

Sydney College of the Arts
The University of Sydney

MASTER OF FINE ARTS
2016
RESEARCH PAPER

Currents of exchange: HEAD THROAT GUTS the sounding structures of
the body in experimental voice practice.

By
Kate Brown

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my supervisor Margaret Seymour for her ongoing support and dedication to the completion of this project. Her feedback and practical guidance overall were very much appreciated.

I would also like to acknowledge my editor Stephen Creek who ensured that quotes and attributions were consistently formatted across the whole document.

To my friends, family and partner for all of the warmth and inspiration, turning up to my gigs and giving feedback when it was due. They have been equally enthusiastic and supportive of this far-reaching process.

List of Illustrations

Image 1: Meredith Monk, *16-millimeter earrings*, performance for stage, 1966

Image 2: Alvin Lucier, *Vespers*, sound performance using Sondol device, 1968

Image 3: Kate Brown, *Skyscraper*, vocal performance, 2015

Image 4: Marina Abramović, *The Artist is Present*, performance, 2010

Image 5: Lee Mingwei, *Sonic Blossom*, interactive performance with opera singer and audience, 2010-present

Image 6: Guy Ben-Ary, *CellF*, modular neural synthesiser with musician, dimensions variable, 2015-present

Image 7: Mike Patton, *Moonchild: Songs without words*, composed by John Zorn, vocal performance, 2006

Image 8: Kate Brown, throat (contact mic) experiments, vocal performance with metronome, contact microphone and delay pedal, 2016

Image 9: Tori Wrånes, *Oo*, vocal performance with accordion, 2011

Image 10: Kate Brown and Thomas Hungerford, *It Speaks of Others*, vocal performance and sound installation, dimensions variable, 2016

Image 11: Kate Brown, *Long Distance*, image still from streamed vocal performance from Cardiff UK to Melbourne, Australia, dimensions variable, 2016

Image 12: Kate Brown, *Howling City*, vocal performance, 2016

Image 13: Meredith Monk and Ensemble, *Songs of Ascension*, vocal performance in Ann Hamilton Tower, dimensions variable, 2008

Image 14: Kate Brown, *A body of Echoes*, vocal performance and installation, SCA Galleries, 2016

Abstract

Throughout this Masters research paper and practice I have placed the sounding body in different experimental contexts including live, event-based performances, sound technologies, and installation. My research specifically explores how the human voice sits in a body; how it is used and practiced to produce sound, and projected out to be placed elsewhere.

During these moments the body undergoes physical challenges linked to the architecture and technology of a space. Each performance is specific to a site and is devised accordingly. I have conducted a number of experiments and collaborative projects to define and place the sounding body into a contemporary art context. These discoveries have led to parallel findings and have allowed for a continuous trajectory throughout the MFA degree.

My particular focus of research has led to the investigation to how live experimental performances alter an experience in an audience as opposed to a documented or mediated experience. When an audience is presented with a raw sounding body, I'm interested in how are they affected and how this experience translates from one person to another. Throughout this paper I analyse, discuss and exemplify six of my own live event based works alongside other artists practicing in a similar field and context to highlight the intrinsic bodily experience that is evident when observing and receiving a sounding body in performance.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	page 2
List of Illustrations.....	page 3
Abstract.....	page 4
Preamble.....	page 6
Introduction.....	page 7
Chapter One - GUTS.....	page 13
Chapter Two - THROAT.....	page 22
Chapter Three - HEAD.....	page 34
Conclusion.....	page 49
Bibliography.....	page 51

Preamble

I come from a family of listeners. My grandmother worked as a telephone switchboard operator in the 1940s. She would take calls from unknown voices and connect them to others. She would tell me how she would sometimes listen to these voices in conversation and imagine the worlds they were occupying. Although the voice was removed from the physical presence of a body, a connection was still made. She worked in a room with other women operating the same connections. Their voices would overlap with the ones holding the space down the telephone line creating an echo of present and distant voices, all connecting and disconnecting across time and space. My father was a communications officer during the Vietnam War in the 1970s, where he operated sonar communication - interpreting Morse code signals, decoding and translating them across technologies. He linked and dissected communication, capturing messages through sound alone.

In a sense these two techniques of operation used by my grandmother and father are closely linked to my practice. The disembodied voice through sound technology creates something completely new and separate from the body, while encompassing its every aspect.¹

¹ This is a statement that outlines my personal position and approach to working in this way with influence from previous family roles working with voices, sound and technology.

Introduction

*Language is a virus from outer space*²

- William Burroughs

VOICE

Viral language is synonymous with our contemporary culture. In the Internet era of the 21st Century, language creates as many misunderstandings as it does instances of meaningful communication. Humans are constantly infecting the world with the sounds from physical and digital bodies, projecting meaningless ramblings that ricochet across space and time. This infiltration of sound across bodies and technology is apparent in my practice and research. How a body resonates via sounding elements is individual and how a body experiences this on a personal level is open to interpretation. As William Burroughs states: "Language is a virus from out of space" - this phrase from Burroughs' *The ticket has exploded* (1962), sums up the many ways I explore contemporary bodies as sounding elements.³ Bodies collect, carry and expel sound, drawing it seemingly out of the ether, transforming it and sending it back out into the world. While this phenomenon can be discussed, it is always morphing and changing.

Experimental voice practice has an underground history in the arts. In the 1960s and 1970s, John Cage and Meredith Monk created seminal works that incorporated a wide range of vocal textures, found sound, new notational styles, dance and performed actions. These works later received critical acclaim and inspired artists

²William Burroughs, *Nothing here but now recordings*, sound recorders, Kansas City, 1959-1965, 3

³ Ibid.3

working at the fringes of contemporary sound and performance practice. Examples of these ideas are seen in John Cage's *Solo for Voice (3-92)* in *Song Books (1970)*⁴, and in Meredith Monk's *16-millimeter earrings (1966)*⁵. Inspired by the radical nature of these early works, experimental voice artists are likely to be seen today at underground sound gigs, festivals and spaces that cater to this particular practice. They are still now only gradually infiltrating art museum and gallery settings. Curators often struggle to understand the changing technologies and presentation modes used in experimental voice performances. This is, in part, because experimental voice practice is a field that is continually changing and evolving.



Image 1: Meredith Monk, *16-millimeter earrings*, performance (1966)

My own art practice incorporates aspects of experimental voice and performance art and has developed over the course of a number of projects in the last five years. In

⁴ *Song Books (Solos for Voice 3–92)* is a collection of short works by John Cage, composed and compiled in 1970. It contains: songs, songs with electronics, directions for a theatrical performance, and directions for a theatrical performance with electronics. They were performed with one or more singers.

⁵ *16mm Earrings* is an early performance by Monk made specifically for the Judson Church, New York, in 1966. It is a collection of sound, film, dance and voice. *16mm Earrings* includes a reading of Wilhelm Reich's essay *The Function of Orgasm (1940)*; 16mm films are projected onto Monk's body and onto screens. *16mm Earrings* is an exploration of gesture and image using a cross over of sound, body, found image and text.

these works I aim to highlight aspects of the sounding body through voice practice. I am using the term 'sounding body' to describe the idea of a body producing sound in alternative ways. It is a way of straddling the boundary between interior sound production via the voice and the exterior aural occurrences that happen in public or semi-public spaces. The sounding body is the voice's boundary between the inside and the outside of the physical, human body.

Technologies amplify and extend the voice and sound over distance but the body can also project or mute a sound and express many subtle changes in pitch and timbre. My research and practice investigates the means by which I can alter my muscle control so that one sounding technique can allow another to open up, resonate, project, mute, soften, sharpen, or flatten. Another important aspect is the way this dynamic and experimental voice comes into contact with technology. These twin aspects of the sounding body are at the nexus of my studio practice; I am exploring how sound is produced inside the body and how it is projected out into the world. I am conscious of the ways a 'sounding body' can be changed or deflated by external surroundings or conditions. Working with voice is about acknowledging environmental limitations, restrictions or enhancers and working within them to open up new avenues for experimentation and how it can be enhanced through technology. Like the changing weather, the human body and voice should always be considered in a state of flux, moving from one state to another at different speeds and intensities. The practice of 'body weather', a Japanese performance technique derived from Butoh practice, helps one engage with and approach the body as it is in each passing moment. I am inspired by this technique to be more mindful of each moment, working within a medium to progress to a point where I can observe, answer and acknowledge what I am presented to work with. Doing so allows me to experiment with my own limitations and harness my body's full potential as a sounding structure. In these investigations, I begin by mapping the ways in which the body exists within the world through sound. By working to overcome restrictions, I aim to mine the body's potential as a sounding structure and extend it out into the surrounding environment.

Humans typically use their voices to express ideas and emotions but there are many more sounds and subtle intonations that they seldom explore consciously. For example, echoes give us information about the space around us. While most people combine aural and visual cues, vision impaired individuals use a clicking tool called Sondol to hear sound reflected off objects so they can predict the form and depth of a space. In 1968, Alvin Lucier produced a work entitled *Vespers* that places non-hearing impaired performers in darkness with Sondol devices. The audience observes the performers who navigate the space by using alternate senses including sound and touch. Within my research and exploration of the sounding body I want to explore the limits of the sounding body and give voice to the raw qualities that are assumed to exist in the human range but aren't often practiced.



