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Runa Hestad Jenssen

# Voicing dialogues

Exploring kaleidoscopic notions of voice  
through performative autoethnography

**NTNU**  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Thesis for the Degree of  
Philosophiae Doctor  
Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences  
Department of Teacher Education



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Science and Technology



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# Voicing dialogues:

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through performative autoethnography

Runa Hestad Jensen



*Drawing 1 Voicing dialogues*

All drawings included in this document are by Ingvild Blæsterdalen

“To sing – is an expression of your being,  
a being which is becoming”

Maria Callas





## Abstract

I am obsessed with voices. This obsession meant I sang before I could talk, it led me through higher music education as a classically trained singer, it shaped my experience in a western sociocultural context of singing as a soprano, teacher and now – as a researcher. So, ‘naturally’, *voice* is the topic of this thesis, you might think. But voice is such a huge topic. What kind of voices am I interested in? There are SO many voices. Starting my PhD study, I was particularly interested in female changing voices – the adolescent voice. Wonderful, you might think. A clear and narrow topic to research (just as a PhD study should be). But, instead of investigating voice as *an* object, something to study from the outside, I ended up studying voice from the inside, asking – *What possibilities might lie within a performative autoethnographic study of a soprano-teacher- researcher’s embodied voice experienced in a western sociocultural context of singing?* – as the main research question for my thesis.

Through exploring notions of voice by engaging in a methodology of performative autoethnography, and leaning into theories of performativity, gender, embodiment, and feminist new materialism, I also engage with voice at a sociopolitical level. Who is given a voice? Who is not? What does this tell me about what voices we listen to, who we include in vocal pedagogy and in music education? And broadly, what does this negotiation or understanding of voice mean for the way we learn, teach, and research voice?

Basically, I deal with the idea of voice in an experienced way. Through this inside-out process of exploring voice, I discovered the voices of Others and I started to critically question the cultures and contexts I experienced. This led me on a journey where I saw possibilities to expand on methodologies, breathe with theory and push boundaries of how knowledge might be created.

My thesis is a ‘storied thesis’. I believe in stories as a way of knowing and see stories in ‘simple’ terms - as a series of events arranged in time. Through stories I can explore questions. To help answer the main research question in my thesis, I dived into four sub-research questions, each explored in four articles. The first article, *Facing the Soprano* (Jenssen, 2021), examines how a singer’s feminist performative “I” is created through autoethnography. Article two, *A tale of grappling* (Jenssen & Martin, 2021), explores how performative duoethnography can be understood as an expanded way of methodological thinking. In *A different high soprano laughter* (Jenssen, 2022a) I ponder how Nomadic theory

might lend new entrances to think about voice, and how this re-thinking offers diversity in vocal pedagogy. The final article, *The voice lessons* (Jenssen, 2022b), acknowledges the value of (auto)ethnographies as a way of producing, analyzing, and representing voice.

In the meta-text, the 'kappe' – which translates from Norwegian to 'cape' in English, I thread the stories and questions from the articles together, as a kaleidoscopic exploration of notions of voice, constantly changing and becoming. Sewing my 'cape', I take you through the process of sharing and listening to the stories told in my four articles. Reading and analyzing my discoveries offered in my articles I see new entrances for engaging with voices. Embracing embodied knowledge as the foundation, for creating dialogues, seeing possibilities, and seeing Otherwise, I aim to find a space where a multiplicity of voices can voice, in vocal pedagogy, music education, and academia. I therefore offer my thesis as a contribution for those engaging in arts and pedagogical practices where voice (in its plethora of possibilities) is at the core. However, this study is also for those interested in epistemological and ontological ways of exploring notions of voice. If you are ready to dive in, I will dive with you – voicing dialogues, together.

## Sammendrag

Jeg er lidenskapelig opptatt av stemmer. Kanskje er det derfor jeg sang før jeg kunne snakke? Lidenskapen for sang har ledet meg gjennom høyere musikkutdanning og formet mine erfaringer som klassisk skolert sopran med utspring i en vestlig vokal sosiokulturell kontekst, og videre som lærer, og nå som forsker. Men stemme er et stort tema og det finnes så mange ulike stemmer. Hvilke stemmer er jeg interessert i? Da jeg påbegynte studien, var jeg spesielt opptatt av jenters stemmeskifte – ungdomsstemmen. Fantastisk, tenker du kanskje? Et klart og snevert tema å forske på (akkurat som en PhD-studie skal være). Men i stedet for å undersøke stemmen som et objekt, noe å studere fra utsiden, endte jeg opp med å studere stemmen fra innsiden og utviklet følgende hovedspørsmål: *Hvilke muligheter kan ligge innenfor en performativ autoetnografisk studie av en sopran-lærer-forskers kroppsliggjorte stemme erfart i en vestlig vokal sosiokulturell kontekst?*

Ved å anvende metodologien performativ autoetnografi, samt teorier om performativitet, kjønn, kroppsliggjøring og feministisk nymaterialisme, undersøker og løfter jeg forestillinger om stemme opp på et sosiopolitisk nivå. Hvem slipper til med sine stemmer og hvem stenges ute? Hva avslører dette sett i lys av hvilke stemmer vi lytter til og hvem vi inkluderer i vokalt og musikkpedagogisk arbeid? I vid forstand blir det et spørsmål om hva ulike forståelser og forhandlinger av stemmer innebærer for måten vi lærer, underviser og forsker på.

Med utgangspunkt i en erfaringsbasert tilnærming, utforsker jeg forestillinger om stemmer. Gjennom denne utforskningsprosessen fra innsiden og ut, har jeg oppdaget andres stemmer og begynt å stille kritiske spørsmål ved kulturene og kontekstene jeg har høstet mine erfaringer og kunnskap fra. Dette har ført meg ut på en reise hvor jeg har sett muligheter til å utvide metodologier, puste med teorier og flytte grenser for hvordan kunnskap kan skapes.

Avhandlingen er skrevet i en narrativ form. Jeg oppfatter fortellinger som en måte å forstå og søke kunnskap og som en serie hendelser skapt over tid. Gjennom fortellinger kan jeg også oppdage noe nytt. For å besvare denne studiens hovedspørsmål har jeg utarbeidet fire delforskningsspørsmål, utforsket i fire artikler. Den første artikkelen, *Facing the Soprano* (Jenssen, 2021), undersøker hvordan en sangers feministiske performative jeg skapes gjennom autoetnografi. Artikkel to, *A tale of grappling* (Jenssen & Martin, 2021), utforsker hvordan performativ duoetnografi kan forstås som en utvidet måte å tenke metodologisk. I *A different high soprano laughter* (Jenssen, 2022a), reflekterer jeg over hvordan Nomadisk teori

kan gi nye innganger til å tenke stemmer på, og hvordan denne retenkningen tilbyr mangfold i det vokalpedagogiske feltet. Den siste artikkelen, *The voice lessons* (Jenssen, 2022b), anerkjenner verdien av (auto)etnografier som en måte å produsere, analysere og representere stemmer.

I metateksten, 'The Cape', vever jeg fortellingene og spørsmålene fra artiklene sammen gjennom en kaleidoskopisk utforskning av forestillinger om stemmer, som jeg ser er i stadig endring og nye tilblivelser. I det jeg syr min kappe, deler jeg prosessen med leseren og lytter samtidig til narrative fortalt i mine artikler. Når jeg leser og analyserer oppdagelsene som presenteres, ser jeg nye innganger for å engasjere meg i stemmer. Jeg omfavner kroppsliggjort kunnskap som grunnlag for å skape dialoger, se muligheter og se noe annet. Målet med studien er å finne et rom hvor et mangfold av stemmer kan 'stemme', innen vokalpedagogikk, musikkpedagogikk og academia. Derfor er avhandlingen et bidrag til alle som driver med kunst og pedagogiske praksiser der stemmen (i dens mangfold av muligheter) utgjør kjernen. Denne studien gir også et bidrag til epistemologiske og ontologiske måter å utforske og forstå forestillinger om stemmer. Hvis du er klar til å være med på den videre reisen, vil jeg reise med deg – voicing dialogues, sammen.

## Acknowledgements

I like science fiction movies. I am a huge Star Wars fan, and I still remember the first time my two oldest boys looked at me when they understood that their mother had a key into deep knowledge of the Star Wars universe. That look of admiration, still makes me smile. The Star Wars universe has created many moments where my children and I have shared playful moments. What I like about science fiction, is that it can give a portal, key, door (whatever you name it), to enter other worlds. In no time, with a blink of an eye, you can travel in space and time. In many ways I feel that this is what my PhD journey has done for me. I have been stepping into many portals and visited new worlds.

But just like in the Star Wars universe, it is not possible to survive the travels alone. Such journeys demand teamwork. You need a support crew, especially when you doubt yourself, or when you might fail. I have been so lucky to have such a crew.

In the front of my starship, I have shared the space with my co-pilot and brilliant main supervisor, Rose. Thank you for handing me the deep trust of riding my ship, from the first time I met you. I am forever thankful for your guidance, which is like talking to the depth of wisdom of a 100-year-old lady (you are my Yoda), in a body of a 40-year-old woman (with bad old ballet knees). With you, I have found the courage to dive into dark caves filled with hundreds of asteroids – taking pathways I never thought were possible. Your deep knowledge, investment in my work and me as a human being has made my PhD journey a fantastic experience, where asteroids can come as fast as they want. Because, with you we always find a way, being just the right amount of crazy. Rose, you are a guiding (super)star. I am in deep gratitude for having the honor to work with you.

Thank you, Elin, my co-supervisor, for the way you made me believe in taking on a PhD about voice – and the support and mentoring you gave, especially in the early stages of the work. I appreciate your humble openness. Your positivity never ends!

Thank you, Regine, my co-supervisor, for the good conversations about life, singing, writing and being a mother in this PhD journey. Thank you for all the cheering from your warm alto voice.

During my PhD I had the opportunity to visit the University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign, for six months. Thank you, Fulbright, for the scholarship. I could not have dragged my whole

family with me to the USA without your support. Bridget – my dear friend – thank you for sharing your office and knowledge with me, for taking care of us as a family when being in a new country. For all the laughter, food, gatherings and letting us into your family. Evelyn, Luke, and Jason. You are the cool guys. Thank you Merel and Bob, for inviting us into your home, playing cards and music. Thank you, Carolee and Steve, for arranging things in advance of our stay and welcoming us so warmly. Thank you, Jeananne, for inviting me to the University, for all the travels and conversations in your car, visiting other universities and for standing in our living room the first day we arrived – with a Santa hat. Thank you, Sharon and Reed, our kind neighbors who we adore. Thank you Liora, for taking care of my family and me – as an academic and friend. For filling our house with art and furniture. For all the conversations over tea, where you shared your wisdom and listened. When I walked out of your door, I always flew into writing.

Thank you, Ingvild Blæsterdalen, for the conversations that resulted in drawings. You rock! Your drawings say it all. Thank you, Hege Vatne Arntsen, for creating the voicing dialogues logo, and for all help with formatting and graphics. Thank you, everyone working at the library at Nord University. Every book and article, many of which were hidden – you always manage to dig them up. Fast.

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A big thank you to all of my friends in the NAFOL community (National Researchers' School, for Teacher Education), for inspiring conversations and sharing frustrations, for

letting me be exposed to other entrances of doing research, and for support and funding for going to Urbana.

I am forever grateful to my family who are the people who make my work happen, both practically (lots of logistics, food, cleaning, homework, training, practicing violin – just ‘everything’), but also you are the ground of my work. You are all very present in my thesis. Mom and dad: Every PhD student should have people like you living next door. You make life easier, and every day is better with you on board. To my brother, Odin, my grandparents, Marit and Sverre (who are not with us anymore), Gjermund’s family, Maj Brit and Geir Egil. I am deeply thankful for everything you have done to make this thesis happen. A big hug to my human friends in ‘Underetagen’, and my non-human friends, the kittens Illi and Undine Jordan. You make me do and be better.

And – last but not least:

All my love to my husband Gjermund, who asks the questions I do not want to hear (but clearly need to), who keeps a calmness in every situation, and who just understands what I need without me having to ask for it. Our children, Emanuel, Eleseus, Jensine, and Jeremias - you are the ones who have been brave in this PhD period. And patient. Mom is finished now. I love you. This thesis is for you.

In one way – I do not want the PhD period to end. Writing this now, I would like to hold the thesis, for just a little bit longer. Because, writing this thesis has been an amazing and privileged journey, filled with hard work and lots of fun. The PhD journey has created a new life and world for me, and I like it. But, just like the Star Wars universe, there are always other portals to open – new worlds to visit and discover. The universe and possibilities are never ending. In that way – I am ready to hand the thesis over to you now, the reader. Take a seat beside me and let’s travel. Together.

Verdal, December 2022

Runa Hestad Jensen

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## **PART 1: The cape**



## To the reader: Sewing a cape – weaving stories together



*Drawing 2 Sewing a cape*

I was never very good at sewing. My mother was. I often brought sewing projects I worked on in arts and craft at school back home, so my mother could finish them for me. She told me she liked that. I did too. Years later, when I was expecting my first child, I suggested I could try to knit and sew something for the baby. She answered just as she did when I brought sewing projects home from school: “Let me sew for you. You are so good at doing other things, Runa. Qualities you can continue to develop. Let me sew”. Those ‘other things’ included singing. I loved to sing. To perform with my voice on a stage. The imaginative storytelling space it created. To convey a story through voice with Others doing the performance with me. To listen to the orchestra setting the scene and then to dive into their sound – creating and dialoguing together. Feeling the costumes on my skin. How the fabric helped me *be* the character I played on stage. Doing a PhD, I had the opportunity to

developing the qualities of singing and storytelling, using my voice and telling stories in new ways. Although, I never originally planned for stories to be the core of this thesis, they became a way of knowing for me – a way to make meaning in the world and with Others. My collection of stories provides a way to interpret my PhD journey, and the topics I was looking to explore. But, back to the sewing, which I am still not very good at. The sewing is of course a metaphor used for a reason. My thesis is an article-based PhD and consists of four articles and a meta-text, which is called a ‘kappe’ in Norwegian. It translates to ‘cape’ in English. Sewing my ‘cape’ (keeping you warm from the Norwegian winter), I thread the stories and questions from my four articles together, as a kaleidoscopic exploration of notions of voice, constantly changing and becoming. I could not help it, ‘cape’ made me think of a patchwork quilt, where each piece is individually crafted specifically to tell one story, each piece with unique embellishments, textures, and fibres. When the pieces are sewn together, they create a larger work that tells a larger story. My stitch pattern, holding together the entire quilt, shows how and where I position my research, and myself as a researcher.

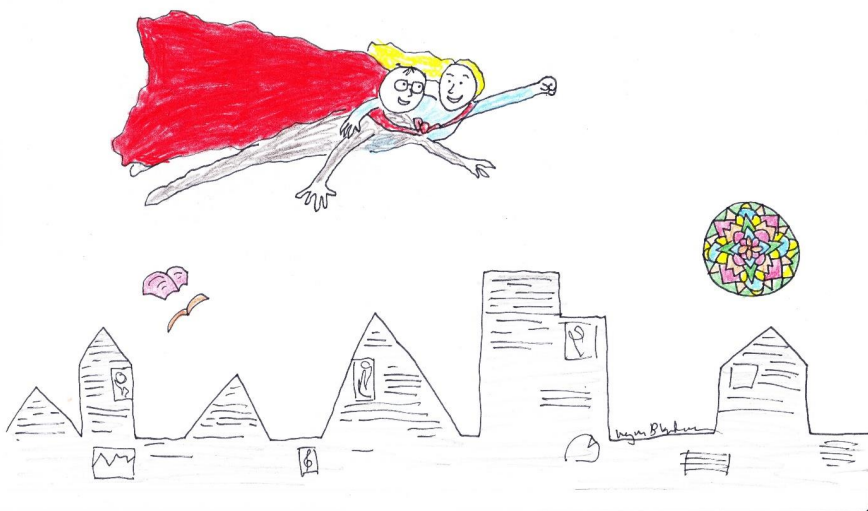
From my sewing of the cape, I have created six chapters. Think of them as important pockets to keep your precious items, and as the ties to keep the cape tied on you securely. Chapter one *Body*, shares how I arrived in this project, and what topics and concepts I specifically engage with. I grapple with questions of ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, and ‘why’ concerning the exploration of kaleidoscopic notions of voice, to lay the ground for the following chapters. The questions I ask, and the stories stitched between bring me to question: Who and where am I in this research? Where do I position my study in relation to other research? And (the big and frightening question) why does my research matter at all? In Chapter two, *Breath*, I offer the locations and contexts I move in and between. I convey the theoretical framework for my work and how it illuminates (and foreshadows) what I see in my stories. Moving between different worlds of voices, I map out these worlds and see what they can offer me and what I can offer in return. Chapter three *Flow*, dives into my methodological anchoring, and how falling in love with methodology creates spaces of dialogue, imagination, and creativity. In chapter four, *Sound*, I thread my four articles together as a whole. What do I see through telling these stories? What have I discovered? What do I not see? What is left untold? How do my four storied articles help me answer my research questions, or open new questions? With the sound from my articles resonating behind me, I enter chapter five *Resonance*, where I discuss and analyze my discoveries, through creating and engaging with a kaleidoscopic model to think through. As an end I offer chapter six *Reverberations*, where I make offerings,

even provocations, and little gemstones for you to pick up and perhaps use as little decorations for your own cape. This text, my cape, is an unfolding story through the wisdom of telling stories (Bresler, 2020), where caring for stories through listening to ‘all voices’ is at core as an emphatic and ethical way of seeking knowledge.

This time I have to do the sewing without my mother. Or wait – maybe not. The articles in my PhD study do not exist in a vacuum. The stories do come from ‘somewhere’ – they are situated in the world I live in. I rest on my embodied experiences when choosing which material and fabrics to include when sewing my cape. I still *feel* the different fabrics on my body - now performed with (an)other layer in my voice, to *be* a researcher on stage. I hope you can find moments where my stories resonate with yours.

I am so eager to let you into my thesis, but I have a little note: There are some articles in the back of the thesis. Four of them. They are sort of the journey of the thesis. The backbone. If you, dear reader, want to – you could have a sneak peek at them. It might make the reading of the ‘cape’ text a little easier, or a little different, by reading them first. But it is up to you to decide.

With this image of the cape sketched out in your mind, and the invitation to join me to try it on, I am very curious how the cape feels for you. I hope you are ready to try it on. Actually, why don’t I help you put it on and secure it over your shoulders? Then, together, we can let our capes flow behind us as we leap, fly, dive, into my thesis ‘Voicing dialogues: Exploring kaleidoscopic notions of voice’.



*Drawing 3 Leap, fly and dive*





## Chapter 1. Body

I still remember when I auditioned for the ‘Norwegian Academy of Music’ for the first time. I did not get in. I got a nice rejection letter. It said something like, “you have a lovely timbre and presence on stage, a nice instrument, which have a possibility to be easily shaped”. I cried. A lot. I desperately wanted to become a singer. So, I continued to work hard, supported by my father, who was an opera singer and who asked me “are you sure there is nothing else you want to do, maybe there is another career for you?”. My answer was always “no”. I finally got into the music academy. Ready and eager to be shaped into a singer.

I loved being at a music academy, singing, performing with Others, being in the music. The space music created for imagination, for traveling in time and place (metaphorically and literally). I cherished the beauty of the music, and the aesthetic ideals resonated with my ‘femininity’. As a cis woman from Norway, with a ‘Nordic look’, blue eyes, long blond hair, and white skin – I fitted a western sociocultural context of singing well. My voice easily sang and conveyed the repertoire I was handed (very often made by dead white men). I had a body that moved easily on stage, and the imagination to dive into the roles of characters such as the naïve princess, the young and seductive chambermaid, or the fearless and down to earth country girl.

I became a singer, a soprano. I worked as a singer for many years. I was lucky to sing the roles I studied at the music academy. Pamina and Michaela. But most of all, I enjoyed singing in a vocal ensemble. I traveled around the world with this ensemble and made prize winning recordings. Lots of hard and fun work. I also started to move away from the western classical music I was trained in – experimenting more with other genres and styles. Especially contemporary and folk music. I started to teach. Having four children in close succession, I needed a stable job with less traveling. I appreciated teaching voice at university, in higher music education. I enjoyed the way voice and music connected the students and I in our pedagogical encounters, working with voice lessons. Have you ever listened to someone sing and felt the voice of the singer in your body? How the voice of the singer hits you, that it might take the breath out of you, how emotions in your body are released and you cannot hold them back. That the voice you listen to opens a door into your heart. I have. Many times. And in many ways, this is what I try to encourage my students to do when they sing, when I teach

voice. Singing requires lots of courage, and a will to open the body to find the core of the voice, which is the singer's support. Without the support, the voice will crack.

When teaching, I totally surrender into the moment the student and I have together. I often feel that I embody what my students do. I can even sense the position of the student's larynx when they sing, in my own larynx. I can be totally worn out after teaching voice students. Listening to my students sing at concerts, even though I am sitting still and listening, I sweat, embodying the singer's bodily engagement. Wanting to help or being moved by the way they sing. Of course, I can't really feel how the students feel when they sing. That is not a goal of my teaching. But I try to use my own experiences, my embodied knowledge, to walk beside them. To try to understand. To listen with my whole body, to engage as best as I can.

### **1.1 Primal sounds, the 'glamorous' life as a soprano and growing pains with voice**

So, as you see, as a soprano, teacher, and now researcher in arts education, I truly care about voices. No. That's wrong. I am *obsessed* with voices. I embody voices – I feel them, and I analyze them. Not only singing voices. Right now, writing this introduction chapter for my thesis, all my senses are activated. Sadly, not from my writing, but from a voice – I can hear a cry outside the house. I hear it from where I sit in the home office this horrid pandemic made me establish. Although I can't see her, I can very quickly hear that this is the sound of my crying 7-year-old daughter. And this time, it is not 'just' crying. I can hear from the sound that she is really hurting. A primal sound from a voice, where the whole body and emotions are activated into a sound that tells you something. Something from the deep. I leave the laptop and run downstairs and into the front yard. From a face filled with tears, my daughter is bleeding badly from her nose. The helmet on her head is smashed in pieces and I quickly understand that she had an accident on her bike. "Oh! What did I say about riding a bike in this slippery autumn weather!?" I can hear how frightened I am, from my shivering and high-pitched voice. Luckily a friend wheels the bike next to my daughter, whispering comforting words with a calm voice. A little bit ashamed of my first reaction, I pull myself together and I wrap my arms around the little body, which cries even more with the motherly comfort. As a child, I was terrified of bicycling. Well, to be honest, I still am.

Everything went well with my daughter. We were both a bit shaken, but after some coco and comfort, we both went into our daily tasks. Me, writing my thesis about voice, and she –

playing with our two kittens. One of them is sitting in my lap right now. Undine Jordan, our 10 weeks old kitten. She likes to lie in my lap when I tap furiously on my laptop. I like it too. It is calming, the purring sound of the cat, quivering and keeping me warm and present in front of my computer. But the calming feeling lasts only for a few minutes. It's back to daily life. Chaos. The voices of three wild boys fill the house. Undine Jordan wants to join the party and off she goes, running wildly around with the other kitten, Illi. I can't stop thinking about how I'll manage to land this introductory chapter in between violin playing, basketball practice, orchestra, homework, accidents on bicycles, sore throats, vomiting and fevers. Basically, my fiddling playing husband and I hold a house filled with life. What a noise! What voices they have. And what a glamorous soprano life.

My frustration of being in the everyday chaos brings me back to my PhD study. Right now, writing this chapter and the cape of this thesis feels like a comfort. A place to escape. The cape is something I can tuck around me while I dive into my imagination for a while. Almost like reading a book. I am quickly drawn back to reality, when one of the boys is yelling: "If you don't give me the controller, I will use all the explosives I have and blow your house up!" I do hope he is talking about blowing things up in the game 'Minecraft', I think to myself. I can't help to notice the timbre in his voice. So dark, so filled with intensity. With that instrument given, he could surely follow a career as an opera singer.

This makes me grapple further. Is voice really 'a given'? I wonder. Because, as I see it, not everyone "has a voice". Have you heard that taken for granted and arguable problematic phrase before? "Everyone has a voice". I certainly have. But what does it mean to have a voice? Is voice really 'a given'? Or are some voices heard more than Others? Is voice an instrument? Or are there more polyphonic and porous ways of viewing voice?

## **1.2 Voice is such a huge topic**

I must be honest and say that the topic of my study has expanded and shifted over the course of my PhD study. I have opened many doors, but the first door in my article-based PhD study situated in music education, was opened with an obsession with female voice change. As a voice teacher in higher music education, I had many female voice students who had challenges with their voices. In one way I loved these 'cases', where the student and I had to trace the history of their voice, to try to dig into where the 'problem' came from. Very often

my voice students told stories from difficult encounters with voice in puberty. I could not help but think, could it be voice change?

Females undergo voice change. A vocal range extension downward about one-third an octave and upward three to four pitches (Sweet, 2018), with a husky, breathy voice that cracks, followed by, for some, uncertainty, shame, silence (see: Abitbol et al., 1999; Abitbol, 2019; Abitbol & Abitbol, 2014; Baker et al., 2022; Gackle, 1991, 2006, 2011, 2014; Hall, 2009; Hentschel, 2017; Sweet, 2015, 2018; Sweet & Parker, 2019). Although male voice change might be more ‘famous’ than the female voice change, at least when reading research literature, every voice changes. This has been known in literature for quite some time. Researchers substantiate the occurrence of voice change for both females and males (Abitbol et al., 1999; Abitbol & Abitbol, 2014; Kahane, 1982; Luchsinger & Arnold, 1965; Weiss, 1950). However, discussions of voice change most frequently focus on male vocal experiences. As a result, the needs of adolescent males experiencing voice change are often met, but females are left to navigate challenges of voice change on their own (Sweet, 2015). Orienting myself in the field of research on voice change triggered my curiosity and continued with more questions and explorations. The door of ‘voice change’ opened many new doors in my PhD study. Why was female voice change so hidden in literature? How did voice, music, and gender intersect?

A wave of questions and suspicion hit my PhD study, and I was drawn back to the western sociocultural context of singing I had experienced as a soprano. A culture known for its uncertainty (Strøm, 2021) and its rigid criteria for technique and aesthetics through the gaze from a culture on a female body (Borgström Källén, 2012, 2014; Borgström Källén & Sandström, 2019; Cusick, 1999; Green, 1997; Hentschel, 2017; Schlichter, 2011; Schei, 2007), where a taken for granted reproduction of gendered musical performances permeates the context (Borgström Källén & Lindgren, 2018; Nerland, 2007; Richmond, 2012).

I must admit that I met myself in the door I had opened when starting to explore voice as a topic for this PhD. I started to think about why I did not react when I was being shaped as ‘a voice’ and living in the culture of voice education? Maybe I fitted a western sociocultural context because of my ability to adapt, adjust, and to be shaped? It was certainly clear, that I belonged to a culture of sameness, both as a soprano and researcher. But did that mean that ‘it was all just fine’? Maybe I loved the culture so much, and desperately wanted to become a singer, that I did not notice the challenges that existed within the culture? Not to mention all

the times I was shut down when asking questions or when trying find my own expression, by teachers, conductors, and other singers. These memories, which still hurt, were not something I talked about loudly. To be honest, even though I was trained to have a strong and penetrating voice which should make its way through an orchestra, these memories and feelings were nothing I spoke about at all. I had been quite silent about them. Did I ‘take for granted’ the idea that ‘everyone has a voice’, and my experience and expectations of a western sociocultural context of singing? And, why on earth should I start to grapple with these questions now, when I was supposed to be a researcher – researching the voice?

