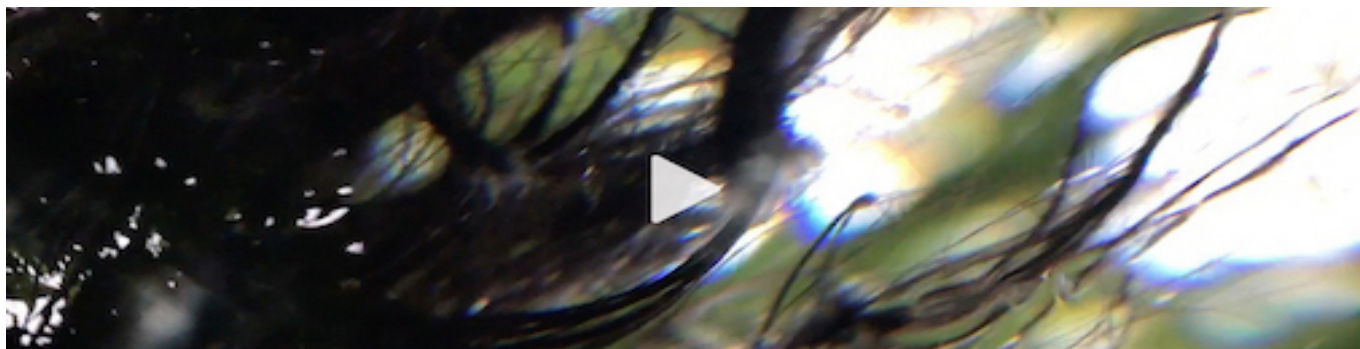
Fig. 23   *Medusa* MediaWall film. Video (13:30 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14900040

- **The score and libretto** for the live version of *The Medusa Project* may be found in 'Scores & Libretti'.

Conceal / Reveal: Voice, Body, Process[38]

> I am spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human,
>
> but alive because of transformation. — Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of Medusa' (1975)

Whether traditionally notated or expressive and improvised like Berberian's aforementioned *écriture sonore* [vocal 'writing aloud' (Verstraete 2014, 71)], I think of my vocal composition methods as a musical version of Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* (feminine writing). In her influential essay, 'The Laugh of Medusa', Hélène Cixous (1975) set in motion an ongoing discourse about writing as a disruptive, embodied practice distinct from the linear structure of language. She put forth the concept of 'writing with the body' as *écriture féminine*[39], that is, a way of writing and being that defies binary linguistics and subverts the symbolic, quotidian function of language. This subversion is present in vocality as an embodied expression independent of the communicative properties of language – the voice upends and undermines *logocentrism*[40], becoming a destabilising force. Cavarero (2005) notes that Cixous' writing exhibits a vocal presence '[a]kin to song' and that she 'turns the text into music...where vocal rhythms decide the movement of the text' (141). This transgressive writing 'combines words according to the laws of rhythm, echo, and resonance' and the sense or multifarious meaning arises 'from its sonorous drives' (141). Please approach the following with that spirit in mind.

> I see my (re)flection[41]
>
> I see myself and am seen
>
> I hear myself and am heard
>
> (Re)flect). (Ab)sorb. (Re)flect –
>
> I originate in sound and sound originates in me

---

38 A version of this writing was published online in the *South, West, and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership* 'Question Journal' blog as 'The Making of Digital Medusa', 2017.

39 According to Kelly Oliver (1993), Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* has been misunderstood. Oliver writes that Keith and Paula Cohen's translation of the phrase *écriture féminine* is '"women's writing"' (163) rather than the more accurate, 'feminine writing'; and she notes that '[t]he feminine does not necessarily have to do with women's bodies; it is not biologically determined' (163). This mistranslation may 'explain why American feminists were so quick to reject the notion of *écriture féminine* as essentialist' (166). I position my thinking on this matter with Oliver's, in that I feel that Cixous' idea of *écriture féminine* need not be interpreted as essentialist, and as is the case with Kristeva's work, Cixous is a living writer and thinker whose complex and extensive body of work spans decades and genres.

40 The influential mid 20th-century French philosopher Jacques Derrida coined the term *logocentrism* to draw attention to 'legitimating discourses of the spoken word over the written word' (Johnston 2017, 62). For Derrida, language is 'a subtle vehicle for operations of power within social relationships' (62). Johnston notes Derrida asserted that 'discourses are premised upon *logos* – a fixed meaning or rationality behind its worldview'. This system may 'privilege certain terms over others', emphasising 'binary oppositions' (62). Derrida's 'deconstruction' is the destabilisation of 'such binaries and unmasking the systems of power that they enable (62). A number of subsequent philosophers have explored and expanded Derrida's linguistic and deconstructionist ideas; among those most germane to my work are Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Adriana Cavarero.

41 According to Ovid, the demi-god Perseus uses a shining bronze shield to capture Medusa's reflection and avoid her deadly gaze.

I shatter the mirror:

'The mirror itself is the instrument of a universal magic that changes things into a spectacle, spectacles into things, myself into another, and another into myself' (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 168)

I am one of many monsters,
one of the 'unacknowledged sovereigns' (Cixous 1976, 876)
Formidable Gorgon
I am she
She, me
My sisters, Stheno and Euryale, howl with ferocity and mourning and rage
We are Monster Women
So many many many more of us, now
My sisters
My kin

We whisper. Snarl. Gasp. Speak. Scream. Sing. Sigh. Rage –
Our voices shriek and cry and call and howl
When we voice, we are thunderous sonority
Our language is our bodies
We are 'shot through with streams of song'[42]
We write our bodies and we write ourselves into being
Our bodies 'must be heard'
We are voice-body-body-voice
We are poetry
We are vocality

Vocality is a phenomenon of simultaneity: I hear myself as a (re)flection, as an 'acoustic mirror', wherein the voice is 'at the same time emitted and heard' (Rosolato 1974, 79). Kaja Silverman (1998), the art historian and critical theorist, illuminates Rosolato's theory, writing that 'the voice is capable of being internalized at the same time as it is externalized, it can spill over from subject to object and object to subject' (80). This simultaneity defies duality: vocality reflects its reflection.

Interior
Exterior

---

42   This line and the following two lines are a riff on Cixous (1975, 882, 880, 886, 880).

Outside

Inside

Subject. Object. Object. Subject –

My voice is a me that is not me (Kristeva, [1969] 1980)

A body that is not my body and yet my body

A phantasmagoric 'vocalic body' (Connor 2001, 80)

An acoustic mirror

Emitting and heard

There and not there

Materially tangible and yet utterly(!)

Intangible

I am a 'musicovocalic culture hero[ine]' (Connor 1998, 214)

My vocality is a force moving stones, sea, rock, tree, wind and wave

I voice-whisper-snarl-gasp-speak-scream-sing-sigh-rage:

Raging is more than something done to or written over a particular body; it is the desire for,
and hallucinated accomplishment of, a new kind of body, a fiercer, hotter, more dissociated,
but also more living, urgent, and vital kind of body…a huge, boiling, bottomless reservoir of
feeling…the voice that may otherwise flame through all supports and restraints, shrivelling
shape, space and distance. (Connor 2001, 81-2)

I call out

I shout and scream and sing

I hear my echoes return from underground tunnels and cavernous naves of cathedrals

and rise from steel and glass city canyons

and swirl across cliffs and valleys

'When I shout, I am all voice, you are all voice, the space between us is nothing but a

delirium tremens of voice' (Connor, 2001, 79)

I call out to you, my other me

My voice-body reaches out to the spaces I inhabit

desiring to close space, to 'diminish and abolish' space,

to be 'where there are no distances or dimensions' (Connor, 2001, 79)

I close the gap between myself and other

between voice and body

Separate / Not separate

> My voice 'begins to gives (sic) rise to space. What the scream tears apart, it also holds together. The scream is the guarantee that, after the world has been atomised, it will reassemble and again resemble itself' (Connor 2001, 79-80)

> Rend
>
> (Re)assemble
>
> (Re)semble
>
> (Dis)member
>
> (Re)member: voice-body-body-voice-body
>
> A new way of being / A new way of voicing
>
> A 'new vocality' (Berberian 2004, 51)

The voice, 'with its sonorous rhythms', impels 'the semantic…to the musicality of the vocal' (Cavarero 2005, 10). Along these theoretical lines, philosopher and cultural theorist Mladen Dolar (2006) writes of the paradoxical nature of the human singing voice and its effect on meaning. Singing centres the voice 'on purpose, at the expense of meaning' (30). Vocality, then, becomes a lived-experience of 'expression versus meaning, expression beyond meaning, expression which is more than meaning, yet expression which functions only in tension with meaning' (30).

> The body-vocality (de)stabilises
>
> (Dis)members
>
> (Re)assembles
>
> (Re)members and (re)flects language
>
> My membranous wings (for I am wingèd Medusa now, as I write my own being into being) are a luminous darkness, like Homer's 'wine dark sea'. My wings brush cold, wet walls. My long, twisted hair sweeps damp stone floors. My eyes are huge and round; my pupils dilated. I am made for this world, and my (re)flection in the deep lake of this place causes it to alight in fire. I laugh. An opening fills with sky and clouds and sun. I am dizzy with the cliff-edge drop into the city below. The pointy tips of my wings scrape the very very very edge. I look down at the concrete-turned-to-stone cityscape. There is space here. So much space. I open my wings. I breathe in: I inspire. I soar. I tower up to the place of clouds. I am flung abroad into space.[43]
>
> Over stars.

---

43 The former and latter phrases are paraphrased from, and inspired by, *At the Back of the North Wind* by George MacDonald (1868). Some of the text of this paragraph appears in the complete libretto for *The Medusa Project*, reviewable in the chapter, 'Scores & Libretti'.

Medusa and her monster kin subvert meaning as 'the sowers of disorder' (Cixous 1976, 884). Their energy disrupts established structures and contests the rational 'disciplining codes language' (Cavarero 2005, 10). An embodied exploration of poetic ferocity then becomes possible, 'in which the sovereignty of language yields to that of the voice' (10) and its 'contagious pleasure' (102).

Now, in my studio, in front of my computer, my wings are folded beneath my blouse. I am Medusa at the helm of her digital audio workstation and my 'voice goes beyond utterance into pure uttering; it expresses the passage of the human into the inhuman' (Connor 2001, 83).

And so, I am human-inhuman
I am even part machine

I capture my voice with my machine, a 'penetration of the living voice by the deathly apparatus of reproduction' (Connor 1998, 227). My *was*-analogue but *now*-digital *whispers-snarls-gasps-screams-wails-sighs* are (dis)embodied and (re)assembled in digital form: *cut, splice, grab, take, paste, distort, effect, (re)mediate, (re)master, rend –* and these fragments become 'the fantasy of sonorous autonomisation' (Connor 2001, 83). I am fodder, material, and ingredients; I am rendered as a dynamic, beautiful-hideous, hallucinatory vocalic monster.