Image 2: Alvin Lucier, *Vespers*, sound performance using Sondol (1968)

Theatricality also plays a major role in the overall aesthetic of my performance work. When I view my works from the last 5 years, I see that I have made specific choices to create a continuous thread. This may be through costume, face paint or ornamentation and the use of specific colours across the installation. When I first started using experimental voice within my practice I collaborated with Sy Browne on *In my heteroclitic body*. During our performances I wore a red hooded jacket and a gold tinsel veil to conceal my face. This was the first project where I started combining my art, music, and sound and performance influences together. Using the detail of covering my face to add mystery to the performing body, this revealed a body making sound with an absent sound source. Hidden but completely vulnerable behind the face covering, I attempted to place the exterior environment or audience into a trance with the swaying gold tinsel. This project continued over a number of

performances and I continually played with the dynamics of the costume. After watching video documentation after a number of performances, I noticed that something was missing. There was a gap between the physicality of the body producing sound and the audience receiving it. The audience was missing a vital performative element. The physical energy it takes to produce sound from the body was completely absent and lost. Added to this, the voice was also being manipulated electronically- the essence of this voice coming from a human body was muted. From this realisation I made a decision to reveal the face and give the audience access to the performing vocal body in a raw format and use sound effects more sparingly. From a few small live performances, I discovered the effect on the audience was much stronger and I would continue to work in this way and later brought this performance method into a gallery context where I combined costume, installation and sculptural forms.

My use of costuming and staging can also be traced back to my previous performance for video works. This connection to costuming and creating characters stems from my desire to create spaces that are otherworldly and fantastical, weird or grotesque. In doing so I am often inspired by science fiction films such as THX 113- George Lucas, 2001 Space Odyssey- Stanley Kubrick and artists such as Matthew Barney, Rebecca Horn and Björk to create characters with unusual or alternative qualities and capacities- surprising the world with elements and potential of things they can interact with. I aim to create spaces that are non-spaces, spaces that haven't existed before the performance and discontinue once the performance is through. Within these spaces, new behaviours can be created dissected, distorted and evolved.

In this paper I will outline the frameworks and lineage of voice practice in relation to other visual and experimental performing arts practices to examine the sounding structures of the human body. My aim is to follow the production of vocal sounds from initial stirrings at the core, to amplification in the throat and out through the mouth as if with an endoscopy camera traveling from the guts to the head. By breaking the body and this paper into three parts - the head, the throat, and the guts

- I aim to tease out the physical, conceptual and theoretical components of my practice but also show how they are linked together like tissue.

In chapter one I discuss the *Guts* as the energy centre of the voice and body - its 'emotional' core. The guts are the depth and breadth of the breath; the raw, the powerful, and the guttural. When voice has access to the guts, the tone and timbre change completely. When performing I inhale my breath into different parts of the physical anatomy.

I like to think of sounds emanating from the guts as being subject to a process of exchange. It is like producing, reaching in and pulling something out, like the process of gestation and regurgitation. In some ways this process mirrors the relationship between the performer who creates the sound and the audience who receives or consumes it. This interaction or slippage between the actions of the performer and how the audience interprets the sound is a concept I'm exploring, which I call 'reverse catharsis'. This is a term I have coined that describes the experience of some audience members, and helps to explain what happens to the inside/outside body of the performer and audience in a live setting.

In chapter two, *Throat*, I discuss the way breath passes through the vocal chords to make different sounds depending on the tension of these folds. The throat is the thoroughfare of the vocal framework; it is the space where sound is created by breath and vibration. Although there are many points of departure depending on which sounds are desired, the throat is where the physical sound is produced. This is the known part of the vocal anatomy, whereas the vocal chords or pharynx work in tandem with full body processes to produce a range of sounds. A trained vocalist will use a combination of tools such as breath and resonator techniques utilising the pharynx. The pharynx can be broken down into three components: laryngopharynx, oropharynx, and the nasopharynx. These specific points are used together or in isolation to create different tonal colours. The body uses these aspects of the throat as a way of opening and closing, turning on or off to release and control resonant

vibration and movement of sound.⁶ The pharynx is the active, joining element between breath, saliva, articulation, and the exchange of sound from within the body's internal structures.

This chapter will further explore the idea of live and recorded performance with reference to the body as architecture, and how the sounding body is transformed through a digital lens. I will discuss Tori Wrånes' *Oo*, 2011, and my collaborative work with Tom Hungerford, *It Speaks of Others* (2016), with reference to Roland Barthes' *Grain of the Voice*. These concepts and works will outline the sounding body within a technological framework alongside my streamed performance *Long Distance* (2016), and Frances Dyson's *Sounding new media; immersion and embodiment in the Arts and Culture*. These examples will further position the body within a technological framework, referencing the disembodiment of the voice in space and time to the rise of the digital age.

In chapter three I discuss the *Head*, which is the home of the mouth, tongue, and numerous muscles that control the face when eating and swallowing and the articulation of sound. The head directs sound, interrupts it with the mouth and sucks it in with breath. The head has several orifices: eyes, ears, nose, and the oral cavity. The oral cavity and the nasal cavity (known as the mask) are the two resonating components in the head.⁷ The voice resonates and shapes the sounds produced by the vocal chords. At times the head and throat are working concurrently to produce certain tones. The head is the end point of the sound before it leaves the body and is placed elsewhere. For this reason I consider the head as the threshold between the inner spaces of the body and their surrounding architecture. I am interested in the way that my own sound performances and those of other artists can traverse this space between the inside and outside, between performer and audience.

Like my progress through this research degree, this paper is structured like a journey. I will take you, the reader, across the body's terrain to further examine the

⁶ Dylan J.P Ball, "Vocal Technique", Sing with Confidence, free your voice, last modified 2007 <http://www.vocaltechnique.co.uk/learn-how-to-sing-with-singing-resonance.html>

⁷ Ibid.1

human voice in all its wonderful intricacies while I delicately unravel my fascination with its every aspect. You will be placed at points across the body in order to comprehend the reasoning behind my determined approach of working with each element. In doing so, I will highlight aspects of the human voice that are often removed from conscious habits of the body and its abilities.

Chapter One

GUTS

We are here in the gurgling centre and the endoscopy camera is in focus, whirring around the squelching gasses and stomach pockets. We hear a rumble and are sprayed in the lens with incoming fluids. Everything is slightly muted and constant. The terrain is hard to navigate here, but lets go a little further...

In this chapter I will discuss the voice we don't normally hear: the raw sounds that are produced from the body without restriction or the coherency of language. Examples of raw sounds are groans, squeaks, raspy sounds or wheezes. Raw sounds trigger an emotional response in the audience. As I am creating sound through my body via my voice, other bodies receiving this sound are affected in an emotional way and a cathartic response ensues.

I became particularly aware of this cathartic aspect of sound during my vocal performance *Skyscraper* (2015), which I performed during Liquid Architecture's (LA) series *Beyond Capitalist Surrealism* at Firstdraft Gallery. The Firstdraft space in Woolloomooloo is intriguing because of its architectural quirks. It is located in a three-storey art deco building. My first instinct was to respond to this architecture in relation to the city and the theme. This particular performance was the first that I had presented in a gallery-based installation environment. I was allocated to 'Gallery Two' - a triangular space that has a curved corner at one end. This corner provided a starting point for mapping the performance and experimenting with sounds in relation to this specific architecture. I imagined the space as if I was standing at the top of a skyscraper, delivering a message to those on the footpath below, drawing on the theme *Beyond Capitalist Surrealism*. The theme of the tour, which began in Melbourne, was *Capitalist Surrealism*. The directors Joel Stern and Danni Zuvela rethought the theme for the Sydney leg of the tour as they considered Sydney a much broader and stronger counterpart when it came to capitalism; they needed to look past it, to look beyond and see a clearer and more fantastical picture, hence the

name *Beyond Capitalist Surrealism*. For me, the people working inside these buildings were the cogs stabilising what these strong architectural forces stood for. Thinking in this way about time, space, an environment, and the people that occupy it made me question: *what would a skyscraper say to its people?* And from this question I established a vocal score and in performance sent the messages down.



Image 3: Kate Brown, *Skyscraper*, vocal performance (2015)

I installed a 20 metre piece of rope attached to two hooks on opposite walls. The rope was installed at 1.5 metres above the floor on the widest parts of the triangular space. I positioned the rope in an overlapped loop at the curved point of the space, where the rope draped to the floor. I installed a music box in the space, which had a small glass tube pressing down on it to play the music. As the roaming audience entered the space, I waited in a side room. The original purpose of the music box was to hold a phone receiver that played waiting music. This object functioned as a micro-architectural space, holding the audience before I entered. It played Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. When this music ceased, I entered the space, picked up the glass object, walked into the looped rope at the end of the space and rolled the glass object back towards the audience. I began vocalising and then approached the walls of the space and attached my hands at right angles.