As a beginning, researching voice seemed so simple. So easy and clear. Voice was an object to be researched from the outside. Now, everything was so complicated. So chaotic. Now, that resonated very well with my everyday chaotic life. But I had a need to know – what voices was I researching? How was voice commonly viewed? And why did I have to take on this common view of researching voice? From having a nice time in academia, teaching and singing – everything might seem fine on the outside. But a nagging feeling was haunting me. Demanding me to dig deeper, from the inside. Well, something was clearly disturbing me. Problems. Such a paradox. I had a problem with what I loved most, voice. Maybe there was more to the soprano voice than I originally thought?

### **1.3 Voicing problems and questions**

In the beginning of my PhD study, I viewed voice in the same way it is commonly seen in research literature, where studies on voice is divided in two ‘worlds’, either philosophical or material (Eidsheim & Meizel, 2019; Schlichter & Eidsheim, 2014). This binary thinking of voice results in a way of viewing and researching voice as an object or instrument, ready to be shaped from the outside (Eidsheim, 2019). However, the emerging field of voice studies (Eidsheim & Meizel, 2019) embraces a view of voice in its broadest term, while seeking to understand or interact with voice knowledge beyond a narrow or a defined area of inquiry. Voice studies aims to synthesizing the myriad ways voice is conceptualized and researched in between disciplines – in between the two ‘worlds’ it is commonly viewed in (Eidsheim & Meizel, 2019). This way of thinking about voice was very different from the way I was used to working with voice, trained in a western sociocultural context of singing, or even the way I taught voice in higher music education. To be honest, it was also different to the way I thought about voice in life. And that triggered my curiosity.

If voice could be viewed in the broadest way possible and move in between and beyond the two ‘worlds’ of voice, perhaps my vigilance and urge to listen and analyze voices could be helpful, after all? And maybe, the voices around and in me did not have to ‘stay away’ from my research? I had met myself in the door when starting to dig for knowledge about voice. There were bigger and more known doors with more solid pathways to research voice that could be opened, but for once, I did not pick the most common or known door. This time, I needed to open a door with pathways to my voicing body. In one way, my choice of door departed from the precise and narrow concept of ‘female voice change’. There were more voices to study than just female voice.

Taking on a different way of viewing and researching voice – I did not research a voice – I researched notions of voice. Voices in the broadest term, meant that the voice of my crying daughter, the intensity of my sons shouting, the way I embodied my students singing, how memories from my own experience in a western sociocultural context of singing, teaching, and now researching, mattered. Even the chaotic and loud voices at home, living my not so glamorous soprano life. So, embracing this broad view of voice, letting voice move in and out of the context of daily life, I ask the following main research question for my thesis:

*What possibilities might lie within a performative autoethnographic study of a soprano-teacher-researcher’s embodied voice experienced in a western sociocultural context of singing?*

I have chosen a broad and open-ended main research question that is open for possibilities and entrances to knowledges. From the body as evidence, I lean on a performative autoethnography (Spry, 2011, 2016) as my methodological anchoring. Researching voice from the inside, embracing the lived and performed aspect of researching voice, I also engage and lean on a performative paradigm (Bolt, 2016; Haseman, 2006). A performative paradigm asks for how knowledge is created and embraces a research process where knowledge production and expression are intertwined. I challenge the common idea that voice is ‘a given’ – fixed, innate, but improvable – as a soprano, teacher and researcher situated in music education. I look at voice even as a mother.

Through my study, I bring voice into the material world it is experienced within. I bring voice into a contextual, conceptual, and political level, by engaging in feminist new materialism (Alaimo & Heckman, 2008), and different post-human philosophies of thought, such as

Nomadic theory (Braidotti, 2011). These theoretical perspectives are not the most common in music education research. It can be said that there are even a lack of post-human and new methodological approaches in music education (Zimmerman Nilsson et al., 2022). Music education is a space where envisioning new and beyond traditions is challenging (Houmann, 2017). I decided to create a different perspective on voice in music education. Performative aspects and post-human thinking offer new possibilities in music education research (Asplund, 2022; Ferm Almqvist & Hentschel, 2022) – then maybe it was about time, that a soprano challenged her own voice and a western sociocultural context she was part of? I guess I was ready to take on this challenge of looking at the context I have been part of because, to put it bluntly, I am fed up with the taken for granted attitudes about voice in music education, vocal pedagogy and in daily life. Through embracing ways to learn about voice as something more fluid, vulnerable but powerful, something that connects us as material beings in the world, I have asked the following sub research questions to try to voice dialogues with other beings, other voices, and the world:

- How is a singer’s feminist performative “I” created through autoethnography?
- How might a performative duoethnography be understood as an expanded way of methodological thinking, and how can it expand into pedagogy and pedagogical practices?
- How might Nomadic Theory lend new entrances to (re)think voice and offer diversity in vocal pedagogy?
- How might (auto)ethnographies create alternative ways of producing, analyzing, and representing voice?

These four sub-questions are materialized in four articles. The first article, *Facing the Soprano* (Jenssen, 2021), examines how a singer’s feminist performative “I” is created through autoethnography. Article two, *A tale of grappling* (Jenssen & Martin, 2021), explores how performative duoethnography can be understood as an expanded way of methodological thinking. In *A different high soprano laughter* (Jenssen, 2022a) I ponder how Nomadic theory might lend new entrances to think about voice, and how this re-thinking offers diversity in vocal pedagogy. The final article, *The voice lessons* (Jenssen, 2022b), acknowledges the value of (auto)ethnographies as a way of producing, analyzing, and representing voice.

## 1.4 A storied thesis

As a child, my mother read books to me when tucking the blanket around me in bed trying to get me to sleep, and my father told stories. I still know the books my mom read by heart – and when I read the same books for my children, I hardly need look at the pages. If I forget something, my children will let me know, loudly. My father’s stories were the craziest tales about animals and books that could speak. There was one, about Hedgehog Peter who had a best friend, a sausage who could sing, named Anton. They both lived under the stairs outside my bedroom. Although I knew these were ‘just’ stories, I can assure you I checked many times underneath the stairs to see if there was someone there. Because I was certain that on occasion I could hear voices coming from the stairs.

You might already notice, but I believe in stories as a way of knowing. Through stories I trace the past of my voice, voice the present, but I also envision a future voice. Through stories I can explore questions. But what are stories in my research? In my thesis I use the terms narratives and stories interchangeably. Jerome Bruner (2002) writes that narrative is an invitation to problem finding, not a lesson in problem solving, “it is about the road rather than about the in to which it leads [...] The conversation of private trouble into public plight makes well-wrought narrative so powerful, so comforting, so dangerous, so culturally essential” (p. 35). Bruner’s words describe the process of my PhD study so well. How starting to trace stories invited me to problem finding. How every story carried with itself a new perspective to care about. To take time with and listen to. For me, stories became a way of listening. To Others, through the self. I have titled my thesis *Voicing dialogues*. Through writing stories I aim to create a conversation, with the reader, myself, and Others who are near and far, alive and dead – within the contexts I am exploring. I do not think I could write these stories and create dialogues without trusting my embodied knowledge. That knowledge was what made me enter the world of Others. Through writing stories, I enter imagined new worlds.

Writing from the body, trusting embodied knowledge through believing *in* stories (Hearne, 2015) might be an empathic and ethical way of doing research. It reminds me so much of the act of singing. As a soprano, telling stories is somewhat organic. To reach the audience, I need to embody the story I am telling. If I do not do it well enough, I lose the listener. I even lose myself, the body I sing with. Connecting to the core of the body, embodying both repertoire, technique and character is vital when I sing. It means opening to be able to connect. I think that is what I have been doing in this thesis – I have been connecting my body



through writing stories. Stories resonate. They can bring people closer (Bochner, 2014). But stories might also bring distance – they might create divides. When writing about voice, creating a voice in my work through writing stories, there is always a risk to silence someone’s voice. Because “even the most inclusive narrations will be exclusive” (Hast, 2018, p. 7). That is an ethical issue to take care of. To be aware of. If not, the voice of Others will remain silent or static, with no room for movement.

### **1.5 Voicing sameness and difference**

My embodied voice from a western sociocultural context of singing is a privileged voice. I write from the perspective of a majority. In my thesis – I have tried to story and stay with both sameness and difference. Without the discussion of these aspects, voicing dialogues is not possible. If dialogues are about to happen, both difference and sameness needs to be acknowledged. I acknowledge the majority and sameness of the voice I hold – at the same time, I have tried to consider how I might open for difference. I have found it redeeming to look at difference through the lens of Braidotti’s Nomadic theory (2011), where one of the grounding ideas is to look at difference not just as sexual difference, or difference between women and men, but as difference within the subject. Difference is not something to be measured. All difference, micro difference, or even shy difference might be felt differently within every subject. Difference is always there, all the time. It is already here, in my writing. As an echo, or an imaginary. Within all the directions my text and stories could have taken, or all the Other meanings my words could have, there are different possibilities and alternatives. This makes me think about silence. In my thesis I explore voice. Voice is often directly connected to sound (Eidsheim, 2019). But, what about silence? There is silence in my thesis as well. In between the words, the stories. Maybe giving space for silence also offers a space for difference. Hearne (2005) writes about the space within a story, as the silence between words – but also the space around or beyond the story which translates as silence between the teller and listener, where both kinds of space are active rather than passive. Trusting the reader as an active participant of my thesis has been a goal in my writing and a way of offering difference.

The affirmation of the possibilities within difference is what creates robust alternatives to voice from – and is what feminist philosophies are all about (Braidotti, 2011). Both sameness and difference are concepts that I use, but these concepts also shift during the journey of the

thesis. That process is part of my discoveries, and therefore many of the concepts I use will be unpacked in later parts of the thesis too.

So, eventually it was embracing life itself, my messy and chaotic life as a soprano, teacher, and researcher – my embodied knowledge that allowed me to ‘land’ my introduction chapter. I have the fabrics for my cape in front me – the different pieces are resting in my lap with a sleeping kitten beneath. My hands are still a bit bloody, from comforting and cleaning my daughter’s nose. I better wash it off before I get it on the fabric of the cape. Blood is incredibly difficult to wash off. Or maybe I will just let it stay – and see what happens. Sometimes these small risks are worth taking. Such risks might bring you into journeys and stories you never dreamt about. Perspectives that are not yet seen but are waiting around the corner. If you care to, follow me around the next corner, into the world of theory. Maybe the world I welcome you to will not share the most common theories for a thesis situated in music education. But why not step into more uncharted territory? Sopranos, teachers, and mothers do the most incredible things to make things happen in the most challenging situations, bloodied hands and all.

## Chapter 2. Breath

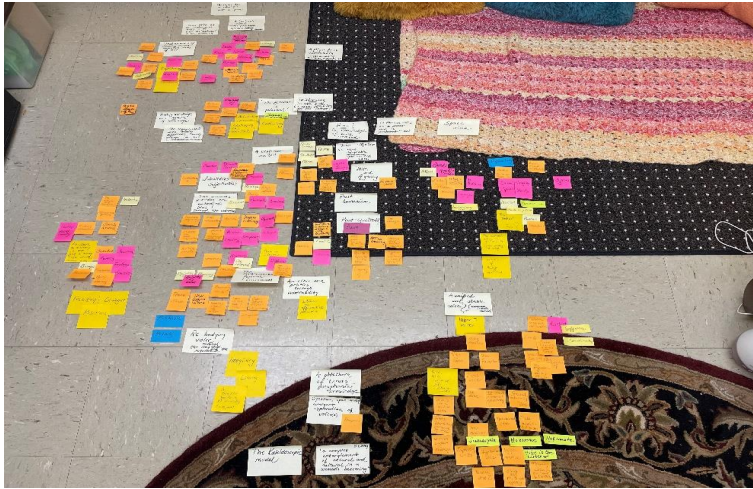


*Photo 1 Mapping*

### 2.1 So many colors

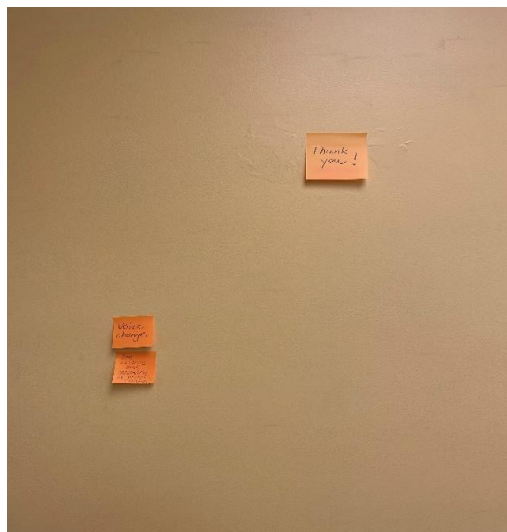
“Theory is not about showing how ‘smart’ you are or showing off ‘look at all this serious theory I have’. It can be playful, and it can be, hold on...FUN!”. I am not sure if it was my ‘PhD mind’ going crazy, spending too many hours reading, or desperately seeking the perfect theoretical landscape and structure to use, but I found myself talking with theory. Theory was something that stopped me in my tracks. Theory made me listen. Really listen. To stories, to concepts, to life, surroundings. What a joy! But I can assure you, I did not start with a feeling of joy over theory. When I started to read theory and research on related topics to my study, I thought of theory as something that needed to be ‘applied’ to my work. I found that idea of application quite difficult. Such an approach was far from the ‘doing’ I was used to and felt comfortable with when using my voice as a soprano and teacher. When someone would ask me what kind of theories and existing literature I was using in my dissertation, I very often started to tell stories. Stories that connected the theory I was reading into my daily practice. In this way I started to converse with what I was reading.

Writing this chapter, I started to map out the theory and existing research related to the topics I had been in conversation with. I brainstormed words and phrases that I touched on when working on my study, writing my articles, crafting my stories. So many colors, so many notes! But the big question still loomed - how to find a 'logic' to convey all of this in the chapter of this thesis, when theories and literature converge with my research focus. I questioned: Can theory be felt? If so, how can theory help me sense the landscape I am navigating for my work? And what theories are vital for exploring voice – what theories enable me to have a 'tuned listening' (Bresler, 2019), where I can linger with theory, dive deeper, and make theory my own. I guess I was asking how might I think with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017)? But also, and maybe most importantly, how to *breathe* with theory? These are questions I have been grappling with when writing this chapter. It was not just the theory that provided 'answers' for how I could navigate my PhD study. Rather, the following theory chapter follows the story of how I, piece by piece, found different colors, layers, and depths of theory to build and expand notions of voice in my study. In the picture above, I show how I started to map out the chapter with post-it notes on the yellow wall in my office, which still had a sharp odour of fresh paint. I am not sure if it was the fresh paint that made the sticky notes continually fall off no matter how hard I pressed them into the wall, but when I came back to the office after the first day of 'mapping on the wall', almost every post it note had fallen down. I had to redo the whole process (and this time, I decided to take pictures). As the process developed, I moved the post it notes from the wall and down to the floor. I made clusters with sticky (some not so sticky) notes that 'belonged' together.



*Photo 2 Clusters and bridges*

Some notes overlapped, and some found clusters I did not originally plan to put them in. Other words on the sticky notes just wanted to stay in between and made bridges between and across the clusters. And some never made it to the floor and stayed on the wall, alone, but acknowledged.



*Photo 3 Thank you!*

Luckily, the office was generous in size, so I could use the entire floor to map and remap my ideas (thank heaven for the cleaners not removing a thing – maybe they have met this sight and process in other offices at the university before). I am also very glad my colleague, Dr. Bridget Sweet, had a large supply of post-it notes. So many colors. So many words. But also, so many possibilities.

In this chapter I tune in and out, listening to how theory and the stories intertwined to understand and explore voice. Breathing with theory to expand and embrace the many colors and shapes of voice.

## **2.2 ‘What’s the problem with voice?’**

“Why do you use the term ‘singing’? I don’t ‘sing’ – as a Sami I ‘joik’. It is a part of my culture. Something I do. Do I belong in your conference when I don’t sing, but joik, Runa?” I am two minutes away from welcoming participants to the *Voicing Dialogues Conference*, where I have invited Frode Fjellheim – a Professor at Nord University (and a fabulous joiker and composer) – to do a performance to open the conference. After a successful sound check everything is supposed to be all clear, and he asks me this question. My reaction? Well, stressed and a little confused to say the least, I answered that of course he ‘belonged’ to this conference. That was the whole point of the conference – to voice dialogues, to share knowledge from working with voices in different practices to create new perspectives - knowledge that I have found to be hidden behind locked doors in the voice studio or other spaces where voice was practiced. Frode’s question challenged me in the moment. But maybe more importantly, he shook my view of voice and much of the literature on voice that I had been reading.

To be honest, I was confident that I knew voice. After all, I had spent much of my life working on my singing voice. My way of thinking about and practicing voice was steeped in the community and profession I was trained in – classical singing, known for its uncertainty (Strøm, 2021), for its rigour, and disciplined way of creating a voice (Schei, 2007). I was trained in a western classical vocal performance context, where the core of the pedagogy remained focused on how to produce a desired sound, develop range, speed and agility in a voice and grow as an interpreter while maintaining vocal health (Eidsheim, 2008).

This focus on ‘how to create the voice’ was also reflected the literature I read when I studied vocal performance at the music academy in Norway. One of my favorite books was Oren Brown’s (1996) *Discover your voice: How to develop healthy voice habits*. It was the required book on our syllabus in vocal pedagogy. The book offered the perfect ‘recipe’ on how to develop voice. Brown’s way of thinking about the voice came from the field of phonology. *The science of the singing voice* (Sundberg, 1989) also came from the same field, and it still stands on my bookshelf. It is one of those books you are expected to have as a voice teacher, where much of the literature comes from a western and mainly European research tradition (Thomaidis, 2017). This was how I knew voice. I opened the book *The science of the singing voice*, and the first heading on page one was ‘What is voice?’ and the famous Swedish researcher Johan Sundberg (1989) explains:

We would all agree that we use our voice when we speak or sing. To speak or to sing is to move one’s lips. Tongue, jaw, larynx, and so on, while an airstream from the lungs passes the vocal folds. In this way we generate sounds, which we call *voice sounds*. (p.1).

Sundberg (1989) goes on to talk about other sounds, such as hawking, whispering, and laughing – and that such sounds also can be labelled as voice sounds:

All sounds can be considered voice sounds if they originate from an airstream from the lungs that is processed by the vocal folds and then modified by the pharynx, the mouth, and perhaps also the nose cavities [...] a singer uses this tool as a musical instrument. (p. 1).

Yes. This was all very familiar. And by the way, I have always liked definitions. Lists and clear answers also appeal to me too. Readings such as those from Brown and Sundberg provided the perfect recipe for me about how to create the sound of *The human voice* (Eken, 2014), including how to nurture it, how to shape it. Brown’s book even included a CD with samples of ‘voice sounds’ to listen to and mimic. It was like having a voice lesson at home – lovely! This way of thinking about voice fitted the master-apprentice pedagogy perfectly (Nielsen, 1998, 1999, 2006; Rakena, 2016), which was the most common way of teaching the instrument – voice – at least in the context of higher music education in Norway (Nerland, 2003), and the Eurocentric theatre schools, conservatories, and university programs (Magnat, 2020). So, although I had just started on my PhD (which was totally overwhelming) and felt

out of my depth in many ways, there was one thing to hold on to. I knew voice. Or so I assumed. But, when I read this literature again and again, and returned to it when starting to write this chapter – there was something disturbing me.

### **2.3 There is no definition**

The definition Sundberg wrote was somehow bothering me. Who is the ‘we’ that agrees on this definition? Was Sundberg speaking about a homogenous ‘we’, an assumed sameness of who is listening to a voice and who is producing the sound? And what about ‘other’ sounds? There must be more ‘sounds’ included in the act of making voice, teaching voice, and performing voice? Although I had worked much of my career as a singer in a vocal ensemble, where the homogenous sound was something the choir (or at least the conductor) strived to fulfil, I was troubled by the expected sameness when creating and listening to voices. From starting this PhD with an assumption that I ‘knew’ voice, I had arrived at a point where that unsettled feeling was nagging at me to be explored further.

Yes, there were definitions of voice, but these definitions came from somewhere. The bookshelf above my desk, which had inscribed the knowledge I carried of voice, suddenly felt very heavy. The literature on my bookshelf contained knowledge of the voice made within the socio-cultural and political standpoints of a western culture. Definitions born out of a traditional, patriarchal, and Eurocentric culture, oozing systematic exclusion, marginalization or silencing of the experienced lived materiality of voice (Thomadis, 2017). I questioned the definitions that I had always relied on. This realization *was* disturbing me, and perhaps most disturbing was why had I not thought about this before?

Reflecting on the definitions of voice that I had encountered and embodied, I was not satisfied. I was ready for change. In one way I wanted to ‘move on’ with my work and show the reader a solid definition of voice as a foundation for my PhD work to develop from. In another way I felt triggered to dig deeper. To stop and question. Again, and again. This felt riskier because there was no fixed object or phenomenon ready to be discovered. Within my unsettlement of voice, I also sensed possibility. Possibility was a feeling I had been carrying for a while, sandwiched next to the nagging feelings of dissatisfaction and disturbance, jostling for space.



Inspired, I began to wonder and imagine new potentially wonderful stories. Could there be other ways to know voice? Could I find a way to think voice, away from the ‘taken for granted’ way of conceiving voice? Away from ‘voice as a carrier of the self’, ‘voice as a fingerprint’. When engaging in different ways of thinking about voice, I gradually started to become aware of the sound of my writing voice. Voice has also been a huge topic in creative writing (Elbow, 2007). Creative writing was a field that I gravitated towards, and I saw the discussions of the personal and impersonal writing voice, discussions which align with the current conversations in the field of voice studies. The creative writing and voice studies intersection is certainly something I could dive further into – but perhaps not in the scope of this thesis. I needed to focus on the task at hand, and that was thinking about my thinking of voice.

I could not carry out this reductionist way of thinking voice. It reduced voice to an object or instrument, a fixed entity ready to be shaped or researched from the outside – or voice as a defined material, a passage from the inside to the outside (Ahmed, 2014). Voice felt absent and distant when considering voice in such ways. I found myself reaching towards the interdisciplinary field of ‘voice studies’ (see for example: Eidsheim & Meizel, 2019; Schlichter & Eidsheim, 2014; Thomaidis & Macpherson, 2015). I dived into this landscape of research and theory, and learned that what distinguishes voice studies from other scholarships of voice is that it seeks to understand or interact with voice beyond a narrow or confined area of inquiry (Eidsheim & Meizel, 2019). Voice studies, which especially draws from sound studies (Schlichter & Eidsheim, 2014), speak to ways in which the symbolic, material, and cultural intermingle and co-produce voice. In this interdisciplinary field of studying voice, voice and its surroundings represent no stable category, but are negotiated with every utterance and every listening. Voice is complex and includes so many aspects of our interaction with and meaning making in the world that it cannot be viewed as or studied by a single discipline or reduced to a definition (Eidsheim & Meizel, 2019). Rather, voice could be discussed in a “shifting landscape of questions and concerns, as a proliferative interdisciplinary” (Thomaidis & Macpherson, 2015, p. xi). Frode’s question “do I belong in your conference when I don’t sing, but joik, Runa?” was still lingering in the back of my mind. Maybe it was not a question of one way *or* the other? Maybe, and I give advance warning, I do swear in this thesis: There was no fucking definition! No ‘answer’ to be claimed. Voice could not be defined in one definition, or even defined at all. The phenomena voice flows in

between borders, contexts, locations, and cultures. Just like Frode's joik, voice could be seen as a matter of constant creation and being in the practice it lived in.

## **2.4 Voice as an inter- or in-between discipline**

If there was no unified and stable voice, what then could voice be viewed as? Voice as 'in-betweenness' pervades discourse about voice in the field of voice studies (Thomaidis & Macpherson, 2015), where scholars seek to combine or find a space in between the two most common ways of researching voice, the symbolic or the material (Schlichter & Eidsheim, 2014). The in-betweenness was something I dwelled with. The spaces where movement happens. There was a vast knowledge on voice and what it could offer when being viewed as in-between. This "in-betweenness" of voice was explored and described in Lacanian terms by Mladen Dolar (2006), as "a bodily missile which has detached itself from the source, emancipated itself, yet remains corporeal" (p. 73), while the voice's power to create a "liminal space of permanent transitions, passages, and transformation" (p. 128) was expressed by Erika Fischer Lichte (2008). Roland Barthes (1977) defined the 'grain' of the voice, and Adriana Cavarero (2005) challenged the voice as an object, in her text *For more than one voice*. From a musicology perspective approaching opera studies, Michelle Duncan (2004) described voice as something that "puts matter into circulation" (p. 303), while Nori Neumark (2017) argues that the in-betweenness of voice makes voice "work intersubjectively, relationally, affectively, and emotionally—transmitting and moving through us and between others" (p. 23). Performance theorist Amelia Jones (2010) uses the words "hinging quality [...] bending and connecting, opening and intertwining" (p. 146) to make us feel the in-betweenness of voice.

While reading this literature mentioned above, I saw there were so many possibilities, openings, entrances to working and thinking of the voice. No end! What if my voice teachers and the curriculum in voice pedagogy had a hint of in-betweenness? Maybe it was there? Maybe I did not notice it as a student? I gave a lot of effort and focus to my own voice studies as a student. Understatement. I *lived* for voice. But I was trained in a culture that did not highlight the in-betweenness of voice, nor its fluidity, or its relational and listening aspects. As a student, I had 'a' voice – an object ready to be formed – and within that formation of offering my voice it was at the same time being prepared, trained, and shaped to be 'shut down'.

## **2.5 ‘Shut up and sing’ – stepping beyond normative views of voice**

“If you don’t make this phrase right now – I will shoot you” – we both laugh out loud, my voice teacher and I. We are in the middle of our weekly voice lesson, the highlight of my week, studying vocal performance at the music academy. An education I longed for and fought so hard to get into. I can’t believe it. I am going to be a singer! A soprano. This is serious business. Of course, my teacher does not literally mean she will shoot me. But I also know I better get it right this time. I better deliver what she asks for. I am actually pretty good at doing what I am told – repeating the sound(s) of my wonderful teacher, who had an impressive career as an opera diva touring the world. She certainly knows how to sing. But, before I give it a shot (or get shot), I can’t help asking with a gentle voice; “But, I really feel pain in the top of my larynx when I move to the highest tone. It hurts when I swallow and when I move the hand over my throat...”. “It costs to sing, Runa”, the teacher snapped. “You should feel it in your body. Your body is your instrument. Don’t be afraid to use it”. That was how voice was viewed. An object to be formed. That was the whole point of going to the music academy – to have a teacher that knew the content of singing and who could tell me how to make it as a singer. But, as a researcher, I now saw that voice was not a static object at all. Performing, teaching, and researching voice is about giving voice, and letting voice be heard. It is not a one-way track. It is a passage, constantly in response with its surroundings. Voice is a movement and constant becoming from the inside, as a passage to the world. And the other way around.