Sometimes randomly, after the initial vocal creation and recording, I cut, copy and paste, without listening, and I allow the Universe to intervene with its Random Wisdom. And then, when the work feels complete, it is like the phonograph: '[i]t answers me with me: I hear myself (and even see myself) as identical and different. Dream accomplished. There without being there. Person without person. Horror and rapture' (Grivel 1992, 51).

My digitised voice possesses 'the power of self-extension' (Connor 1998, 227). I am a monster of my own making, a digital phantasmagoria. I (re)imagine myself. I am artifice and authenticity, 'advancing masked despite everything: in a secret that is shown but not unveiled' (Rosolato 1974, 91). My voice-body-body-voice is a new imaginary (Cavarero 2005, 103) and I hear myself afresh. I am, at once, (dis)embodied, (re)embodied, (dis)membered, (re)membered, (re)assembled, (re)flected, and (re) made through digital interventions, through 'this fantasy…of technologies which allow the electronic modification, enhancement, storage and administration of the voice' (Connor 2001, 83). I am hyperreal by my own design – 'no one knows which I,

more or less human, but alive because of transformation' (Cixous 1976, 889). I rend and (re)member myself from digital fragments of voice-body-body-voice: '[a] voice comes from a voice comes from a voice comes from a voice' (Grivel 33, 1992).

It is a transformational rite, then, this embodiment, (dis)embodiment, and (re) creation of vocality / digital vocality. In fathomless ringing tones, mountainous sighs, and soaring spider silk thread sound shimmers, I (dis)member, (re)member, (re)assemble, (re)flect. I am rent asunder and put back together again. No past. No future. Whole, beyond dualism, ever present, ever fluid. The voice is simultaneously and paradoxically both its Romantic ideal and its fragmentation, separation, demise, and dehumanisation. Vocality comprises 'all of its defining negatives' (Connor 1998, 234-5) – it is a body-not-body body and a voice-not-voice voice. Both / And / Or. Always (dis)membered. Always (re)membered. Always (re)embodied. The Passion of the Monster. The Passion of the Muse. Glorified. Horrified – 'Horror and rapture' (Grivel 1992, 51).

I am surrounded by heaps of non-corporeal, (dis)embodied vocal audio files on my digital device: fragments and phrases of my voice calling back to me, calling back to my body, calling to other bodies.

———

In *The Medusa Project* films, I do not reveal my face. The audience hears my voice and sees moving images of floating hair and waterscapes evocative of reflections of reflections (*mise en abîme*). The theoretical concept of the heard voice that is never seen is the 'acousmatic voice' – 'a voice whose origin cannot be identified, a voice one cannot place' (Dolar 2006, 60). The acousmatic voice is credited to film theorist and composer Michel Chion's (1999) idea of the *acousmêtre* in cinema, a neologism of the French *acousmatique* (acousmatic) and the verb *être* (to be): an acousmatic being (21). This distance or disconnect from the voice and who speaks manifests in film as an absent or faceless 'acousmatic presence…a special being, a kind of talking and acting shadow' (20). Chion endows the *acousmêtre* with special powers that may instil fear; it has 'the ability to be everywhere, to see all, to know all, and to have complete power' (24). A traditional application of this idea is the voiceover or an unseen surveillance system, which is often associated with a male presence. However, in my work, I assert that this being – this *acousmêtre* – is not simply a voice with an unseen source; rather, the *acousmêtre* is a vocalic entity itself. In my films, the voice of Medusa possesses an 'omniscience and omnipotence…and it seems that no obstacle can stop it' (24). This concept of the ubiquitous, ever-present *acousmêtre* points to the endurance of the mythology of Medusa, a presence that has persisted in retellings and re-imaginings since at least the 5th century BCE.

I reside, now, in digitised and (re)mediated 'ever-shifting currents' (Miller 2008, loc 109). I reside in the 'vocalic uncanny' (Connor 1998, 216) wherein the voice is 'caught between the antinomies it is meant to transfuse; body and will; the past and the present; the dead and the living; myth and the profane present' (224) – between the analogue and the digital; between flesh and the cybernetic.

I hear the me who is not me, yet still me

I am Many She-Monsters

I am the Furies

I am the storm-torn Harpies

I am Scylla and I am Charybdis

I am Medusa[44]

I am lighting rod and I am lightening

I write-voice-write-voice with my voice-body-body-voice

What if am heard?

What visceral beauty-horror-beauty then?

What unbridled and as-yet unknown vocality then?

Can you hear me?

You bet you can hear me

I am made for this world

I (re)member myself

I don't have a Muse

I don't need a Muse

I am the Muse

And I have crafted my gauntlets from the skin of Perseus

---

44   See May Sarton's (1971) poem, 'The Muse as Medusa' in *The Medusa Reader*. Edited by Marjorie B. Garber and Nancy J. Vickers. New York: Routledge, 2003, 107.

On Devising & Collaborative Processes[45]

Threshold

Here, I explore the process, creation, and composition of *Threshold* (2017–18), a site-specific collaborative, devised work. *Threshold* is loosely inspired by the enigmatic Greek initiatory rites, the Eleusinian Mysteries: an ancient biannual mythopoetic underworld journey and ceremonial retelling of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (c. 7th century BCE). *Threshold*'s versions include process videos in preparation for the live performance, a video and audio documented ensemble live performance, a music video, and experimental writings. The work premiered as a live performance on 30 April 2017 in Houston, Texas, USA, and was created for The Silos at Sawyer Yards, a mid 20th-century rice factory, now a raw industrial space offered for artistic use. It is an enormous, labyrinthine complex of grain silos with resonant sound qualities.

The music for *Threshold* was created through semi-structured improvisation and group devising methods. I directed and conceptualised the work thematically, textually, and aesthetically, and I led and instigated the group devising and improvisational framework. For the performance, the cast and audience walked through the space together. Voices, instrumental sound, and pre-recorded audio reverberated within The Silos in seemingly infinite directions.

I consider the music video of *Threshold* (February 2018; Fig 28) to be the final and definitive version of the work. However, the engagement in this chapter is a reflection upon creating the live ensemble performance piece (winter and spring 2017), and the reader will find a number of in-process solo and ensemble videos throughout the text below. These in-process solo and ensemble videos became mini works-in-themselves (versions), particularly 'Solo voice experiment at The Silos' (Fig. 25) and 'Duo experiment at The Silos' (Fig. 26). The music video version of *Threshold* closely reflects the sonic and visual world of the live performance due to the process of devising and performing the work as an ensemble in a live setting, coupled with the use of similar improvisational and chance techniques in recording and filming.

———

> Sound, like breath, is experienced as a movement of coming and going, inspiration and expiration. If that is so, then we should say of the body, as it sings, hums, whistles or speaks, that it is *ensounded*. (Ingold 2011, 139)

> I enter the code and open the white industrial door. I pull the handle toward me and

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45   A version of this chapter was published as 'Vocality, Space, and Mediated Works' in the journal, *Body, Space & Technology*, 2017, 17(1), pp.177–218.

a rush of wind carries the scent of wet grain, mould, and Mexican free-tail bat guano.

I throw a switch and fluorescent lights flicker in the low-ceilinged antechamber of the old rice factory. In front of me, a black wall of mysterious electronics, now defunct, once controlled the ferrying of rice around the innumerable silos.

I haul my camera and audio gear over the threshold.

I close the exterior door.

A doorway on the right leads out of the antechamber and into the labyrinthine complex of silos. I move my gear into what feels like the centre of the complex. Concrete cylinders rise hundreds of feet into darkness. Portals lead in and out of each silo in an incomprehensible pattern.

It is quiet. I am alone.

Outside, it is afternoon and all Texas sun. In here, time feels suspended.

This is a place someone might stumble upon in a thousand years and think it's an ancient site for worship. There's an odd sense of primeval-futuristic-apocalyptic religiosity here.

I set up my equipment to film and point the single camera into the most interesting trio of silos: three in a row with succeeding passages opening one into the next. A mid 20th-century sodium vapour light emits a yellow–green glow at the end of the set of three.

My steps echo with a several-second delay.

I am here for the sound.

The motivation behind this project is to make vocal sound in this cavernous and sonorous space – to reach out beyond my skin and bones and flesh – to reach out with my vocalic body: the imagined, manifold me that is voice and body, body and voice. Connor (2001) writes of this embodied experience in 'Violence, Ventriloquism and the Vocalic Body':

> The vocalic body is the idea – which can take the form of dream, fantasy, ideal, theological doctrine or hallucination – of a surrogate or secondary body, a projection of a new way of having or being a body, formed and sustained out of the autonomous operations of the voice. (80)

Through improvisation, I play the space like an instrument. I touch the space with my vocalic

body and feel the *space-as-sound* touch me. My voice echoes and bounces back, amplified by the twenty-foot wide and hundreds-of-feet tall concrete silo cylinders. Through the sonority of the architecture, the sense of my body becomes enormous: my voice is huge and towering, and so my body is huge and towering. I experience the dissolution of space and body.