The performance lasted 20 minutes and during this time I wrapped myself in the rope and gradually made my way closer to the seated audience. I constantly vocalised with ritualistic chant-like melodies that were interrupted and mutated by stretching, glitching and screeching patterns. The sounds I created were raw, bodily sounds mixed with melodic humming, screaming and gasping. I was in costume wearing a white, knee-length dress with gold tinsel falling out of the pockets. I painted an upturned red triangle on my forehead, resembling an inversion of the triangular space I was performing within. My final position in the performance was leaning over the audience wrapped in rope, making sound directly over the top of them. Firstdraft is an artist-run space that hadn't experienced this type of performance. Most performances in the visual arts conceptually deal with the physicality of the body and the voice is almost never present. A story was being told and a message was translated to the bodies of the audience. One body making raw sounds and delivering them to silent bodies that also have the capacity to do the same. I had some members of the audience tell me afterwards that their body was engaged in the sounds. The sounds were reminiscent to the inner workings of their own body, so the audience felt a sense of exchange or empathy with how I was performing these sounds from the inside out. Once fully wrapped in the rope, I loomed over the audience temporarily before unravelling from the rope. Then I wound the music box up to play and held them in that moment again while I exited the gallery.

After the performance, some of the feedback I received from the audience surprised me. I reassured them that I am not presenting an idealised hysterical female body in *Skyscraper*. I explained that in this state and time during the performance, I use a form of 'language' or communication that doesn't involve spoken words. But, subconsciously, audience members perceived these sounds to have meanings and emotions attached to them, and in this moment the automatic response of some audience members was to empathise with what they perceived as an expression of trauma. The audience in attendance may know me closely or by acquaintance and

they are aware of my personal journey with my body and its health.⁸ Because of this some people automatically assign these sounds to pain, fear or purging from a body that has experienced extreme physical trials. In post-performance conversations I have had people ask me, 'do you feel better now?' When I explain that my direction and outcomes are the opposite of their interpretation they are confronted with their misunderstanding. Without intending to stimulate emotion, *Skyscraper* triggered an emotional experience in an audience.

According to writer Walter Watson, 'Katharsis' is a Greek word whose ordinary meaning equates to that of the English word 'cleansing'.⁹ However, as Watson explains, in Greek tragedy this ordinary meaning became more narrowly focused on the idea of 'cleansing the soul'. This is not at all my intention. To be clear, the cathartic response from the audience is a complete surprise to me. And yet, the more I practice and make sound with my body, I have realised that we are all made up of the same structural components. In turn, we are recognisable to each other and the animalistic qualities and meaning of raw vocal sounds are confronting and trigger emotion. This response doesn't occur in every single audience member, and I am only aware of those who have shared this experience directly with me.

In my performances I am imitating sounds that have an associated emotional connection to the body, but I am not aiming to produce a cathartic experience.¹⁰ I am interested in a depersonalised exploration of sound.

⁸ Over the last ten years I have had two major brain operations. I have recovered from both surgeries well, but I have been subject to intensive physical rehabilitation, muscle spasms, and medical Botox injections to reduce spasticity, double vision, fatigue, and residual muscle weakness with reoccurring physical problems. It has been a long a tumultuous process.

⁹ Walter Watson, *The Lost Second Book of Aristotle's "Poetics"* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 142.

¹⁰ In *The Lost second book of Aristotle's "Poetics,"* Walter Watson explains how the meaning of catharsis has evolved into the idea of imitating fear and pity to induce a shared emotional feeling. He says: "Aristotle also lays out the elements of successful imitation. The poet must imitate either things as they are, things as they are thought to be, or things as they ought to be."

From my initial performances, my sole intention has been to create or amplify vocal sounds using various parts of my body from which sound is not normally transferred or heard. Sometimes the sound travels through my body and the audience is taken on a transitory journey of this process, but I am not aiming to create vocal works as therapy. I am purely producing sound from my body with no sense of purging through sound or trying to create an emotional connection. The pure, raw sound experience is my intention, and to accentuate the limits and potential of the human body through sound.

An element of chance comes into play in live performances. Who and what takes place in that space and at that time is somewhat unknown on many levels. The sounds I am producing are often sounds that some may associate directly to trauma, pain or the forbidden part of the vocal range. Some audiences perceive my works to be dealing with concepts of deep emotional standing and attach subjective experiences and therefore meaning. This dissimilar shared experience is quite confronting as a performer. When beginning this investigation I was unprepared for how the raw voice can conjure emotions in others. And yet I have observed this type of reaction since experiencing Lee Mingwei's participatory performance *Sonic Blossom*, 2012-present.



Image 4: Lee Mingwei, *Sonic Blossom*, interactive performance with opera singer and audience, 2010-present.

Sonic Blossom places an opera singer in a gallery space to offer an audience member a 'gift of song'. Similarly to Marina Abramović's *The Artist is Present* (2010), the visitor is positioned on a chair in the gallery and the singer stands opposite a few metres away, setting up a direct, face-to-face connection. Assisted by gallery staff in all aspects of the work's preparation, the opera singer decides which song they will sing and classical music starts to play.¹¹ A Schubert 'lieder' is sung in operatic style for three to four minutes, ending with the singer bowing and slipping back into the crowd without direct contact or response from the viewer. This work was exhibited at The Museum of Contemporary Art Australia as a part of curator Rachel Kent's *Telling Tales: Excursions in Narrative Form* exhibition (June - October 2016).¹² This exhibition focused on how storytelling can be portrayed across mediums, and how it can be silenced or highlighted across cultures.



Image 5: Marina Abramović, *The Artist is Present*, performance (2010).

¹¹ The chosen opera singers are assisted by gallery hosts and are dressed in Mingwei's hand-made regal cloak. They guide the singer through the gallery to assist with communication with visitors. The host controls the music and stabilises audio glitches by troubleshooting in situ. The singers are in character and do not communicate more than offering 'the gift of song' to an audience member. If there is confusion, the host directs the audience member to where the performance will take place. This is an important aspect of the performance, helping it to remain true to the artist's intention and professional at all times.

¹² Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2016 <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibition/telling-tales/> sited 6/10/16

By bringing different approaches of storytelling together, Rachel Kent has created a much larger conversation between the selected artworks. I work as a gallery host, assisting the opera singers at the MCA, and I have observed different reactions from viewers in regards to *Sonic Blossom*. One viewer passing by as the performance began burst into tears as the sound of the first note hit their ears. He was a man in his sixties who described the reaction, saying: "Something inside me just needed to be released but I was unsure of its presence".¹³ The intention of the singer was not to create an overwhelming experience for the viewer; it was simply to exchange a song as a gift. Although the viewer's initial intention is to experience this work, they are unaware of the sometimes powerful emotional response that can happen. Viewers and singers alike have told me that when sound is placed outside of the body and onto another's, an experience of exchange can happen. It can be a sense of recognising oneself in another's body. A body making sound is relatable and it can be, at times, confronting.

After speaking with artist Guy Ben-Ary, this idea of using sound to trigger something outside the performer's body led me to discuss his work *CellF* (2015-2016), created with his collaborators Darren Moore, Dr. Andrew Fitch, Nathan Thompson, Douglas Bakkum, Mike Edel and Stuart Hodgetts. *CellF* is a modular neural synthesiser made up of living human stem cells. These cells are patched or grown onto an analogue synthesiser board and then stimulated electronically. The cells react to this input produced by musicians fed through the board in *CellF*. The analogue synthesiser board outputs a reaction from the cells to this stimulus, creating a reactive composition amplified by 16 surround sound speakers. Although *CellF* is a post-human project, it is alive and it is reacting to a live performing body in real time. I spoke with Ben-Ary about the potential of working with *CellF* vocally over an extended period, with the aim of mapping how the cells change over time. At this stage they are only in contact with direct human input through instrumentation in one-off performances. The research at this stage shows results that are inconclusive

¹³ *Sonic Blossom* (2012- 2016) by Lee Mingwei is currently on exhibit as a part of the Museum of Contemporary Art's Telling Tales exhibition, curated by Rachel Kent. This quote comes directly from an interaction I had with a visitor in the space after the performance. I am a gallery host at the MCA and this conversation happened by chance while invigilating the space at the time.

as to whether this affects the biology of the cells and if this input causes the cells to change or mutate.

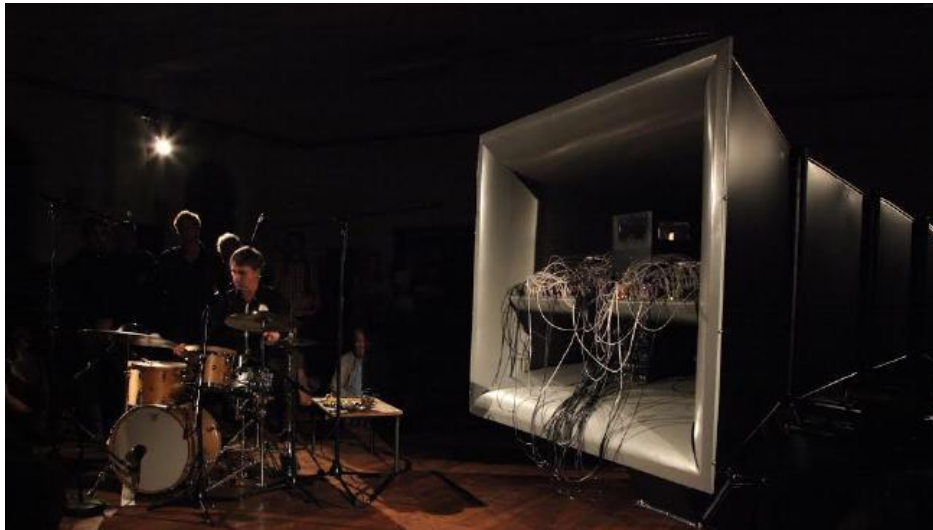


Image 6: Guy Ben-Ary, *CellF*, modular neural synthesiser with musician, dimensions variable (2015-present).