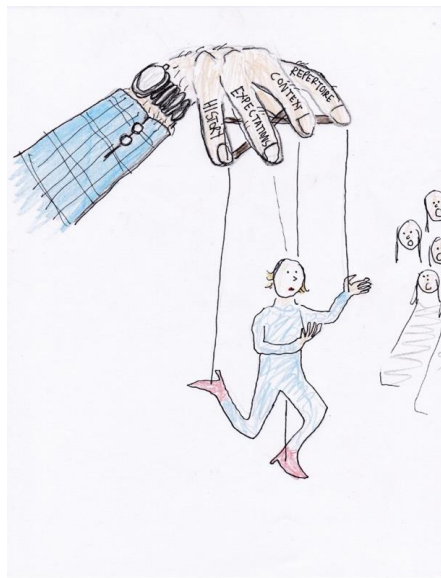
To explore voice involves critically questioning who and what are being formed, into what, are there other possibilities than the most traditional and common ways? If so, what do these ‘new’ ways of thinking voice enable? Vocal performer and artistic researcher Elisabeth Holmertz (2020) investigates Otherness and Self in performing baroque opera. She explains how even opera singers can sing with the specific voices we are given in an opera, we must understand that there are a thousand more voices we could sing with, if we wanted to. I could not agree more, but I also wonder how that would work in practice? Is vocal pedagogy and music education open for these thousand voices mentioned by Holmertz?

This memory of being shut down in the voice studio by the teacher who threatened to ‘shoot me’ still resonates in my body. As a student in the voice studio, I was on the threshold of a career as a singer. Now, there is another reverberation. Today, I am on the threshold as an academic. I could now critically engage with theory on voice. Theory that helped me expand

my knowledge on voice. I was in a privileged position to ask questions and to explore. I decided to take advantage of my position and to shake my history.

Shaking my history also involved shaking my own pedagogical practice, where I was repeating the acts I had learned from my teachers in the voice studio and practices I engaged with ‘Repeated acts’. I was trained to repeat and reproduce sounds, repertoire, aesthetic ideals from a western classical music history. Music that I loved. But repeating did not necessarily have to mean reproducing, as history had taught me. I could perform but perform otherwise when repeating acts. To help me navigate this terrain, I started to listen to and seriously consider the idea of ‘gender as performative’, coined by Judith Butler (1990).

My first discovery of Butler’s theory, through reading the Reddy and Butler (2004) text, was to see voice and identity “not made in a single moment in time” (p. 116). It takes time for identities to develop. They are dynamic and historical, made again and again. Butler describes that the distinctive element of being human is that being human is always about becoming, and urges us to ask the question “through what constellations of social discourse and power was I brought into the world?” (p. 116). Voice and power. Butler’s question created chills down my spine. I read Butler’s words while I saw my own voice being constructed in a slow motion in my mind.



*Drawing 4 Puppet singer show*

In Butler's (1990) view there are norms we are born into – gendered, racial, national – which lay the premise for what kind of subject we can be. We inhabit these deciding norms when performing them. Voice as a performed gendered act triggered critical thoughts. I was starting to scratch my skin, like I wanted to see what was beneath it. After all these years with repeating acts from norms in a western classical sociocultural context of singing, the cultural imprint on my body was strong. My skin was thick and resistant, but still permeable. I was back in the voice studio with my teacher again. Maybe there was more to it than my poor singing technique or failure to imitate my teachers voice when having voice lessons? I had repeated acts, as a very loyal and obedient student negotiating my own voice identity, as a “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (Butler, 1990, p. 45), in the culture I moved within.

Thinking with Butler's (1990) theory, the voice could not reflect an inner female or male core, and such – the singer could not choose which gender to enact, because of “meanings already socially established” (p. 191). Gender. Stereotyped gendered roles were a part of my daily life in a western sociocultural context of singing. I also handled that part well. I was the ‘born’ soprano. I read with curiosity and understood that in Butler's view gender is inextricably connected to a heteronormative framework, where only certain voices appear as intelligible. Butler's theory was like ‘reading’ the sociocultural context I came from and still worked within. I thought about my gay friends and colleagues, who were told to act more masculine on stage – after all, they were baritones. Chills down my spine again. If I could think of voice as performed, rather than a priori, I could maybe find ways to view voice that embraced more nuances of voices, than voices within binaries.



*Drawing 5 Your measurements, please*

I did well as a soprano (if ‘doing well’ meant getting paid jobs), so why change something that appeared to be working well for me? I belonged to the ‘majority’ of voices and fitted into the expected categories of voice (hence the paid jobs). In a highly competitive culture, I knew how to survive – and as a teacher I could teach Others how to survive and do well too. I knew there were many other voices that did not fit into the sociocultural context as well as I did. Applying Butler’s framework to my own study, I saw that although I handled my performed gendered voice well, my performance did not come without a cost. And, did I want to continue teaching voice, as the way the ‘majority’ thought about and taught voice? I was in ‘a loop’, repeating patterns from the culture I was trained in, but having the opportunity to explore voice in a PhD study I could seek a way to get out of that loop.

Why should we care? Why should we not just continue as the majority? These are also questions asked by Susanne Cusick (1999), one of the first scholars who applied and extended Butler’s framework into music scholarship, with the idea of the performance of social categories take place within the human voice. Cusick (1999) describes vocal parameters into masculinity and femininity. She investigates two artists, and writes that the refined performance from singers, perform quite specific subjects’ positions that can be intelligible to their audience without ‘references’. She shared how: “The intelligibility of their gender performances depends on the audience’s experience of the ‘background’ of cultural norms

that link singing to gender, sex and sexuality” (p. 38). Cusick (1999) continues that that “singing is a discourse one can accept, reject, or play with” (p. 38), and uses Eddie Vedder, the famous vocalist in Pearl Jam as an example of how the singing voice can be rejected. Vedder’s voice performs a refusal to accept the discipline of singing, “refusing thus to re-inscribe his subordination to culture, refusing to submit to a set of laws (tonality, mode, group intonation, a particular sense of time) that might be understood as metaphors for Law itself” (p. 38). I spent hours listening to Vedder’s voice in my youth. I sat in front of him every day after school, watching him on MTV. He was the coolest. He was different. He produced a sound differently from what was expected of him. In Cusick’s (1999) analysis, Vedder refused disciplines that would perform culture’s right to control the internal spaces of his body. As such, the culture could not control his subjectivity.

I really felt triggered by Cusick’s analysis and use of Butler. Cusick ‘messed’ with the ‘normal’ way of viewing voice being socially related to gender. Although I came from a western classical context of singing – Cusick’s words and analysis made sense. I viewed singing as a performance of the body. Singing is a medium through which people negotiate their relationship to Others, their cohort, and their cohort’s values (Cusick, 1999). In understanding my own performance and its relationship to culture, I could reveal, or see it as a ‘symptom’ of my relationship “to the power regimes that enforce culturally intelligible performances of gender and sex” (Cusick, 1999, p. 42). I could make voice intelligible in between the expected categories of voice, and reveal power constructions in the discourse I was trying to make voice intelligible in. To create change. To contribute to a better world. To show that I care. To find alternative ways of producing, analyzing, and representing voice, not only as a singer, but as a teacher and researcher.

No wonder Butler’s term ‘gender as performative’ was often used in research on voice in music education. I was not alone in my thoughts of feeling a dissonance between me being prepared and ready to have a voice as a singer, as the same time trained into an acceptance of being ‘shut down’. Ongoing struggles between empowerment and objectification, between being an acting subject and being the object of a disciplining gaze is described by Cecilia Björk (2011). The focus on the gaze on females in dance and voice education is also explored by Carina Borgström Källen and Birgitta Sandström (2019). They describe voice as an instrument constructed by special terms and conditions, which differ from other instruments, which can be linked to the singer primarily using its own body in the musical performance.

Women and singers are both exposed as objects and of the male gaze, and this bodily discipline harmonizes with western performing arts aesthetic ideals and traditions (Green, 1997; Rosenberg, 2012). Characteristics of how normative femininity is constructed, through actions, movements, sounds, and language used in teaching, can be seen as an expression of both performing arts traditions and for how femininity is constructed of the surrounding society (Green 1997; Rosenberg, 2012). Stereotyped gender constructions are discussed by Borgström Källén (2012, 2014), where key discoveries are that there is a lack of a reflective critical discussion among teachers, students and pupils which maintains stereotypical gender constructions in music teaching, and that questions about teaching methods and content are not sufficiently discussed.

Vocal performer and musicologist Nina Eidsheim (2008, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2019), who has done extended work on voice, especially related to the field of sound studies, suggests that we can better capture what voice is and what we identify voice in three correctives. Firstly, voice is not singular; it is collective. Secondly, voice is not innate; it is cultural. Thirdly, voice's source is not the singer; it is the listener. There was something 'going on' in existing research in the field of voice. Layers of voice(s) was slowly revealed in the literature I read (but also the way I read it). In the beginning of my study, my view of the voice felt like a closed door. No entrance to the body. Theories and research I now engaged with made me open my view on voice, as I could start to identify what was behind the culture I was shaped in, and that shaped Others. Starting to engage in feminist theories, especially drawing from Butler as a starting point, I could identify what kind of performative acts my voice was expected to do to make my voice intelligible. These were universal and the acts of the majority, divided in binaries. But still, there was something missing when reading theories and relevant research related to my study. Something I wanted to express, but did not have the language to express, yet. I wanted to challenge the universal. I needed more conversations, more listening. A deeper breathing. I was tuning in with further help of feminist theories to be able to know other(wise).

## **2.6 Searching to connect voice and body**

I felt I was on a 'right' path in searching for theory that could be vital in my tuned listening for voice. I understood why I never blamed my teacher for threatening to 'shoot' me. There were other and deeper layers and structures in the society that needed to be pointed at that



went beyond this teacher's actions. I saw that voice was now touching on a political level – and engaging with my embodied knowledge, could make me come closer to that layer. But, if I was supposed to bring the voice of the body into the discussion, I also had questions about Butler's theory of 'gender as performative'. If my voice was performed within the sociocultural context of singing, how could I enter the material body? I saw the body was not empty – not only socially constructed.

Using Butler, did I limit myself to a soprano with a voice, but an empty body? Others had critiqued Butler's theory (see for example: Alaimo & Heckman, 2008). Many feminist philosophers and researchers have searched for an additional view to the social constructionist, to embrace the materiality of the body (Alaimo & Heckman, 2008). From this critique and search, a new feminist strand is created. Under the term feminist new materialism and feminist post-humanism (Braidotti, 2011, 2013, 2019, 2022), all kinds of matter is viewed as something that is (per)formative in itself, not only formed by language, culture and politics. This perspective embraces and has provided a new way of thinking about the materiality of the body "as itself an active, sometimes recalcitrant, force" (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008, p. 4). Feminist materialisms are therefore exploring bodies to be active, rather than passive. So, if the body was an active participant in the creation of knowledge, not a passive objective ready to be formed or 'shot at', then the body mattered. It was not about finding out if I explored a singing voice, or a 'cultural' voice, a female or male voice, or a soprano or alto voice. I was seeking a perspective which dissolved the divide between the 'worlds' voice was viewed within. I was no longer an obedient soprano. I was ready to perform differently. To perform other categories than the dualistic and binary way, which Butler (1990) and now feminist new materialisms helped me see.

Rosi Braidotti was one of the philosophers who spoke about and actively used art as an entrance to understanding and finding new perspectives of thinking. I started to read her book *The Posthuman* and was captivated when Braidotti (2013) used art to describe the relationship with post-human thinking. A philosophy that decentered the subject, the human (which she exemplified with Da Vinci's *The Vitruvian man* as an ideal of bodily perfection) as the center for knowing and claiming truths in the world. In *The Posthuman*, Braidotti (2013) invited Others, meaning all entities, human and non-human, which she called "Zoe" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 16), in the production of knowledge. Braidotti (2013) saw a connection to art, which was:

posthuman by structure, as it carries us to the limits of what our embodied selves can do or endure. In so far as art stretches the boundaries of representation to the utmost, it reaches the limits of life itself and thus confronts the horizon of death. (p. 107).

I saw a potential filled with creativity in Braidotti's thinking. I continued into the world of this feminist philosopher. I even wrote a speech about Braidotti to my supervisor, Rose.

**From:** Runa Hestad Jessen <runa.h.jessen@nord.no>  
**Date:** Wednesday, 28 April 2021 at 15:53  
**To:** Rosemary Kate Martin <rosemary.k.martin@ntnu.no>  
**Subject:** SV: constantly changing and becoming

*Dear Rose*

*I think Braidotti's ideas (or new materialist perspective in general) on the singing voice is a perfect match. Bodies are "open" and through that openness, constantly changing and becoming. Singing is one of the activities that beautifully demonstrate the "open materiality" of culturally embedded human bodies. When Braidotti speaks of 'life' is "an acquired taste, an addiction like any other, an open-ended project. One must work at it. Life is passing and we do not own it, we just inhabit it, not unlike a time-share location" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 133). It is SO like the performance of voice. I feel Braidotti is a philosopher that embraces the flesh of the singing body – the multilayered, diversity and 'difference' in voices (in a positive way).*

*That was Runa's speech on Braidotti. Thank you.*

*Hope you have a nice walk in the sun (and snow).*

*Big hugs,*

*Runa*

After a warm applaud from my supervisor for my Braidotti speech, I dived further into Nomadic theory (Braidotti, 2011). I was intrigued by the idea that thinking was structurally Nomadic. What did that entail? (And what did that enable in my study?) Braidotti (2011) explains the principal of Nomadic thinking in three ways; conceptually, politically, and contextually.

Conceptually, Nomadic thought stresses embodiment as the idea and structure of thinking. Therefore, Nomadic theory is a bodily materialism that blurs and unifies the dualisms

between mind and body. Ontology is therefore viewed as a process, as constant becoming. This way of thinking results in an affirmative and ethical activity where producing concepts is a relational and dialogical way of approaching Others. The creation of concepts is triggered by creative leaps of the imagined that connects the subjects beyond the self.

Politically Nomadic theory views the subject as a socially mediated process, which is negotiated with multiple Others. This view enabled me to think about voice as multi-layered – it moved voice in and between power relations and contexts. As subjects, power flows in between power connections, and subjects becomes as the effect of these flows. To enter Nomadic theory politically, Braidotti urges the reader to think globally, but act locally – from embodied and grounded perspectives. Therefore, Nomadic thinking produces subjects with multiple and complex politics.

*Contextually*, Nomadic theory belongs to the branch of poststructuralist philosophy that is related to ‘bodily materialism’. Compared to other post structuralist thinkers, for example Butler, Nomadic theory sees the formation of the subject in a multiple manner, where the subject becomes in a self-organized matter. This empowers the body, compared to Butler’s view where I felt the body was left empty, with no flesh, even with no sound (Schlichter, 2011). But the body means nothing if it is not explored critically. Contextually, Nomadic thinking emphasis the connection between critique and creation. Critique is an active engagement of the conceptual imagination to produce sustainable alternatives. I liked this. Actually, that is an understatement. I loved it – both Nomadic theory and Rosi Braidotti. Her theory, thinking Nomadically, was so much like the performance of voice, as I wrote in the email to my supervisor. Braidotti was a philosopher that embraced (every)body – the multilayered, diversity and ‘difference’ in all voices (in a positive way). With Nomadic theory, I could continue the path I had started with Butler and even go further. Braidotti (2011) created a thinking where flows and interconnections were central, a complex entanglement of the physiological process and the corporeal practice, where biology and culture dynamically merge. Nomadic thinking is therefore a dynamic, flux and open-ended exploration of embodiment.

Braidotti’s Nomadic theory rested on “a monistic vision of matter in opposition to dichotomous and dualistic ways of thought” (p.3). Was the colored wall made of sticky notes a hint?). But also, there was no single ‘truth’ to be hold about voice, teaching voices and researching voices. In Nomadic theory all matter, mattered as self-organized and relational,

and therefore made a connection towards Others. I understood Nomadic thinking to decenter the focus on the individual, moving away from the static identity of voice, and turn towards a thinking that emerges from embodied relations. In doing so, Nomadic thought empowered the Other (Braidotti, 2011). Empowering bodies. Empowering the Other by moving away from the individualistic centered view of voice, which permeated the sociocultural context I had been trained in, by valuing the embodied and embedded voice, which never stopped developing or moving.

The mobile and changeable in betweenness of voice helped me think voice as empowering, because voice was not static, nor linear, or ‘straightforward’. Voice:

emerges from the body and carries the body with it. It emanates from it but is not fully disembodied. It carries its embodiment within itself and from one body to another. It is haunted by the body. (Neumark, 2017, p. 25).

My haunted embodied experiences could be thought of and used as an archive of experiences. With the ‘body as an archive’, as expressed by dance scholar and theorist Andre Lepecki (2010) (see also: Bissell & Haviland, 2018; Puwar, 2021; Harkin, 2020), I was using a sensed way of seeking for knowledge about voice, rather than recognized and verbalized. A perspective of voice that was densely material and embodied. I had to actively use the in betweenness of the voice, to *listen* to the materiality embedded in my voice. Or, as Cavarero (2005) suggests, when speaking about the intersubjectivity of voice, which is about unique beings listening to each other, “communicating their uniqueness to each other, in a call-and-response duet that is fundamentally a reciprocal relation” (p. 5). Creating this duet, the body could be in a dialogue in the world it was already situated in. Not as an instrument, but as personal, social, and cultural.

I had always thought of the voice as a way to access to the world I lived in. Now I saw voice as a material link to the world, and how the world linked me to it. Voice and the world were always and already connected, which meant that Others could be affected, and vice versa. Voice was never static, and voice was never singular. I started to think of the voice as a Nomadic subject, constantly formed and informed in the world, a nonunitary vision of the subject. Not a static identity, or a body without matter. Braidotti (2011) invites a rethinking of the self by viewing structures and boundaries of the self as fluid, open-ended and in constant movement. She draws from Michel Foucault and views power as processual – flowing

between internal and external forces. Subjectivity is “the effect of these constant flows of in-between power connections” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 4).

To unveil power relations, Braidotti (2011) draws from Gilles Deleuze, and advocates for speaking from one’s own intellectual and social practice, noting that: “one has to start from micro-instances of embodied and embedded self and the complex web of social relations that compose subject positions” (Braidotti, p. 4). By finding alternative notions and practices, the subject can find alternative subjectivities and hold ethical and political agency. I was intrigued by the thought of finding alternative subject positions to voice from. That was the goal of my teaching, to find spaces of learning where students could experience potentials of their voice in music education. Oh, it felt good to feel that breathing with theory, interweaving embodied knowledge with theory, could not just enable new perspectives of voice, but it started to change my way of thinking. I was changing. My researcher voice was changing. From not only learning about voice, how to do it, but to find entrances for critical questions.

Since I had grappled with female voice change as the beginning of my PhD project, I was curious about how change and movement affected the voice. Feeling different was something I came back to in the literature I read about voice change (Abitbol et al., 1999; Abitbol, 2019; Abitbol & Abitbol, 2014; Baker et al, 2022; Gackle, 2006, 2011, 2014; Hall, 2009; Hentschel, 2017; Sweet, 2015, 2018; Sweet & Parker, 2019). The notion of difference caught my eye Braidotti (2011). Reading theory and the stories that came with theory, triggered me to seek other possibilities of seeking knowledge about and viewing voice where a multiplicity of voices could live. If I followed Deleuze, could difference be viewed as something positive in voice pedagogy and music education? Performing difference in/through dance was explored by Anttila et al. (2019) to work against erasure of difference, through embodied encounters in the context of dance education. Could difference also be performed through voice? And maybe not ‘only’ the performance of the singing voice – but also the researcher voice? I was drawn into the thought of bodies feeling difference as a positive space to hold, a space for possibilities, and even a space for freedom?

## 2.7 Giving space for voice(s)

If voice could be seen as an act of moving through and between Others (Neumark, 2017), I was moving myself into a view of voice, where voice already (and always) was entangled with its surroundings. Having a voice was clearly more than ‘singing’. God, I felt lucky to have colleagues who asked critical questions about my work, as Frode did. Frode had made the music to the Disney movie *Frozen*, and here he was, performing in my very small online conference. Frode played the electric piano – he looked directly into the camera and joiked (into microphones, which makes the most amazing sound) – a deep vibrating sound from his body – from his culture, into the listeners in their zoom boxes. My eyes wandered to his table where he kept his instruments. Was that a red jelly fish? Had he accidentally left a red jelly fish when performing directly on Zoom?! Frode continued his joiking, in between the Sami words he included Norwegian and English words: ‘Welcome to voicing dialogues – sharing voices’. I smiled, but my eyes still were drawn to the red jelly fish. Of course, he had not ‘accidentally left it’ there. He was joiking the jelly fish! A deep and respectful joik which included all voices. Human and non-human.

I am not Sami. I do not know how to joik. But I believe in finding perspectives when working with voice in vocal pedagogy, music education and in research, where the plethora of voices belong. How to do that? I was finding myself in the need of using other terms, language, which could help me capture the nuances I searched, all the colors I saw on the wall when mapping out the theory of voice in my project. Voicing. The word ‘voicing’ rather than ‘singing’ could help me create a duet, a dialogue – and include the multiplicity of voices I was looking for.

Maybe it was Frode’s joik that brought my perspective of voice into dialogue with a multiplicity of voices, but when writing about Frode and the jelly fish I suddenly remembered the first time I picked up the book *Meeting the universe halfway*, by Karen Barad (2007). I was a bit reluctant. Metaphysics. What help could metaphysics be in my view of voice? But I had been prompted to buy the book after being in a lecture and workshop with Tone Pernille Østern, which included words as affects, intra-action, diffraction, entanglements, and performative encounters - all words that resonated with me. The lecture and workshop also involved other beings, objects, smells of wood, feeling wood, walking, and playing with ideas entangled with Others, and discussions of ethics. I experienced words and encounters that I did not fully understand, but they triggered something in me, forcing me to think differently. I

liked the language – the different layers of meaning and the need to dig into what these words could offer – and I very much appreciated the dialogue. Dialogue as listening to Others. Being with Others.

After that workshop with Tone, I was bursting of ideas related to the notion of voice. Then, I made the discovery that Barad's (2003, 2007) agentic realism was as a space where everything was relational, not individual, on an ontological level (Østern et al., 2021). That meant that ontology and epistemology were not separated. Matter and meaning, material phenomena and discursive practices, were not separated, but threaded together – like a strong thick rope, where none of the threads were being “ontologically or epistemologically prior” (Barad, 2003, p. 822). There was no distinction between the subject and the object. The learner and the learned were intertwined. The researcher and the researched were intertwined.

For my being as a researcher – this was a shift. It was not about knowing or being – it was a knowing through being (Bresler, 2019). Or, knowing and being totally intertwined. Barad (2007) does not divide ethics, ontology, and epistemology, but calls it an ethico-onto-epistemological way of thinking, where knowing did not come from a distance, but from a direct engagement in the world. This relational and entangled way of being and knowing resonated so well with the notion of voice. How voice was always connected to something else. How voice begins to vibrate and ring when it is connected to air flow and becomes sound waves in the room, within the culture, discourse, materiality, and history it is part of. If voice was both densely material and relational, the same focus could be brought into pedagogy as well.

Again, I was back in the voice studio, with my teacher who ‘shut me down’. I tried to speak, I wanted to ask a question, but the teachers wanted me to ‘shut up and just sing’. In that voice studio, voice unfolding in a one-way direction, where voice pedagogy was about fulfilling the expected demands of how to do voice, imitated by a master, the teacher. A sharp distinction between the object and the subject, the learner and the learned. I also saw a clear divide between the theory of voice and the practice of voice. Could Barad's (2003, 2007) philosophy create new, more relational ways to see and know voice in education? Could it give space for voices in education, through refusing divides?

Several studies in educational and arts research have explored Barad's (2003, 2007) philosophy (see for example: Bagheri Nesami, 2021; Bjørkøy, 2020; Jusslin, 2020; Jusslin &

Østern, 2020; Lenz-Taguchi, 2012; Maapalo, 2018; Maapalo & Østern, 2018; Pedersen, 2022). The majority of ‘see for example’ studies I mention here come from the fields of dance and early childhood education. I wondered why that might be the case. Watching practices with children (especially being a mother), I saw how both materiality and the body played together in an intimate discovering of the world, by erasing the distinction between the subject and the object.

Erasing divides between practice and theory to find a more holistic and relational vocal pedagogy, was explored in Anette Schlichter’s (2014) work. Voice, singing, gender and opera have been discussed with a Baradian lens by Belgrano (2021), Holmertz (2020), Leppänen and Tiainen (2018) and Tiainen (2007, 2017), but not specifically articulated into an educational context in relation to voice, singing, gender and opera. Exploring voice through performance practice, voice and somatic boundaries were challenged by Kapadocha (2020), while Thatcher and Galbreath (2019), reconsidered and retrained the corporeal voice in theatre, dance and performance training. However, none of these studies are situated in teacher education or music education. Nevertheless, Barad’s relational philosophy resonated well with my own vocal pedagogical practice, which I experienced as a sharing of practices, between the students, I, and the world we were situated in. Voice flew in between us, as a constant and never-ending dialogue, entangled with the learner and the learned. Instead of seeing the voice as constructed, I could see voice as constantly be(com)ing.

Several scholars had engaged with the notion of voice through Barad’s term intra-action, in the field of voice studies (see for example: Belgrano, 2016, 2021; Fast, 2010, 2020; Magnat, 2020; Neumark, 2017; Tiainen, 2007, 2017). In these studies, voice was described as an intra-active tool, because silent or sounding, voice cannot be separated from the living body/mind. When intra-acting, voice takes on different shapes in co-constitutive relations with other material being, such as other bodies that uses its voice, act and respond (Tiainen & Fast, 2018). Voice also intra-acts with discourses and social practices, and the effect of this intra-action leads to different ways of forming the voice.

The intra-active aspect of voice has also been explored in recent sound and performance art projects (Eidsheim, 2015; Fast, 2010, 2020), to show the voice’s ability to effect change in the relations and states of bodies and minds. What I found common for all the mentioned perspectives, is that voice is always entangled not only with human social contexts and environments but also with the broader material and vibrant world. Frode, who joked the red



jelly fish, was completely right. There was so much more in voice, than the singing voice. And, my limited view was excluding voices. I now saw this, but it was difficult for me to explain, because I was so used to separating things from each other and making divides when teaching and researching voice. With Barad helping me along, I was changing my view of voice, but also, the way I viewed the creation of knowledge. Now I was reading voice(s) through theories in relation to my practice as a soprano, teacher, and researcher – as entangled. A different way of knowing and doing voice.

## **2.8 Rebodying voice through difference, the imagined and the performative**

Voice, with its quality as ‘in betweenness’ resonated well with Barad’s conceptions of intra-action, at the same time as I found the terms agential realism and intra-actions hard to understand. For me, voice was so embodied, so near. Now, it felt a bit too abstract, as it was losing its musical language, its peculiarity. Maybe voice was not so unique after all, maybe it just was different.

I was drawn back to a memory of being a Fulbright student in the USA. To be honest, it was hard. In the middle of the pandemic, it very often felt lonely. I wanted to explore voice, but there were not many voices to discuss with. Literally. Most of the voices at the university were working in their home offices. Well, on this particular day I was not alone in my office. My 10-year-old son, was lying on some pillows on the floor – reading a book titled *Wondering*, which was about a boy in 5<sup>th</sup> grade who could not go to school. Paradoxically, my son was in my office because of that – not going to school. Entering the classroom in the middle of a pandemic in a new culture with a different language was not easy. Well, the book he was reading was in English and the language quite difficult – but he had been very quiet for the last hour, so I had guessed that he *was* reading. “Mum – what does anomalies mean?” he suddenly asked and interrupted my thoughts. “It means that you differ from what is known to be normal” I answered, feeling very bad about my explanation. “Oh – you mean as in being unique?” he answered right back and was spot on (which children very often manage to do). My son took on a different view of being different. He revealed my view, which was an explanation and definition with a divide between the majority and the minority. We and Others. I was bursting with pride about my son’s reflection. And I was encouraged to follow his thoughts.