> My vocalic body is transformed:
> I become the space

- **Solo voice experiment and walk-through at The Silos (Winter 2017).** Misha Penton, voices and camera.
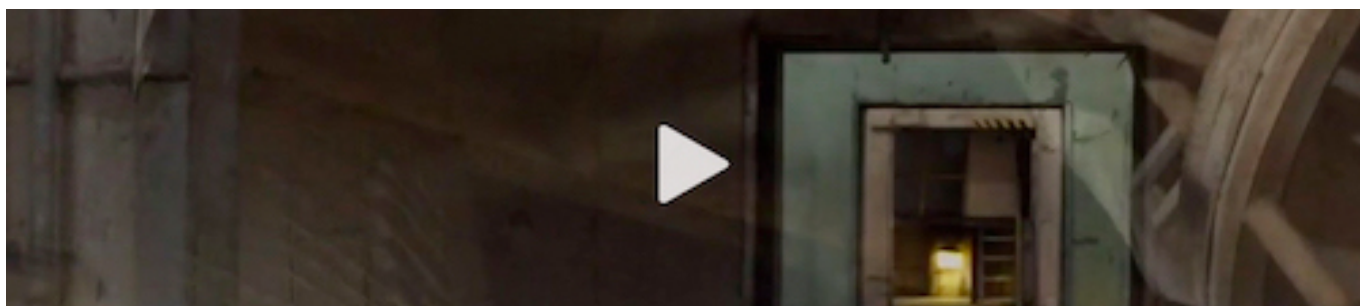
Fig. 24   Solo voice experiment Silos I. Video (edit: 01:26 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14900052

- **Solo voice experiment at The Silos (Winter 2017).** Misha Penton, voices and camera.
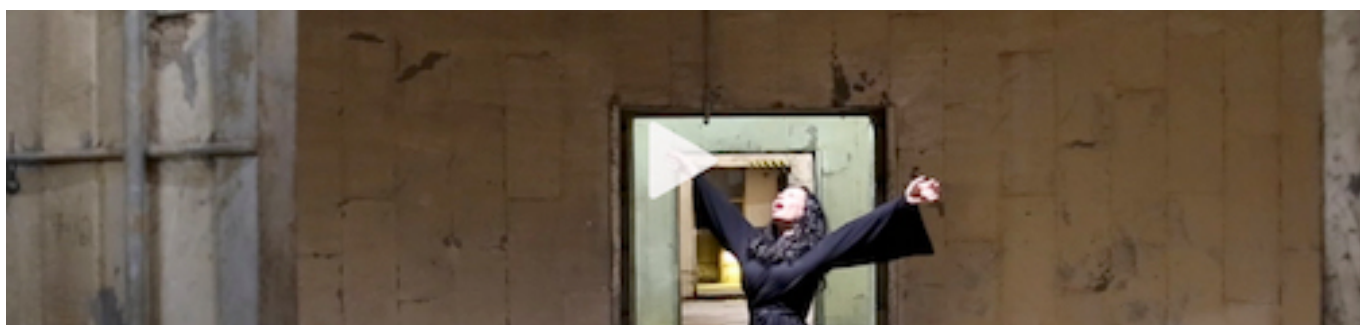
Fig. 25   Solo voice experiment Silos II. Video (edit: 03:35 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14900064

> It is late April. In Texas, the rains come. It rains. Hard.
>
> I arrive at The Silos to check on the site the day before my first rehearsal with the electric guitarist. The Silos are flooded: a thin lake spreads through the concrete labyrinth of the towers.
> I panic.
> I leave.
> I return wearing galoshes and carrying several fifty-gallon plastic blue trash bins. I

position the bins under the silos that are trickling water. I put signs on the bins in English and Spanish: DO NOT REMOVE / NO QUITAR.

The next day, I meet the guitarist for our first rehearsal with his electric rig. Electric: there is water throughout the site. In some places, the water is several inches deep. The guitarist sets up in a remote, dry silo. He plugs in his amplifiers.

I walk through the space, my feet tap-tap-tapping and sloshing and dripping through the puddles.

I weave through the maze of silos, vocalising. I am unamplified. The silos serve as amplifiers for me. As I sing straight up into their cone-like openings, even with the guitar amplified, I am easily heard. I hear the guitarist's drones and loops and squeals and sustained tones, and he hears me. We talk to each other through sound, as musicians do. It is a familiar way to communicate and much deeper than words. My experience reiterates composer Tim Hodgkinson's (2016) views on improvisation in *Music and the Myth of Wholeness: Toward a New Aesthetic Paradigm*: '[o]ur different intentions in each moment are generated by our different constitutive listenings to what is happening in the previous moment' (70).

We find our way, together in sound, moment by moment.

- **Duo experiment at The Silos (April 2017).** Misha Penton, voices and camera. George Heathco, guitar.
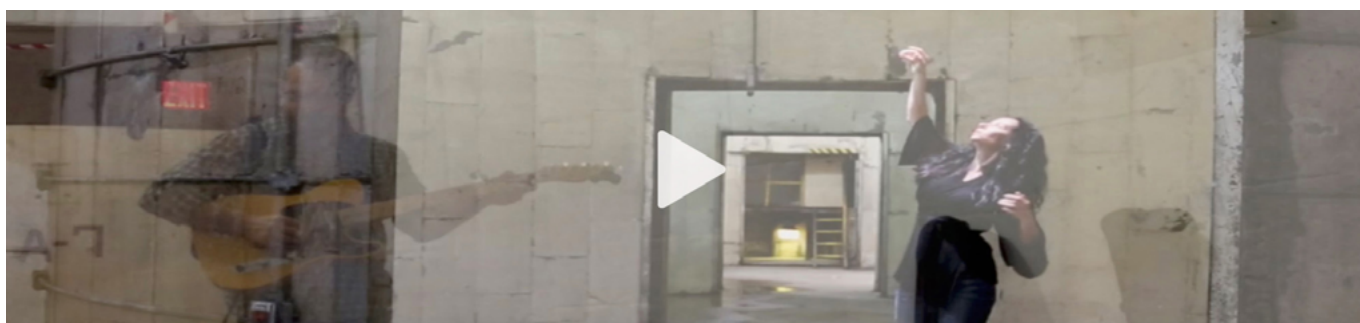

Fig. 26   Duo experiment Silos. Video (edit: 01:57 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14900085

Shape & Possibilities

In Umberto Eco's (1989) influential volume, *The Open Work*, he writes:

> [L]ife in its immediacy is not 'openness' but chance. In order to turn this chance into a cluster of possibilities, it is first necessary to provide it with some organization. In other words, it is necessary to choose the elements of a constellation among which we will then—and only then—draw a network of possibilities. (116)

With this in mind, I outline below the 'network of possibilities' that shaped *Threshold* and have become, to some degree, a working method that I have applied to a number of subsequent projects:

- **Direction:** I lead the 'game' as I shape the work in real-time. I call this 'directorial scoring'. Through spoken and nonverbal cues, I set conditions for the work to happen. I do not tell collaborators what to do.

- **Libretto:** I compose the poetics / text, and before the first rehearsal with the chorus (the three other vocalisers), we memorise the text. The text evolves through rehearsal, organically, with the four of us together in the space. We use the words in a loose order and over time the libretto morphs, but not much – I mostly cut and cull words that feel too specific.

- **Vocality and Staging:** the solo voice and chorus work evolves from improvisation with the libretto and develops into a semi-improvised final structure. The movement patterns unfold through group body awareness as we move through the space.

- **Concept:** my personal artistic aesthetic. This is nebulous and complex, but I might say it is marked by abstraction, expressivity, *bel canto* vocality, and vocal techniques borrowed from contemporary theatre practices, as well as a theatrical visual aesthetic based in body relationships in space.

- **Instrumentalists:** when the instrumentalists join us for the last rehearsal in the short production period, they 'plug' their improvisations into what the vocalising cast has devised. For the performance, the instrumentalists were in a centrally located silo with their amplifiers and speaker systems dispersed throughout the larger space.

- **Score:** there is no notated musical score beyond my directorial scoring and libretto[46].

- **Duration:** the work is approximately 30 minutes. We have no timekeeping devices.

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46   I created a score for *Threshold* after the project was complete which may be reviewed in the chapter, 'Scores & Libretti'.

Through timekeeping in rehearsals, the work develops to that length on its own. In performance, we clock-out at something like 28 minutes.

- **The Silos:** the space is a cast member and the primary physical and conceptual container for the work; therefore, all rehearsals must take place inside the space.

- **Silence** is an active participant, a cast member.

- **The whole of the work is a listening game.**

> *Threshold* **Libretto Excerpt**
>
> Liminal / Luminous / Step. Over / One. Step / Over. Come / Ever. After / Under. World / Other. World / Our World / Discord, descent, plummet, plunge, dive, crash, wane, degrade / Fall, drop, tumble, spiral / Can you stop this? 'The centre cannot hold'[47] / Plant, reap, sow, eat, grow, sell / Plant, reap, rape, eat, sow, grow, sell / Train and gate / Load and wait / To the market / To the market / Sell her to the market / Pomegranate, narcissus and honey / Saw it all and said nothing / His hands on her / His hands on her body / Silent / Silence / Complicit / Complicit men / Complicit women / Chaos / The world is unrecognisable / The Portal opens / The Portal closes / What kind of world? / Thresh / Threshold

I choose to ask the chorus not to 'sing'. I want their vocalisations to be audible breaths, gasps, whispers, spoken words, and vocal fry(s), and to leave the *bel canto*-esque tone production to me, that is, the *performance me* that functions as lightening rod, guide, and focal energetic system, driving and shaping the work in real-time. There is a considerable amount of *allowing* for this guidance to happen on the part of my collaborators, and I trust this to occur due to the specific people involved. The piece developed from an intuitive, instinctive knowing that simply *happens* when the right conditions are set. Although the rehearsal period was brief, our collective attentiveness allowed for chance, happenstance, idiosyncrasies and synchronicities in the process and performance to shape the work.

These group methods are familiar to theatre practitioners trained in improvisational devising techniques influenced by the foundational work of Mary Overlie (2016) and her Six Viewpoints, and Anne Bogart and Tina Landau's (2005) expanded Viewpoints. Overlie, Bogart and Landau pioneered ways of composing group performance by utilising concepts of space, shape, time (tempo / duration), emotion, movement, and story (Overlie 2016, n.p.). These techniques evolved to include spatial relationship, kinaesthetic response, gesture, repetition, architecture (physical space), and topography (movement patterns) (Bogart and Landau 2005, 35-65), as well as the Vocal Viewpoints of pitch, dynamics,

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47 'The centre cannot hold' is a line from the poem 'The Second Coming' by W. B. Yeats, published in 1920.

acceleration / deceleration (again, tempo), silence, and timbre (105-121). *Threshold*'s sonic and physical world applied these techniques, and the work emerged in a collaborative, deeply attentive way.

> We breathe and sound
>
> How are we in relationship?
>
> Together? Apart? Who is beside me? Who is isolated?
>
> Are we moving slow? Fast? Both? Neither?
>
> Who is in stillness? Who is not?
>
> Who is silent?
>
> Are we touching?
>
> Is breath quiet? Audible?
>
> Exhale / Intone / Growl / Wail / Whisper
>
> Gasp
>
> Shout
>
> One word is added, then another and another
>
> Another phrase; another fragment
>
> Discard what is not essential
>
> Take apart the diphthongs
>
> Vowels long. Vowels short. Explode plosives
>
> Consonants crackle, et cetera, et cetera, and so on...
>
> Our bodies are fleshy and tender, vulnerable
>
> We follow a maze of thresholds, one to the next
>
> We invade the concrete
>
> The silo towers are singular, separated, apart yet connected,
>
> and we make the space whole

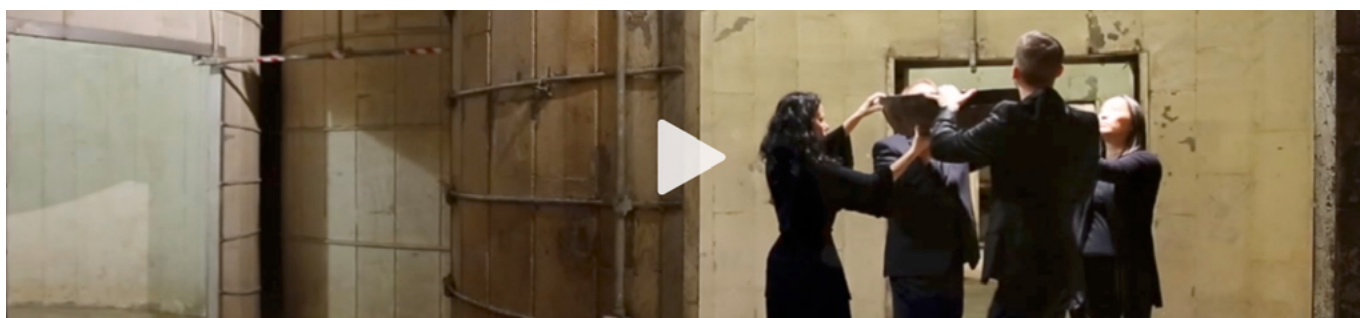- **Ensemble Voice Rehearsal at The Silos (April 2017).** Misha Penton, Sherry Cheng, Neil Ellis Orts, Michael Walsh.