This experiment with *CellF* will aim to investigate the direct effects of a live vocal performance on the cells, documenting how they form and change due to human interaction. As we are all made up by the same biology and are intrinsically tuned to physically respond on a biological level, the concept of *reverse catharsis* will be ever present. Whatever the body's output intends, it can be absorbed and interpreted individually on another body whether that is human or post-human.

In my performances, vocal sounds are rearranged, improvised and deciphered purely for sounding purposes. The meaning can be confused and misinterpreted. An extraordinary thing happens when an audience member's understanding of these sounds takes hold: sounds are perceived through a cultural or learned lens that causes people to respond subjectively and emotionally. This uncanny response to my work is welcomed as I see this as an exploration and development between bodies in live performance scenarios. It is a fascinating and powerful tool that continues to unravel in each live performance, continually morphing and changing. This research is at an early stage but the potential of further conducting these types of experiments may be crucial to how we investigate human interaction in a world surrounded by digital technologies.

...Now as we contract the muscles in the guts, the endoscopy camera repositions itself, further entering the oesophagus channel, flowing towards the throat...

Chapter Two

THROAT

...We have arrived at the throat; the hidden component to the vocal construction. There's a lot going on here: cartilage and tissue, moving parts, breath, vibration and occasional interruption by a combination of elements...

The voice must leave the individual for it to reveal that one is alive.

- Brandon LaBelle¹⁴

Vocal sounds are made when breath passes through the oesophagus and the vocal chords are engaged. From a young age, humans are conditioned to replicate and mimic the sounds that are the building blocks of spoken language and in turn to use them in a meaningful way as vocal communication. But instead of language, I am interested in raw vocal sounds. Raw vocal sound is an undercurrent; not a language or mode but a way of operating the voice as a tool to measure the potential and capabilities of the body as a sounding structure. All humans can make vocal sounds but what happens to the meaning of said sounds if they remain in an unconventional, raw format? What is produced and what is understood, and how do other bodies react to an unfamiliar sound coming out of a body?

In this chapter I discuss the destruction, disruption and subversion of ordinary vocal sounds. I will question how the raw voice is perceived and experimented with in an art context. I have long been a fan of musician and performer Mike Patton, who collaborated with composer John Zorn on *Moonchild: Songs without words* (2006). Artists such as Antonin Artaud, Aleister Crowley and Edgard Varèse inspired this album.¹⁵ I am particularly interested in Mike Patton's vocal contribution as he displayed varying techniques such as screaming, gagging, breathy inhalations and

¹⁴ Brandon Labelle, *Background noise: perspectives on sound art*, The Continuum Publishing Group, New York, 2006, 103

¹⁵ J.L Walters, *John Zorn: Crowley at the Crossroads*, The Guardian, June 2006

silences following a score written by Zorn. These sounds, which are not usually included in traditional music, were performed in front of a willing audience for around nine minutes. At this point in his career, Mike Patton was known for his grunge and post-rock bands *Faith No More* and *Mr Bungle*, with fans attaching certain expectations towards his releases. This combination of Patton and Zorn - one a rock star icon with a six-octave range and the other an experimental composer - was bound for extreme variations in composing the capacities of the vocal range.¹⁶



Image 7: Mike Patton, *Moonchild: Songs without words*, composed by John Zorn, vocal performance (2006).

From the beginning of the performance, you sense that this is a chance encounter with a sounding body. But as the performance continues, it is clear that the performer is reading from a score and the work could be performed over again. Patton here is decoding an instruction from Zorn and using his vocal capacities to break it down and reimagine the body's limitations and components through voice. Although it is overtly a scored piece for voice, it is confronting and liberating to hear the dynamics and range of the human vocal capacity in a new compositional way. This composition takes the vocal range through various limits and trials. It is almost a tool to map the capabilities of the voice in performance, showing the extremes it is

¹⁶Collin Joyce, "Mike Patton actually has the biggest voice in pop music", Spin News, 2014, <http://www.spin.com/2014/05/mike-patton-biggest-vocal-range-octaves-chart-music/> sited 11/8/16

capable of. With this composition in mind, I conducted my own vocal experiment using a contact microphone placed on the outside of my throat.

In this studio experiment I attempted to gain access to and amplify the vocal sounds coming solely from the throat area. This experiment was later realised as a live performance at Life Groove Café (LGC), Leichhardt, NSW, in July 2016. LGC is an independent experimental sound venue in Sydney that supports local and interstate artists in pushing the boundaries between how sound is used as an instrument and as a tool across experimental platforms. Placing a contact microphone on the throat helped me gain an understanding of the idea of isolating aspects of the sounding body in a structural way. It heightened my awareness of the ways sound can be made, carried and collected from within the body. This awareness changed the delivery and concentration of the chosen vocal sounds, which were guided by breath and exaggeration in certain areas of resonance in the throat. I began to reimagine traditional singing techniques and concentrate on directing vocal sounds on to the microphone on the outside of my throat, capturing and amplifying sound from within my body in a way that I had never imagined.



Image 8: Kate Brown, throat (contact mic) experiments, vocal performance with metronome, contact microphone and delay pedal (2016).

With the microphone in direct contact with my throat, it was sensitive to volume and would distort the sound when amplified. I used the muscles in my body in an

alternate way, exerting direct force from my chest and stomach. This technique helped deconstruct a learned method of vocalising and helped me to expand my understanding of the body as a sounding structure. This specifically highlighted the way the throat works in tandem with the rest of the body's architecture. During this performance, I had to develop a way of projecting the sound out through my throat onto the contact microphone without knowing how this could be done. At times I completely closed my mouth and pushed the sound back inside my throat, projecting and resonating sound in an alternative way, similar to throat singing. Placing restrictions or alternative technologies onto the voice leads to new ways of working with the body as a sounding structure. Through these limitations new techniques develop and change the way, as a performer, you approach your tool or instrument. When you take risks, discoveries are made through experimentation, creating the potential for new outcomes.



Image 9: Tori Wrånes, *Oo*, vocal performance with accordion (2011).

This way of working is seen in Norwegian artist Tori Wrånes' work *Oo* (2011), performed at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde, Denmark. Wrånes cloaked herself in a costume that completely concealed her physical body. Beneath the cloak she carried another musician hidden on her back and for four minutes she moved slowly while playing the accordion. *Oo* placed physical limitations on a performing body and, by weighting and disguising the sound source; it left the idea

of endurance and physical strain of both bodies up to the viewer. By presenting an unquavering hidden voice lit by a spotlight for four minutes, the artist left the audience to decide which body was active or inactive. As well as exploring whether the pressure of one body on the other is key to producing said sounds, in *Oo Wrånes* takes the audience on a pleasant sonic journey; there are no challenging vocal aspects to this performance. Wrånes explores a combination of lyrical and melodic sounds. Although her body was under the physical strain of carrying another body on her back, her voice was unaffected. Wrånes portrayed a body experiencing a challenging physical moment for a short period of time. By holding the weight of a body during a vocal performance, she made the audience aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their own bodies.¹⁷

Inspired by the idea of cloaking the body, I recently devised and performed a new collaborative work with artist Thomas Hungerford, entitled *It Speaks of Others* (2016).¹⁸ In this performance in the basement of Airspace Projects, we inhabited a constructed sculptural installation. Within this installation we imagined the space allocated to us as the throat of the building. The exhibition space was the thoroughfare of the building and we constructed a sculptural installation driven by the idea of passing sound through it as if it were the throat in a body - the throat of the building. Not only were we passing sound through the space but the audience also activated the space on many levels, by passing through, watching, stopping and curiously coming close to the object to explore it further. We wanted to investigate the absence of language and what is communicated when voice is used as pure sound. The sculptural sound component of the work consisted of a five-metre horizontal instrument made of PVC pipe. At either end of the gold painted PVC pipe, long flowing metallic gold fabric hid our bodies hidden underneath covering us from head to toe. Inserted into each end of the pipe were two studio microphones attached to delay pedals. Hungerford and I were seated on stools under the fabric with the pedals positioned on our laps. These pedals were then plugged into a

¹⁷ Tori Wrånes, "About the artist", 2016 <http://www.toriwraanes.com/about/> sited 30/8/16

¹⁸ *It Speaks of Others*, 2016, was exhibited at Airspace Projects in Marrickville, curated by Elyse Goldfinch.

mixing desk and levels were set for the performance with effects added. On the opening night, Hungerford and I performed a vocal soundscape through the pipes positioned directly in front of our mouths for one hour. We used the pedals to control the volume, delay and feedback of our vocal performance and create dynamic effects.



Image 10: Kate Brown and Thomas Hungerford, *It Speaks of Others*, vocal performance and sound installation, dimensions variable (2016).