What if having a different voice could be seen as something unique, something positive, to follow Braidotti's (2011) lead? Then the engagement with bodily difference, changing bodies could be seen as a tremendous source, in singing, teaching, and researching. Difference could give an entrance to diverse spaces, discussions, practices – ways of being. And then – difference could be a unique space to hold, just as my son easily understood and clearly expressed. I could not help but think that Braidotti said the same as what my son had articulated, but just with 'fancier' words. Regardless, I was drawn back to Nomadic theory and the philosophy of thought by Braidotti (2011), which helped me move in between the worlds of voice.

I was becoming a Nomadic subject, constantly on the move and in search for the many layered and slippery notion(s) of voice(s). I could not settle down, conclude, and continue to produce voice with sameness (using the same views, methods, and theories, as a soprano, teacher, and researcher). If I continued that path, I would be in danger of reproducing the sameness I was trained into and was a part of in a western sociocultural context of singing *and* the academic discourse I was beginning to take part of. That sameness did not embrace a multiplicity of voices. It listened more to voices in the majority, which fitted into the established categories of having a voice. I had to move on. To settle, resettle and move. Nomadically. To actively think and rethink voice. To 'seeing more' (Greene, 1995). The notion of voice was expanding in my study. In my daily thinking and doing. There were so many colors and levels of voice.

Why did I need feminist new materialism and post-human philosophies of thought? And how could they be used in my practice. If I was to 'breathe with theory', not only as a fancy technique, but a conceptual framework that could work in practice, in action (or hopefully intra-action), I had to act myself. This was not 'a' action. It was not 'a' new voice I took on. Not a mask (oh, Goffman (1959) also made me see so much. How he helped me navigate in my actions to see that my explorations were totally intertwined with the performance of life). My actions happened when *doing* my study. When performing, living in it. Breathing with it. It happened *in* the action, when acting. Very intra-active, as Barad (2003, 2007) might have phrased it.

I wrote the four articles in this thesis constantly seeking to expand my view on voice. My theoretical thinking grew with each article, although the work with this study was not linear – I constantly took many small and new pathways, leading me forward, backwards, in circles.

But the engagement with theory often led me into new movements, new actions to follow up. Few scholars used Nomadic thought in research connected to voice pedagogy and music education. But I found support through Elisabeth Gould's (2009) article *War machine* to find alternative subject positions as a woman in music education. I wanted to find my feminist action. Maybe this action was not so distant as I originally thought?

As a performer I had experienced the intensity of performing to and with an audience from the stage. Several times I have been standing and singing in between the audience. Does that sound a little weird? It was an idea one of my fantastic choral directors had and often used, especially when one of the vocal ensembles I sang in performed demanding repertoire. She placed us around in the concert hall, in between rows of people. Standing like small pieces lost in a big puzzle, it felt weird, because I really needed to stand with my colleagues – to 'tune in' – to really listen. If not, the whole work could fall apart. Being a 'high soprano', I also felt that the listeners sitting nearby the row I was placed to, were showered with my trembling high-frequency sounds, which would sound much better when merged with the rest of the voices in the choir. It was also often difficult to see the choral director, whose job was to keep the rhythm and pulse of the piece steady. If I did not see her, I would easily fall out of the rhythm – now *that* was something that could not happen. It would be a disaster. Well, sometimes, all these worries I mention, happened – and I wanted to sink into a big black hole in the floor. Other times, it worked. The situation the choir director put us in, made my whole body feel awake. I listened and performed with my whole sensorial body – and with the audience and I felt completely entangled with the listener. Sometimes people in the audience were very touched and came running up to me after a concert. "That was magic. I felt I was singing with you". For me, that was exactly what they did. The listeners became co-creators of the sound, with their presence and being in the room.

## **2.9 Releasing critique through the imagined and the performative**

Tuning the theoretical lens in my study, I noticed the emphasis on the intimate connection between critique, creation, and imagination in Nomadic thought (Braidotti, 2011). I had always found the act of imagination fascinating. As a soprano, imagination was the key into the world of Others. The characters I embodied on stage. Through the arts I could connect myself to Others. The force of performativity is central in arts in education. The arts have the capacity of touching us deeply on an embodied level. Arts education can provide bodily

awareness, with “the relationship between embodiment and meaningful, constructive experiences as a foundation for all learning” (Anttila, 2015, p. 372). The meaning with artistic experience, and why we should educate teachers in art education, rests on art as a performative force and its capacity of accessing inner worlds (Bresler, 2020). The arts can make us see and hear more, and thus listen to other narratives than the majority of narratives being told, for example through the imagined.

The imagined made me have hope for the future of voice pedagogy, music education, my life as an academic and mother of children in education. Sounds cliché? Maybe. But what if the imagined could even reshape music education, to embrace a more open music education paradigm, moving from the predictable to the possible (Allsup, 2016), and position music education as a vehicle for social change (see for example: Benedict et al., 2015; Gould et al., 2009; Hess, 2019). The imagined gave me hope (see: Anttila & Suominen, 2019; Webb, 2013). In the future. In the utopian. Because, with the imagined, there are all kinds of openings and possibilities. Through the imagined we can “cultivate multiple ways of seeing and multiple dialogues in a world where nothing stays the same” (Greene, 1995, p. 16). With the imagined we can critique the very system we are part of. The imagined is “the possibility of looking at things as if they could be otherwise” (Greene, 1995, p. 16). All of this depends on a “breaking free, a leap and then a question” (p. 6). When I read Greene, I thought: “This is how learning happens! This is how art happens. This is how research happens (for me)”. I do not shut up anymore. I am moved to ask questions with a rich and multi-layered voice.

In writing this theory and literature chapter, Braidotti (2011) had constantly been asking me to find alternative subjectivities, alternative representations. I now saw these alternatives. My alternative representation was rebodilying voice through the theory of the imagined. In such a way, I could investigate the world of Others. The arts were one way of grasping these worlds. In my study, I have become more aware of the world, through feminist new materialisms and post-human thinking. I realize that Greene (1995) did not use these perspectives, but her philosophy made me realize that the imagined triggered me to seek knowledge in ways we are not fully conscious about. I encountered works from other scholars who engaged with different ways of knowing and representing research –situated in transdisciplinary, new materialist, performative and post-qualitative studies (see for example: Andersen et al., 2017; Elina, 2019; Hickey-Moody & Willcox, 2019; Karjula, 2021; MacLure, 2018; Rosiek &

Snyder, 2020; Ulmer, 2017; Østern et al., 2019). Because we need alternative ways of knowing, to create change.

## **2.10 Pushing boundaries – creating new paradigms**

“Is there a room Francesca and I can sing together without being disturbed? If it is her first-time doing voice lessons, it might be good for her to sing without everyone listening”, I asked the music teacher with firmness in my voice. I am at a high school in the USA, teaching Francesca, a female voice student from the Congo, who now lives in the USA. The teacher does not look convinced. In advance of the lesson this teacher has told me that she has never heard Francesca sing a note or seen any of the text she should have written. The teacher replies to me, “Ok. I see. But Ruby will need the room with the piano because she is rehearsing”. “We can manage without a piano” I answer, realizing this is the first time I have to ‘fight’ for a room to teach voice in. I am not ready to give up. We got a room, although it looked more like a closet filled with old costumes for the school productions. Francesca fills the room with a beautiful dark voice. She is not as shy as I thought she would be. “Ok. What do you think about that we build our lessons from two areas – where creative writing is one of them. From that field we can work with creating lyrics. The other area could be working with the singing voice through exercises with breathing, connecting with the body and making sound”. “Sounds great”, she says. “Why do you want to write your own songs?” I ask. “I love the language of music. Music lets all worries come out” she answers. And she continues to tell stories from her life. That she feels labelled at school because of how she looks. The other students are not interested in who she is, they have already decided that. For three voice lessons I sit in ‘the closet’, listening to Francesca. We work with our ‘singing voices’, but mostly I just listen. To the voice of Francesca. That her highest wish is to be able to afford to buy a guitar for her father. He was a musician, a songwriter - when they lived in the Congo but had to sell his guitar to afford to come to the USA.

The last voice lesson, the whole group of voice students perform together. Francesca starts to cry. “Don’t be sad”, one student says to her. “The song we are singing is a happy song. It is about coming home for Christmas”. “I get that”, Francesca replies, “but, the friends I have do not have a home to come home to. They live on the street”. At the very end of the last lesson, I can see that Francesca is trying to find courage to give me something from her bag. Quickly

she hands over three pages with written text. In fluid English. The song is called *I want to show them who I really am*. A song by Francesca.

For me, the story about Francesca is a story of the force of the performative, and why I need the performative in this study. A performative paradigm produces a space for movement, freedom, experimentation, and inclusion. It offers provocations that shake the more common ways of viewing what research is and should be (Østern et al., 2021). I would argue this applies for pedagogy and life as well. For me, the three voice lessons with Francesca were some of the most fascinating and meaningful voice lessons I have been part of. And they awoke something in my researcher body. Austin (1955/1975), who introduced the term ‘performativity’, explained that speech utterances do not only describe or represent the world but *perform* the action to which they refer (exemplified by his famous example of the word “I do”, uttered at the marriage ceremony). Every utterance has a force. I rest on this understanding of performativity, but also challenge my thinking further, because “the performative acts does not describe something, they *do* something. “This ‘something’ has the power to transform the world” (Bolt, 2016, p. 137). With Bolt’s thinking I saw that my teaching was performative. This practice I engaged in – being in and exploring voice, made me see the force of art in education. Through the arts and through her voice, Francesca could show them who she really was. I could contextualize and conceptualize the theory I read.

At this moment, I see that the threads in this theory chapter are being stitched together, as one of the pieces in my patchwork, creating my cape. In this chapter I have shown how I have been seeking for different perspectives of voice, through engaging with theory, research on (for me) relevant topics entangled with my own stories. I can see a pattern unfold. In this specific chapter, bits of material might stick out a bit, it’s quite new fabric and still a little stiff, yet to relax and soften into shape, but it sure has a lot of colors, through the force of the performative.

So many colors. So many possibilities. Breathing with theory.

## Chapter 3. Flow

I have the most incredible crush on methodology. Even all its confusing and more challenging qualities are beautiful to me. But this chapter is not a love letter to methodology. Chapter three *Flow*, voices how I entered methodology for this study and the evolution of how I grew with the methodology, and how the methodology grew with me. While I just wrote that this chapter is not a love letter, I can't stop thinking about 'falling in love'. Because, to explain my methodological anchoring and development, I need to travel back in time – to when I started my study. How did I get such a huge crush on methodology? And I need to reveal a secret, it was not just one crush. I had several. I have 'dated' different types of methodological approaches. Some I only speed dated, which worked out fine, but I needed to move on. Then, I found THE one, so to speak – and wow – I did fall head over heels. I experienced the honeymoon period, the rough patches, the commitment to the methodology, and the desire to allow it to grow. Ok. So, I am using a stereotypical 'falling in love' analogy. But that's what it was. So even though this is not a love letter, this chapter is written in love to methodologies.

To understand how I found my flow with methodology, I revisited and traced my (love)story with methodology. Through tracing my process of working with methodology, I show how I came to love and how methodology became a radiant core in my PhD study, permeating every facet of my work, and how the methodology is not just the anchoring of my work, but it is 'more'. Imagine you are with me on my first date with methodology.

### 3.1 Methodological anchoring

Have you ever read a book or an article and felt the author's voice speaking directly to you? I mean, almost whispering in your ear? Feeling as though the text hits you, moves you, the words flowing directly into your heart – and then thinking "Yes – this is it!" (Usually followed by, "oh! I wish I could think and write like that!"). Well, that was exactly what I felt when I started to read autoethnographic work.

For me, autoethnography moves and reshapes with the different encounters I have had with the methodology. Maybe that was one of the reasons why I fell in love with this methodology? It is so rich, complex, and layered (just like voice!). Maybe my date with autoethnography started more like a friendship. I started to listen to other voices who were

friends with autoethnography (and boy, I did want to become friends with these folks). Tony Adams, Stacy Holman Jones and Carolyn Ellis (2021) define autoethnography as “research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (Adams et al., 2021, p. 180). Tami Spry (2011, 2016) talks about the autoethnographic approach as a way of challenging canonical ways of doing research and representing Others. While Denzin (2006, 2018) treats autoethnographic research as political, even writing that the only thing we might explore today is our lived experience. An autoethnographer uses both autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Therefore, autoethnography is both a process and product (Skousen, 2022).

I am sitting at my desk in my office reading articles. Lots of articles and books. I feel like I am devouring literature. Is this a possible way of doing research? I feel good about it. I am eager to know more! I have a long list of readings (provided by one of my supervisors, Rose) and the list is growing rapidly. For every article I read I follow new traces, new work to read is added on my list. Maybe I have already told you, I do like lists. They make me feel safe, like I have a job to do. I continue to read, to trace. I feel obsessed. The literature I was reading had a certain kind of voice in their work. An ability to reduce distance between the page and the reader, just like good artwork can. This way of researching and writing spoke directly to my heart. It resonated with me and the sociocultural and political context and issues I was curious about and wanted to question.

The reading list was given to me because I was a bit stuck in my PhD, and I had been stuck for a while. Well, not completely stuck. I did manage to write, to work with my data, which was very small at this stage of the PhD process. I had done observations of rehearsals in a girls' choir, and I had done an interview with the choir director. I was humbled about the way this choir had let me in. How they opened their practice to me – how the choir director shared stories. Stories from a life as a choir director, working with the female adolescent changing voice. I had decided to do ethnography. I was interested in finding the best practice of a culture – how to work with female voice change. And, for a little while this approach worked. I was gathering data material in a qualitative study about female voice change. I tried to do what I was told in the books I read. I tried to use a phenomenological approach. I wrote and created narratives from what I had observed and been told. Foucault visited my work – I desperately tried to find a way of being critical to what I was investigating and to myself. I



wrote about my subjectivity as a researcher – and how writing all this out could help me find distance to my data, so I could categorize, analyze, and represent my data. Phew! I was nearly one and a half years into in my study. But something was bothering me. A feeling. A disturbance. I mean, I had so many questions that I wanted to dig into, but those questions very often dealt with how *I* had experienced the sociocultural context I was researching. I wanted to *dialogue* with the culture, to include my own voice. But this study was not about me. Or was it?

“I think you are dealing with autoethnography”, my supervisor Elin said. She was an expert on discourse analysis and Foucault, and I must admit I was a bit surprised that she suggested this entrance. “We need an expert”, Elin continued. An expert arrived in the team – Rose Martin. And, as I already said – she arrived with a reading list. I was not even a bit skeptical. It might sound naïve, but I just dived into the list. Maybe I had faith in the list (ok – so it was given by an ‘expert’), but I did not do it because everything else I had been working on earlier in my study was ‘wrong’. My curiosity and questions on how to create a dialogue with my ‘data material’ made me want to see if there were other possibilities. Opening the reading list opened a new world of possibilities.

### **3.2 How I met autoethnography – a methodology of the heart**

I am not sure that being naïve is the best starting point for a first date – but for me, my total openness for methodological possibilities was a good entrance. Maybe my encounter with the list was love at first sight? I am not sure. I just know that I dived into the arms of autoethnography, a methodology of the heart (Pelias, 2004). Describing the love of your life might be hard, and you don’t want to risk forgetting anything important. I already referred to Adams et al. (2021), definition of autoethnography, but I discovered that autoethnography was a huge field (world) of methodology (see for example: Adams et al., 2011, 2021; Bochner, 2014, 2020; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Adams, 2014; Ellis & Bochner, 2018). Some even described autoethnography as a way of living (!) (see: Bochner, 2020; Ellis, 2004; Grant, 2020). One of my newfound methodological friends within the literature was Caroline Ellis (2004), who saw autoethnography as “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. This form usually features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-

consciousness, and introspection” (p. xix). What struck me with Ellis’s words was the methodological connection from the personal to the political.

So, I started to write from the self. My writing was prompted by Others autoethnographic work, and scholars who embraced artistic and embodied knowledges, a knowledge through being, as a valuable source to draw knowledge from (Antilla, 2015; Bresler, 2006, 2019; Leavey, 2017; Østern & Knudsen, 2019). I saw that the knowledge I carried as a soprano, as an artist, was a powerful source of knowledge. I had a performance sensitive way of knowing (Conquergood, 1991) and that way of knowing was not only a method, it was ‘the evidence’. I could research with the body as evidence (Spry, 2011). It felt incredibly good to find such links – the interplay between my experiences in a western sociocultural context of singing and the research context I was specifically concerned with. Not only were they linked. They were totally entangled. Allowing myself to actively use my soprano knowledge made me move closer, into dialogues. A dialogue involves a change of self with being reshaped by encounters. So, I tried to write out ‘encounters’ I had experienced as a soprano, as an open ended dialogue from me (the self) with the other (the culture I write from), to enable the expansion of self in interaction with the environment (Bresler, 2006). I started to write auto-narratives as a way of dialoguing with the culture I was investigating – as a way to see and hear more, as Bresler (2019, 2020) writes (and wow – she could write. I was *totally* in love with her writing). I have to admit that felt I was wondering in the dark (Bresler, 2019) – but also this wondering - ‘unknowing’ triggered my curiosity. There was more to autoethnography than I thought (and maybe there was also more to the soprano than I thought?). So, I wrote, and I wrote, and I wrote.

Leaning on and in autoethnography I started to write article 1, Facing the soprano (Jenssen, 2021). With feminist theories and feminist autoethnographies I had faith in and I started to slowly realize the power and potential of my experience as a singer and how it affected my research. No – it was much more than ‘affected’. The methodology allowed me to open questions I had been carrying, as a soprano – now as a researcher. And gosh, did I have questions. I think that my questions had started to have a life on their own but diving into the arms of autoethnography – I could speak. I could write. I had a voice. I could ask questions, I could defend them, I could provide the questions with the environment they needed to be explored. I could ruminate and grapple over the disciplined body in vocal pedagogy and music education. But still something was missing – I was craving for something more. I

started to grow with the methodology. I started to write stories, not only from a western sociocultural context of singing, but stories from my being in the world. My life. I wrote ‘stories within the stories’. Because, when writing, new stories were revealed. Anecdotes and metaphors permeated my writing – not only as pictures, but also as analysis. When I write this now, I see what happened, but being in the middle of it, I did not (and I was not able to, yet) articulate that process specifically. I was not only in the middle of the discourse I was researching – voice, I was researching from inside the process, not applying methodology, but moving with it, looking for new ways of expressing research. I felt the force of the performative (Haseman, 2006; Bolt, 2016).



*Drawing 6 Becoming and unfolding*

### **3.3 How I met performativity and the - I**

In one way it feels a bit odd to tell the story about how I met performativity and the -I. I am a soprano (I have spent my whole life nurturing the voice of the I). I also work in music education, so performance has always and still is a huge part of my life. But meeting performativity and the -I as a researcher was something else. Or something more would be a precise way to put it. I met Tami Spry (2011) and her performative -I, where the embodied knowledge is the researcher’s home, “the breath of the performative autoethnographer” (p. 502) as she writes. Spry’s (2011, 2016) creation of a performative -I is located within the

interrelation of self/other/language/body/context. The notion of a performative I has been articulated by different scholars with slightly different interpretations and connections, however I specifically lean on Spry's use of performative -I, which draws into the context of autoethnography. I have also chosen to write Performative I (without the -, throughout my thesis, because of my expansion of Spry's term). Performative autoethnography enabled different ways of doing 'auto' and 'ethnography'. Because, when performing text, it "enacts a politics of possibility" (Spry, 2011, p. 12). For me the engagement with performative autoethnography enabled a critical awareness to ask questions, disturb the present and to create new alternative spaces to voice from. I could not change the past or the present – but I could shake it a bit and I could envision a future.

In performative autoethnography, the personal collides with culture and structure. This 'colliding', results in an embodied, dialoguing, unruly and multi-layered voice, a diffractive voice. My voice as a performative autoethnographer comes from a critically reflexive location where I seek to create a plural sense of the self (voice), and a copresence with Others concerning how my body can be read in a western sociocultural context of singing. So, my performative autoethnography does say something about my body – but also about the body of Others. My body is always performed with Others. How bodies are performed within a context, but also why bodies are performed in a certain way – how bodies negotiate voice, and how this negotiation might be performed differently. Now, that was redeeming! No wonder, I was head over heels in love.

This was it! I had found it. My love. At the same time I saw that my methodological choice opened 'Pandora's box'. Performative autoethnography was not a recipe I could 'put on my desk' and follow. Not a one-way street. The word methodology contained so much more than I ever expected. Maybe autoethnography was a way of living? A way to be in relation to the self, Others, and the world? Bochner (2020) writes that "the autoethnographic way of life originates in doubt and uncertainty. To be alive is to be uncertain" (p. 84). If I embraced methodology as life, that would expand the methodology to permeate my whole study, growing further into other contexts than the 'researcher' arena. This way of thinking and being a researcher was maybe not the most 'common way', but I just knew that THIS was the methodology I had said 'yes' to. To make it work, I had to invest (and I had to be okay with uncertainty, but coming from the arts, well uncertainty *was* everyday life).

### 3.4 The performative in performative autoethnography

I felt there was space for both the soprano and researcher in me when reading about Spry's performative autoethnography. The methodology embraced my body's being not only in the world, but *with* the world. The performative in performative autoethnography "operates as the dialogic process within and between the body and language" (Spry, 2011, p. 27). The body illuminates the doing of performative autoethnography, what it is and what it does. The performative is a methodology, not a 'performance' on a stage, which the words might indicate at first glance. For Others not familiar with performance theories, this might be confusing. Or at least it was for me, coming from the field of performing arts. Being a performative autoethnographer, was I now expected to perform research from the stage? To clear my thoughts, I made a list of bullet points, based on Spry's (2011, 2016) use of the performative in performative autoethnography (I knew my obsession of lists would become useful):

- Performance is a *methodology*, not an entertaining option or an added scholarly bonus.
- One needs no performance experience, or any intention of theatrical performance to use performative autoethnography as method.
- Performance is a method to activate our awareness of the body's involvement with Others, culture, language, and materiality.
- Performance assists in the creation of the text by engaging the body's knowledge through critical reflection – and by a specific focus on the body's experience in the autoethnographic encounters.

But what were 'autoethnographic encounters'? I learned from other scholars who saw ethnography as performance (see for example: Conquergood, 1991, 1998; Denzin, 2018; Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005; Madison, 2006, 2011, 2012; Pelias, 2008, 2018; Pineau, 2002; Pollock, 2007; Turner 1982, 1986), that every autoethnographic encounter is connected to performance – in its broadest meaning, the performance of everyday life. So, from being scared to death that 'letting go' of my tiny ethnographic study of a female choir, which was the small amount of 'real data' I had on my desk, I suddenly had the largest amount of data I could ever dream of – my embodied experience (being 45 years old suddenly felt good) – the performative I.

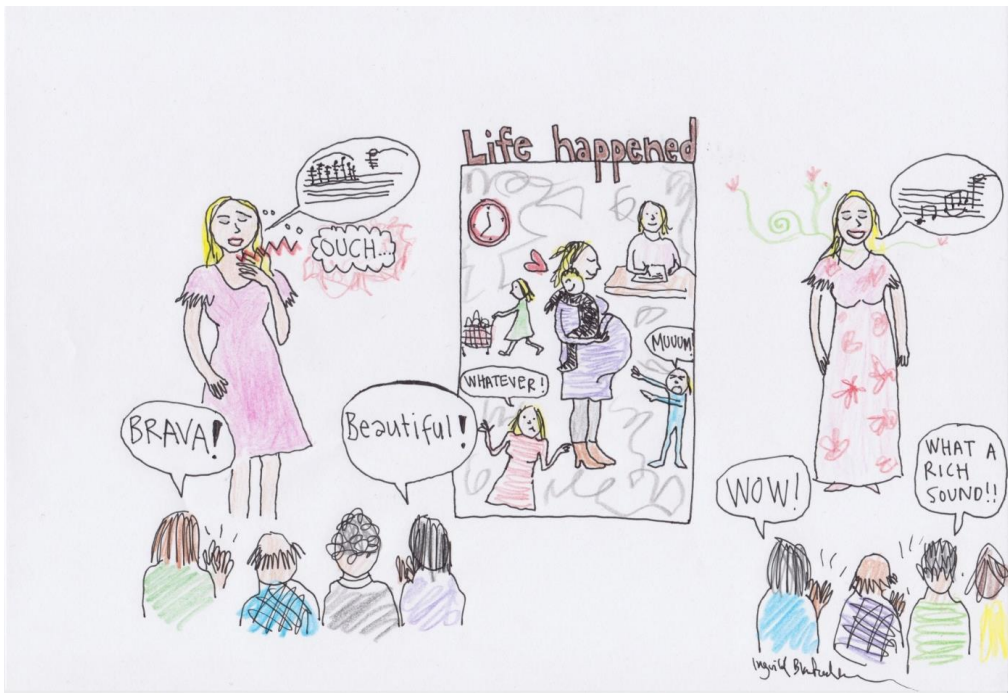
Was it 'enough' to write from my embodied experiences? To analyze my stories through engaging in different kinds of critical theories? Was creating a Performative I a way of

writing out my positionality, because I embraced my subjectivity when engaging in autoethnography? Was it only about me, the self? Was it only therapeutic? So many questions. I had fallen in love with the methodology, but that did not mean I had not listened to other voices that were critical to the methodology. I am not sure if it was the thick skin that I had developed from being a soprano that made me continue despite the critique. Not only did I want to continue, but I was triggered to act.

I was in love with performative autoethnography but could not help but dive into the arms of other methodologies, which also Spry leaned on. I am talking about Soyini Madison's (2006, 2011) critical ethnography, where ethnographic positionality is not identical to subjectivity. Positionality requires that we direct our attention beyond the individual or subjective self (Madison, 2011). My subjectivity will always be informed by my engagement and representations of Others (oh – I now understood why I had that crush on Butler). My subjectivity needed to be in dialogue – in dialogue with Others. That was how I could 'go beyond the I', which Spry (2011, 2016) writes about. A conversation with Others requires a deep listening, an attuned listening. Bresler (2019) was back, and I was thrilled that theory and methodology spoke with each other. Going beyond the I, meant an involvement in a *dialogue* that makes a difference in Others' worlds (Madison, 2011). To make this happen, Madison and other performance scholars (see for example: Denzin, 2018; Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005; Pineau, 2002; Pelias, 2018) encouraged me into a labour of reflexivity (Conquergood, 1991; Madison, 2011). And that kind of reflexivity meant seeing more and representing more than what you might initially see in the mirror.

As a soprano, I had spent hours in front of the mirror in the voice studio. I tried to copy what my voice teachers taught me – I tried to look like my teachers (and looking like them meant much more than just hair and clothes, although that was part of too). In the mirror in the voice studio, I copied a culture of voice – the world I was trained in. Creating a performative I, I understood that I could see what I saw in the mirror as a knowledge I carried – a valuable and tremendous source to draw knowledge from – but to make it performative autoethnography, I needed to look beyond the mirror. What I saw in the mirror was not only a mirror of *my* making, but a making with Others. I needed to dialogue with the Other. To listen. Ah, this reminded me SO much of singing in a choir – and that might also be part of the reason that autoethnography was not about the self at all; "perhaps it is instead a willful embodiment of "we"?" (Spry, 2017, p. 48). So, I continued to create with the performative I. I could not give

up on creating. No way. How could I do that? I had met *the one* – and the honeymoon was in front of us.