Fig. 27   Ensemble Voice Rehearsal Silos, Video (edit: 01:49 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14900106

In allowing the creative work to reveal itself, its aesthetic properties become native to the process itself. The work feels like it occurs on its own, through self-organisation, with me gently serving as conceptualist. In *Beyond the Score*, musicologist Nicholas Cook (2013) notes similar ideas from the jazz musician Jared Burrows:

> [The] process of improvisation, he [Jared] writes, creates 'its own time-dependent meanings—let's call them short-term archetypes—specific to each improvisation', and groups that frequently perform together develop archetypes that persist from one improvisation to another…Scores and works as traditionally defined may not be involved, then, but 'free' improvisation is both structured and constrained by specific patterns of interaction that emerge in the course of performance. (226)

Through the artists involved and their familiarity with my practice, the work emerges, evolves, and changes during the process and, ultimately, dissipates and dissolves. The *people* are the work, not the work itself. As performers, our relationships are 'self-evident…in the acoustic trace' we leave behind (9). As an ensemble, we became guides for the audience. *Threshold* allowed performers and audience to journey together as the work unfolded in the resonant space.

Modularity & Emergence

Composer James Saunders (2008) explores the practical, creative, and artistic considerations of modularity. He writes that a 'compositional, or indeed any, method involving use of modules…would require a number of standardized units and a procedure for fitting them together' (2). There are conceptual similarities to modularity in *Threshold*, such as a number of 'pieces' (collaborators and space) coming together to form a whole and a short rehearsal period within which the pieces snap together. However, I'm reticent to call the parts and working processes of a live piece like *Threshold*, 'modules', as they are not meant as building blocks, nor meant for later reuse in the sense of a modular work. I choose the word, 'element', rather than 'module' or 'standardised unit', due to its association with natural processes.[48] The process of realising *Threshold* draws attention to the flexible territory between composed and open works. *Threshold*'s conceptual and creative framework embraces chance and the happenstance of group devising, yet the shaping of the work and its subsequent versions is through my role as composer-director-producer in a traditional sense. As is the case with all of the creative work presented herein, *Threshold* and its versions do not significantly depart from what I think of as the original concept, whereas a more open work may be designed to radically change in the hands of subsequent interpreters and performers.

The elements of *Threshold* overlap and are intertwined with the 'network of possibilities' that shaped the work, as listed above. *Threshold*'s elements include the libretto – a composed component which pre-dates the rehearsal period; the solo and group vocality realised as a fluid, semi-improvised

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48   Saunders' work in this essay explores closed and open modular systems as well as temporal modularity in music composition. Eco and Saunders also use the word 'element' in describing aspects of open works.

poetic text; the devised group staging; the improvising instrumentalists; and the architecture of the space which serves as the most fixed of the work's elements and the most significant 'given' of the performance game. These components form additional sub-elements in their relationship to each other, multiplying the modules: solo voice and chorus, individual vocalist to individual vocalist, voice(s) and guitar, voice(s) and percussion, guitar and percussion, body(ies) and site, staging and site, et cetera. In addition, The Silos space evokes modularity in its architectural design as it possesses many thresholds, an obvious physical example of thematic material.

Threshold came together from pre-*conceptualised* parts rather than pre-*constructed* modules. An element of the work, such as the guitarist spontaneously interacting with my vocals, becomes a *conceptual* module: it is an improvisatory component *within* a larger improvisatory and devised process, with the final outcome, as desired, unpredictable. Rather than forming a cohesive whole from pre-made building blocks, this approach feels akin to biological processes, like tending a garden of emergent forms. Furthermore, there is a tension between the biological elements of human performers (embodied / ephemeral) and the architectural site (concrete / nonhuman). Through this friction, there is a sense that the human cast 'invades' the architectural fixity of the site with an embodied vocality and a physical ephemerality, like vines over-running an abandoned building.

Threshold emerged into a work that is repeatable, if not reproducible, in that the work consistently held its visual and sonic aesthetics, but it was not exactly the same from rehearsal to rehearsal, to filming, to recording, to performance. Now, *Threshold* exists only in its (re)mediated traces…

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Versions of *Threshold*: Music Video & Performances

- ***Threshold* Music Video (February 2018).**
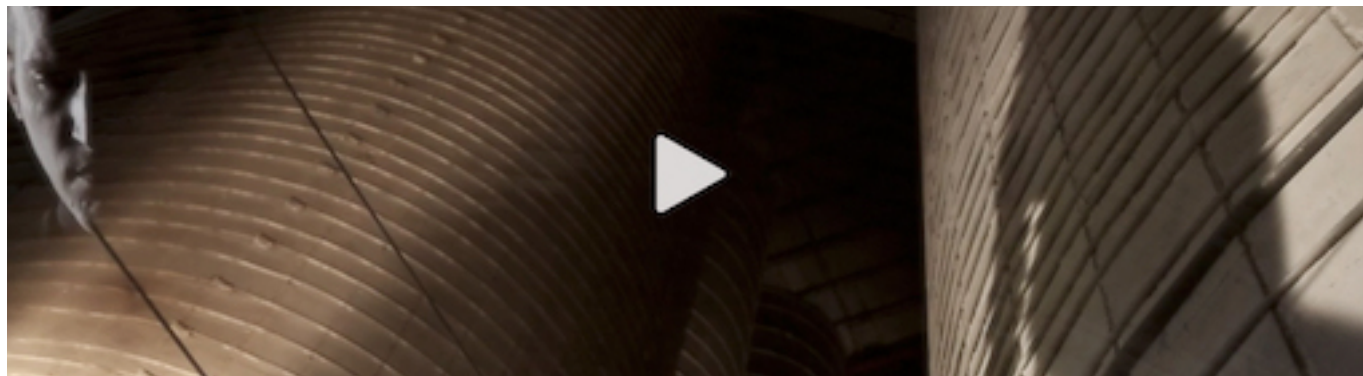
Fig. 28   *Threshold* music video (07:52 minutes).   https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14900118

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- ***Threshold Dress Rehearsal* (30 April 2017).** Full cast. Excerpt.
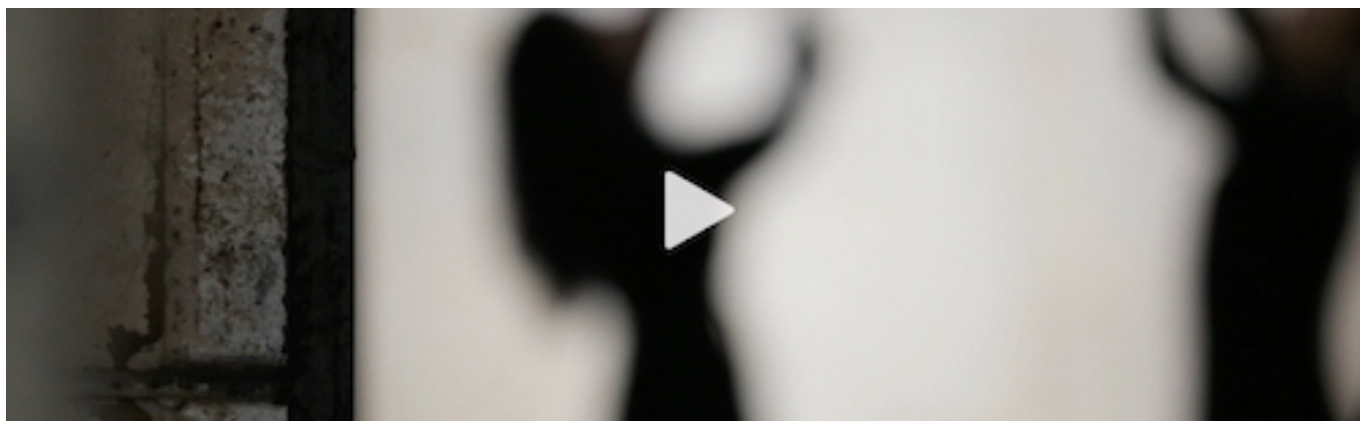
Fig. 29   *Threshold* dress rehearsal excerpt. Video (edit: 05:24 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14900130