The sounds created were choral sounds, whispers, guttural throat tones and harmonies produced through the pipe. The pipes were not fully connected to each other; there was a gap in the centre of the PVC pipe, joined together by a piece of gold fabric draping between the pipes. This central connection linked the ready-made pipe structure with the visceral, sack-like structure covering our bodies at either end of the sculpture. At times throughout the performance we would move our arms underneath the fabric, slightly puffing it out as if it was a living organism. This action made the object come to life and emphasised our active bodies within it. The idea of a hidden body creating vocal sounds into the piece connected the object to the throat. The throat is the hidden sound source within the body but it is extremely active and alive. In a number of my works, I create a spectacle of the body

in performance, interacting it with objects or decorating it in costume. By using objects and costume in my work I aim to place the body in an otherworldly context. I aim to trigger the audience's imagination, presenting an unexpected spectacle that can't be rationalised or understood using conventional conceptual frameworks. The way in which I work with the idea of spectacle is highlighted by how I position my body, enhanced by visual and sounding elements. I explore these in alternative spaces through visual components, and the materiality of the voice.

This sense of the materiality of the voice is demonstrated in *Image Music Text*, where Roland Barthes refers to the materiality of song as geno-song as opposed to the pheno-song: The geno-song is a signifier of the materiality of language and how it sounds, a materiality that has little to do with expression or feelings but the production of volume in and of the singing and speaking voice.¹⁹

These intricacies of the voice are what I find extremely interesting to work with and investigate. Where meaning and language can operate on a primal level, breaking apart the sound of communication as we know it to exist. Barthes also considers the idea of the grain of the voice; 'The 'grain' is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs.'²⁰ This idea of 'grain' is pivotal to my work with experimental voice practice. The grain identifies not only the voice but also the pure essence or affiliation with performance practice. Barthes further states that he can identify exactly what part of a performer's body is playing a piano simply from the position of a hand and the grain that is articulated because of this.²¹

Uniquely, I am working across a number of 'grains' to emphasise a hidden dynamic in the way sounding structures are developed and composed via the body in performance. Most recently this includes working across extended distances and international time zones in streamed performances. For example, *Long Distance* (2016) was a vocal performance streamed from Cardiff, United Kingdom, to

¹⁹ op.cit., 183

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, Fontana Press London, 1977, 188.

²¹ Ibid.188

Melbourne, Australia, as a part of curator Arie Rain Glorie's *Love City III: The Planetary Festival*. This was the third festival in a trilogy exploring how humans decipher three designated tropes. Firstly *Love in the City*, then *Of Time and Country*, and thirdly *The Planetary*. This curatorial brief was open to interpretation and spanned multiple mediums including live performance, installation, photography and music. My pitch for *The Planetary* was to stream a live performance from Cardiff to the festival in Melbourne while I was on student exchange for my MFA in early 2016. This stream would encapsulate and highlight aspects of how humans try to remain perpetually connected through technology while experiencing constant states of failure. I presented an eight-minute vocal performance highlighting the break down of communication through technology via Ustream - an online streaming platform. Here, the difference between a live voice in performance as opposed to a recorded or streamed voice is evident in the technological connections required to realise this work.

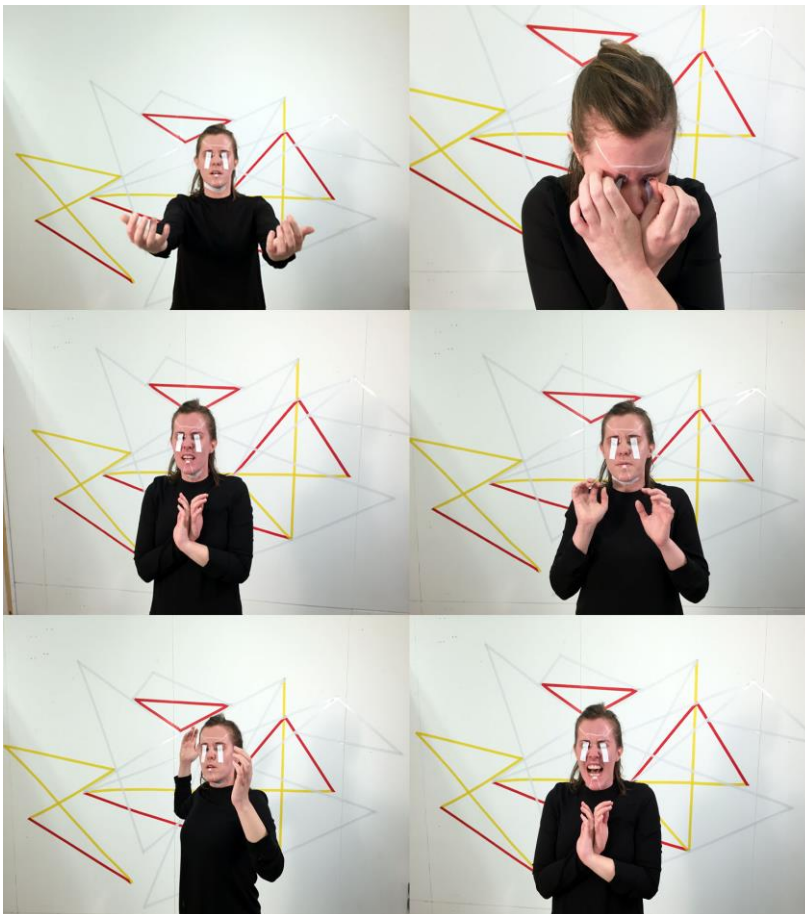


Image 11: Kate Brown, *Long Distance*, image still from streamed vocal performance from Cardiff UK to Melbourne, Australia, dimensions variable (2016).

Streamed human voices have become the voice of the Internet. The chatter and the data collected its depths relay information and purposeful connections across bodies and technologies. Norie Neumark describes this sense of voice in her essay *Doing things with Voices: Performativity and Voice*. Here Neumark considers the voice in a digital realm of ones and zeros where that digital voice becomes sound in an uncanny environment haunted by the sense of where it exists and now performs.²²

This is a link to our reliance on technology to stay connected, in its constant states of unreliability, disruption and failure. Where are bodies placed within this realm with the deliberate purpose to interact?

During the performance I examined the voice in correspondence to phases of movement, using body weather techniques. I transitioned between five phases while making vocal sounds in between moments of silence. To finish the performance I purposely ended it prematurely with a rehearsed glitch to confuse the audience. Through multiple tests and conversations about how to execute the project, there was no room for technological failure. Luckily, it was a successful stream to the festival. However, there was a lot of confusion for the parallel audience streaming on their own devices across the globe. Time differences, patchy Internet connections, access to the site and understanding the technology were all difficulties. I constituted this element as a part of the work as it demonstrated the premise of connection and communication that was in question.

Long Distance existed in three forms: the live performance that took place in the studio, the streamed version that audiences could personally stream online, and the streamed projection live in the gallery space at the festival. I presented the sounding body across time zones, placing a disembodied voice across varying dimensions. I questioned the structures of technology across present/absent bodies, distance, and

²² Norie Neumark, *Doing things with Voices: Performativity and Voice, Voice, Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*, edited by Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson and Theo van Leeuwen, MIT Press, 2010, 97

the immaterial spaces that we are able to occupy physically because of the Internet. This work shows a development of ideas about how a body sits performatively within these spaces and an audience's role within them.

Brandon Labelle describes 'the digital voice within networked conditions' in his essay *Raw Orality*. Here LaBelle emphasises the fracturing of a digital voice and the processes it goes through to remain present. This informs my work *Long Distance* that fractures face-to-face interaction by filtering it through a digital realm. Direct communication is transformed by digital interference. This interference begins to question the meaning that is translated via this communication. Are elements of the interaction are lost or distorted? Digital communication often breaks down and becomes digitally manipulated and confused. This is an aspect that was at the forefront when theorising and troubleshooting multiple aspects of potential technological breakdown during *Long Distance*.²³

Frances Dyson explains in her text *Sounding New Media: immersion and embodiment in the Arts and Culture* about developments between the body and technology, from the first telephone conversation to the rise of the digital answering machine, recording, regurgitating and saving voices across multiple networks:

'From the first awkward 'hello' on the telephone, reproduced and transmitted sound (that is, audio) has provided a conceptual model and a set of technologies, that together have laid the ground work for notions of immersion and embodiment: the primary figures that characterize new media.'²⁴

Dyson considers the presence of a body through technology from the beginning of its interaction with it. We no longer need to physically *be* anywhere to experience something because of the domestic integration of online media. It is often recorded and placed on a digital platform where minimal connection to the idea of a *one-off*

²³ Brandon Labelle, *Raw Orality, Voice, Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*, edited by Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson and Theo van Leeuwen, MIT Press, 2010, 165

²⁴ Frances Dyson, *Sounding new media; immersion and embodiment in the Arts and Culture*, Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 2009, 3

event takes place. No matter where you are geographically, a person's voice can now speak for their whole being from a distance.²⁵

From the first connected telephone conversation, our bodies have been placed into closer and closer proximity, no matter what the space is between them. We are currently perpetually connected through technology and the idea of being face-to-face continues to change as technology becomes embedded in the everyday. These themes of technology and its perpetual state of presence and failure were presented in my work *Long Distance* (2016). The idea of a communication breakdown has a much simpler meaning when referred to in terms of connection and disconnection, glitch imagery, and dropping out. *Long Distance* investigates what it means to be face-to-face in association with constant states of failure, all the while remaining present in each other's lives from a distance. A different experience occurs when you place a phone up to your ear, listening and responding, as opposed to viewing a montage of scattered, pixelated images via Skype. Our conversations break down and the voice is distorted, sped up or machine-glossed.