*Drawing 7 Soprano everyday life*

### 3.5 Dialoguing a ‘performative we’

I had found a methodology to hold onto and I was filled with hope and joy of doing research. I literally felt I was in the honeymoon period. In parallel with writing my first article, a conversation developed between my supervisor Rose and I in the comment boxes of word documents we bounced back and forth between us. We were both women, from two different parts of the world, Norway and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Common between us was our background from the performing arts, but with different timbres and expressions. Runa from a western sociocultural context of singing. Rose, from the culture of dance, being a ballet dancer. Our ideas and stories shared in the comment boxes developed into a dialogue – a dialogue about the sameness we felt between our cultures and disciplines. It felt appropriate that the dialogue we had established continued to develop into an article. An article where we wanted to understand how dialoguing could help us see the Other. Bringing Rose with me to

my 'honeymoon' was not risky (although bringing a third wheel on the honeymoon might develop some unbalances in any relationship). I felt much safer when having a supervisor and professor with me in my writing. I felt momentum to power forward when we decided to continue our dialogue from the comment boxes when writing article 1, into the methodology of duoethnography which is a collaborative methodology "where two or more researchers of difference juxtapose their life histories to provide multiple understandings of the world" (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 9). As a start, we held onto the tenets of duoethnography, created by the founders of the methodology, Norris and Sawyer (see: Norris & Sawyer, 2012; Sawyer & Norris, 2009).

I am not sure if it was me just being 'high on love' and 'secured' by the voice of my supervisor, but I was craving to 'do more'. I had the force of the performative to back me up and this created a space of possibilities, between the two of us in the article. I wanted the text to be 'alive', to be dialogical. I wanted to stretch and expand the Performative I. If I was to see beyond the mirror of the voice studio, I had to develop more – I needed to unsettle the I (Spry, 2016). I had felt a transformation from a being a soprano to researcher when creating the Performative I, and when diving into Norris and Sawyers (2012) tenets, I saw that the third wheel (Rose and duoethnography) was a perfect match (I felt I was doing academic match making, not only between people, but between theories and methodologies). Diving into the duoethnography, we were ready to learn about ourselves through the Other, especially through each other's difference, which was core in the methodology of duoethnography (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). While duoethnographies are often scripts from the conversation between the researchers dialoguing (Norris & Sawyer, 2012), we created a 'common' voice, where we showed the reader how we expanded the tenets of duoethnography, into a performative duoethnography. Again, the recipe (the tenets) was rebuilt, and reshaped. With the Performative I, as a foundation, we created a 'Performative we'. To invite the reader into the text we used cultural artifacts such as a poem, and drawings made by a friend and colleague of mine, artist, Ingvild Blæsterdalen. By doing this we stretched our thinking of how a duoethnography could be done. We also wanted to make the reader feel our engagement in the methodology, to enter our world.

Norris and Sawyer (2012) write that duoethnography embraces transformation through the act of research, which might create fluid texts where the reader also is an active part of the text: "duoethnographies are both participatory and emancipatory because they do not strive to



impose conclusions on readers; rather, they encourage readers to juxtapose their stories with the ones in the printed text” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p.10). We were hoping that our desire to stretch and expand the methodology would resonate with the reader – maybe even wanting to explore the methodology on their own. To see new possibilities within a methodology.

After writing two articles, I was still wondering “What could my researcher voice be and become?” Or could my voice have many layers at the same time? For me, performative autoethnography allowed me access to diversity. Not be pinpointed into one role – the soprano or the researcher. I felt like I had a big rebellion (something I did not do as teenager, and now here I was, rebelling in a PhD. Was I totally losing it?). As a researcher, I was not performing the norm, the expected. And gosh, that felt good. At the same time, I constantly felt that I needed more space. Where could I go to find that space – to expand my researcher voice more – with the aim to expand and see other nuances of notions of voice? Again, I leant on Spry’s performative autoethnography, but this time I expanded the I, into an imagined ‘we’.

### **3.6 How I was released by meeting the imagined**

As a teenager, nightmares haunted me. Why did I have all these nightmares? I was a happy child – nothing was disturbing me. My father thought I needed to be a bit more rebellious, after all I was now a teenager and my parents had prepared for ‘emotional outbursts’, but I had no need. Well, occasionally I stamped up the stairs to my bedroom, and I could slam the door and tell my father he was an ugly green frog (he laughed and that made me scream loud with my high and strong soprano voice), but that was it. When I was 18 my father gave me 200 Norwegian kroner and said, “please go and buy yourself a beer”. I did not like beer. I still do not like it. I liked to sit home with my parents and watch TV. My father liked to watch boxing or operas on TV. I did to. But I did not like to go to bed, because then they came back. The nightmares.

At high school, the nightmares came every night and were so painful that I slept on a mattress on the floor beside my parents’ bed. My father was also often haunted by dreams. “Let’s trace our dreams, Runa”, I remember he said when I woke him up in the middle of the night. “Let’s write them out”. So, he bought two notebooks and pencils, put them on the bedside table. When I woke up, I told the dream out loud to my dad and I wrote it down. In the middle of the

night. We did not do anything more than that. I just wrote them out. I think we agreed that I had a joyful imagination. “You two are so lucky. You are filled with creativity. I never dream. I wish I could write stories like you” my mom told me. I did not think of it like that, but she was (of course) right. My notebook was filled with stories, and often I tried to continue them. To finish the dream, or even start a new one.

I have not given much thought of this ‘writing dreams out’ happening. Until now. Writing this chapter, I needed to describe and transparently explain how I write stories – how I have been working with writing stories in my thesis. Maybe I have been writing stories all along in the thesis? I just became more conscious of this as I found a methodology that gave space and encouraged me to expand, to see beyond and to grow. The stories in my thesis grew out of the methodological approach, rather than being a purposeful agenda to begin with. Maybe this was the Utopian I Spry (2011, 2016) was talking about?

My curiosity is what prompts my writing. I write because I want to. I write because I have *a need to know* (Pelias, 2008). I enjoy writing (in between the frustrations). I often write prompted by intuition and maybe that is why I feel like I am a ‘messy writer’ (which is a bit surprising, since I usually have loved to work with lists and recipes, details, and organization). If I ‘ask’ myself for a story, it might be tricky. But, if I allow myself to feel, to let memories flow back, to let my imagination set me free – then I do see I am rather creative. I see stories everywhere. I hear them in music, I see them in pictures, and they are present in my dreams – but maybe most of all, I *feel* them in my everyday life. I write when I am *in* the world. Writing stories have become my way of knowing. My way of making sense in the world.

In this methodology chapter I have written several times that through methodology I tried to see the Other. Through the methodology I wanted to listen, to embody the other – to create a ‘we’. It is not easy. Seeing the other through writing from the self, also involves stories with Others. I am not alone in my stories. From our performative duoethnography I learned that the methodology was ethical in nature because it was research with and not ‘on’ each other (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). I have tried to bring this way of doing research along my way of becoming as a researcher. Again, it is not easy. How much of the Other do I bring in my stories? How much is needed? How would Others feel about reading the stories themselves? The last question is, in one way, the easiest to attend to. I have asked Others I am bringing into my stories if they want to read what I write. The only one who said yes, was my mother. I think she said yes because I asked and not because she felt that she needed to read what I had

been writing about her. Others have said “no thanks, I trust you. I will take it ‘unseen’”. I wonder why they trust me. Or it might be that they trust themselves.

I write about people who are dead. I write stories about things and artifacts that do not have a literal voice. I write about my family. A lot. I write about my children, who are small, all of them under 12 years old. I question if that is ok? I have read to them what I have been writing – when some of them are present in the text (for me – they are present all the time). “That was a nice story, mom, I did not think of it that way”, one of my sons said when I read a story from our stay in the USA. And his answer made a good point. Stories travel. They are not linear – they are embodied differently; they are memorized differently (Ellis, 2004; Pink, 2015). I have learned to follow or to be led by memories (Poulos, 2013, 2016). I make meaning with my stories from the moment I am in right now. I remember what I want to remember. But I have tried to not make Others in my stories as object that I write stories about and do research on. And sometimes, I must admit that I have been thinking “you were the person who did this to me – I was the one who was left with the pain. Why can’t I write about that?”. Taking care of the researcher when writing stories is also part of the ethical questions of what it is ‘ok’ to write about. What stories do we tell ourselves? How might we tell them and why do we tell them? These are questions I have been grappling with a lot. I have so many stories that did not find their way into this thesis. Some of them served their purpose as an entrance to an idea, or as a way of allowing other stories to be visible. As you can probably tell, I am in love with stories too.

But why did I need to imagine? To make an imagined dialogue between me, the feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti and the world-famous diva Maria Callas, which I did in article 3? I wish I had a perfect explanation. A clever one, which would make me look smart. I can only be honest. The imaginative in my thesis, developing a performative imagined we, rested on intuition, playfulness and performative autoethnography. I guess I share Maxine Greene's (1995) desire to "see through as many eyes and from as many angles as possible" (p. 94). When I took my questions, and explored them through stories, into the imagined – I even found a space for my dreams – a space where anything might be possible. Maxine Greene (1995) calls upon individuals to look at things as if they could be otherwise; “To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real” (p. 19).

Imagining requires a process of movement, of actions. One of my actions was to write an imagined conversation. I thought I was so radical when I created an imagined conversation – but when I got the first submitted text back reviewer 1 said “the content is radical – why have you chosen such a traditional form?” I am not sure if you have the expression in English, ‘to have the coffee in your throat’, but in Norwegian that means you are shocked. Here I had brought my favorite people (one dead and one alive) around a table at a cafe in Paris – and that was ‘traditional’? Of course, it was. It was a conversation. I had created space for a dialogue, but the people in the dialogue were of course my own voice.

For me it was fascinating to see how a methodology like performative autoethnography could expand into an imagined conversation. I did not read about the imagined before I started to imagine. I needed the imagined, to see and hear more. To feel more. Maybe this was a way of embodied writing? I had read Martin’s (2019) article *Feeling the field*, where somatic experiences and writing merged (see also: Kapadocha, 2020; Päntäkainen, 2022). Could imagination, and within this the embodied, be ethnography? The simple and easy answer is, yes. But the trickier question to answer is: how to get there? I confess that I did not sit down, close my eyes, and imagine. I went back to Bresler’s (2019) idea of ‘wondering in the dark’, and to Spry’s (2016) ‘unsettled I’, and I was back to the force of the performative (Haseman, 2006; Bolt, 2016). I dialogued with the imagined. Maybe my conversation around the coffee table would not have flowed so easily if I had planned too much. I found it liberating to trust the reader to follow me (ultimately that means trusting oneself). Like nightmares, all of this sounds so harmless - it is ‘just imagining’ after all, isn’t it? But, for me, to show and not tell the reader the ideas I wanted to share meant letting go of ‘the academic jargon’, and that really meant flying without wings (Inayatullah, 2010). Falling. The shared script from my draft was transformed into a conversation where I slowly removed the jargon. The conversation became more honest, raw, and ‘verifiable, measurable, transparent, valuable’ – words that often come as critique to the field of autoethnography as research method (see for example: Adams et al., 2011; Denzin, 2018; Ellis, 2004; Kimpson, 2005).

At the same time, I invited Others into my world. A different kind of invitation. Greene (1995) asks: “How are we to comprehend the kind of community that offers the opportunity to be otherwise?” (p.39). Her words spoke to me on different ‘stages’, both as a soprano, teacher, and researcher. The possibilities within performative autoethnography had opened a space where I saw my voice seeking voices of Others. With the performative imagined we, I

had developed an academic voice, which I never thought was possible to have. And – academia was now a space I could think differently. So, my aim in my PhD, to create a space for a multiplicity of voices in vocal pedagogy and music education, was now merging into my development as a researcher as well. I was not only the soprano or researcher, I was both at the same time, and I could be more. I was in a constant becoming.



*Drawing 8 Diva trio*

### **3.7 How meeting creativity got me in trouble and back on track again**

It might be unfair to the notion of creativity to say that it got me in trouble. But it did. In one way I was flying on a pink sky from my date with the imagined, flowing in the air, being totally seduced with the imagined. On the other hand, I could not pretend that questions, from myself and Others, made my pink sky a bit heavier every day. I got a feeling that if I did not do something I was in the danger of flying into a storm, eventually falling fast to the ground. No wings. And likely to be soaked by heavy Norwegian rain. Why was I feeling this way? I had created an imagined 'we', a space where anything could happen. From the anchoring with my love, Performative autoethnography, I had had developed a performative I, a performative

we and a performative imagined we. But a nagging feeling of “is this good enough? Is this what is expected? Where is all this creativity bringing me?”, was sneaking under my skin. And again, I started to dwell on my engagement with my topic, voice. What does the imagined have to say about voice? I had now written three articles, but what kind of voices was I dealing with? What had my creative self and curiosity brought me into? A writing voice? Even a creative writing voice? (see: Karjula, 2021, 2022). Now, *that* was something I did not plan on doing. What was I *actually* dealing with?

Again, I found support in post-human and new materialist philosophies, which reminded me that my singing voice was densely material. Of course, my writing voice was material as well. Karjula (2021) describes writing as “engaging with a language-fueled subjectivity embedded in power relations as well as a way of channeling and enduring the intensity of life as a ruthlessly material force” (Karjula, 2021, p. 60). My writing was prompted by the material force, my body through writing. Maybe my father’s suggestion of a notebook and pencil on the bedside table was more influential than I thought? Not only as a way of processing nightmares, but as a way of understanding the world. A way of knowing. As a researcher, I was writing stories as a way of knowing! (I can’t believe I needed three and a half articles to see that). But was I a creative writer?

Again, it would be a lie to say that I planned to engage with creative writing in my thesis. But, gosh, I did love to write. In developing a researcher voice, anchoring my voice in the methodology of performative autoethnography, working with text as a way of using life as a ruthless force as Karjula (2021) writes, was emancipating. For me, that engagement created a sustainable voice. I was grounded in a methodology, and with that grounding I found my flow. Being at the end of my PhD, writing the cape, I see how I grew with methodology, explored ways of knowledge production and presentation that might go beyond the norm or convention of more traditional or common academic prose. I interpret ethnography widely, just as I do with voice. For me, ethnography has been a dialogue partner – a collaborator, rather than a specific method (Karjula, 2022). Others have engaged with this way of thinking ethnography (see for example: Silow Kallenberg, 2022; Rinne, 2022). Writing teacher and researcher Johanna Pentikäinen (2022) reorients socio-cognitive writing research with a somatic approach, exploring the connections between creative writing and the practice of awareness through movement.

I have read the words by Pentikäinen (2022) after writing my fourth article – *The voice lessons* (Jenssen, 2021). But what she describes is a very good description of what I ‘did’, when trying to find alternative ways of producing, analyzing, and representing (auto)ethnographic data. I activated a sensitivity, a somatic awareness of myself encountering that data. I saw myself in the mirror, but instead of reflecting the picture of myself in the mirror, many different reflections came through. I saw different realities and effects from what I had experienced in a western sociocultural context of singing. I even saw behind the mirror (!). I had created a performative diffractive I. The term diffraction comes from the post-human thinker Karen Barad (2003, 2007). According to Barad a diffraction does not map where difference appears, but rather the *effect* of difference.

My way of exploring voice, through engaging with theory and methodology in a sensed and deeply material way, not only resulted in an expanded way of viewing *voice* – but also the process expanded my own voice. I had created a writer’s voice. A storied voice. Maybe I was a diffractive storyteller? Maybe I was even a writer after all? I can see a movement in the way I tell stories. In article 1 I use a more traditional way of representing my narratives, followed by an analysis and discussion. This way of inquiry in music education is strong, positioned as narrative inquiry in music education (Barret & Stauffer, 2009, 2012; Smith & Hendricks, 2020). To be honest, I do not think there is a big gap between narrative inquiry and the way I tell and create stories. To believe in stories, narratives – in and from music education as a way of knowing; “Narrative of, by, and through relationships draws on our ability to connect with Others to achieve empathic understanding and can illuminate the fluid, embodied nature of lived experience” (Bresler, 2006, p. 21). My way of telling stories is just a way of engaging with lived experience. The main question might rather be: how might methodological approaches be trusted (regardless of which point of view the researcher chooses)?

Performative autoethnography rests on the labor of reflexivity (Madison, 2006, Spry, 2011, 2016), where reflexivity alone is not enough. Through the four articles I have created, I strived to go beyond the I. I have been encouraged by Alexis Kallio (2021) who suggests working with reflexivity as a form of listening (specifically articulated in article 2). Kallio (2021) describes listening as an invitation to engage in risky methodological work that might generate new engagements with seeking knowledge and the transformation of ourselves. I am not sure if I have succeeded with this in my work. I believe it is up to reader to decide. But I have tried. And in that trying I needed to expand on methodology - to make it resonate with

my way of listening. To be honest, I don't think reflexivity as listening is easily done. It needs work. Hard work. Crafting the stories in article 4, *The voice lessons*, I located the Other, through locating myself in a western sociocultural context of singing. I was back to the notion of voice, at the same time I was back to the culture I had started to investigate when creating a feminist performative I, in article 1. But this time I saw more than the I. I saw a diffractive I, and the voice of the soprano and researcher voicing together. The methodology of performative autoethnography opened to a felt sense of theory, of the material I was exploring – with the body as evidence.

What might I have learned by telling stories? What might Others learn? What is it to be creative, anyway? For me, creativity meant finding another entrance to see and hear more. To feel more. To listen more. The creative influenced my thinking, my writing, my being in the world. I wonder why I needed to do that? I think it has to do with being curious and wanting to make change to the present. But is that possible? Stories we tell ourselves also come with complications (Pelias, 2008). And at the end of my study I saw that these complications were actually what made me believe in stories. Then, they were not *only* stories. Voice has power: it voices stories. Stories have power, and stories can change. Stories can diffract (Barad, 2003, 2007). With my way of viewing voice, I create a researcher voice, a writing voice, a creative writing voice, within music education. These voices are fluid, vulnerable but powerful, material with a thirst for the symbolic, to other beings, other voices, and the world.

I guess most PhD's would consider methodology as core in their thesis and work. But, for me - it was more than just being a core. At the end of this chapter, now seeing my thesis as a whole, methodology radiates out into all facets of my research and life. And I guess that is what happens when you fall in love – and when that someone, or something, becomes the love of your life (not only a short-lived love affair). Yes, because *All you need is love* (thank you The Beatles).

Love, love, love.

Love, love, love.

Love, love, love.

There's nothing you can do that can't be done.

Nothing you can sing that can't be sung.

Nothing you can say, but you can learn how to play the game.

(Lennon/McCartney, 1967)





*Drawing 9 Flowing with methodology*



## Chapter 4. Sound

Have you ever watched the program *Symesterskapet*?<sup>1</sup> It is my mom's favorite TV show. I like to watch it with her, mostly because I like to see her reaction to what the participants on the show do. How they solve the tricky tasks. How they grapple with getting the pattern to fit. And, how they find the strangest solutions to make the outfit just right (and always just in the nick time). At the start of the show the participants can choose fabric to work with. They all run as fast as they can – and fight (literally) over the stack of fabric. I wonder why they fight, because eventually everyone seems happy with what they get. Writing this chapter, chapter four, of my cape, *Sound*, I imagined myself in *Symesterskapet*. I have already chosen my fabrics, my four articles – and they create the main patches of the cape. But now I must carefully work with every piece (article) and show that the patches fit and create a whole garment. What is revealed in the fabric of these main patches? What do I not see? What is told? What is untold? How do my four storied articles help me answer my main research question? Or open new questions? Luckily, I am not in a reality TV competition – but I do work within a given time for this PhD – and I will be judged. Will my stitches hold – or will the pieces fall from each other? I now present my *Sound*, the findings of my articles.

I see findings not as conclusive objective findings, but rather suggestions, offerings, curiosities, and queries for further exploration (Ruggunan & Kinnear, 2019). Words, such as 'discoveries' or 'offerings' suit and sit with my process of writing the four articles that form the ground, the foundations, the deep and layered soil, that this work is situated in. What I have discovered and chosen to include in every article is fascinating for me when I reflect on the process. It is very much like walking with my children in the woods or by the ocean. What do they choose to pick up – to collect and to finally bring home? A stone, a pinecone, a stick? Or maybe some of them just wander looking at the sky – humming a song and daydreaming, or maybe refusing to join the walk at all – yelling "I want to stay home!" Oh, our hallway is filled with sticks and stones. Occasionally I try to get rid of some of them. That is never a

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<sup>1</sup> *Symesterskapet* (The sewing championship) is a Norwegian TV series on NRK (Norwegian Broadcast Company). The series is based on the BBC's concept 'The Great British Sewing Bee' (first season in 2013). In the show, talented amateur sewers compete against each other with scissors, fabric and sewing machines - to be the best sewer. For more information see *Symesterskapet* – NRK TV

success. I always regret doing that. Because – the children notice. Of course. They are attached to every single stick and stone, and they never forget the crawling worms and insects they were not allowed to bring with it. Like the collection of sticks and stones gathered by my children, my articles all have their different shapes, smells, colors, and are written in different phases of my study – in my walk. Moving with me and my being in the world, literally traveling with me in the world – they are informed by encounters with literature, theory, culture, human and non-human beings, co-authors, reviewers, and editors. Basically – they are part of my life. This might all sound quite dramatic and chaotic, but I have not felt the process of writing chaotic. Yes, there have been messy moments, but I have learnt that in the middle of the mess, writing through the mess is, in itself, the process of discovery. The findings are not just hanging around, waiting to be discovered. Findings are there to be discovered. Some findings are discovered quickly, some after long grappling, turns, and twists. Some findings I did not want to see or discover – at least not bring home into the articles, and then again into the cape, taking them one step further. After a while, I realized that I had to. What I mean to say is that my articles and findings are not disconnected from the world around me. They are not created in a bubble; they are not disconnected from each other. But each article has its own voice – existing within the larger whole of my thesis.

What I now see as findings and what my articles share, might have changed since I wrote the texts. My first article for this thesis was written about two years ago. Things change, thinking changes, life changes. Because of that I have made a framework for you (and me) to follow - to guide us through the process of this chapter and see the findings more clearly. Therefore, in the following pages I present the findings of my four articles in the order they were written. I have tried to draw out the findings from the articles. That was quite tricky – because after this moment I have made the conscious choice to not use the word ‘finding’ and certainly not the word ‘result’ in relation to what my research and the articles offer. I am going to refer to what I offer from the articles as ‘discoveries’. Sure, normally in a Norwegian PhD kappe, the word ‘findings’ is used, and that is cool. But I am going to go with something else, because it feels like a better fit for me – a bit like the difference between wearing a hand-me-down suit, or one that is tailored for you.

To navigate how my discoveries are built on one another, and how they are also layered and unfolding, I have created a ‘framework’. The frame consists of my *aim*, as in, what sparked my interest to write the article, and what *question(s)* guided me through the process of

investigation. From there I show what approaches and *methodologies* I held onto, but also how they pushed and activated my thinking, followed by an extraction of my *discoveries*. As an end to this chapter, I highlight what *traces* I have left for the reader (and me), which lead to new questions. These new questions are then unpacked in the discussion chapter that follows, *Resonance*. In between the framework of this chapter, I offer a little sense of ‘behind the scenes’ of each article. Thinking and writing about the behind the scenes, has also often been the ‘spark’ I have needed in developing and creating (and living) the articles.

As a reader you might not have read my four articles yet. Or maybe you took a sneak peek first, before reading this chapter or even starting the cape. My articles exist in part two of this document. In one way that feels a bit odd. I am presenting discoveries in articles – and I even discuss what I offer in the articles (in the next chapter), before you, the reader knows about them. I know my articles well – I feel like I ‘own’ them, and for me, they are my ‘home’ within this thesis. But for you, maybe you have not visited that home yet. But you will visit, and I will invite you in, a cup of coffee ready and waiting for you, and a welcoming embrace. Today, I read the articles differently compared to when I wrote them. I guess that is the beauty of a text. That it changes and reads differently with every person and every time it is read. With that in mind – I present the discoveries in my four articles, which together answer the main research question of my PhD study: *What possibilities might lie within a performative autoethnographic study of a soprano-teacher- researcher’s embodied voice experienced in a western sociocultural context of singing?*

#### **4.1 Possibilities**

Article 1: *Facing the soprano: Uncovering a feminist performative I though autoethnography.*

Jenssen, R. H. (2021). Facing the soprano: Uncovering a feminist performative I though autoethnography. In E. Angelo, J. Knigge, M. Sæther & W. Waagen (Eds.), *Higher Education as Context for Music Pedagogy Research* (pp. 113–135). Cappelen Damm Akademisk.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> From here on I will refer to the article by the short title *Facing the soprano* or ‘article 1’ when referring to the article in the rest of the thesis.

The aim of this article was to show my journey from soprano to researcher. Not only to show it, but to *feel* it (Martin, 2019). As I describe in the methodology chapter, starting to work with methodology triggered my curiosity about this journey. From sitting alone with my ‘data material’ in front of me – diving into the methodology of autoethnography opened a new world of possibilities. It was not ‘only me’ who grappled with questions of positionality in a broader sense than writing about my bias in doing research. That discovery made me to dive into my own subjectivity.

In *Facing the soprano* I embrace embodied knowledge and explore the query: *How is a singer’s feminist performative I created through autoethnography?* By unpacking my lived experiences through writing three auto-narratives, I establish a connection between the I and the context I live in, referred to as the Other. Through the methodology of performative autoethnography (Spry, 2011, 2016), a position of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1991) and Judith Butler’s (1990) thinking of gender as performative – I create a ‘feminist performative I’. This position brings me into a liminal space of becoming as a researcher, and that enables me to see and discover:

- How my voice has been constructed and disciplined to that of a normative feminine soprano through attaining and repeating acts from the sociocultural context of singing.
- How music education and gender intersect.
- How Butler’s thinking of gender as performative might foreclose the materiality of the body, and how feminist new materialist perspectives may contribute to a more porous thinking of the body.
- How insights and allowing myself to hold the position of a feminist performative I, offer epistemological and ontological ways of thinking for Others experiencing similar encounters.
- A ‘feminist performative I’.

Basically, writing this article made me feel empowered. Diving into theories of embodiment, feminism and connecting them with the methodology of performative autoethnography – I felt I had a voice. Not ‘only’ as a soprano, but as a researcher. I did not want to ‘hide’ this discovery and new knowledge I had gained from anyone. I wanted to scream it out and tell everyone who worked with voice in different practices – research, performance, and teaching – “this way of thinking and doing research is actually possible!” (in my loudest soprano voice). I loved writing this article. I felt I grew a little taller every time I went to the computer,

to the university. I wrote stories I did not think I would find courage to share in an academic context (or in my everyday life). I found a criticality in my voice that I did not think I had – and I discovered that theory and methodology could reveal something and foreshadow Others(s).

When I now read *Facing the soprano*, two years after I published it, I am a little proud and a little critical. Proud, because I just dived into it. I lowered my guard and just went for it. I found tremendous support in the theories, literature, and research on relevant topics (wow – someone had talked about this before – someone felt the sociocultural context of singing, of music education being gendered, disciplining and normative). I had a supervisor who slowly opened the door for me – and I felt I ran through that opening (hopefully not into the door or the doorframe!). Core discoveries from exploring how a feminist performative I are created through autoethnography, which relates and helps me answer my main research question in my study: *What possibilities might lie within a performative autoethnographic study of a soprano-teacher- researcher's embodied voice experienced in a western sociocultural context of singing?* can be synthesized into one word: *possibilities*.