- ***Threshold Dress Rehearsal* (30 April 2017).** Full cast. Full-length.
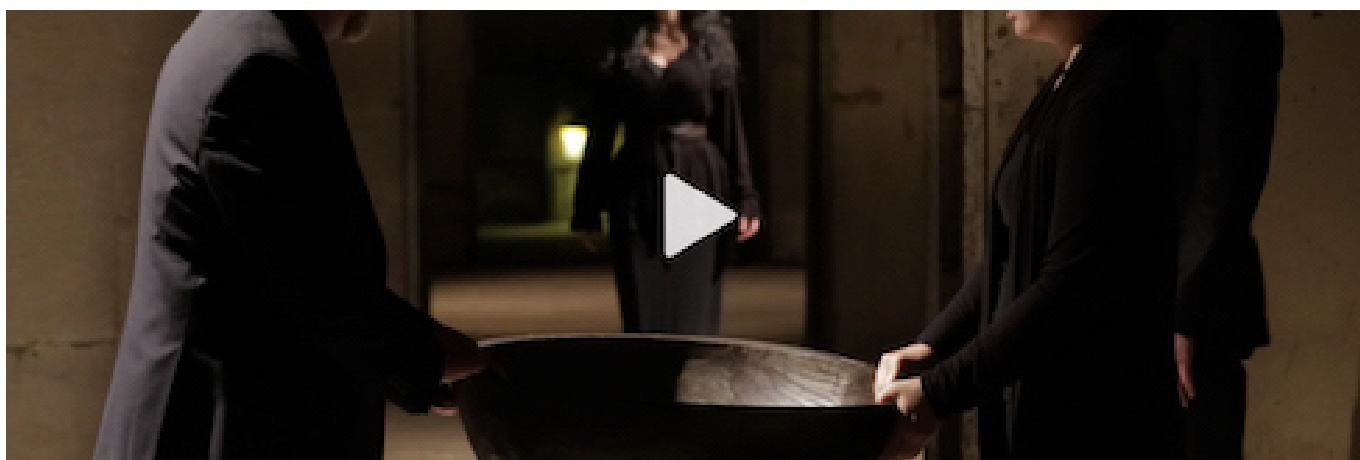
Fig. 30   *Threshold* dress rehearsal full-length. Video (21:56 minutes). https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14900133
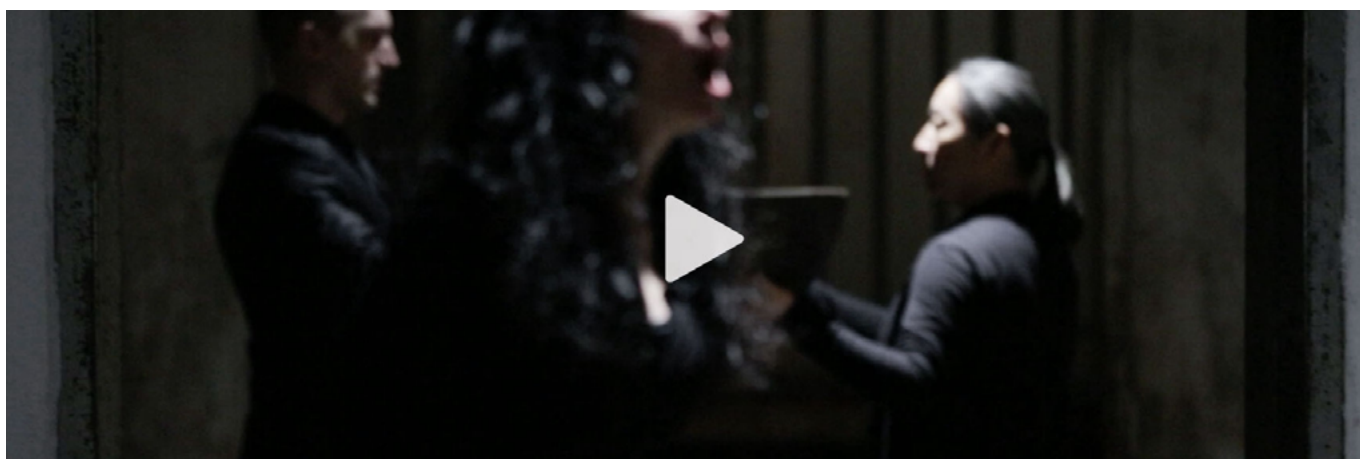
Fig. 31   *Threshold* live on-air radio performance audio with still images as video (13:05 minutes)
https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.14900154

- **The score and libretto** for *Threshold* may be found in 'Scores & Libretti'.

69

The 'world exists in a universe of possible music'.

(Merleau-Ponty [1948] 2004, 99)

Scores & Libretti

To Score or Not to Score?

I have a complicated relationship with the scoring process. Notation has not been central to my process, as my works are based in improvisational methods and are generally created without scores. The exception to this is my recent body of recorded and media work which includes *Visible Darkness*, for which I created a score of the lead voice part as a mnemonic device for myself and as a communication tool for collaborators. The scores below are, in part, an experiment in notating my already-completed works – that is, these scores were created *after* a project drew to a close. This process is a mutable and evolving aspect of my practice, leading me to ask, 'What role does notation play in my process, if any at all?'

What I call Directorial Scores or a Directorial Scoring process, is a method whereby a work is developed via improvisational group interaction under my direction, and in which I am involved as a performer. By influencing the work in real-time without trying to control it, I aim for a range of possible, yet somewhat unpredictable, responses and contributions from my collaborators that shape the work 'in new ways…each action constrains the range of appropriate responses to it, and the series of successive entailments forms the core of the improvisatory process' (Cook 2013, 233). These constraints or parameters – the rules of a game – nurture the collaborative process and the emergence of a particular kind of aesthetic which I am facilitating (admittedly, an aesthetic that is difficult to define).

My scores are by-products of the creative process and are not created in order to generate a work. Somewhat problematically, in terms of future reproductions, my work doesn't exist without me. I do not expect my works to be recreated or performed by others. The intention of my work is simply to make and perform the pieces with a small band of collaborators of like mind. If the work exists for posterity, then it does so only in its audio and video archival forms. It would be possible for an ambitious musician to transcribe the works from my archival media material (in the way guitarist Steve Vai transcribed Frank Zappa's work!) and then to recreate the work live. Additionally, it is possible to learn the music from my recordings like a rock musician or a singer-songwriter might with extant works they wish to learn and perform.

I have also begun to consider an experimental scoring process that I call Teaching Scores. This process would involve me handing down a method and technique for realising a work, and then coaching the performers in style, implementation, and production. This work-making method requires my direction and input to be realised, but I would not be directly involved in the performance. Once learned, performers may teach the work to other artists. I would, however, be concerned with how the work may evolve over time, distinct from my original vision. I have not yet tested this score concept, and I continue to maintain that scores are not central to my process whether as an artefact or instructional

tool. However, this teaching process is akin to how choreography is passed from teacher to dancers. It is also how classical music is taught since classical music scores offer little to no performance practice nor stylistic directives. Composers such as Meredith Monk and Éliane Radigue often pass on their work in a similar manner, partly with the idea to preserve it for posterity.

I am simply unconcerned with the future of my work – or rather, I am unconcerned with whether other artists re-interpret or re-present it, although I would like a long-lasting internet-accessible archive of my work. This may be ironic, as I was an artist for whom ephemeral live performance was central; however, now my works are predominantly realised as archival media pieces. The archival media work is the work; it is its final and definitive version.

Visible Darkness

There are two scores for *Visible Darkness*. The first is a text score I used for communicating an improvisational performance with an instrumental ensemble at *Music and / as Process Conference* which took place at the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance, London, 26 July 2019. The second score is a mnemonic device for recording with collaborators and features an expressionistic vocal *Sprechclef*. The libretto is included in the scores.

Visible Darkness (Score I)

Score & Libretto

Misha Penton

A Directorial Score

For composer-performer (Misha Penton, voice) and one to six instrumentalists: single or any combination of orchestral strings, orchestral winds, piano, and / or marimba, acoustic guitar, any 'regular' / 'traditional' pitched instruments. No objects or electronics. All unamplified.

Duration: approximately 8–10 minutes at the discretion of the performers, and under the time constraints of the programme upon which it is performed.

Process

This work is a listening game.

All players use timekeeping devices.

Voice / composer-performer leads the work as outlined below.

Full ensemble prepares / rehearses, leading to performance (it is possible to perform the piece with no rehearsal and a sound check only, depending on the nature of the relationship of ensemble members).

Voice

Sung / Whispers

Spoken / Swooping

Sliding / Soaring

Follow the rhythm and the texture of the poetry

Allow the sonority of the poetry to lead the voice

- Singer leads the work in real-time and drives timekeeping by the phrasing of the libretto,

allowing sections for instrumentalists only, and making space for the sonic world of the instrumentalists to coexist with voice.

- *Sprechgesang*-like quality: 'sung' tones, legato is central, large tonal and dynamic range, leaps, *portamenti*, sparse use of *coloratura*, intermittent use of extended vocal techniques such as ingression, spoken words, sighs, gasps, whispers, et cetera.
- Expand the natural inflections of speaking the poetry into a large tonal and dynamic range.
- Emphasise consonants, alliteration / sonority – especially of consonants and illustrative words.
- Embrace non-tonic notes of the scale, avoid a tonic.
- Preference non-melodic phrases.
- Use a broad and varied dynamic range throughout.
- Avoid repetition.
- Honour silence.

Instrumentalists

Sparse / Melancholia
Ambient / Textured
Quiet / Bursts!
Broken / Shattered
Spidery / Landscapes

- *Suivez la voix, toujours – suivez la texte!*
- Follow the libretto (singer may repeat phrases – listen for these).
- Provide a quiet textured ground from which the voice springs, floats, soars.
- Allow space, stillness, and silence to inhabit the sound world. During sung sections, provide texture to the sound world, peeking in and out with more varied dynamic phrases.
- Use a broad and varied dynamic range throughout and create surprising shifts in dynamics.
- Embrace non-tonic notes of the scale / avoid a tonic.
- Favour mood and textures.
- Prefer non-melodic phrases.
- Visit these pitches occasionally: G# A# C C#.
- Avoid repetition.
- Honour silence.

—

Times are approximate, as noted below. Total duration is roughly 8 minutes.

The work may be extended in overall duration during the rehearsal process, at the discretion of the performers and the programme in which it is presented.

> **I**
>
> All start timekeeping devices simultaneously.
>
> (Instrumental intro approximately: 00:00–00:30)
>
> *'This was the darkness in which ghosts and monsters were active, and indeed was not the woman who lived in it... —was she not of a kind with them?'*
>
> A thunderhead churns in slow-motion, its high clouds billow white against a darkening blue expanse. Bats chirp a chorus under a bayou bridge and a falcon circles a slow descent. Thousands of grackles gather on powerlines to watch the end of day: the last rays of sun move across the city as it rises from the desert plain.
>
> *'...in 'visible darkness', where always something seemed to be flickering and shimmering...'*

(Part I ends at approximately: 02:30)

> **II**
>
> Her abdomen hovers above the sparkle of twisted skyscrapers and her thin, long legs easily navigate between metallic buildings: one furry claw here on the pavement (barely missing a sidewalk crack), and one claw there, next to a man asleep on a bench (he doesn't wake).
>
> *'The darkness wrapped around her tenfold, twentyfold...'*

(Part II ends at approximately: 04:00)

> **III**
>
> Now, beyond the buildings, she rests at the edge of a concrete-lined waterway. Above her, blue lights hang from the underside of a bridge, signalling the coming full moon.

Between her two front legs she holds the remnants of a shattered porcelain bowl. Its glaze is a galaxy swirl of greens and blues – tiny bird silhouettes lift from its fractured surface and merge into the surrounding darkness.

(Part III ends at approximately: 05:30)

IV

With mother-like coaxing, she gathers the shards and makes her way to a deserted avenue. She ascends a slick glass tower. A shimmer of silk spools out from her spinnerets and wafts high on the breeze, sticking to the steel building across the street. One glimmering thread at a time, she crafts a magnificent web. At last, she settles in its centre and starts to work on the shattered bowl: with silk and gold, she adheres each broken piece to its match, and makes what was once broken, whole – and more wonder-full and splendid than before.