It Speaks of Others (2016) initially had a live aspect activating the sculptural installation, which was recorded through the mixing desk on the opening night. Throughout the rest of the exhibition, this recorded version of the live performance was played to demonstrate the object as a way of sounding through the body. It was a documentation of sorts, or an aftermath of a moment that had taken place live in the gallery, seeing the voice produced in raw form and then mediated through a recording of a moment, deconstructing or subverting the body's presence. Counter to this, *Long Distance* was performed live in a studio with one assistant present and streamed to various audiences across time zones. These live, mediated performances carried across two oeuvres: the live performance and recorded performance, shifting a viewer's relationship to an active sounding body in live or mediated contexts.

When technology interferes with this process, or the idea of language and

²⁵ Ibid. 9

communication is removed, a new set of potentials opens up, crossing the body and the idea of presence into new territories. By approaching the developments of the sounding body as an experiment and placing it across time zones has brought bodies across technologies into closer proximity. These works map and expand on how the sounding body relates to, communicates and navigates the technological world through experimental voice practices.

Chapter Three

HEAD

We have reached the final point of the journey through the sounding structures of the body. It is the point of departure, resonance and contraction. The mouth is an orifice for the projection of communication and expression. We have arrived where sounds move from the inside of the body and are placed elsewhere...

Hearing my own head as a finite domain, a mappable space where sounds can exist and disappear, made me face the possibility that my body may, in actuality, really be finite.²⁶

- Gascia Ouzounian

Throughout this paper I have referenced the idea of the sounding body, referring to the body that is resonant when making vocal sounds. I have experimented with the sounding structures of the body in various projects and the way the voice travels through the body. Exploring the body as if it is a cavity or vessel, spurting out traces of the internal physical structures. The way I hope to further outline this investigation of the sounding body is to compare it more intrinsically with architecture, not simply as a physical structure but also as a tool that shapes the way we understand and interact with physical forms. In a similar way to a building, the body has several compartments that join together and carry sound. But, perhaps like a kind of urban sprawl, one building or body is also connected to others. In my previous research I investigated the body as a landscape through video performances accompanied by sound compositions. I was aiming to connect the body within a series of *networks*, and to visually realise the body in performance, in turn freeing a body bound by its skin and giving it potential to extend and connect in an environment outside of itself. As the body has inside and outside spaces, so too

²⁶ Gascia Ouzounian, *Embodied Sound: Aural Architectures and the Body*, Contemporary Music Review, Vol. 25, No. 1/2, Routledge, February/April 2006, 10

do the structures that surround our bodies - the architectural structures that physical bodies occupy. Gascia Ouzounian references the 'finite body' in *Embodied Sound: Aural Architectures and the Body* and in a sense the mappable space in which she discusses can carry voices that sit within architecture, these are spaces where sound can be held and also vanish.

In my work *Howling City* (2016)²⁷, I return to the idea of voice within architectural spaces. The concepts I used as the basis of this work placed the body within a built cityscape and focused on its interaction with an environment. The city has its own hum; it has a type of ambient sound that is constantly changing and reverberating with environmental conditions.

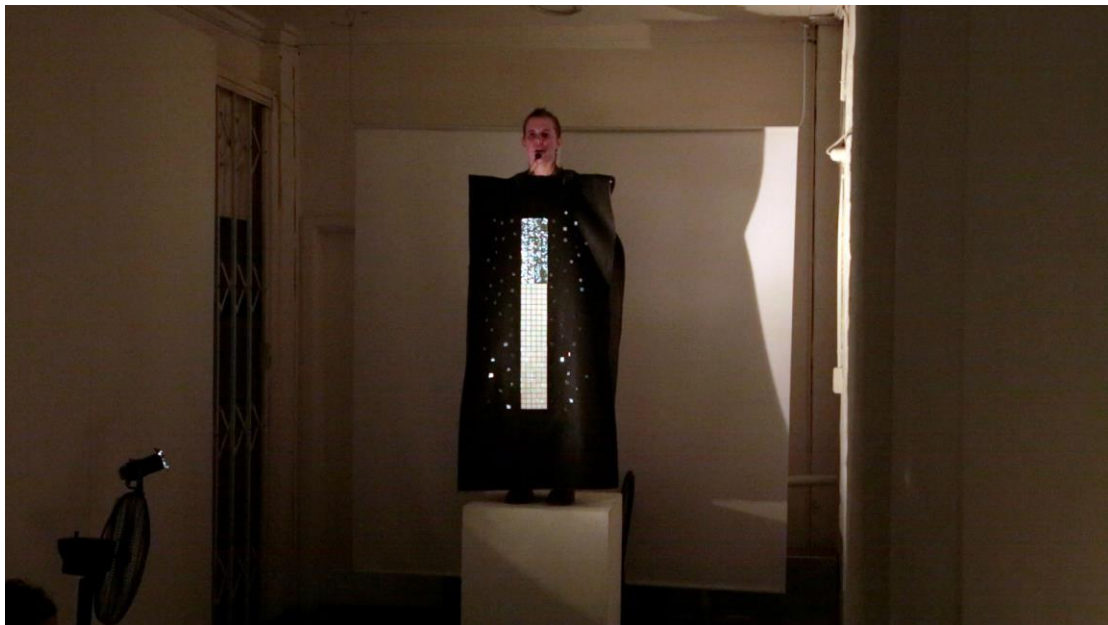


Image 12: Kate Brown, *Howling City*, vocal performance (2016).

Like the head, the physical architecture of the city can be thought of as a resonator, whereas the throat is the generator. In this performance I stood on an 800x600mm white plinth and made vocal sounds inspired by high-pressure winds passing through a cityscape at a howling speed. Cloaked in a black costume with glass tile panels

²⁷ *Howling City* (2016) was performed at Little Woods Gallery during The Gertrude Street Projection Festival in Melbourne, Victoria, curated by Arie Rain Glorie and Amanda Haskard.

vertically positioned down the front and center of the garment, a sweeping spotlight passed my body and reflected light fragments across the small, artist-run space. I positioned my body to capture the sweeping spot light as if the fragmented light was reflecting from passing cars and other buildings. As I stood still on the plinth, I listened to the space and imagined the sounds from the outside coming in, reinterpreting them through vocal improvisation. I imagined howling winds passing through a city like breath passing through vocal chords. The live performance, whistling and howling, gasping and exhausting sound from my body, was accompanied by a recorded track to build and layer sounds. The piece was twenty-five minutes in length and the small audience stood captivated in the space for the entire performance.

The recorded track was produced in my friend's recording studio with high-tech recording equipment. We recorded and layered breathy, noisy and harmonic vocal sounds. A portable PA system amplified my live vocal performance and this countered or mimicked the recorded vocals I had prepared and arranged. My costume and physical positioning above the audience visually drew a closer connection to the cityscape. The space was active with shadows from the sweeping light as I maintained a sense of stillness. When the performance was no longer in situ and my body was absent, I suspended the costume above the plinth as a physical remnant of my absent body. My piece, *Howling City*, was an investigation into - and a response to - a built landscape, using live and recorded vocal sounds, subtle body movements and chance moments. These elements work together to echo the way sounds resonate throughout urban architecture.

The head holds the final measure of sound produced from within the body. It contains what Brandon LaBelle describes as 'the mouth as an active cavity'. LaBelle elaborates on the notion of the active cavity and how it is used as a sounding source to go 'beyond function'.²⁸ This concept of an active cavity going 'beyond function' is a way of breaking down the idea of 'normal' or 'socially acceptable' vocal sound. By

²⁸ Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth; Poetic and politics of voice and the oral imaginary*, New York: Bloomsbury 2014, 1

breaking away from the socialised sounds of the body, the architecture of the sounding body is expanded and new ways of sounding that are less traditional are given voice.

LaBelle's approach to theorising the qualities of the voice is specific and deliberate. In the following passage he explains the idea of the internal and external effects of processing sound from the body:

'If the voice is the very thing that forces itself outward, to carve out a space for the self amid all the intensities of surroundings, the mouth can be highlighted as the cavity that resonates with all such negotiations and brings them back *into* the body, to gather and inflect further expression.'²⁹

He also discusses the voice once it has left the body, saying:

'While it may come from my body, it never quite belongs to me; in short, it brings me into the world according to a fundamental separation from myself.'³⁰

In this description of the voice in relation to the body and the outside world, LaBelle sees these spaces as environments that cross over and interact. He continues:

'...speech *sounds out* our interiority to deliver it to another, and deeper, into the interior private space of their hearing.'³¹

LaBelle talks specifically about the mouth in this chapter, and about inside and outside spaces. He discusses where it is that the voice resonates and travels to once it leaves the body. Specifically, how it is interrupted, absorbed and ricocheted off bodies via internal and external spaces. These concepts and ideas that LaBelle refers to were at the forefront of my thinking when I was devising *Howling City*. LaBelle runs a line between the body's functions and its potential to interact vocally with its surrounding environments. Thinking about the sounding body in such a way has guided my research and helped me to develop new ways of thinking about the voice

²⁹ Ibid.,2.

³⁰ op.cit.,4.

³¹ op.cit.,3.

in relation to architecture.