In article 1 I started to open ‘Pandora’s box’ – the body of the singer. When I ‘closed’ the article (which you are of course forced to), I thought I had ‘the answer’. Now, I see that is not the case. These are challenges I will bring further into the discussion of my thesis (while I try not to panic. Yes, gaps – cracks, questions - very much like voice change– but also brilliant as a foundation for digging deeper – seeing more). I see that I did not manage to reflect deep enough on the questions of music education and gender. Why? Well, my answers in article 1 generated more questions. Do I need to *be* a feminist to have a voice in an academic discourse? Am I self-ontologizing in my desperate need to claim space as a researcher? What does a ‘feminist performative I’ *not* see? I claim to see the Other – but do I? Who is the Other in my study? Is it only the sociocultural context I am writing about? What voices am I *really* exploring?

So many new questions emerged from writing this article. But these questions did not arrive immediately after I had written the article. They gently landed in my thoughts weeks and months later, or came cascading down like heavy Norwegian rain when I least expected it. The questions, they kept arriving. What I do know is that by the end of article 1 I was in love with methodology. I saw possibilities I had never dreamt of as a researcher. But were these

possibilities only connected to my soprano-researcher journey and world, or might I be able to take them further?

## 4.2 Dialogue

Article 2: *A tale of grappling: Performative duoethnography as expanded methodological thinking.*

Jenssen, R. H. & Martin, R. (2021). A tale of grappling: Performative duoethnography as expanded methodological thinking. *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*, 12(2).<sup>3</sup>

After writing an article about my journey from soprano to researcher – diving into my own subjectivity through investigating my experiences in the sociocultural context of singing – was I finished with the self? I was definitely not finished with the methodology of autoethnography (so no – not finished with the self, but hopefully not *too* in love with it). As a PhD student the conversations with supervisors are tremendously important, at least it has been that way for me. It is a relationship filled with inequality in power, yes, but also a relationship built on trust and sharing (very much like teaching voice! The master apprentice relationship in one-to-one teaching). When I wrote article 1, I just had a new supervisor in my team – Professor Rose Martin. We did not know each other. My other supervisor Professor Elin Angelo got to know Rose and her knowledge of autoethnography, and basically said “she is the perfect supervisor for you”. I think this act from Elin shows much of the ‘team spirit’ in my work. There are room for Others. And it also says something about me. I trusted Rose from the very beginning (and we are talking deep trust here – because this happened during the pandemic, so our trust was created through only meeting on Zoom for 1.5 years).

Sharing embodied experiences from the different sociocultural contexts and disciplines Rose and I came from (dance and music) – one of us from Aotearoa/New Zealand, the other from Norway – set the foundations to explore notions of voice through the methodology of duoethnography (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). We wrote auto-narratives and exposed our vulnerability for each other. We saw so many similarities in between us –and strived to find

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<sup>3</sup> From here on I will refer to the article by the short title *A tale of grappling* or ‘article 2’ when referring to the article in the rest of the thesis.



differences, one of the main tenets in Norris and Sawyer's (2012) framework of duoethnography. Through sharing auto-narratives on how we had experienced voice in our different positionalities, our conversation constantly went back to the methodology of duoethnography itself.

We both dived into other scholars work on duoethnography, and we did not reduce the work to concern only research on dance, music, and voice. In a moment of grappling with which direction to follow – there were so many threads and possibilities – we decided not only to embrace the methodology, but to try to stretch it. Our aim was to bridge duoethnography into pedagogy, to see what possibilities existed in *doing* a performative duoethnography. To do that, we engaged with a performative paradigm (Bolt, 2016), and leant into relevant theories from new materialist feminist thinkers such as Karen Barad (2003, 2007), Lenz Taguchi (2009, 2012) and Tami Spry (2011, 2016). We created 'A performative we' and asked: *How might a performative duoethnography be understood as an expanded way of methodological thinking, and how can it expand into pedagogy and pedagogical practices?* And, yes – this co-authored article did expand our thinking when we decided not to 'follow' the methodology as a framework solely for doing research. Stretching and expanding on already existing knowledge, as tenets and frameworks, allowed us to discover:

- How playful impulses connect methodological considerations and pedagogy, and boundaries between research and life, practice and theory are blurred.
- How difference, which might appear as hidden or obscured, is important.
- How a duoethnography can be proposed as a critical performative pedagogy.
- How our performative aspects of doing a duoethnography could challenge our knowledge production and roles as researchers and the current and more dominant practices we operate within.
- A 'performative we'.

After reading my discoveries from article 2, I revisit the main research question for my thesis: What possibilities might lie within a performative autoethnographic study of a soprano-teacher- researcher's embodied voice experienced in a western sociocultural context of singing? – which prompts me to ask: what do the existing and more dominant knowledge production and roles as researcher's offer? Why do we need to stretch and expand – why do we need new possibilities? Again – new – and critical questions to be unpacked in the discussion chapter of my thesis.

The overall contribution of article 2 to my main research question is connected to *dialogue*. Dialogues are needed in pedagogy, and in research and when performing. Being playful with already existing knowledge might open and create those dialogues. Writing *A tale of grappling* was so ‘easy’ (but oh, we did grapple). The conversation flowed easily between Rose and I. But was it all a success? Did we achieve our aim? At first glance and experience it felt very good. But was it only that? A beautiful ‘love story’ of sorts, of doing a performative duoethnography?

When reading the article now – I have new questions (and I want to continue doing duoethnography – because I do love dialogues and conversations), but my biggest concern is actually the dialogue. Creating a performative we, we desperately try to listen to the Other, but as we write in our article – “listening is not an innocent or passive act” (p. 108). Is our proposition of dialogue an aleatory process – because the kind of learning we encourage to do is difficult to plan? Is our dialogue made up of nothing? What do we aim for, or want with sharing our stories? Are they ‘just stories’? Do these stories ‘work’ when they are not clearly conceptualized, analyzed, and contextualized? And why did we strive to find difference – was it not good enough to embrace our sameness, which sparked our interest of doing a duoethnography?

Fleeing from sameness, I was also getting a little bit worried – I had a nagging feeling that I should articulate and just research ‘voice’ in my study. Being totally immersed with methodologies and theories, had I completely lost which voices I was researching? Who was going to read my thesis now? Those in the sociocultural context of singing who expected my thesis to be a lovely step-by-step study of ‘how to teach voice’, were going to be *so* disappointed.

### 4.3 Seeing Otherwise

Article 3: *A different high soprano laughter*<sup>4</sup>

Jenssen, R. H. (2022a). A different high soprano laughter. *Journal of Narrative Politics*, 8(2).

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<sup>4</sup> From here on I will refer to the article by the short title *A different high soprano laughter* or ‘article 3’ when referring to the article in the rest of the thesis.

I had now written two articles – and the word ‘female voice change’ was not yet mentioned, at least not in any bold way. After article two, I really started to question myself – if I could even bring myself to write ‘female voice change’ at all. I was striving to overcome binaries, diminish distance through dialogues – and here I was – doing exactly that: creating categories within voices. Was I digging a big hole for myself that I couldn’t get out of, diving into my subjectivities as a soprano, teacher, and researcher? Was my PhD about the singing voice at all? Or was I so preoccupied finding and claiming space as a researcher that I forgot I could sing, and that I actually worked in music education? And – why did I chose to go into these new and seriously difficult theoretical landscapes, that few researchers had used when exploring voice? I longed for the feeling of writing article 1 – *Facing the soprano* – when everything seemed so ‘simple’. In my frustration I started to talk loud in my office. That is something I often do. Talking to myself makes me have a conversation with me inner voices – and that allows me to really ask those stupid questions and give shameful answers I would never dare to ask anyone else, except my cat. Well, that conversation with myself and theory in my office – made me imagine that Rosi Braidotti, the famous feminist philosopher and author of *Nomadic theory* (2011), which I really loved, ‘hated’, and tried to understand – sat on my grey couch in my office with me. I did manage to ask her some questions, but I felt she had the upper hand – so I invited another voice, someone who I also had also been dreaming of meeting, the famous soprano diva Maria Callas<sup>5</sup>. My grey sofa was too small to seat all of us – so we went to a café in Paris, France.

I emailed my supervisor and asked (with humour), “what do you think of me writing an article where I can discuss my issues about voice with Rosi Braidotti and Maria Callas?” My supervisor quickly replied – “Go for it”. So, I did. Diving into the force of the performative (Bolt, 2016; Haseman, 2016), combined with being released by the imagined (Greene, 1995), I created (with huge inspiration from Spry, 2011, 2016) a ‘Performative imagined we’ and wrote an imagined conversation with Braidotti, Callas, and I, which resulted in article 3: *A different high soprano laughter* (Jenssen, 2022a), where I explore the query: How might the notion of difference and Nomadic theory lend new entrances to (re)think voice and offer

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<sup>5</sup> Maria Callas (December 2, 1923 – September 16, 1977) was an American born Greek soprano who was one of the most renowned and influential opera singers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her musical and dramatic talents led her being hailed as La Divina. For more information visit: [Maria Callas - Official Website \(maria-callas.com\)](http://maria-callas.com)

diversity in vocal pedagogy? Writing this article, I had so much fun and areas of discoveries merged in our conversation around the café table in Paris. I saw:

- That performativity and imagination enable alternative ways of knowing.
- That holding positive difference can offer new ways of relating to concepts, processes and being in the world.
- That music education is not necessarily open for a multiplicity of voices.
- That voice is not singular or innate. Voice is a cultural and a shared practice.
- An ‘imagined performative we’.

My researcher body ‘exploded’ when writing this article. So many possibilities and discoveries came out of the imagined conversation. How did my exploration help me answer my main research question? I need two words: *seeing otherwise*. Writing article 3 was not only fun (it is easy to say ‘fun’ when the article is published), but also it felt risky. I did think about rewriting the whole conversation into one long auto-narrative, but in the end, I had the revelation that the voices of imagined Rosi Braidotti and Maria Callas were ‘my voice’. So – I decided to embrace the imagined conversation. When I now read *A different high soprano laughter*, I wonder – why did I invite these people, Maria Callas and Rosi Braidotti – two privileged European women to dialogue with me? What does that say about me? Am I looking for other ways of feeling empowered as a researcher – when engaging with an opera diva and the rock star of feminist post-human philosophy? Is this a way of hiding or camouflaging my vulnerability, which I try to show when telling stories to my imagined friends Braidotti and Maria? What did the imagined foreclose? Did this way of writing and knowing have any impact on vocal pedagogy and music education? Again – was it all about me?

#### **4.4 Multiplicity**

Article 4: *The voice lessons*<sup>6</sup>

Jenssen, R. H. (2022b). The voice lessons. *Scriptum: Creative Writing Research Journal*, 9(2).

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<sup>6</sup> From here on I will refer to the article by the short title *The voice lessons* or ‘article 4’ when referring to the article in the rest of the thesis.

Where could I go after being in a café in Paris with Braidotti and Callas? Well, I moved. Literally. I took my family to the USA, for a 6-month research stay at the University of Illinois, Urbana – Champaign. That hurt. I did not expect that. We had planned everything so well. Why did we experience this pain, as a family and as individuals, in this geographical relocation? I thought about writing an article about a mother’s academic voice. I did write. About the frustration I felt being a mother in a very different culture and philosophy of education (that is another article to come). But mostly I think I used my trauma, anger, and pain to access another world. The inner (and outer) world came out as stories. I ‘just’ wrote stories, sitting in ‘Café Paradiso’, my favorite local café in Urbana (not fictive!). I have always loved to go to cafes, to drink coffee and chat – but I had never been one to go to a café to do ‘serious work’ (who could manage to do that in that terrible noise?). Well, this time I had no choice. Because of the pandemic, combined with university bureaucracy, I was not granted access to the university when I arrived (well, the truth is, I never was officially granted access. I got a key from the caretaker, and I got to know the guards standing by the door). The ‘Café Paradiso’ became my ‘escape room’. I had good coffee (in an enormous mug), and I sat there, feeling invisible. I hid in the sound of Others, and I wrote. And I cried. I very seldom cry (and certainly not at cafes).

Leaning on (and questioning) the methodologies of (auto)ethnographies – I went back to performative autoethnography (Spry, 2011, 2016) and used my fascination for the notion of difference (Barad, 2003, 2007; Braidotti, 2011), created a ‘diffractive we’ and asked: How might (auto)ethnographies create alternative ways of producing, analyzing, and representing voice? Who would have guessed that I aimed to publish this article in a journal about ethnography and creative writing? Well, it felt so good to write the stories. I remember I thought ‘this is how it feels to *write culture*’ (which was ironically also the first thing I learned about ethnography). So, from this time of coffee and crying, what were the discoveries in article 4, *The Voice lessons*?

- That writing stories are a way of knowing as a researcher, and through my writing I was able to discover new perspectives of voice - allowing me space to rethink notions of voice.
- How new materialism and performative autoethnography enables movement between the worlds of the material voice and theoretical-philosophical-‘academic’ voice.

- How the voices of performing bodies are ‘open-ended’, and through that openness, constantly changing and becoming.
- That vulnerability and risk can empower academic and singing voices.
- The development of a ‘diffractive we’.

Did my exploration of how (auto)ethnographies might create alternative ways of producing, analyzing, and representing voice contribute to a clearer or richer answer to my main research question? Did I see something else, or did I only heal my own pain when writing at the café? The word I am left with is *multiplicity*. Because, through writing *The voice lessons*, I saw there is room for a multiplicity of voices, as a soprano, as a teacher, and as a researcher.

Are my stories from a western sociocultural context of singing only negative? Am I ‘playing defense’ in this article (or the study as a whole?). So many questions – and I have not started the discussion chapter yet. Before I close this chapter – I now see all of these ‘new questions’ as one of my most important discoveries. Who would guess that writing all these stories, engaging in theories and methodologies would do that? Did my articles with their specific questions help me answer my main research question in my thesis? Well, from the sound of my articles resonating behind us, let’s explore that a little more as I bring you further and deeper into these questions and discoveries – into my discussion.

I can’t help but wonder how you see my cape now that we are at the end of this chapter. Have I stitched it too tightly around your shoulders? Should I loosen it up a bit to give you a bit more room to comfortably move? I imagine myself back on the reality TV series *Symesterskapet* – stepping into the arena where the judges evaluate if you did a good enough job, after racing against the clock, sewing furiously, with passion, and even with a little pain. Am I thrown out of the competition, or can I continue to the next stage? Suspenseful music plays, and I am almost wishing we could cut to an ad break to prolong things. But, what the hell – this is my shot – and I am going get you to sweep that cape behind you, feel its weight and care, and let’s go. Further. Into the discussion

## Chapter 5. Resonance

With the sound of my articles resonating behind me, I fly into chapter five *Ressonance*. When starting to write my discussion chapter, I was so eager to fill the gaps, holes, and cracks I had found in the re-reading of my articles, in chapter four *Sound*. The moment had come – I now had the chance to ‘secure my work’ in this discussion chapter. I made a list of the new questions that had emerged out of my discoveries (and that list was growing long). I put the questions into a table to keep track of every single one of them, to be sure that all new critical questions were answered ‘properly’. I was entering the phase of doing a ‘meta-analysis’ of my four articles – to see ‘the big picture’. But I also saw a big (self-made?) attack coming at my work – and I was ready to ‘toughen up’ and fight it. Now, I had to show the reader that I was certain – that I knew how and could secure the answer to my main research question for my thesis: *What possibilities might lie within a performative autoethnographic study of a soprano-teacher- researcher’s embodied voice experienced in a western sociocultural context of singing?*

I felt ready to leap into the writing of the ‘main chapter’ for the thesis, *the* discussion - and I just could not help it. I heard the clock ticking. The judges in *Symesterskapet* were back – ready to give me the final task in the grand finale. The task felt enormous. From the four main ‘pieces’ I have made I can bring what I want, but I cannot bring anything ‘new’ to create ‘a final dress’. I love dresses. The way a dress makes me feel and be. This final task should be a good fit for me. However, I do not feel totally ‘secure’. There is a sense of insecurity sneaking into my mind. “Are you sure you are up to this?” Well, I really thought I was, so why this feeling of insecurity now?

By the end of the chapter four, I was so ready to “sweep that cape behind you, feel its weight and care, and let’s go” – gosh I was confident. Now, I wonder, maybe I am not well enough prepared to this? I might need to read some more. The doubts creeping into my body came for a reason. Was I questioning myself? Yes, in one way I was. I was feeling the vulnerability of doing research. The demands and expectations from another context, the academic context, compared to when I performed with my singing voice. Of course, I was questioning myself – which also could be viewed as a humble way of approaching my work. Had I missed something in my study? Why all these new questions in my discussion chapter? What questions were most important to take forward in the discussion, what ones had to rest for

further research to come? I was now supposed to discuss my discoveries, and at the same time deal with the creepy feeling arriving in my body, prompted by the question: How should I approach the meta-level in my study? I felt so grounded in my embodied knowledge, that I was afraid I could not grasp the meta-level. Did meta-level mean that I had to have ‘distance’ from my work? In addition, my methodological and theoretical knowledge grew as a researcher, I could not help but continue to expand. Expanding my knowledge to expand and explore notions of voice. I felt excited and vulnerable all at the same time. I decided to use my vulnerability as a creative space, to continue my journey of seeing the possibilities in my study, in an analysis of my work on a meta-level. So, yes. I decided to read some more.

Books landed in my mailbox, in my imagined world – they flew down like letters brought by the owls in the beginning of Harry Potter 3. First one by one – then as an army. Of course, they did not. I ordered books online. One book I ordered was Paulo Freire’s (1970/2018) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. I started to listen to the audio book during the summer before delivering my thesis and fell in love with it. Why did I not read this book before? Well, I had thought about it, but I just did not go for it. I wondered if I imagined Rosi Braidotti had something to do with that? She strongly encouraged me (listening to her energetic talks on YouTube) to stop reading work by dead white men (but then again, maybe I was acting like an obedient soprano again, interpreting her a little bit too literally?) Also, I like to listen to podcasts and TED Talks (I love these short videos where people explain a term, a book, or a theory in about 20 minutes) – and there she was – Brené Brown – taking about vulnerability, which was exactly what I felt in this stage of my process. I was supposed to be confident now, but dear oh dear, that little voice returned to me saying, “is this enough?”. To go forth I had no choice but to listen to Brené Brown (yes, I am good at listening to people), and step into vulnerability – to deliver a thesis that I already had been vulnerable in, in so many ways.

Instead of fighting my own insecurity – I decided to embrace vulnerability. Instead of hiding from this discussion chapter (which I really wanted to do), I tried to create a dialogue with my discoveries from my articles and the questions that emerged when presenting them in chapter four. Yes - I did go through every question in the chart table in my Word document I had made. I printed the Word document, and I cut the questions out, placing them on the kitchen table. From these questions I wrote post it notes with words, feelings, theories, methodologies, and sentences from earlier comments in my work (both my own and other readers). I wanted to make the questions from my discoveries and post-it notes ‘speak’ to each



other. I tried to make clusters to see if my questions and discoveries formed any sort of pattern. They did – but the pattern constantly changed. Such a mess.



*Photo 4 Such a mess*

I sat at the kitchen table, with all my sticky notes and small slices of paper with difficult questions and desperately tried to make them *dialogue*, which was one of the main discoveries in article 2. I felt stuck. I took a deep breath and thought to myself that I might try to follow my own advice in article 2 – and listen. “A forced dialogue is a challenging start for a good conversation and discussion”, I said to myself, and I tried to relax my shoulders that by this point felt like they had moved beyond my ears. I just had to listen - a deep and attuned listening (Bresler, 2019). Sticky note by sticky note, I moved the pieces around. I moved myself to another location – the kitchen is the heart in our house, and there were too many small and interested hands from kids who wanted to take part in my puzzle.

Moving my post it notes with different colors around in my puzzle, seemed like a never-ending job. When I moved one note and heading, the puzzle and post-it notes spoke to me differently. Every post-it-note did somehow connect with another. But where they were placed lead to different positions and connections. I moved to another room, a small apartment we have in our house (which has been my ‘escape room’ while fishing my PhD).

The new and ‘safe’ location (in my experience, sticky notes do not stay sticky for long) did not help either – with no curtains, it was getting too warm with the (unusual) Norwegian summer weather outside. It felt like there was no chance that I would finish this discussion chapter on time. And then, our new kitten, Illi, walked all over it!



*Photo 5 A cat and constantly changing patterns*

Frustrated, I collected the post-it notes and just spread them over the floor. Was it me? Could I just not decide what to focus on, or was the constantly changing pattern of the post-it-notes a possibility as well? From wherever I moved myself in the room, I had a different angle. The colors of the notes looked different when the light from the window touched the floor. I saw a pattern through a kaleidoscope! The constant shifting pattern made me feel like I was holding my ideas of voice in my hands – grasping them, something tangible, feeling these ideas between my fingers and pressing into my palms. I was holding a kaleidoscope of voice, and now it was time that I look inside the kaleidoscope.

### **5.1 Shifting perspectives of notions of voice**

The unsettled feeling of questioning myself in the beginning of writing the discussion chapter was slowly loosening its grip on me. A meta-analysis was of course also grounded. Grounded in the local, the embodied and embedded. Where I was, the summer heat, who I was, the kids

and cat running around me, and what I was feeling, frustrations and possibilities – this *was* my kaleidoscope. The culmination of all of this allowed the kaleidoscope to emerge.

The concept, idea and structure of my thinking was Nomadic (Braidotti, 2011), built from the embodied, with shifting perspectives from where I moved my body. I saw that I entered the analysis with the same approach as the rest of my study. With my embodied knowledge as the grounded perspective. In my analysis, I have intra-acted (Barad, 2003, 2007) with theories, relevant literature, methodologies, and everyday life. I acknowledge that the analysis might have been done differently by another researcher, from another body as researcher (Lenz Taguchi, 2012). I understand that as a Nomadic thinker “I am rooted, but I flow” (Braidotti, 2014, p.163, quoting the words of Virginia Woolf<sup>7</sup>). What that enables is “one’s capacity to feel, sense, process and sustain the impact with the complex materiality of that ‘outside’” (Braidotti, 2014, p. 172). For me, that ‘outside’ was turned inwards, when seeing my study through a kaleidoscope. Thank goodness, I could finally exhale my shoulders away from my ears - I did not have to create distance to my discoveries in my four articles when doing the meta-analysis.

I continued the dialogue, intra-acting with my articles. I remind myself again, “I am constantly in the becoming as a researcher and my perspectives will shift and change as an everlasting movement of change” a mantra of sorts, allowing a meditation on what I was seeing through this kaleidoscope. Leaning on a performative research paradigm (Bolt, 2016; Haseman, 2006), I understand research and analysis as creating something new, with the researcher positioned on the inside of the research process. This kind of analysis that I position as performative has an ethical dimension and responsibility. There will always be relations and perspectives which are excluded. Ethics is therefore viewed as a practice, an “intensive ethics” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 317). Such ethical practices take work, because the ethics follow every step and movement, completely entangled with the researcher in the research process.

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<sup>7</sup> Virginia Woolf (1882–1941), was one of the most innovative writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In her novel, ‘The Waves’ (1931), she introduces six characters—three men and three women—who are grappling with the death of a beloved friend. Instead of describing their outward expressions of grief, Virginia Woolf draws her characters from the inside, revealing them through their thoughts and interior soliloquies. As their understanding of nature’s trials grows, the chorus of narrative voices blends together in miraculous harmony, remarking not only on the inevitable death of individuals but on the eternal connection of everyone. See Virginia Woolf | The British Library (bl.uk) for more information.

The kaleidoscope might also be seen as a diffraction (Barad, 2007). A diffractive reading “involves insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter” (Barad, 2007, p. 30). Literally and metaphorically moving my researcher body around my post-it notes, seeing different angles on the discoveries in my study as a Nomadic thinker, I decided I was going to do it, I was going to use the kaleidoscope<sup>8</sup> as a model for my analysis and discussion. I was not alone in landing on this kaleidoscope idea. Others had explored the metaphor of the kaleidoscope as a tool for understanding self, Others, society, the world, and our place in it (Gonnami 1998; Gray 1991; Owens, 2014). The kaleidoscope was also used as an inspiration to generate a polyphonic knowledge through a kaleidoscopic pedagogical approach (see for example. Päässilä, Owens & Pulkki, 2016; Päässilä et al., 2019).

Scholars in music education, such as Stacy Holman Jones (1998), have also explored the metaphoric entrance of the kaleidoscope when exploring women’s music and organizational culture. A practice of what prompts creating writing, using Laurel Richardson’s (2011) image of a crystal is investigated by Emilia Karjula (2021). I was drawn to how Karjula offered the idea, describing with words what she saw through the different angles of the crystal – a perspective I was curious to follow. I thought, maybe the image of the crystal could make me understand the kaleidoscope and how to use it in a more nuanced way?

Laurel Richardson (2011) wrote that the central imaginary for ‘validity’ in ethnography as creative analytical practice, is not the triangle - a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object, ready to be discovered. Rather, she says, “there are more than three sides by which to approach the world” (p. 963). Nodding and smiling, I continued to read about Richardson’s use of the image of crystallization as an alternative to triangulation. She writes that “the crystal combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach” (Richardson, 2011, p. 963). I was bursting with excitement. This was exactly what I saw in the kaleidoscope. The post-it notes were the crystals moving around. This was how I viewed notions of voice – and how I explored voice (ok, I admit it – I also thought “yes – this is how I secure my work”).

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<sup>8</sup> Originally, the word ‘kaleidoscope’ was invented in Scotland by Sir David Brewster who coined the from Greek; ‘kalos’ (beautiful), ‘eidōs’ (form) and ‘skopeō’ (meaning). See Oxford English Dictionary 1998, Vol. 7, p.342.

Like Richardson's (2011) image of the crystal, the kaleidoscope allows understandings to be clarified, shaped and shared. In a series of continuing phases I could also hold the pattern for a while before I turned the kaleidoscope, shifting into a new pattern (see also: Pääsilä et al., 2019). The kaleidoscopic model resonated well with my way of working with the post it notes and my understanding of voice, and how my exploration of notions of voice expanded (and kept expanding), in between spaces, in between and across the categories and frames voice was experienced within. I nodded and smiled when I read: "Ethnographic analysis is a process, where words gather and form assemblages, which reading, in turn, gives new directions and movements" (Karjula, 2021, p. 62). With the kaleidoscope I could break the familiar way of defining and thinking voice and see new shapes of voice. But was it merely just a break? Was it not also a re-vision, a repositioning of voice – not just breaking and starting again, but to use what is there and re-view it? Maybe there is a break at times, something that shatters never to be pieced together in the same way again, like a crystal dropping to the ground - oh so dramatic - but also there are the more subtle changes and adjustments than a break. The voice could take on different and nuanced shapes and resonate differently from whoever had made the kaleidoscope, and whoever held the kaleidoscope.

But how was I to turn my kaleidoscope 'just right' – yet, not with definite answers? Because the answers keep resonating, in a never-ending world of different shapes and colors.

However, the kaleidoscope is also built from something. The frame needs to hold all the shapes and patterns occurring. My kaleidoscope is built from my articles, but what really makes it produce the brightly colored symmetrical figures is my extension of methodologies. What holds the glass in my kaleidoscope is how I have seen and enacted possibilities within the methodology of performative autoethnography (Spry, 2011, 2016). My creation of a 'performative I' (article 1), a 'performative we' (article 2), an 'imagined performative we' (article 3), a 'diffractive we' (article 4), made me dive into the self. But, not alone – as a constant co-creation performed in a self/other/we construction with the in different ways, times, and spaces I would call these my 'performative utterances', which means that the extension of methodologies made me perform with and through my embodied knowledge. With the Other, but with my voice.