(Part IV ends at approximately: 07:30 / ensemble finds an ending).

Spring 2019

Visible Darkness (Score II)
Vocal Score & Libretto
Misha Penton

Score used as a mnemotechnical device for the recording process.

Misha Penton

Visible Darkness

Sprech Clef indicates singer is free to explore, improvise and expand the natural inflections of speech into singing:

- *Sprechgesang*-like quality: 'sung' tones, legato is central, large tonal and dynamic range, leaps, portamenti, sparse use of coloratura, intermittent use of extended vocal techniques such as ingression, spoken words, sighs, gasps, whispers, etc.
- Expand the natural inflections of speaking the poetry into a large tonal and dynamic range.
- Emphasize consonants, alliteration / sonority— especially of consonants and illustrative words.
- Embrace non-tonic notes of the scale, avoid a tonic.
- Preference non-melodic phrases.
- Use a broad and varied dynamic range throughout.
- Avoid repetition.
- Honor silence.

Visible Darkness

Misha Penton
Music & Words

(siren)

Ah...

a thun - der he - ad churns in slo - ow

mo - tion___ its high

clouds billow white against a darkening blue

(ex)panse.

Bats chirp a chorus under a bayou bridge and a falcon
circles a slow descent.

Thou - sands of gra - ckles gather

on power lines

to watch the end

of day

the last rays of sun move across

C

the city___

as it rises from the

desert plain.

Her abdomen hovers above
the sparkle of twisted
skyscrapers and her thin,
long legs easily navigate
between metallic

buil

- dings:

one furry claw here on the pavement
(barely missing a sidewalk crack), and one claw there,
next to a man asleep on a bench (he doesn't wake).

Visible Darkness score page 1

Now, beyond the buildings, she rests at the edge of a concrete-lined waterway.
Between her two front legs she holds the remnants of a shattered porcelain bowl.

Its glaze is a galaxy swirl of greens and blues—   ti - ny bird   silhouettes
lift from its fractured
surface
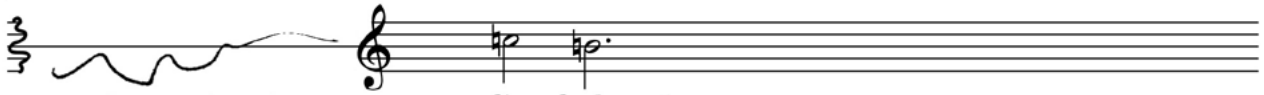
and merge into the   surrounding darkness.

She gathers the shards and makes her way
to a deserted avenue. She ascends a slick glass   to - wer.
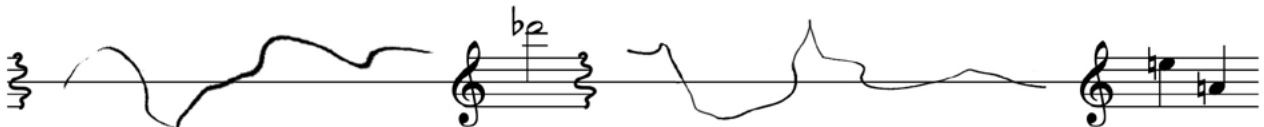
A shimmer of silk spools out   high   on the breeze, sticking to the steel   At last
from her spinnerets and wafts   building across the street.
One glimmering thread at a time,
she crafts a magnificent web.

she settles in it center   with silk and gold   she adheres each broken piece   whole...
and starts to work   to its match, and makes
on the shattered bowl: what was once broken

-      -   -   -   -   -   (and makes what once was bro - o - ken___ whole)_

The Medusa Project
A Monodrama for Solo Soprano
or Soprano and Orchestral Instruments
plus Media

Score, Concept, and Libretto by Misha Penton
Duration: 15 minutes
May 2018

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SOPRANO

ORCHESTRAL INSTRUMENTS (e.g. clarinet, viola, violoncello, contrabass, oboe, cor anglaise, or marimba).

If the soprano is performing the work solo, simply omit the instruments.

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Rehearsals

No rehearsals, but both musicians familiarise themselves with the audio and video before the performance. The soprano leads the timing, so it is essential that she rehearse the timing of the piece before the performance.

Libretto may or may not be memorised.

This work is a hybrid: a cross between an opera and a concert work. It may be semi-staged in a theatrically minimalist manner.

Space & Lighting

Classical music hall with theatrical lighting capabilities. Not appropriate for a sonically 'dead' space. Alternative spaces like resonant galleries or other acoustically friendly spaces may be considered.

> Stage lighting is low and stage may be dramatically side lit. No house lights.
> Space must have no exterior light bleed and must be lit to optimise the film screening.
> In performance, the soprano is centre stage right, and instrumentalist(s) centre stage left.
> All performers wear concert black (no formal attire).

Media

The audioscape is played at low volume, never to compete with the unamplified live performers. The film is projected behind the performers. The audio is embedded in the film: the media is one MOV file. Given the possible limitations of projecting the film, it may be projected onto the performers. The film and audioscape is available from the composer.

— ✦ —

Creating the Sound World

Invite silence into the sound world as an active participant.

Vary dynamics and tempi.

Allow space and stillness.

Cultivate awareness & attention.

Do not rush.

Do less.

— ✦ —

Soprano

Sprechgesang-like quality: 'sung' tones, legato is central, large tonal and dynamic range, leaps, *portamenti*, sparse use of *coloratura*, intermittent use of extended vocal techniques such as ingression, spoken words, sighs, whispers, et cetera.

- Expand the natural inflections of speaking the poetry into a large tonal and dynamic range.
- Embrace non-tonic notes of a scale / non-melodic phrases.
- Privilege non-melodic phrases.
- Use a broad and varied dynamic range throughout.
- Honour silence.
- Choose new choices and new variants (avoid repetition).
- No screaming, no mundane life voice sounds: crying, chatting, et cetera.

Instruments

Privilege the voice / follow the voice. Allow space, stillness and silence to inhabit the sound world. During sung sections, provide texture to the sound world, peeking in and out with more varied dynamic phrases.

Libretto & Timing

During the rehearsal process and performance, performers both use a timekeeping device on a stopwatch setting. For the performance, sync the timekeeping devices with the start of the film, either by the performers starting the media and stopwatches themselves, or by coordinating with a tech person.

> (Voice & instrumentalist(s) enter at approx. 00:20 into the fixed-media work, then begin to create sound world with breaths and *pp* instrument tones, before voice enters with text:)

> **I**
>
> I see my (re)flection
>
> I see myself and am seen
>
> I hear myself and am heard
>
> (Re)flect
>
> (Ab)sorb
>
> (Re)flect
>
> I am snake-haired
>
> Formidable
>
> Ferocious

(above section is repeated twice)
(Approx. 30-second instrumental solo)

> Exquisite: my armour
>
> Intricate in swirls and swooshes and whirls and whooshes carved with patience.
>
> The engraving is meticulous and painful, yes, but ever so slow, I barely realise. I am
>
> exquisite,
>
> shimmering and crystalline – chitinous, some even say, magnificent.

(stopwatch should read approx. 04:00)
(Approx. 30-second instrumental solo)

> First
>
> My skin gently hardens (over time, I barely notice)
>
> I did it myself, meticulously, patiently
>
> The designs stylus-carved
>
> Splendid

(stopwatch should read approx. 06:00)
(Approx. 30-second instrumental solo)

II

Echoes return from steel and glass canyons and spin across headlands and valleys and rise from cathedrals, tunnels, and vaginal caverns. The pointy tips of my wings scrape the very, very, very edge of the cliff and I look down on the concrete turned-to-stone cityscape. I gasp and scream and sing with ferocity and mourning and rage.

(Approx. 30-second instrumental solo)

Firecloud lighting splits the sky: there is space here, so much space. I open my wings, I breathe in, I soar – 'I am spacious singing flesh...shot through with streams of song' (Cixous 1976, 882).

I tower up to the place of clouds
I am flung abroad into space, over stars
Over stars...over stars...over stars

(stopwatch should read approx. 09:30)
(Approx. 30-second instrumental solo)

III

I am she
She is me
My sisters, my kin
Howl with ferocity and mourning:
We whisper. Snarl. Gasp. Speak. Scream. Sing. Sigh.

I call out, I shout and scream and sing and rage...rage...rage...

I am thunderous and sonorous: I am poetry.
I am Many She-Monsters: I am the Furies and the storm-torn Harpies, I am Scylla and I am Charybdis, I am Medusa: a New Muse.

We are Monster Women. Now, so many many many more of us.

(stopwatch should read approx. 12:00)
(Approx. 30-second instrumental solo)

I see my (re)flection

I see myself and am seen

I hear myself and am heard

(Re)flect

(Ab)sorb

(Re)flect

I am snake-haired

Formidable

Ferocious

I am exquisite, shimmering and crystalline – magnificent.

I am thunderous and sonorous: I am poetry.

I am Many She-Monsters: I am the Furies and the storm-torn Harpies, I am Scylla
and I am Charybdis, I am Medusa: a New Muse.

We are Monster Women. Now, so many many many more of us.

I shatter the mirror and craft my gauntlets from the skin of Perseus.

(stopwatch should read approx. 14:15 minutes)

Rend and reassemble, resemble, dismember, remember, destabilise, reflect,
disorganise, destabilise, reflect, destabilise, reflect

Re-imagine

Dismember

Re-semble

Remember

Re-imagine

Reflect

(When the recorded voices in the audioscape begin at 14:45, stop all live sound, turn away from the audience to face the film and wait for film to play out. Alternatively, at 14:45, stop all live sound, turn away from audience to face film, and then performers slowly drift offstage in opposing directions, either into the wings or out into the audience and to the very back of the house).

Threshold

Score, Concept, and Libretto by Misha Penton

For Four Unamplified Voices, Electric Guitar, Percussion, Audioscape, and an Acoustically Resonant Space

Duration: approximately 25 minutes
May 2018

Threshold is loosely inspired by the Eleusinian Mysteries, enigmatic ceremonial rites that enacted the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (c. 7th century BCE), the story of the abduction and return of Persephone. The rites were held at Eleusis in Greece for a thousand years before the rise of Christianity; artists, then and now, freely interpret the story. We have very few details about the original events, but Cicero wrote, 'Athens has given nothing to the world more excellent or divine than the Eleusinian Mysteries'. The rites were transformational for participants, honouring the cycle of life and offering a philosophy based in meaning and hope.

The myth tells a mother-daughter passion play of abduction, loss, and renewal.