Alongside LaBelle's idea of the mouth as an 'active cavity,' Pauline Oliveros' Ted X conference event, *Deep listening: The difference between hearing and listening* has also played an important part in my thinking about sound and architecture. In this talk she discusses an experience of climbing into an underground cistern with two other musicians and conducting several recordings. These recordings were improvised and developed intuitively using instrumentation with Oliveros' *Deep Listening* band, which consisted of various different musicians at any time. Oliveros describes how, when playing inside the cistern, the musicians created an "acoustic space where time and space merge as they are articulated by sound".³² This process is a way of listening to the architectural space – a kind of conversation where sound enters the space and sound comes back to you. In order to listen to and play the cistern, Oliveros had to listen to the sound being absorbed, reverberated and returned to continue to improvise with it. In a sense Oliveros was 'playing' the architectural space through improvisation. She coined the term 'deep listening' as her first experience of this kind of listening happened deep underground. From each of the environments she occupies, she listens and channels that listening back through her instrument to create sound.³³

If you imagine the head as an active space in the way Pauline Oliveros did in her 'deep listening,' the body comes into closer proximity with architectural spaces. The space of a building and the body synchronise to develop ideas of physical and architectural spaces as inside and outside sounding spaces. Listening to the body as if it is an architectural space takes it beyond its normal human functions and gives it new possibilities in a structural sounding framework.

In the article *Embodied Sound: Aural Architectures and the Body*, Gascia Ouzounian discusses the work HEADSCAPES by Bernard Leitner. Ouzounian describes Leitner's work as: "Your own head as an architectural space that has particular definite

³² Pauline Oliveros, "1989 recording Deep Listening: The difference between hearing and listening", Ted X event using Ted X conference format, published Nov 12th 2015, sited 9th May 2016

³³ Ibid. sited 9th May 2016

dimensions, reflective qualities and resonant properties.³⁴ Reversing the terms, it is also possible to rethink the idea of a building, imagining it also as a body. This conceptual relationship between architecture and a body is unifying and interchangeable.

Ouzounian says the HEADSCAPES piece includes the "constantly shifting sounds that the head naturally makes... like the barely audible sound we make when we swallow our own spit." She continues:

'Electronic sounds sweep in fragmented gestures across the headspace ('VAR_10B'), while its realness comes through in tracks like 'HTp 10PM', where subtle foot-dragging noises are measured in space against a distant ambulance alarm.'³⁵

This is an example of how physical and metaphysical spaces, or real and imagined ones, can co-exist at the intersection of sound, space and the body. It is important to acknowledge the types of internal sounds created by the body. Although subtle, they are evidence of an internal experience that combines with the previously discussed external experiences produced by the performative sounding body.

American Nation Medal of Art recipient Meredith Monk and Taiwanese/Australian artist Alice Hui-Sheng Chang are two artists who work with the materiality of voice and architecture. In her work *Songs of Ascension, (Ann Hamilton's Tower)* (2008), Meredith Monk collaborated with a string quartet led by violinist Todd Reynolds and a chorus. In this piece, which explores ideas of ascension, the performers transverse the architecture of the tower designed by artist Ann Hamilton for the Oliver Ranch in Northern California. The work was originally inspired by Norman Fischer's translations of the Psalms, in response to the eight story high tower.³⁶ The

³⁴ Gascia Ouzounian, "Embodied Sound: Aural Architectures and the Body", *Contemporary Music Review*, 25:1-2, 69-79, DOI: 10.1080/07494460600647469, 2006

³⁵ Ibid.10.

³⁶ Meredith Monk, "Songs of Ascension", Meredith Monk House, 2008
<http://www.meredithmonk.org/currentrep/songsofascension.html> sited 9/8/16

performers trace the edges of the stairwell, with each performer responding to a set of instructions for the composition. Some are stationary, carrying instruments, and others move forward and backward with Monk in a walking/rocking movement along the stairwell. This is a beautifully impermanent piece that is experimental in nature. Monk's artistic background informs the choreography from movement to stillness in body and sound. There are several stages within the piece, some with harmonium, violin and clarinet at the forefront, while others foreground the vocals and movement. This piece is partly about positioning the sound within the architectural space and hearing it rise and fall, as performers create sound at differing points in the tower. This is a thoughtful and deliberate component and it is purposefully accentuated. There is a pool of water at the bottom of the tower which one performer disrupts with a long wooden stick, creating watery sounds. At times while vocalising, the performer places her body in the water, abandoning the stick, and gazes with hands stretched towards the ceiling.

Songs of Ascension uses architecture as a point of inspiration in the development and the choices made to produce this piece. There are also many iterations of this piece adapted for live stage performances and audio recordings. The performance in the tower itself is documented and edited for video. This is but one point in the development of the work, however all further performances are drawn from this particular production. This piece encases the performers' bodies in a resonating tower. As the performers move up and down the tower's spiralling stairwell, new acoustic relationships take place and the presence and resonance of the building changes shape. In this piece the tower acts as a resonating chamber, similar to the head, and when the bodies of the performers move inside the tower they create shifting and ascending sounding spaces.



Image 13: Meredith Monk and Ensemble, *Songs of Ascension*, vocal performance in Ann Hamilton Tower, dimensions variable (2008).

I gained direct experience in the way performers can activate and be activated by architecture when I worked with Alice Hui-Sheng Chang's vocal ensemble on the performance *Gentle Steps with an Open Mouth* (2015) as a part of *Liquid Architecture's Nite Art* festival.³⁷ As a large-scale vocal ensemble, we responded to the architecture of the building using our bodies, voices and breath by exploring and experimenting in the different spaces across the building. Alice Hui-Sheng Chang blurs the gap between sound and noise and what we are intrinsically attuned to hear in specific spaces. Hui-Sheng Chang's practice spans various performance methods to encapsulate the voice as noise. Hui-Sheng Chang gave the ensemble a set of instructions that placed vocal sounds across different parts of the building. Part one started on a staircase in the centre of the building. The ensemble was instructed to pass and mimic sounds up and down from one person to the other, creating a whirring effect. Part two was conducted under a hanging classroom where we stood as a group making static-like sounds. Part three took us up in the lift to the top balcony of the open-plan building. In this part we were instructed to cascade sounds down onto the lower levels as if a shower of sound was washing down from the

³⁷ A group of 15-20 performers worked alongside Chang to produce a vocal performance that spread across Melbourne School of Design's Brian Lewis Atrium.

balcony. In part four we positioned ourselves across a balcony bridge and staircase where we created a wall of sound back and forth to each other. Finally, in part five we occupied the outside balcony and forecourt and made loud screeching sounds. These final sounds were created inside but filtered through to the outside.

We extended and improvised within these instructions, interacting with each other, and with the spaces and audience around us. A vocal ensemble is an interesting framework to work within, as each member was a volunteer vocalist with a vastly different way of working with sound and voice. This made for a diverse outcome that Hui-Sheng Chang was expecting - she was very calm and accepting of all the terrain we crossed vocally. Her philosophy and arrangement of chance in an experimental vocal capacity was at the forefront of the performance and its outcomes, as opposed to a controlled, didactic experience. Each performer remained autonomous in the way they were producing sound, and this kept the piece alive in the space and went further to create a sense of transience, temporality and phenomenon. Participating in this ensemble helped me to grasp the idea of working vocally across spaces in an experimental way. It inspired me to think about the inside and outside of the vocal body.



Alice Hui-Sheng Chang with ensemble, *Gentle Steps with an Open Mouth*, vocal performance at Melbourne University, dimensions variable (2015).

Hui-Sheng Chang's relationship to architecture springs from the sounding body and how it then interacts with spaces, as well as its sounding capacities. There were several workshops to prepare the ensemble for this performance, but more than half of the group received no previous instruction or practice. This made the dynamic fresh and accessible to an audience who were unaware of what was premeditated by the group.

In my final examination piece, *A Body of Echoes*, I revisit an idea from the very start of my MFA candidature. Parts of this installation were made at the beginning of 2015. It was, at the time, a clear starting point to discover what it meant to work with the raw condition of the sounding body. My first point of departure was to work directly with bodies in one-to-one interactions. The setup consisted of an audience member in a pseudo-therapeutic scenario, lying on a table filled with pebbles. This set up was to put them in a non-comfortable position while also giving

them a tactile bodily experience. Lying on your back is one of the hardest positions to vocalise in, making it hard to fully realise accurate vocal techniques. This would create limitations in a participant's sounding body. I planned to hang a microphone from the ceiling and suspend it in front of their mouth, before instructing them through pre-rehearsed vocal exercises. What would happen next was unknown, but the purpose was to encourage people to experiment with their voice, as present or absent as it may be in their lives. My aim was to free the participant from the notion of 'I can't sing' and instead use their voice without the pressure of sounding 'good'. Although this piece was conceptually and visually achievable, I was confronted with more questions than answers and decided to leave it for a while as I began to develop live, event-based and installation-oriented performances. So now, returning to this piece towards the end of my MFA, I have reimagined it as a new work with some aspects from these earlier ideas.

Returning to work on this piece, I am now looking at the idea of architectural spaces of the body and the spaces that we occupy, inside and outside of the body. I am investigating ideas of ritual and habit in relation to how bodies interact in an exhibition space, whether they are participating or observing. Another aspect of this work is to create a dialogue with a space, to experiment in this space in comparison to when Kirkbride, the Sydney College of the Arts Campus, was a mental health facility.