So, how is the kaleidoscope working in my thesis? I imagine myself holding the kaleidoscope, which is formed as a tube. This particular kaleidoscope is not so big (but wait until you have a look in it!). It is handcrafted, made of metal, covered by a piece of green

velour (from a theatre curtain perhaps?) and many sparkling silver stones. I put my research question in the kaleidoscope on a little piece of paper, like a message in a bottle, and I hold the tube to my eye. I point it towards the light and slowly turn it. As it turns, I can see the analysis of my work. Yes, the traditional or more common way of doing this is made through a triangulation to consolidate research. Another possibility is to see my work through the kaleidoscope as an extension (alternative) of the triangulation. In my process of analysis, seeing through the kaleidoscope, I describe what I see in every ‘turn’ I make with the kaleidoscope. What I see in the different turns, will ‘breathe’ through and with theories and literature on relevant topics (chapter 2). Each turn shows its own ‘mode’ of knowledge production – different ways of embodied knowing – as a process “that keeps the trajectories of the knower and the known in constant movement” (Karjula, 2021, p. 56). In my thesis I have been breathing with feminist new materialist and post-human theories. However, I also engage with other writers who are not positioning themselves in these philosophical and theoretical landscapes. They arrive in the text, needing to make their presence felt by the discoveries and questions which surfaced during the process of writing my thesis. I listened to these ‘new’ voices of different scholars – and I needed to dialogue with them, to see more and to understand my embodied knowledge that I see in the kaleidoscope.

There is no fixed object or answer waiting to be discovered in my kaleidoscope – but shifting perspectives on notions of voice. Some readers might accuse me of leaning into relativism. Do I? No, I think it has more to do with seeking accountability or situated perspectives (Braidotti, 2011), where both what I explore (voice) and how I explore voice is always plural and always open-ended. I will now take you into what possibilities and challenges that might lie within every step and movement looking through my kaleidoscope. These are my situated perspectives that I hope will eventually give the full picture of what I am offering in my thesis. Now – I am ready. I hope you are too. Because what I see when holding my kaleidoscope, is that I am not only seeing possibilities – I am seeing change in how we think about notions of voice. But, before I get too carried away, I want to offer a small question, as a reminder: Have you still got that cape tightly secured around your shoulders? There was that moment earlier where I was about to throw that cape away, suggesting it go to the local thrift store for someone else to pick up. But at the last minute I thought, “hold on, there is life in that cape, corners that have not been worn out enough to discard it right now”. So, I continue – we have more to explore, together.



*Drawing 10 Kaleidoscope*

## **5.2 Voicing dialogues: Exploring kaleidoscopic notions of voice**

The creation of my kaleidoscope was my concept as a Nomadic thinker. Triggered by creative leaps of the imagined I was now connecting the subject, beyond the self (Braidotti, 2011). I see this as a dialogue. A dialogue which is fluid, that flows in between contexts and cultures. What I see in each color shows a different mode of my embodied knowledge on a meta-level, which might enable me to arrive at conclusions and contributions of knowledge about my research. The force of the performative makes me stay on the inside of the research, in constant movement with the knower and the known. Ok – let's start turning the kaleidoscope. What do I see?

### 5.2.1 An empowered voice

Blue was my grandmother's favorite color. She very often wore blue clothes – her kitchen (the best room in my grandparents' house, which smelled of dinner early in the afternoons and fresh baked bread in the weekends) was white, but with dark blue cabinets. Blue resonates well with my grandma's dark voice. Sometimes her voice was a bit husky. I loved listening to her voice – when she sang me to sleep, when she talked loudly to herself, and when she sang along to songs on the radio (she loved listening to the radio. "I learn so much from listening to the radio. It is part of my education", she said. My grandma had no formal education. But, wow, she was smart). Grandma loved to sing, to perform broadside ballads (*skillingsviser*)<sup>9</sup> with her guitar. She adored my bright soprano voice and applauded it whenever she got the chance. Grandma passed away this past summer, she was 90 years old. After her heart stopped beating, I thought about the influence she had on my path to become a singer. Well, not only singing. Grandma made me believe in having a voice. The power of the voice. That voice mattered. I think that is also what the process of writing my thesis has done for me and might do for Others – give power to voice. The shades of blue with the sparkling silver dots in the kaleidoscope tells me, as a kaleidoscopic reading of my four articles, that I have been seeking and finding voice through my exploration. Braidotti (2011) writes that we need affirmative empowerment of alternative difference. In my four articles I have created alternative and different spaces to voice from. The implications from such positions is political and cultural (Braidotti, 2011).

In my first article, *Facing the soprano*, I described my journey from soprano to researcher. My findings showed how insights in and allowing myself to hold the position of a feminist performative I, "offer epistemological and ontological ways of thinking for those experiencing similar encounters" (Jenssen, 2021, p.113). Through a kaleidoscopic reading, I see that I strived to find a voice in article 1. Such a paradox when voice was my subject of exploration and my focus. In article 1, I strived to find a voice as a researcher, not 'only' as a soprano.

Performative autoethnography enabled me to find a researcher voice. I felt empowered. It basically felt good. I saw *possibilities*, which is one of my main findings in article 1. This is

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<sup>9</sup> A *skillingsviser*, or broadside ballad in English, is printed on cheap paper, distributed as single sheets or pamphlets, and sold for a *skilling* – a low-value coin. See Oxford Broadside Ballad Workshop Part 1 | Jenni Hyde (wordpress.com)



not necessarily a new finding, but it is a finding that affirms Others who have been saying similar regarding engaging with the methodology of performative autoethnography (see for example: Allen & Piercy, 2005; Averett, 2009; Bartleet, 2009; Cayari, 2019; Coia & Taylor, 2013; Ettore, 2016; Swafford, 2022). None of the studies I mention come from a western sociocultural context of singing. That was interesting for me. The possibilities I saw when engaging in a feminist performative I (article 1), also came with a cost. I wanted to feel empowered (maybe I even wanted the applaud I got as a soprano, or from my grandma?). In my first article, I now see I was claiming space in my journey of empowering my voice. What did that claim do? What did my feminist performative I see, and perhaps most significantly, *not* see?

Braidotti (2011) writes that “the truth of self lies in its interrelations to Others in a rhizomatic manner that defies dualistic modes of opposition” (p. 311). Through creating a performative I, I tried to see the Other with blurring the boundaries between the researcher and singing voice. Through offering my performing body as raw data of a critical and cultural story (Spry, 2011, 2016), I saw the sociocultural context of singing differently. Or at least the methodology of performative autoethnography made me articulate what I felt – the sensed way I saw power positions and relations. *Facing the soprano* was the starting point of my performative autoethnographic study (if it is possible to define where it ‘started’. I now see that article 1 is more about ‘seeing’). From there on my voice zigzagged in between spaces, places, and temporalities. My work in the other articles moved more from ‘seeing’ into ‘feeling’ in a deeper way as I went on.

Methodology made me aware of issues in a western sociocultural context of singing that I and maybe Others had experienced, especially related to gender. I found support in other scholars who had engaged in issues of voice and gender (Björk, 2011; Borgström Källen & Sandström, 2019; Borgström Källen, 2012, 2014; Graham, 2019; Hentschel, 2017), where voice was viewed as an object, where the female singer’s voice was constructed by stereotyped gender constructions in the western sociocultural context of singing and specifically music education. The common thread of findings and discussion in the studies referred to above, was the lack of a reflective critical discussion about teaching methods and content – issues that were not sufficiently discussed.

The lack of critical discussion seems to have maintained stereotyped gender constructions in music education. I ask myself: What would happen if these issues were discussed in more

nuanced ways? With more time and attention, with different theories and approaches to how they had been tackled in the past? (see also Lines, 2013). Which voices could be empowered then? And *how* could these issues and voices be discussed? Well, that depends on who does the discussing. For me, questions of *with* who, and how critical questions about gender in music education could be discussed, resonated well with Freire's (1970/2018) *Pedagogy of the oppressed* – remember that audio book that I dived into during my Harry Potter moment back at the beginning of the chapter where I felt compelled to binge order books out of desperation? Freire's (1970/2018) description of the oppressed who is characterized by subordination to the consciousness of the master, made sense. Repeating after a master is arguably the 'easiest' and safe way of doing pedagogy. There is no room for critical questions. No time, space, or place for the oppressed to engage in their own embodied knowledge. Subordination works well in the sense it's fast (but what is good about that? I ask myself writing this). The master (the oppressor) tells the apprentice (the oppressed) what to do (in fear of losing the master's freedom?) It is a one-way dialogue. Then the question is – is it a dialogue or is it a monologue? Reading Freire (1970/2018), the situation where a subordination of the oppressed is taking place is what he termed 'banking education'. A system where students are objects, waiting to be filled with knowledge, instead of participating in their learning.

I totally understand, and I have felt this pedagogy work. Not everything is wrong about the master-apprentice learning, or other forms of pedagogical situations where learning takes place between a master and an apprentice. Pedagogy is about power and denying that just leads to more chances to misuse it. My collaboration with my supervisor Rose, also began as a master/apprentice relationship. This pedagogy is efficient. Results are made quite quickly. It carries a tradition forward. Often, a tradition of the majority. The tradition of the expected, which is easily measured. Which is easy for the majority to fill. Why should we change a pedagogy that obviously works for the majority? Why should we ask critical questions to a system that is giving results? In *The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*, feminist scholar Audre Lorde (2018) argues that continuing to use the tools of the majority, to examine the majority, "the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable" (p. 25). I am someone who belongs to this majority, but even I have felt the 'monologue' as demanding. Even oppressing. Was that the reason why I needed Freire to help me see alternatives? Sometimes when being a soprano, I wanted to scream out. I was sick of being shut down as a singer, from expecting demands of how to perform a certain repertoire, ideals,

acts, and sounds. But, also as a woman, as a mother, I felt like a container – that was filled by the monologue from the culture I lived in. I was the container. Too full. Too full of being told how to act.

I am sitting in the hallway at the elementary school. It's a new and fancy school when it comes to the architecture of the building. The materials it is constructed from are mostly concrete and glass, it's airy, spacious, and white. I am sitting in the hallway, so my son can see me through the walls made by glass. He wants me to stay there. It makes him feel safe. It makes me want to scream. Not because of his need, which I feel is a human right. A space to be seen. But what makes me want to scream is the way we both act. Neither one of us screaming but continuing to be filled up. The teachers are wonderful. They want to help. They listen. They run. They have no time – because the system has filled them up. I can't cry. I can't scream. Not within the walls made by glass encapsulating me. That would make a hell of a sound. But it is the sound I want to make.

Both writing out my emotions of and sitting in the hallway in my child's school makes me feel vulnerable. It hurts. The voice of Brené Brown (2021) from her TED Talks came back to me (I originally listened to her to have a moment of peace as a mom, now it became useful to my research). Brown (2021) describes vulnerability as “the emotion that we experience during times of uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure” (p. 13). Why should we expose ourselves as performers, teachers, and researchers into spaces of vulnerability, when we already have other spaces which is filled with safety? Brown (2021) encourages a diving into vulnerability, because it is not weakness (which I must admit was the way I often thought about vulnerability), but rather it is “our greatest measure of courage” (p. 15). But what does it mean to *use* vulnerability as a soprano teacher and researcher (as a mother)? What has vulnerability made me see, or feel? How has the courage of being vulnerable left me with an empowered voice? And what does that mean for Others? How might vulnerability empower voices of Others?

In my exploration of vulnerability, I went back to Braidotti (2011), who views vulnerability as a starting point of becoming, of how to find affirmative and different subject positions to voice from. She describes Nomadic thinking as a space of becoming – a zigzagging pattern flowing in between the subject positions. A constant movement between the local, political, and global spaces. Vulnerability is needed as the entrance for the process of becoming. Working with performative autoethnography, I have experienced this being very present in

my study. I needed vulnerability to start ‘flowing’. It was what grounded me and eventually let me flow. This position, creating the different modes of Performative I’s, was for me both vulnerable and affirmative at the same time. The connection between those terms, vulnerability, and affirmation, is key in Braidotti’s Nomadic theory (2011). She describes this connection as the opening out – the transformative power in the becoming. Crucial to the subjects becoming is the blurring of the oppositional dualism majority – minority, and the affirmative position of what that blurring might create for the subject. This way of thinking makes the voice of the subject far beyond the ‘individual’ or the ‘identity’ of the subjects because it is a collective thinking (and this might also be the reason for me not choosing the ‘identity road’ in my study, which you might have noticed and already questioned). Braidotti (2011) encourages the Nomadic thinker to create and activate different ways of belonging, which means to “reinvent oneself” (p. 41), to desire the self as a process of transformation, with vulnerability as a starting point. This is how one might engage ethically with subjects, overcoming dualities, binaries, and dialectics.

Being in love with Braidotti and her Nomadic theory I was inspired by her thinking to blur the distance between binaries. I had strived for that in all four articles I wrote for this thesis, and I see it is a core issue of working with performative autoethnography (Spry, 2011, 2016). To see beyond the self. To see the Other. But I also found it challenging. I firmly believed in this thinking, but was it all a utopia? The subjects starting points are so different. The power relations between the majority and minority are so visible. How could I, holding a position of the majority engage with the Other, those being at the margins, through affirmative vulnerability without creating distance? The distance was already there. The teacher voice in me spoke up. What do I do when I teach? I try to diminish distance, seeking vulnerable spaces for both the student and I.

There will always be asymmetrical relationships between the Self and the Other. But I can be guided by Nomadic thinking, to embrace the difference in the starting points of acting, both as a soprano, teacher, and researcher. Those different starting points are important, because they mark the levels of our relations (Braidotti, 2011). I experienced this in all my four articles. Through the performative I’s, I found different ways of belonging (Braidotti, 2011), I strived to reinvent myself, to desire the self as a process of transformation. The four different dialogues I created became different, I had different starting points in them – but I strived

with the same aim – to see the Other, to create and find space where a multiplicity of voices can voice, in vocal pedagogy, music education, and academia.

I found courage and was guided with the methodologies and theories, and especially by Nomadic theory (2011) which constantly disturbed me and said, that what matters is to keep open the process of becoming. Not to stop at the binaries. But constantly try to see different possibilities. That process of thinking carries the hope of Others and the self. I could not survive sitting in the hallway at school being encapsulated by the glass walls, making my child feel safe, without hope. Because there was no more room in my container – but with hope I could wait, and I could imagine a different future. A more diverse and empathic future, a utopia, even a common world or community (see for example: Arendt, 1961/2013; Greene, 1995). From Braidotti (2019) I learned that we are all in this world together, but we are not one and the same.

Yes, striving for a better world is hard. It is a struggle. Even a fight, where I want to scream. Maybe my thesis is my scream? I know, that “as long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait” (Freire, 1970/2018, p. 80). Dialogues do not empower voices when being carried out in hopelessness. As one of my supervisors said to me in the last days of finishing this thesis - if we do not have hope, we are fucked. I cannot decide what is a vulnerable space for Others. What is experienced as a vulnerable space is highly individually, contextually, and culturally. Is a vulnerable space a ‘safe space’<sup>10</sup> (or a brave space)? Being aware of that, to really acknowledge and sense that vulnerability and empowerment feels differently, is a good starting point. Even a place where hope might occur. Hope is not developed during the easy and comfortable, but through adversity and discomfort (Brown, 2021). Now, that gives me hope and a belief that empowering voices – those who do not fit in the already established categories of voice, those who struggles with gender issues, of disciplining and normative act, as I did – might find an empowered voice to hold.

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<sup>10</sup> Safe space is a term born out of the 1960’s and 19870’s women’s movement (Sauerland, 2022). It is often used in research related to educational setting (Anderson, 2018; Bostrum, 1998; Brill & Pepper, 2008), where the aim is to create spaces, where students can find the “opportunity to be their authentic gender-self, with freedom to fully express their identity” (Anderson, 2018, p. 30). Safe space is not only a physical space, but a space created by the coming together searching for community (Harris, 2015). For me, safe space is tricky. It can’t be imposed or decided on Others, as is a vulnerable space.

My grandma empowered my voice. Not only my singing voice, but to have a voice. Through my study I aim to do the same. All voices matter. All bodies matter. Not only those with a bright soprano voice. I learned which voices had power, even as a small child sitting on my grandma's lap, when she applauded my bright soprano voice. In one way, that makes my task of wanting to take vocal pedagogy and music education into a space that gives room for a multiplicity of voices, seem unaffordable. The power relations and structures are so deep. They permeate every layer in the world I live in. At the same time, I see hope. Because, this realization of mine, gives me a critical voice. I agree with Spry (2011, 2016), that performative autoethnography must reside in the aesthetic crafting of critical reflection upon the body as evidence. The body as evidence does not mean that such approach will be without bumps, without resistance. What I see in the kaleidoscope might not be what I want to see. That is a risk you must be willing to take. And for me, that has been the risk which eventually empowered my voice.

I turn the kaleidoscope to clear my thoughts (or body). I see something green. My father, who in addition to be an opera singer, is a visual artist, a painter. He taught me that green is a calm color, a color which gives energy but makes me feel relaxed at the same time. I think I see bright green. Or, wait - now I can feel the old and dusty smell of the bright green velour curtains in the theatre, which I nervously stood behind waiting to play the role of the princess in the fairy-tale *Askeladden*<sup>11</sup> when I was 9 years old, one of the first things I did when I moved from the small island of Abelvær to Verdal – a much bigger place (seriously, I had never seen so many people at one place. I thought the whole world was gathered in the schoolyard at my school in Verdal). My mom and dad thought that theatre might be a good idea, since I loved singing so much. Being thrown into playing with Others would make it easier to have new friends, to understand the new place I moved to. At least, that was what my parents told me. I can still sense the emotion of feeling new, and frightened of not having friends when standing behind those green curtains in the theatre. Although the actual experience has passed, I see (or feel) how the experiences has played out on and in my body. Embodied knowledge.

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<sup>11</sup> Translated to English, *Askeladden* is the 'Ashlad' (Norwegian "Askeladden", full name "Esben Askelad" or "Espen Askeladd") is a main character in a number of tales collected in Asbjørnsen and Moe's *Norwegian Folktales*.

### **5.2.2 Stories crafted from embodied knowledge**

In my thesis journey I have sought to trust, activate, and anchor myself in my embodied knowledge. Every story is crafted through my embodied knowledge. I started to trust embodied knowledge as a tremendous source to draw knowledge from, and my next step was to craft a critical reflection (Spry, 2016). I approached this critical reflection in different ways. I wrote auto-narratives in article 1 and analyzed these experiences through engaging in feminist theories ‘after’ I had crafted the narratives. In article 2, auto-narratives served as a foundation to know the other who I was co-writing with. To create trust and to investigate a common experience from two different positions of embodied knowledge. But, in article 3, I had a shift in my critical crafting of my embodied knowledge. I not only acknowledged my embodied knowledge, I traced them further, into the imagined. When I say ‘them’, I refer to my emotions. In article 4, I just dived right into my emotions, without a filter, someone, or something to hide behind (Yes. I do think inviting Rosi Braidotti and Maria Callas in article 3 was a way of empowering my voice, but also to hide behind two people that admired). I must be honest and say that embracing emotions and imagining was not something I strategically planned to do.

Doing the meta-analysis of my articles now, I see that emotions ‘happened’. I did not try to tidy my struggles and emotions away from the text. I tried to embrace them, just as Susanna Hast (2018) writes about in *Sounds of War*. Hast (2018) explains that when “minding emotions in research, the argument does not always manifest in language, but remains lingering inside the skin” (p. 18). In article one, creating a feminist performative I enabled me to feel “the skin of the soprano” (Jenssen, 2021, p.116). This feeling lingered for a while, and as my researcher voice developed, undergoing my academic voice change, I hooked back into my emotions, this time more deeply. Blurring the dualism between mind and the body, was not only embracing embodied knowledge, but it was also lingering with my emotions. Bresler (2006, 2019) speaks about the lingering caress when viewing an artwork, as the mutual absorption that intensify the dialogue between viewer and artwork. The lingering caress allows deepening open ended relationships and requires an emotional and intellectual investment in the experienced. In the embodied (Bresler, 2006). For me, this has been central for my study and ways of working with the embodied knowledge. This is what the methodology of performative autoethnography has made possible. It was a deep investment in the experienced. When I have lingered, hooking into my emotions when crafting my critical reflections through writing stories, I have been aware of and seen patterns of power relations.

I have been able to grasp the whole, the interplay (which Barad might have called intra-play, between detail and whole). It has allowed me to move closer (Bresler, 2006), to tightening my focus on notions of voice, but also widening it. Exploring and expanding notions of voice.

My view of the term ‘feminine’ also expanded during my study. That the acts I viewed as feminine, in the beginning of my work, was normative ways of being and acting. Those actions could be viewed differently in another context and culture. In all that vulnerability, I felt safe. Really safe. Such a paradox, isn’t it? What made me feel safe, was the belief in the embodied. With the body as an archive (Bissell & Haviland, 2018; Harkin, 2020; Lepecki, 2010; Puwar, 2021), I have returned to my embodied experiences in my quest for exploring notions of voice. I have put my bodily experiences on the page (Spry, 2011). But, to do that you need a “will to archive” (Lepecki, 2010, p. 29). That means that the archive of the body is not defined as much by what it holds, but by the relations subjects establish with the Other. The body as an archive also resonate with Braidotti’s ideas of how the grounding of the subject starts with affirmative vulnerability, as the starting point for becoming. The body as an archive also, as Nomadic theory, seeks a multiplicity of perspectives. A belief that “the domain of the body is the site of consciousness, regardless of particular disciplinary approaches” (Bissell & Haviland, 2018, p. xiv). Although the scholars I have read who describe the body as archive do not come from voice studies or the discipline of music, it is of great value to me to lean on their views in my meta-analysis. Bissell and Haviland (2018) come from the field of dance but position themselves (as voice studies does and as I do) to take a multidisciplinary approach, which is meant to encounter a reality that connects dance and disciplines that might be ignored. They argue that western culture has been reluctant to “an unruly body – a body that refuses to be constrained by the demands of objective analysis or to remain passive in the course of investigation – into its midst” (Bissell & Haviland, 2018, p. xv). This was like reading about my voice – about how I had negotiated to find a researcher voice in my study. But also how voice was viewed when performing and singing. An unruly voice. That what was I had been dealing with. Voice in an experienced way. What is stored in my archive is what I see in the kaleidoscope. My perspectives. It would be interesting to see how voices of archives might sound from Others, in performance, education, and academia. Because in the end of my study, this unruly voice was what made me create a sustainable voice.



The performative is what brings me or sets my archive in relation with the Other. Opening to an unruly voice, is an empathic and ethical process which entails a rethinking of voice, but also the way we create knowledge about voice. I return to critical questions to my findings in the discovery chapter, where I asked why we need to stretch and expand on already established knowledge? Why do we need new perspectives and possibilities? We need them because not all voices of archives are heard in the roles more dominant ways of knowledge production offer.

Imagined Maria (in article 3) told me to “cut the crap”. I feel it is time to cut the crap. Maybe it is time that voice and music studies bring in the body with fuller force than ever before? Maybe the boundaries of what belongs with a disciplinary zone just need to ‘chill out’ in a big way? I mean, I know it is happening, people are doing this – I have shown that in my theory chapter, but maybe academia just needs a continual reminder to keep moving into a more fluid space if we want to be relevant and connected to the world? Or not only academia. I am not sure how long I can sit in the hallway at my child’s school, surrounded by walls of glass, before I scream. Maybe I am not able to make a sound. Maybe I will throw a chair through the glass to get out – or is that the way ‘in’, to the body? A way in to embrace and *use* embodied knowledge in pedagogy, education, and research. I want to see action, and I do want the voice and music educational community to help me with throwing that chair or screaming, of course, not literally (although that would be therapeutic, which is very autoethnographic). I am sick of waiting – I am almost losing my hope. I need soprano, teacher, and researcher voices to be loud, messy, unrestrained, angry, roaring, shy, subtle, beautiful, pretty and dare I say it, even feminine – in the plurality of what that could be. For me, that is an act of freedom (see: Laing, 2021). Different voices have the different emotions. Voices can be encouraged to be unruly, which Schlichter (2011) describes as a transgressive voice. Engaging with transgressive voices, as performers, teachers, and researchers, might contribute to alternative, affirmative, and sustainable voices, for singing and academic voices.

My most unruly voice is present in article 4, *The voice lessons*, where I play with the ideas (not throwing chairs), but how embodied ways of knowing, grasping the material lived body, might be an entrance for new ways of producing (auto)ethnographic ‘data’ – but also onto epistemological ways of knowing. Ways of knowing through being – in my way, through telling stories as a way of embracing embodied knowledge.

I believe my scream – my thesis - seeks an entrance to voice, as a soprano, teacher, and researcher, which entails an openness to the possibility that knowledge “can be both legible *and* embodied” (Bissell & Haviland, 2018, p, 1). A somatic approach to writing (see for example: Brown & Longley, 2018; Duxbury, et al., 2018; Kapadocha, 2020; Longley & Miller, 2019; Pentikäinen, 2022), knowledge gained through other expressions than text, but generated through the body.

A confession. Being a soprano, I kind of expected to go into arts based or artistic research. There is a vast body of methodologies, which enter the body with and through arts-based methods (see for example: Leavy, 2017). At least, I was an artist – that was a ‘skill’ I should take advantage of in my research. I did take advantage of the knowledge I carried as a soprano. But, maybe not in the expected way. My archive ended up being explored and articulated through writing, through words. A lot of words. Writing became my way of knowing. I acknowledge that embodied knowledge in research might take form in many other shapes than written text (Bissell & Haviland, 2018). For me, my embodied writing created a nuance in an academic text that was unexpected. I loved it. It made me feel free when writing. I also see that there are nuances in what an academic text might be. I have tried to push the boundaries of what and how it is possible to have a voice in an academic text.

Pushing boundaries through writing revealed stories. Right now, one of the stories told in this thesis refuses to let go – a ghost following my work. The green curtains. Although I had been writing several paragraphs, I was still standing behind the green curtain in the theatre. The dusty old smell did not leave the room, as a child that also made me think of my grandma, who still lived in Abelvær. This made me nearly cry behind the green curtains (the color did not calm me down, despite my father’s theory about the color green). I wanted to escape. To run home (I told you, my grandparents’ house was really my second home), to grandma, to the kitchen, the best place in the house, to my cousin, who was my classmate in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and who was my only and best friend (but she made me feel like I had hundreds of friends). I could not escape. I was standing behind the green curtains in the theatre, waiting to play the Princess in *Askeladden*. I was supposed to feel proud of securing the role of one of the main characters (the audition panel said I got the role because I was so good at singing, and I really looked like a Norwegian princess with all that long blonde hair). I even wore my national costume, called a bunad in Norwegian, as a costume, and an incredibly impressive crown that my mother stayed up during the night to make. I could not escape. I had to sing (and yes, I

still do remember the lyrics to the song). Now, that's embodied knowledge. And that was what embodied knowledge made me feel and *do* in this thesis. Through performative autoethnography there were the embodied realizations - of what my body felt and carried, what it knew and knows. Now, I had a methodology to hold onto. I did not need to escape, I actively used the knowledge to understand, to critique, to move on. And to be honest. That felt good too.