Threshold premiered on 30 April 2017 as a site-specific devised postopera in one act. The work was conceived, directed, produced, and designed for The Silos at Sawyer Yards in Houston, Texas, USA by Misha Penton. All rehearsals occurred at the site. In the performance, Penton performed the soprano role, directing and shaping the work in real-time. She was joined by collaborative voice artists Sherry Cheng, Neil Ellis Orts, and Michael Walsh; and instrumentalists George Heathco, electric guitars, and Luke Hubley, percussion. This score is based on the premiere performance.

Documentation of the dress rehearsal is archived, and a live in-studio recording with Misha Penton, George Heathco, and Luke Hubley was made at Houston Public Media in April 2017. The music video, *Threshold*, was released in February 2018 – produced, directed, and with a sound score by Penton with original contributions from the performance cast.

———

Atmospheres

A Procession. Light. Darkness. Shadows. Ruins. Ceremony. Solemnity. A well gapes and gasps, it is an entrance. A splash and tap of steps on concrete. Echoes. Pause. Long tones. Drones. Feedback. Whisper. Wail. Speak. Sing. Slingshot shouts. Wait. Words out of the order. Discard what isn't useful. Draw out. Breathe. Sigh. Gasp. Ingress. Inspire. Respire. Be silent. Take apart the diphthongs. Vowels long. Vowels short. Explode plosives. Consonants crackle and quake, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, and so on...

Love Violation Rape Complicity Loss Hate Honour Sacrifice Transformation

Thresh.   Threshold.   Under.   World.   Other.   World.   Our.   World.
Plant, reap, rape, eat, sow, grow, sell
Sell her to the market

The Portal opens
The Portal closes

What kind of world will we create?

———◆———

Soprano

Chorus: 3 voices: one woman, two men

Electric Guitar

Percussion

Instruments

Electric Guitar

- Effects pedals: type and number are at the discretion of the guitarist.
- Consider the use of a looping rig; if using, consider drones and loop sparingly.
- 3 amplifiers positioned in disparate locations of space.
- 3 x 50–100' cables for amplifiers to accommodate distance from stationary electric guitarist.

Percussion

- MIDI 'marimba' and use of an appropriate digital interface which will send individual sounds, separately to the 4 speakers. Percussionist decides which sounds are sent to which speakers, and when.
- powered speakers positioned in 4 disparate locations of space.
- 50–100' speaker cables to accommodate speaker distance.

Because the speakers are stationed throughout the space, instrumentalists are to use a monitor system set up in their stationary play area (not monitors for the voices; see below about suitable acoustics of space). Cables leading from the centrally located instrumentalists must be off of the floor and discretely strung / affixed high on the walls, above doorways, out of sight.

Space

Choose a resonant space with no less than a 3-second delay and no more than a 7-second delay. Sound must not be 'muddy'. The space is completely empty and ideally 5000 sq. ft.-plus in size. The walls and ceilings are bare. The space has doorless chambers, spaces, or rooms through which the voice ensemble can move during the performance, and through which they can return to where they started without back-tracking, as if traversing a labyrinth. Alternatively, it is possible to use a space which may be traversed from an entrance to an exit, again without back-tracking.

The voice ensemble is mobile throughout the space but must be able to hear the instrumentalists at all times. Instrumentalists are set up in a centrally located area and remain stationary throughout the piece, but they must always be able to hear the voices. If the space is conducive to the work, the voices will be naturally amplified by the native resonance and delay of the space. If the voices are not naturally amplified in this way, the space is unsuitable; choose another space which meets these criteria.

No house lights, florescent lights, or native overhead lights. If the space has permanently installed work lighting, turn it off. Theatrical lighting is mounted to standard lighting trees and / or C-stands which are placed throughout the space. Lighting is low, moody, high contrast, and stark. Lighting remains constant during the piece. No coloured lights, gobos, or strobe effects, et cetera.

Rehearsals

Prior to rehearsals beginning, all performers familiarise themselves with the mythology of Persephone and Demeter (recommended: the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays*, edited by Helene P. Foley, or another similar translation).

The libretto is memorised by the voice ensemble before the first rehearsal. All rehearsals take place in the space.

All rehearsals take place in the two weeks leading to the performance.

One soprano and electric guitar rehearsal occurs the week of the performance. This rehearsal will also allow the soprano to ascertain an aesthetic and creative direction for the entirety of the work, as she will leads the ensemble 'game.' During this rehearsal, the electric guitar is set up with a complete rig, but only one amplifier in a far reach of the space. The soprano is mobile and works with the memorised libretto.

Creating the Voice & Movement World

- The voice world is created simultaneously with the movement world.
- Characterisation: voice performers are 'themselves yet not themselves' in the manner of a religious officiant or performance artist.
- Led by the soprano, the voice ensemble evolves during the rehearsal process and coalesces into a flexible and repeatable, but not reproducible, structured improvisation.
- Create a ceremonial movement vocabulary or group action with a large wooden bowl or large basket, approximately three feet in diameter. With this action, and the bowl or basket, the voice ensemble moves through the site's chambers or rooms. This action is to be solidified in rehearsal and becomes a flexible but repeatable structured movement improvisation that forms the movement world of the work.

Soprano

- The soprano leads the whole of the work and shapes the piece in real-time. She serves as the director of the ensemble, but allows the work to emerge through group interaction.
- The soprano voice possesses a *Sprechgesang*-like quality with spoken and sung tones woven together. The focus is on *legato*, a large tonal and dynamic range, leaps, *portamenti*, sparse use of *coloratura*, and sparse use of extended vocal techniques such as ingression, sighs, whispers, et cetera. The aim is to expand the natural inflections of speaking the poetry into a large tonal and dynamic range.
- Embrace notes other than the tonic.
- Favour non-melodic phrases.

The Other Three Voices

- The other voice artists embrace speech, whispers, extended non-tone vocal techniques like ingression, explode plosives, accentuation of consonants, sighs, whispers, et cetera.
- Favour textures of vocality. Avoid tones.

Notes for All Voices

- Use a broad and varied dynamic range throughout.
- Honour silence.
- Use *sforzandi*.
- Avoid repetition.
- No screaming.
- No laughing, crying, chatting / talking, no mundane life vocal sounds of that type.

Some Directives...

First, walk together through the space: explore body and space relationships

Then:

Breathe together, in a continued exploration of the space

Pause together

Sigh

Sound begins to emerge from bodies:

A tone, a growl, an exhale

Look at each other

Look away from each other

Where are we in space?

Together? Apart?

Are we all moving slow? Fast? Both? Neither?

Who is in stillness? Who is not?

Are we standing close to one another? Far away? Who is isolated?

Leaning?

Kneeling?

Who is standing beside me?

Are we touching? Who is touching whom?

A hand touches a shoulder

A palm rests on a wall

We look up

We look at each other

Is my breath audible?

Whose breath is quiet?

Who gasped suddenly?

Can I wait in stillness and silence?

A wail

Whisper

Gasp

We find a way, forward, together

One word is added

Then another and another

Another phrase. Another fragment.

The space is alive

We enliven it

Become the space and the space is you

The piece continues

- Invite silence into the sound world as an active participant.
- Use the sonic delay of the site as you would an instrument.
- Vary dynamics and tempi in the voice, sound, and movement worlds.
- Allow space and stillness.
- Do not rush.
- Awareness.
- Attention.
- When in doubt, do less.
- When in doubt, be silent.
- The whole of the work is a listening game.

Threshold **Libretto**

The voice ensemble memorises the libretto before the first rehearsal. It isn't necessary for each voice to use the entire libretto. Although the libretto should be voiced in the order written, and performed through once only, the individual voices may play off of each other, sparingly making use of hocket, and in turn, speaking words that follow or are near other words. Words may be sparingly repeated.

> Liminal
>
> Luminous
>
> Step. Over
>
> One. Step
>
> Over. Come
>
> Ever. After
>
> Under. World
>
> Other. World
>
> Our. World
>
> Discord
>
> Descent, plummet, plunge, dive,
>
> crash, wane, degrade
>
> Fall, drop, tumble, spiral
>
> > Can you stop this?
>
> 'The centre cannot hold'[49]
>
>
> Plant, reap, sow, eat, grow, sell
>
> Plant, reap, rape, eat, sow, grow, sell
>
>
> Train and gate
>
> Load and wait
>
> To the market
>
> To the market
>
> Sell her to the market
>
> Apart
>
> Apart from
>
>
> Pomegranate, narcissus and honey...

---

49   From 'The Second Coming' (1919) by W.B. Yeats.

> Saw it all and said nothing
>
> His hands on her
>
> His hands on her body
>
> Silent
>
> Silence
>
> Complicit
>
> Complicit men
>
> Complicit women
>
> Chaos
>
>
> The world is unrecognisable
>
> Darkness
>
> The Portal opens
>
> The Portal closes
>
> What kind of world?
>
> Thresh / Threshold

(Last word and last voice heard is the soprano solo and *sotto voce*: 'Threshold.')

Timing

During the rehearsal process use a timekeeping device. Allow the work to develop into a 30-minute piece. Do not use the timekeeping device for the performance, trusting that the rehearsal process will have developed the piece to its appropriate 30-minute length.

Instrumentalists

Privilege the voices. Amplification must always yield to the unamplified voices: *suivez la voix, toujours*! (see note on suitability of space, above). Allow space, stillness, and silence to inhabit the sound world.

Electric Guitar

- Use of extended techniques: scratching the pick on strings and headstock, et cetera.
- Use of long and reverberative tones.
- Use of feedback-like tones.
- Embrace non-tonic notes.
- Favour non-melodic phrases.
- Favour new choices and new variants (avoid repetition) but consider the sparse use of

looped drones.

- Use a broad and varied dynamic range throughout.
- Sparse use of *sforzandi*.

Percussion

- Marimba is the dominant or main sound.
- Use of long and reverberative tones.
- Use of feedback-like tones.
- Use of unidentifiable utilitarian percussion sounds (e.g. effected flower pots, fly wheels, et cetera).
- No recognisable utilitarian sounds: no church bells, no car horns, no thunder / rain, et cetera.
- No recognisable orchestral or instrument sounds: no strings, horns, timpani, et cetera; no guitars, basses, pianos, et cetera.
- Embrace non-tonic notes of the scale / avoid a tonic.
- Embrace non-melodic phrases.
- Favour new choices and new variants (avoid repetition).
- Use a broad and varied dynamic range throughout.
- Sparse use of *sforzandi*.
- WAV files of voicescape (provided by the composer) are triggered by MIDI and sent to individual speakers, separately. These sounds are triggered at the percussionist's discretion as another possibility in the sound pallet.