The questions I am asking are: what was spoken inside these walls and what is still echoing? How do we sustain this echo in this moment while existing, breathing, inhabiting transitional spaces and filling them with bodies in and out of time?

I am exploring endurance and spectacle and social acceptance, discovering how to occupy a space and time to deliberately transport an audience and suspend them in a moment of 'examination'. It is an invitation to the audience to participate with their body's sounding structures.

This experiment will begin with my body positioned on the table filled with pebbles and I will vocalise, keeping in mind all of the concepts just stated as well as the physicality of my body and the space I am performing in. As the SCA Galleries have carried and collected sound over time, I will question this echo and add to it. I will then leave the table and allow audience members to participate and create a flow effect – a body of echoes across the space. This part of the work will be unpredictable and allusive, it will translate the insecurities and unknown qualities and relationships people have with their bodies and their voice. It will play on the notion of spaces being filled up with noisy bodies that attach themselves to the walls and become a part of the history of that space. This interactive aspect of the work was fulfilled, however not from observations of the space directly after the performance but throughout the exhibition period. On the opening night, the space was quite charged after the performance and the audience seemed unsure how to interact. Later, in the following days, I noticed the curiosity of visitors in the space, whispering into the microphone and touching the pebbles. I encouraged people to lie directly onto them and play vocally in the space.



Kate Brown, *A body of Echoes*, vocal performance and installation, SCA Galleries, 2016

This piece marks an end to my current body of work that experiments with the sounding structures of the body. In this final piece I am passing on the experience to an audience by allowing others to explore and participate in and experience an essence of my current research. Whether this is a successful resolution will only be determined by the element of chance in a performance such as this. To acknowledge the participation of an audience is to place no expectations on their behavior, as I no longer own the space they occupy once my body has left the object in situ.

Conclusion

In this paper I have identified several aspects of the physical body and its potential to produce sound. I have investigated how sound - specifically experimental voice practice - can influence bodies through live performances, technology and its relationship to internal and external architectural spaces.

I have highlighted the use of voice in a number of cross-disciplinary examples, analysing how they challenge conventional performance methods in gallery and in digital spaces.

Voice practice is evident throughout art history and I am by no means one of the first to experiment with it. It is continually changing and evolving through experimentation and this has been demonstrated in my practice through live, event-based performances that experiment with my sounding body in alternate forms, using varying sound technologies and physical positions and at times featuring a disembodied voice. I have observed, restricted and experimented with the voice to mine the body's full potential as a sounding structure. Foregrounding experimentation in my MFA research has given me the freedom to place no attachment or expectation on my outcomes. At times, I have not known what the results would be before, during or after performances. This 'not knowing' beforehand has stimulated a perpetual evolution of ideas and concepts during these investigations. It has been an unencumbered approach, which is very different to my previous methods of research.

I have divided the sounding body into the HEAD, THROAT and GUTS to help understand where vocal sounds come from, how they are modified, amplified and expelled. This paper followed a journey in reverse through the body, starting at the GUTS. Here, I focused on the idea of *reverse catharsis* and how a vocal performance can give insight into a process of exchange between the performer and audience in a live context. The THROAT, the sound source and thoroughfare of the sounding body, positioned the voice in relation to technologies. This was shown in my work *Long Distance* (2016), in which I streamed my voice from Cardiff to the *Love/City III: The Planetary* festival in Melbourne. In *It Speaks of Others* (2016), my collaborator and I

articulated the many grains of our voices while comparing the throat to an architectural space through which sound passed. Lastly, the HEAD is where the sound is held before it is placed elsewhere, and is the resonator and projector of the internal spaces of the body, placing them onto the outside environments and architectures. This research and experimentation has seen the sounding body analysed in relation to other bodies in live events, and presented alongside recordings to imagine the sounding body as an architectural space, flipping between internal and external sounding structures. Breaking the sounding body down into the HEAD, THROAT, and GUTS has helped to identify the processes the body undergoes when experiencing and producing sound. As our understanding of the body is continually changing and evolving with technology, so too is the relationship to its potential and its capabilities in performance.

The reasons that I strive to create a body with limitless potential is to shift the idea of a body bound by its skin or historical context and give it space to move beyond this. It is impossible to completely strip the sounding body of any pre-existing connotation. The way in which I portray and work with this body opens it up for new connections in an otherworldly context. The otherworldly allows the body and the audience to escape a defined reality for a suspended period of time. Placing this kind of body in museum and gallery contexts is a challenge and a risk, but within this research I have given the idea of experimental voice practice a wider context in a contemporary arts field. This can be seen in the evolution of my practice and how I have continually experimented with its limits and potential within varying contexts.

My aim is to create experiences that surprise, jar and awe an audience, and bring a performing and an observing body into closer proximity through sounding elements. As humans living in the world we all have the capacity to make sound with our bodies. The human voice is an intricate and powerful tool that I use to decipher unknown and exciting terrain. I aim to continue developing and experimenting with the fluidity of the human voice to develop new ways of working with sound across different platforms.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Barthes, Roland, *Image Music Text*, (Fontana Press London, 1977).

Burroughs, William, *The ticket that exploded* (Olympia Press, 1962).

Cobbing, William, Cooper, Rosie, editors, *Booooook- The Life and work of Bob Cobbing*, (Occasional Papers, 2015).

Davis, Pamela J. and Fletcher, Neville H. *Vocal Fold physiology; Controlling complexity and chaos* (London, San Diego: Singular Publishing Group INC 1996).

Dolar, Mladen, *A voice and nothing more* (MIT Press, 2006).

Duckworth, William, *Talking Music; conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson and five generations of American Experimental Composers* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995).

Dyson, Frances, *Sounding new media; immersion and embodiment in the Arts and Culture* (Berkley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 2009).

Eargle, John M. *Music, Sound, and Technology*, (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1990).

Kahn, Douglas, Whitehead, Gregory, *Wireless Imagination- Sound, radio and the Avant-Garde*, The MIT Press Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1994).

LaBelle, Brandon, *Background noise: perspectives on sound art*, The Continuum Publishing Group, New York, 2006 McCallion, Michael, *The Voice book* (London, Boston Faber and Faber 1989).

LaBelle, Brandon, *Lexicon of the Mouth; Poetic and politics of voice and the oral imaginary* (New York: Bloomsbury 2014).

LaBelle, Brandon, Martinho, Cláudia, editors, *Site of Sound: Of Architecture and the Ear Vol. 2*, (Errant Bodies Press, Berlin, 2011).

McCallion, Michael, *The Voice book*, (London, Boston Faber and Faber 1989).

Neumark, Norie, *Doing things with Voices: Performativity and Voice, Voice, Vocal Aesthetics in Digital Arts and Media*, edited by Norie Neumark, Ross Gibson and Theo van Leeuwen (MIT Press, 2010).

Neumark, Norie, Gibson, Ross and van Leeuwen, Theo *Voice; Vocal aesthetics in digital Arts and Media* (London, Cambridge: the MIT Press 2010) Nyman, Michael *Experimental Music, Cage and Beyond* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Ouzounian, Gascia, *Embodied Sound: Aural Architectures and the Body*, *Contemporary Music Review*, Vol. 25, No. 1/2 (Routledge, February/April 2006).

Rodgers, Tara, *Pink Noises: Women on electronic music and sound*, (Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2010).

Smith Brindle, Reginald, *The New Music- The Avant Garde since 1945* (London/ New York/ Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975).

Toop, David, *Sinister Resonance: the mediumship of the listener* (The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2010).

Young, Rob, editor, (continuum books, *The Wire*, 2002).

Journals

Yueh-Tuan Li and wen-shu Lai, "Voice, object and listening in the sound installations of Laurie Anderson", *International Journal of Performance Arts & Digital Media* Volume 9 Number 2, (2013).

Online Newspaper

Walters, J.L, *John Zorn: Crowley at the Crossroads*, The Guardian, June 2006

Online Resources

Oliveros, Pauline "1989 recording Deep Listening: The difference between hearing and listening", Ted X event using Ted X conference format, published Nov 12th 2015, URL https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QHfOuRrJB8 Accessed May 9, 2016.

Boosey & Hawkes, "Reich, Steve: City Life (1995) 24 for ensemble", published, 2016 <http://www.boosey.com/cr/music/Steve-Reich-City-Life/5922> Accessed 10/8/16

Burt, Warren "Some Music and Sociological Aspects of Experimental Australian Music", Original Publication March 2007 URL <http://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/article/some-musical-and-sociological-aspects-of-australian-experimental-music> Accessed November 15, 2015.

Hui Sheng Chang, Alice, "Gentle steps with an open mouth", *Melbourne University* Original Publication March 12, 2012 URL <https://events.unimelb.edu.au/events/5442-alice-hui-sheng-chang-gentle-steps-with-an-open-mouth>, Accessed August 15, 2016.

Monk, Meredith, "Songs of Ascension", Meredith Monk House, 2008 URL <http://www.meredithmonk.org/currentrep/songsofascension.html> Accessed 9/8/16

Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2016 <https://www.mca.com.au/exhibition/telling-tales/> Accessed 6/10/16

Gallery Catalogue

Bec Dean, *The patient exhibition catalogue*, UNSW Galleries, 2016.