The Performance

All performers wear concert black: women wear long black dresses (no formal gowns; no sequins, et cetera); men wear black suits with dark ties.

Audience: standard Western art music concert audience behaviour (no talking, no cell phones, no photos, no recording devices).

Note: consider doing the piece without a live audience: omit the audience altogether. In this case, the last tutti rehearsal is the final performance of the work.

To Begin

- Instrumentalists are pre-set in a central area of the space and remain stationary throughout the performance.

- Voice ensemble is pre-set at the starting point of the space, as decided during the rehearsal period. To begin, the voice ensemble is spaced apart but near each other.

- The audience gathers in a lobby area or antechamber, separate from or outside of main performance space. In relative darkness and silence (except for the voicescape, see below), audience enters and gathers at the starting point in the space. Consider the use of a day-of-performance production manager or stage manager, as well as ushers to gently guide audience during the performance.

- Instrumentalists begin to form sound for at least 3 minutes before any voices enter the sound world. One by one, the voice ensemble physically enters the starting area, with the soprano entering last, and the voice ensemble begins their devised ceremonial action.

- The first voice sounds are breaths and sighs. Allow the breaths and sighs to establish themselves for several minutes before adding any words.

- Performers may make eye contact with each other.

- Performers do not make eye contact with audience.

- Audience follows the performers as they process through the space.

Voicescape

A WAV voicescape file is available from the composer. Set up a speaker and play device with the voicescape audio to loop on a low volume. This speaker is positioned near where the voice ensemble passes at the end of the piece. Use this voicescape on the day of run-through and performance only, it unnecessary for rehearsal. For the performance, start the loop just before the audience enters and turn it off after the curtain call. The voicescape may be omitted at the discretion of the ensemble.

Performance Layout Possibilities: Diagrams

PATHWAYS

INSTRUMENTALISTS

KEY

VOICES ●

THRESHOLDS / DOORWAYS ⊢——⊣

POTENTIAL PATHWAYS - - - - - - -
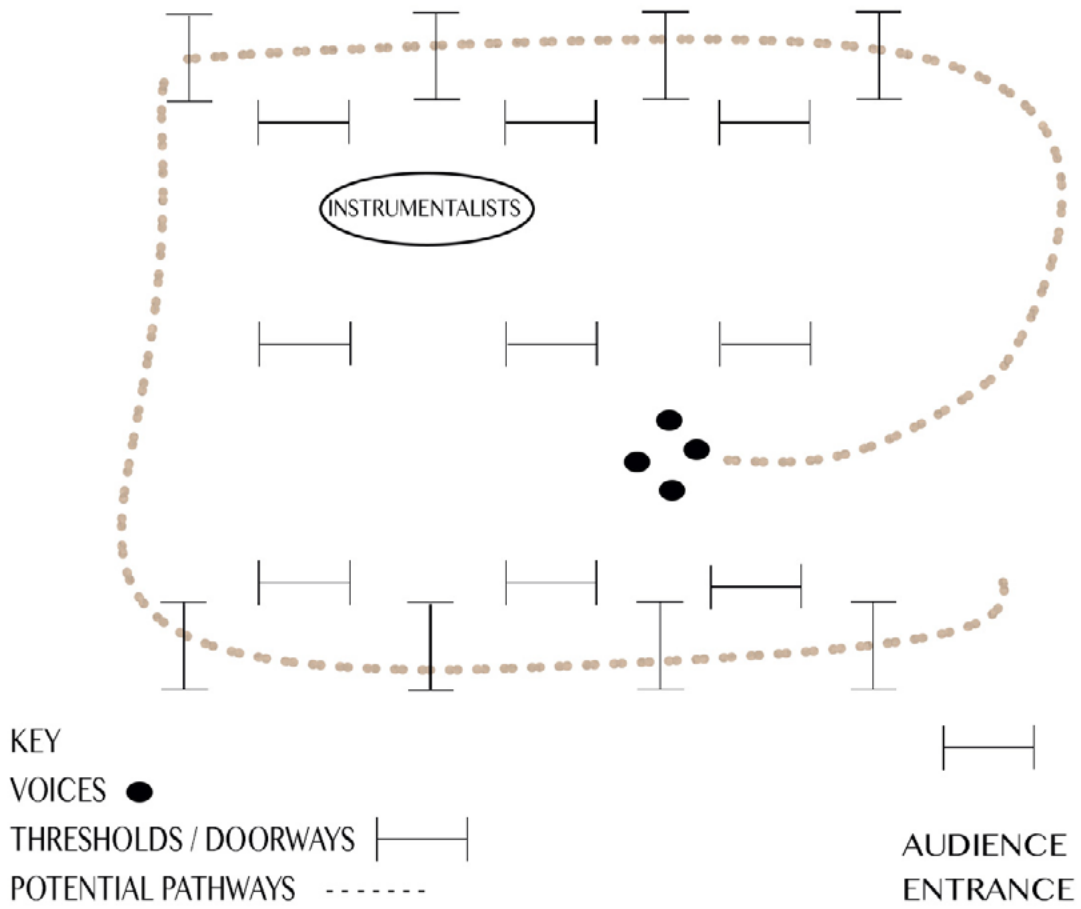
AUDIENCE
ENTRANCE

BEGINNING

KEY

VOICES ●

THRESHOLDS / DOORWAYS ├────┤

INSTRUMENTALISTS

BEGIN AREA
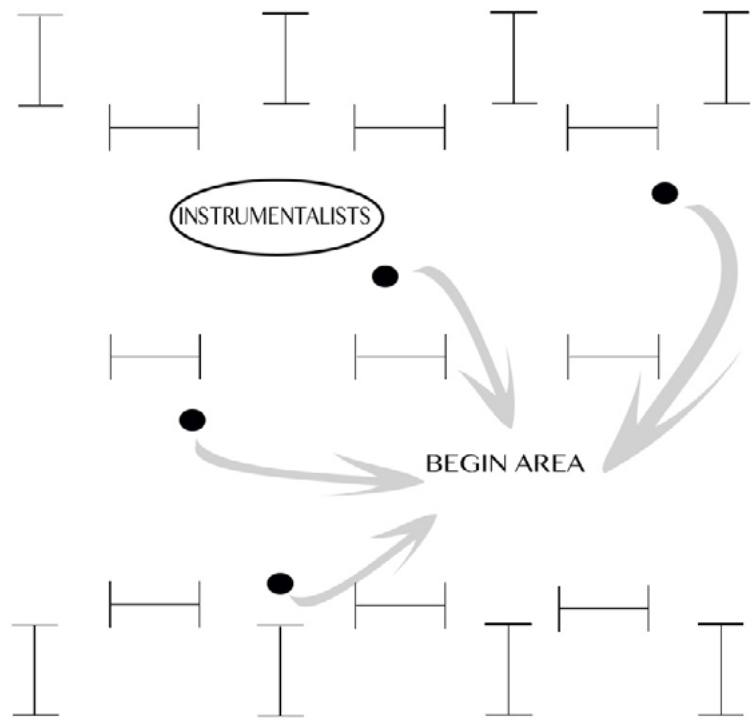
AUDIENCE
ENTRANCE

Score developed in 2018

Conclusion

As a singer-composer-producer, I take part in re-shaping current practices in the Western operatic tradition. My work inhabits the thresholds between classical singing, experimental and embodied vocal practices, improvised and composed works, mediatised realisations, and solo and collaborative performance-making. I am committed to a pragmatic versioned approach to the sharing of work, with an emphasis upon flexible multi-form and multi-durational modes of production.

In exploring significant philosophy of the mid to late 20th-century and early 21st-century, including the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Julia Kristeva, and Adriana Cavarero, I have laid a foundation in theoretical concepts that now influence the way I think about my work and its place in the world. My approach to theory generated a body of written work imbricated with media that reflects the multi-form aesthetic of my creative practice. My creative work and theoretical engagements have become an experiential, lived action-reflection of being in the world – 'my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world...incrusted into its flesh...the world is made of the same stuff as the body' (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 163) – and so, the world is made of the same stuff as my voice.

The micro-operas woven throughout my thesis served as access to challenging philosophical ideas as well as offering a way to reflect upon, and to directly engage with, the inseparability of form and meaning. These works aspired to bring conceptual ideas to life with an emphasis on the beauty and sonority of theorists' writing. Over the course of my thesis project, particularly in the last year, micro-vocal and micro-media works have taken a central place in my practice as compositional sketches. This fruitful sketch process is now yielding collections of miniature works and forming the foundation for pieces of longer duration.

My portfolio of creative work has challenged me artistically, vocally, and technically, and has been an endeavour of discovery. I produced a number of live performances well before embarking on doctoral research; however, *Threshold* (2017–18), the collaborative and site-specific postopera and its related version as a music video, was my first large-scale original composition to be shared in a public performance. *Threshold* also allowed me to continue to test my hands-off approach to directing and collaborative performance devising. Equally challenging, *The Medusa Project* (2017–18) became, in part, a fully developed realisation of the experimental vocal films I had been creating, intermittently, since 2012. The opportunity to prepare a version of *The Medusa Project* for the MediaWall at Bath Spa University was a welcome project that stretched me technically and artistically. My third thesis project, *Visible Darkness* (2019–20), is a milestone in developing my creative voice as an artist. The work serves as the initial piece in a set of three (the other two are yet-to-be-released) and is the beginning of a phase of stylistically related works that foreground my confidence and vision as a singer-composer. All three of these projects embrace theories surrounding the transitional spaces between vocality, singing, speech, and poetic

language. Moreover, the works offer enquiry into the destabilising or decentring effect of an embodied artistic practice – a practice which opens or reveals the inter-relational possibilities of meaning-making.

I view my PhD as the beginning of a much larger and more thoughtful body of work, rather than as a completion or an end. I hope my creative and theoretical approach has contributed to new knowledge in the field of contemporary music practice in a number of ways:

- A new portfolio of singer-generated solo and collaborative postopera works favouring composing with and through the voice.
- The exploration of poetic sonority as a vocal compositional tool, and the theoretical and technical insights gained through this process.
- A versioned production model for creative work-making and sharing.
- Collaborative and devised work-making processes for live performance and media works, including an in-process score framework for communicating my work with others.
- A myriad of engagements, options, and realisations for performer-generated music-theatre works.
- An exploration of theory through a poetic lens that is expressed by imbricating media with hybrid creative-critical writing. By interlacing practice, theory, media, and reflective writing, this approach engages with emerging discourses in practice as research, blurring the boundaries between creative and academic contributions.

I hope my theoretical and creative practice sparks further discussion within the field of contemporary theatrical music performance practices; and proves beneficial to performer-composer-producers and artist-makers who may embark upon journeys true to their unique voices and creative visions.

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