### 5.2.3 Feminist stockings

I have always admired my mom. She is so strong. Fearless. My mom drives her car fast. I have always been so proud of my mom's ability to handle the car. So secure. No hesitation. One summer, she drove from Norway to Austria (2500 km!) in a small Fiat Uno 77 model, with my father (he does not drive) and I as passengers. I was 6 years old. My father studied opera in Salzburg (the cradle of western classical music) and we needed to go there with him. She drove, my dad read the map – and I sat in the backseat, sleeping, or singing. My mom – the feminist. I admire how she proudly wears that title. How she freely speaks about being a feminist. How she is never afraid of being unpopular. She snorts when someone compliments my father, because he is *so good* at housework – “I never heard you complimenting me for housework” she replies. I can't help smiling. I love her snappy comments. I could never do that. My mom - so strong. She lost a child when I was 9 years old. My little sister. But she always continues. My mom, the feminist – who fights for Others' rights. Who literally stands in a storm for children who do not have homes with caring parents and feminists to fight for them. My parents bring those children home so they can live in a 'normal' family, a foster family – to be fully cared for. Why am I afraid of calling myself a feminist then, when I am so proud of my mom's feminist utterances? For her it seems so easy.

For me, it's tricky. What the fuck is it to be a feminist – and what is feminism in my study? I am not even sure I want to give feminism a color in my kaleidoscope. The most obvious color is red – like the stockings my mother wore when marching in feminist protests in the 70's. Maybe it is black. Maybe it is a mistake to be a feminist? I am not sure if I am up to it. Why do I have to *be* a feminist? Do I really need to put on those stockings, or could it be a nice pink dress? Would the *real* feminists laugh at me? I love dresses. I also love feminist theories and what they enable. I love Donna Haraway's 'God trick', which made me find confidence in believing in my situated knowledge when I started this study. I adore Rosi Braidotti,

fighting on the barricades for marginalized, racialized, and sexualized subjects – human and non-humans. I was stunned by Karen Barad’s own unique language and terms, which makes us all entangled and seen – in the never-ending universe.

In article 1 I needed to *be* a feminist. I admit that. That utterance made me feel empowered. I needed feminist theories to critically start exploring my embodied experience, to have something to ‘shoot with’ and hold on to. Braidotti (2011) taught me that feminism was about challenging the universal, speaking from the local. From within. Butler (1990) made me recognize and identify patterns and regularities that needed to be broken. I felt as though Haraway, Butler, Braidotti, and Barad were cheering me on during my writing process. They had a language I admired, and which was useful when creating an academic voice. Language is filled with power. So are emotions. For me, emotions sit in every bone in my body, in our bodies. What I found in feminist theories, and especially the new materialist strand of feminist theories (see: Alaimo & Heckman, 2008), was a deep belief in the body. Braidotti (2011) refers to this as “bodily materialism” (p. 2). The body *mattered* in research – in knowing. As a soprano that was just something very ‘natural’ (oh, I hate that word – can there be a ‘natural’ voice? – or is that ‘natural voice’ only a fulfilment of the expected sound – from teachers, listeners – a western sociocultural context of singing?). Braidotti (2011) spoke about the Nomadic body as open-ended, interrelational, multisexed, communicative - as a flow of becoming with multiple Others. Now, that was a body I could relate to. A body with porous boundaries. For me, the voice is not ‘natural’. It is organic. It breathes, it moves, and it craves its space within its surroundings. Feminist theories made me believe that was possible, as a researcher. And with that belief I started to trust the emotions of the body. My body. Not as something to put aside, to get the real academic work done. But, to dare to open. To fall without wings (Inayatullah, 2010). I have followed traces and threads in my body, which I think has helped me create an empathy and generosity for Others. I have fallen without wings by writing from the body. My bodily approach to writing is part of my feminist investigation. My feminist performative I. Through putting my body into words, I care for Others. That is feminism in my study. And with the body, I had something to shoot from. To challenge, from within.

Claiming to *be* a feminist, was I taking a position of my own ‘God trick’? Did I try to show vulnerability and courage, but ‘hide’ myself behind claiming to *be* a feminist? Claiming space as ‘a feminist’, was I self – ontologizing? Yes, in many ways I was - and maybe I needed that

– as a beginning, as something to hold onto. I was no longer only an obedient soprano. With claiming to be a feminist I was ready to perform differently. Seeking for a position of claiming space – of feeling empowered - to have a voice. To be heard. To be listened to, not ‘just’ a soprano or teacher, but as a researcher too. Fleeing from being shut down. During my process of writing, I let go of the utterance ‘to be a feminist’, or ‘as a feminist I see that’. I saw things in my study that I did not need to *be* a feminist to see or describe. I held on to feminist theories, and then - I ‘just wrote’. I fell without a safety net into writing stories from my experiences in a western sociocultural context of singing. That feeling was even better. I could even put on a pink dress, a Chanel hat, and gloves, and still have a voice in the academic discourse. Writing from my body and my imagination was a connection to Others.

#### **5.2.4 Difference and sameness**

I was a very ordinary child, my mom even called me boring (I think she meant very calm. No fuss with Runa). I looked like a ‘typical’ Norwegian child. White Nordic skin (although I had freckles on my nose), blue eyes and blonde hair, which I often had in a long braid. I wanted red curly hair and brown eyes. My mom refused to let me color my hair (she said it would turn bright orange, for sure) so I was stuck being ordinary, normal. As a singer, I also felt very ordinary. I did not make any fuss. I fitted well into the expected norm of being a singer – a soprano. In vocal pedagogy, training to be a voice teacher in practice – I also felt the same. I was so boring – so common. “I am going to be one of those traditional ‘singing aunts’”. I saw that the students I taught liked my approach. I got very nice feedback from children, students, teachers, and parents. I am not sure why I wanted to be different. It seemed exciting. Was it the attention I craved? I am not sure. I had attention from singing. I had applause from the culture I lived in. I believe I was curious. Trying to see or feel how being different was. Turning the kaleidoscope now, I feel stuck. I am desperately looking for difference. I have written four articles where difference is so present (at least I thought so), and in my kaleidoscope I see no difference? I feel failure. Again, the voice of Brené Brown (2021) returns to me, as a guiding light when things are getting hard, and suggests:

Choosing to be curious is choosing to be vulnerable because it requires us to surrender uncertainty. We have to ask questions, admit to not knowing, risk being told that we should not be asking, and, sometimes, make discoveries that lead to discomfort (p. 65).

Brown's words prompt a torrent of questions out of me: Do I use difference to be politically correct? Social justice looks nice in a thesis. How can I claim or speak about difference when I don't hold it myself? Is difference my Other? If so, how could I use my curiosity to help me see the Other?

These are the kind of questions that invite the vulnerable, uncertain, and even uncomfortable discoveries that Brown (2021) speaks of. Admitting to not know, was not so difficult for me. Maybe it is the 'positive effect' of being curious – to always try to know more (and as a performer, you just need to throw yourself into not knowing, to be able to 'deliver'. Fast. No room for hesitation). *How* to know more was more difficult, for me at least. Knowing brought me into spaces of risk, and discomfort. When I wrote article 1, I felt like I was a naïve soprano asking questions. These questions scratched on the surface of my soprano skin and started to peel layers of that skin back. Article 1 opened a space where I started to dare to ask questions I had never asked as a soprano. Undergoing a journey of articles, new questions flowed towards me, as a giant wave. In the beginning I must admit that I felt a bit threatened. Not by all the questions, but the discomfort and shameful feeling that these were questions I should be able to ask, even to know these questions, let alone ask them, a long time ago.

Why did I not ask more questions as a performer? I am a curious person. I like to dig, I like to talk with people, read literature, to think and be with nature. I enjoy questions. My children ask the best questions. They are not afraid. Especially my 7 years old twins. They just ask. I was studying and performing voice – but when I was not singing, I was quite silent. That did not mean I did not have questions. Often, I whispered and discussed with the person standing next to me in the choir, or on stage. Often, I discussed in the hotel room, with the other soprano I shared a room with when touring. Often in the breaks, with my closest colleagues at my same level, and when we were out of sight of the conductors, teachers, and directors. Of course, I had opinions, but why did I not say anything in the most visible spaces?

In my kaleidoscopic reading of my articles (where constantly stories haunt me), I see that my curiosity, especially seeking for difference, became an important part of the research process. I did not know difference; however, I was curious about it. Working with the unknown, expecting it, lingering with it, aiming to evoke curiosity even when threatened by it, all became important aspects of my research process. It was an interplay between knowing and unknowing (Bresler, 2019), where the notion of difference kept me going. My curiosity of difference was what made me take a risk. I could have left the risk after article 1, but I did

not. I continued into more and different risky positions. I just had to know – could there be more and different ways of seeing notions of voice?

Diving into the notion of difference makes me ask questions about the culture I have been raised and work in. Being concerned about difference means that I am curious about Other's stories. Caring for difference means that I sense a music education where difference is not accepted fully. Braidotti (2011) speaks up, reminding me of difference as a positive space to hold – what does that knowledge or way of thinking about difference make me see in my study? (Even though I am not holding the difference myself?)

My kaleidoscopic exploration of notions of voice offers a framework for connection – to Others. But could I reach the other through difference? Why was I so eager to find difference? Was it only my curiosity, or that I cared about Others, about difference? In article 1, I now see that what I called difference, was a feeling of starting to ask questions to a western sociocultural context of singing. For me, that was a different way of performing and dialoguing with the culture. In *A tale of grappling*, difference was key – Rose and I saw that difference was important to investigate to succeed with doing a duoethnography (or at least Norris and Sawyer told us this was the case). But Rose and I strived to find difference. Why? Was it not enough to have sameness? Our sameness was the idea that really came forward in our work. Something we constantly came back to. We tried to stretch and expand the methodology of duoethnography, but we held on to finding difference, well supported by Barad's (2003, 2007) rethinking of the difference into diffractions. Not difference itself, but the effect of difference. Still, difference was needed. Our 'result' was embracing all kinds of difference, even micro-difference, or shy difference.

Difference which could be viewed as hidden or obscured is also important. In article 3, I explored how Nomadic theory might lend new entrances to (re)think voice and offer diversity in vocal pedagogy. I did that through specifically dive into the notions of difference. And why did I choose Braidotti and Callas to join my imagined conversation? Did they hold more difference than I? Could I hide my vulnerability behind them? Could they say things I could not? Oh, yes, they could, with a different timbre, quality, and punch in their voices. And now I see that was why I needed the voices of Braidotti and Callas in my text.

In article 4, I tried to see and write about moments I had felt marginalized in a western sociocultural context of singing. I gave a critical view and feeling of the contexts I have

experienced. Was I only playing defense? Did my eagerness to find or hold difference make me miss something? I still believe in difference as a positive space to hold. But I also think I was afraid that not holding difference myself would make me unable to see the Other. What does that mean on a meta-level? For me, it means that it is difficult to engage in questions of diversity and inclusion in vocal pedagogy and music education when you do not hold difference yourself. But it does not mean that you cannot do that. I even think it is important that ‘we’, who work within the contexts of higher education, in academia, continue to work with difference, even when we do hold sameness. I learned from Braidotti (2011), to look at difference not just as a binary category, as sexual difference – but, as difference within every subject. I do find Braidotti’s way of thinking useful, as it is an affirmative way of looking at difference – and that difference is not something to be ‘measured’. All difference matters, even the shy and unspoken ones. My study has made me *listen* to difference. What I see, is that difference is my Other.

I return to the kaleidoscope. I am still holding it in my hand. I lift it to my eye again to look, are things any clearer now? The bright orange color has turned into my favorite color – raspberry red – filled with a pink energy, but without being too sharp. Raspberry red is the color I have on the vest in my bunad national costume. My vest is made of French silk with a small pattern of flowers deep in the fabric. The vest sits close on my upper body, framing my figure. I feel good when wearing my costume. It makes me feel feminine – I walk a bit differently when wearing it. My bunad makes me feel proud and connected to my culture. Where I come from. Many Norwegians have a national costume, the bunad, and wear it with pride in events, such as weddings, baptisms and not least at 17 of May<sup>12</sup>. Every part of Norway has its own costume – so wearing the bunad is a great way of sharing where you come from, where your heritage is situated. But now, thinking about my bunad makes me see how privileged I am, as a soprano, teacher, and researcher. I write this thesis coming from the center in my culture. I see something that I might have negated in my study. It is not difference. I see sameness.

What I might negate in my articles – is the culture I loved. My sameness. The way sameness did something with my being. Like when I wear my bunad, I do feel empowered by the

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<sup>12</sup> Constitution Day is the national day of Norway and is an official public holiday observed on 17<sup>th</sup> of May each year.



culture I have been trained and shaped in. The culture I loved is part of my story – shaping how I sing, teach, and research the way I do. The culture I loved brought me to where I am today. I still live in that culture. Yes, I have experienced times being silenced, rejected, belittled, told off, or told to shut up in this culture. These stories I share from my culture highlight the oppression and hegemony of the practice I come from (but that I still love – such a paradox, isn't it?).

Acknowledging the sameness I come from, was something I 'forgot' when writing my articles. I loved the musical culture I came from. I state that many times in my thesis. However, I tried to 'get rid of it'. I cannot do that. Sameness is the position I hold. It does not make it 'all a mistake'. If I continue to follow Braidotti's (2011) Nomadic theory, I am the one holding the position of the majority (the same) as the position to think from, and the minority is the Other. Being aware of that point of entrance makes me aware of what I have, and where I might go. But there are always possibilities. Sameness is not only a mistake. But, as Maxine Green (1995) argues, that sameness is fine, but not good enough. June Boyce Tillman (2012), asks that when voices live in sameness, what are they capable of understanding? She argues that we cannot even imagine freely when we live in a culture of sameness. Talbot (2018) encourages us who work in music education to abandon sameness, the safe, and envision new approaches based on new values, and Juliet Hess (2019) wants to look forward with music, as a way of activism disturbing the same, to create a music education for social change. Sameness meant being a part of the majority, being the one holding the power. I have been writing from the center. Such a privilege. But I was not fully aware of that privilege. Doing that, reminded me of wearing my bunad. Maybe I was afraid that sameness would make carrying the strong culture as the right way and answer of how to act in and understand a culture? Maybe that was why I was negating sameness. Holding the 'answer' was not what I was seeking for. How could I reach the Other then?

Being at the end phase of my study, I choose to see my enactments with difference as a vulnerable area to dive into. Exploring difference in relation to voice, was a possibility I saw and felt strongly I needed to do. Seeing that more and more people are pushed into the margins in the world we live in, I felt it was important to dive into the notion of difference. But the way I negated my sameness also made me see another layer in my study. Difference made me ask questions.

I can't feel the Other's difference (as with my voice lessons with Francesca described in my theory chapter), but I can listen – and I can *believe* in their experience (Brown, 2021), just as I believe in my embodied experience. Although I see that I tried to hold difference in my articles, I do see that I have strived to find an empathic and ethical way of listening to Others holding difference. I wanted to understand difference, so I would not be in danger of reproducing sameness. I will always produce knowledge from the position of sameness, despite my efforts to do otherwise, to mask, stretch, or throw off who I am and the sameness I hold. It does not make it 'bad' knowledge. But it does require me to work and understand my position, to understand the politics of diversity in music education (see for example: Kallio et al., 2021), and to engage with a reflexivity. Reflexivity, as a way of listening to my own ignorance and turning attention to ontological and epistemological ways of working that might give space for a multiplicity of voices, for difference. This kind of reflexivity "serves as an invitation to engage in the politics of diversity through the transformation of researchers themselves" (Kallio, 2021, p. 53). I mastered the culture of sameness so well, and to even see sameness required a deep reflexivity, a way of listening that I might not fully performed in my articles. Am I too harsh in my own analysis of my study now? Can there ever be 'enough' reflexivity when doing research? Is it possible to be 'fully' reflexive? I don't think so. But I have tried.

What I have come to terms with writing this thesis, is that there are always possibilities within our (hi)stories. Coming from the centered position, the majority, does not mean that I cannot care, be curious about, and dive into difference. It does not mean I cannot dive into the culture I loved with acknowledgement and criticality. Writing from the center, from sameness, means that I need to care and be aware of my position. "Maybe I need to show how I *use* my awareness of writing from the center, as a position to speak from?". I am talking loud to myself (again), sitting at the kitchen table, drinking coffee, *really* early in the morning. Only our kitten Illi (who is even too tired to play) and I are awake. How can I show and maybe more importantly, try to use, the nagging feeling that woke me up at 4am this morning? Maybe I am haunted by ghosts in the stories I carry with me (see for example: Cameron, 2008; Fitzpatrick & Bell, 2016). I want and I try hard to ignore the feeling of the ghosts. I pretend the feeling is not there. It is easiest to not talk about ghosts (especially in my research) – the histories, the people, the places related to my research, that I have come to find unpleasant. I try to pretend, but I know there is no escape, because ghosts might also be spaces that works as revealing and satisfying in my writing (again, such a paradox). If I am going to make to the finish line in my thesis, I better be on the alert and start to let the ghosts

in. Into my writing body. Even if is a bit dark in the kitchen I am sitting in, and not much light is passing through the kaleidoscopic lens, I see a bright shade of blue again, emerging with fragments in the end of the kaleidoscope, but this time it shifts into purple. The feeling, my ghosts, and what I see, is pain.

### **5.2.5 Pain**

Pain permeates the room. I sit on the edge of my grandma's bed. She has called me to come. Well, she shouted at me that I had to come. "Hello! Can anyone hear me? Does anyone care at all?" She is screaming. I am telling my kids that grandma is a bit different now. She is living with dementia, that she changes personality. "That's ok mom" of the kids replies. "Grandma is just getting old". But I am not ok with it. This is the first time my grandma has shouted at me. I do not like being shouted at. But, this time, my senses are sharpened. I listen to her. She is uneasy. I can see it's difficult for her to breath. Her heart is failing. Her whole body is leaking water. The smell of the leaking liquid fills the room. Her legs are wrapped in bandages, to stop the leaks. "Take it off" she shouts. "I can't do that, grandma – doctors' advice – but I can rub your back if it makes you feel better". "Yes, thank you" – she moans, "What is this feeling – I don't understand. Take it away!" – grandma tosses back and forth in bed. Uneasy. It's difficult to breath. She is grasping for air. "Call Rita!" (my mom) she shouts. "Rita is in the living room. She is making food for the kids", I answer. "She is too kind. I don't know how she has been handling me the last weeks" (my mom has been living with my grandma for almost two months).

"Can you sing for me?" My grandma asks. I am not sure if I can, I think to myself. She was always the one who sang for me when I was a child – we slept together in this bed I am sitting on the edge of now. "Sing", she repeats. So, I sing. I lie down next to her, as she used to do with me, and she falls asleep after a while. Everything is 'turned around'. Roles are switched. I am the one singing her to sleep now. It feels good, but strange. My grandma and I – still entangled – but in a different way. Her voice is soon fading out. And I start to think what happens after her heart stops beating. Her voice will keep resonating within me. I carry it with me. As a trace. A feeling. It lingers. It hurts. That is pain.

What does pain feel like? It is hard to describe. Sitting with my grandmother, the room oozing pain, made me question moments of pain I had encountered. Pain, not just in a physical sense

of say childbirth (which after four children, is up there with the most physical pain one can endure), but the pain of feelings that cut deep, of carrying ghosts, of conforming into a culture. Pain of being shut down so many times. But, also, pain of seeing Others shut down. If someone in the various ensembles I performed in asked questions – critical questions, they were often shut down. Also, when singing. If someone sang too loud, they would often get ‘the hand’ – meaning, “TOO loud, shhhhh... go back into the homogenous sound – in the background”. That made me feel awful, even though I seldom got ‘the hand’ – I felt the pain of those who did. An unspoken nasty atmosphere spread in the room. I just wanted that feeling to go away – so we could continue to work. So, I stayed quiet. Questions and comments, which were seen to not be appropriate (meaning disturbing the director from doing the planned job) often came from the same performers. I could not help to notice that these performers, the questioners, were not always ‘the first choice’. Troublemakers. Also, they seldom came back to the ensemble. Many times, I thought I was hired and rehired because I did not make a fuss. I did what I was supposed to do. I regret that. It made and still makes me feel like a coward. Instead, I was good at pleasing. That worked. No fuss, but still pain.

Also, I have been doubting my pain. Asking myself – “is this painful enough?” (similar to the feeling I had with the notion of difference – “is this different enough?”). During the process of writing my thesis, I have come to terms with ‘pain is pain’. It is not a competition of how much pain to feel, until it’s accepted as pain. Braidotti (2011) sees pain as a power of affirmation. She talks about pain as a capital, but it is not a naïve position or fleeing from something negative. Rather, pain is an ethical space – an ethics which is “about the transformation of negative affirmative passions” (Braidotti, 2011, p.21). This way of thinking pain is helpful, it really makes sense, even for me, writing from the center. It gives me hope. Giving birth to four children, the pain was ‘worth’ it. I remember I thought that giving birth must be the only time pain is relieved into something good. Braidotti’s thinking made me see a different pain, which could transform into something good (and that was indeed an ethical way of thinking). But what happens if the transformation fails? Does pain stop being an ethical space and just remains as pain? Are we then left with no way out, no hope?

But, the aim of the transformation through pain is hope. I felt good about not leaving my ghosts. I even think about how I can track my ghosts further. Diving into ghosts, sometimes filled with pain, could help me relocate myself as a Nomadic thinker, to make me see differently. Brown (2021) even suggested that we need pain. Maybe she is right? The

intensity of engaging with negative affirmative passions (Braidotti, 2011), expanded my perception. It invited me to see (and hear) more (Bresler, 2019). To breath deeper – to do the abdominal breathing I was taught to do as a soprano – but now, as a researcher, I felt I ‘did it’(!). I never thought I could experience that intensity somewhere else than when singing. But I actually could when doing research. This was what happened when I wrote article 4. The intensity created my unruly voice. When expanding what could be viewed as (auto)ethnographic ‘data’, when pushing boundaries of how (auto)ethnographic data could be produced, analyzed, and presented. Then, I needed pain. Pain could even be viewed as a positive space to hold (as Braidotti talked about difference). Yes, it was pain(ful), but damn, it also felt good.

In all my articles I do use and write about pain. Sewing my cape, I was expecting to poke myself with the needle (I was now heavily regretting that I let my mom finish my sewing tasks at school). Now in this chapter, I had a second chance in making my stiches between the patches, my articles, better, tighter, tidier. I decided to write about the pain I was ‘holding in’, in the cape as well. I found courage to write about the closest and deepest pain, from my last encounters with my grandma, who empowered my voice, but who left me and the world this summer. Luckily, I got the chance to say goodbye in a very painful but respectful way. I remember my mom called me and said – “now grandma is free”.

### **5.2.6 Freedom**

The shapes I see in the kaleidoscope reminds me of an ultrasound picture. The pattern moves around, and in between some blurry grey and white shapes, you are supposed to see something. Something you are expecting. This is the third time my husband and I are going for an ultrasound. I am pregnant, for the third time. The doctor who is doing the ultrasound seems to be very focused and diligent in his task. He becomes silent for a little bit too long, and I ask – “is something wrong?” with an increasing pulse. He answers, “No... it’s just that I found another one”. He found another one? Another what? What does he mean? “I found another heart beating. You are having twins”. This was not what I expected. My husband seems to agree on that, he turns totally pale. I think I am going to cry, because let’s face it – I am about to have four boys running around our house and I see that my career as a soprano and academic is pretty much over (one of the twin-boys turned out to be a girl, but still they

kept running around the house). I start to laugh. An uncontrolled laughter, which spreads to the doctor, and then my husband. We are all laughing.

Nine months later, when we drove home from the hospital with twins in the backseat, I felt so privileged. I now had four kids. I lived in a country where I had free health care, childcare, kindergarten, school – you name it, I had access to it. I thought about my mom, who always wanted many kids, and that now she had a brood of grandchildren to take care of (and to tell you truth, I could never be a singer, teacher, and academic without her help with the kids). I thought about how lucky my kids were, growing up in a country where they could be who they wanted to be. They had won the golden lottery – they lived in a democratic country. A country of freedom. It might seem a bit naïve, but that was what I thought. A few months later I escaped the baby bubble to perform on stage again.

I'm hanging in a cage made of iron, dangling from the ceiling. The cage is made as the shape of my body. The brown iron bars encapsulate me. I'm a prisoner in a cell shaped like my body. A man walks towards me and shakes the cage I'm locked in. He shouts at me, but I can't hear his words. The shaking is so powerful that my mouth hits the iron and I'm feeling blood dripping from my upper lip. It hurts, but I can't cry. If I cry, I can't sing. I play the role of Maria in the opera musical *Which Witch*<sup>13</sup>. It is just three months since I gave birth to twins. Everyone says I am so slim, that they can hardly see I have carried twins and that they just can't understand how I do it – juggling the roles as a soprano and mom. All I can think of is how women who were accused of being witches in Norway around 1500, were put in cages and burned. Because they were different. Because they were smart. Because they listened to and learned from nature. Because they were a threat. My lip is bleeding and I start to sing. I sing well. I love to sing. It makes me feel free.

It's early Sunday morning. I am an early bird. I wake up and read the news on my phone. A shooting at Pride, in Oslo, surely not? Quickly, I send a message to my friend, who might be in Oslo celebrating Pride. "Are you ok?", I ask. Here I am, shivering on my hands when tapping on the phone, but I am totally safe. "Yes. I am safe, but not ok", she answers. I feel ashamed. Of course, she is not ok. "How could this happen in Norway?", I ask myself.

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<sup>13</sup> *Which Witch* is a dramatic Norwegian Opera-musical about love and witchcraft, written by Ingrid Bjørnov, Benedicte Adrian and Ole A. Sørli. It opened at the Piccadilly Theatre in London on October 22, 1992, and ran for 76 performances, after a critical savaging.

Having just returned from six months in the USA, I kind of got a small sense of why shootings and hate could happen. But in Norway? Of course, it happens in Norway too. Why am I so damn naïve?

His hands are sweaty, but he says they are cold. I am holding my 7-year-old son's hand. We are walking into the new school, in a country on the other side of the world. We have just arrived and will spend six months in this new place. "You can let go of his hand now", the principal at the school says with a firm voice. "Why?" I think to myself. Will he feel freer when I let go? Will I?

These are four juxtaposed stories that I saw flying out to me when I saw the shades of grey and white in the kaleidoscope. These shades made me see freedom. But the same way I watched the ultrasound picture, these were not the stories I expected to see. In my PhD I expected to write about singing voices, female voice change, and how to nurture female singing voices. I did not expect to write about freedom.

Whose freedom am I writing about? And why do I see freedom in my kaleidoscope? Freedom was unexpected. I saw that the four juxtaposed stories voiced different kinds of freedom I had felt. I wanted to find the reason for this. Had my kaleidoscopic exploration of voice expanded my view on freedom, or was freedom a central part of voice, vocal pedagogy and music education I had not touched upon, yet? I must confess I was a bit confused and found support in Maggie Nelson's (2021) writing about freedom – where she explains that all we can agree on is that there are different ways of using the word freedom. My juxtaposed stories show how my freedom was performed, but also made me understand that freedom is played out differently. From Greene (1995) I had learned that freedom might be crucial to helping us imagine futures that we want, but now another layer was becoming visible for me. I saw that freedom was already in my life, as "an unending present practice, something already going on" (Nelson, 2021, p. 6). If freedom was a practice, Freire's (1970/2018) words that "freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift" (p. 47), made sense. Freedom is not something ideal waiting 'outside' the subject to be discovered – it is a quest, ongoing and maybe even never ending. No wonder Freire could write that both the oppressor and the oppressed are fearful of freedom. I could not help to think back to my feeling of being a container, sitting in the hallway watching my son at school. The containers we find ourselves in are not built for quests. They are fixed and static entities, waiting to be filled. If freedom was a practice when working with voice in music education – this quest of freedom needed more fluidity. Maybe

freedom was more like a knot (Nelson, 2021), waiting to be loosened (or tightened)? Writing about freedom was indeed tricky. Even exhausting.

At first, I thought, “writing about freedom is exhausting. Why did I have to see this layer?” Why did I pick it up? To be honest – I think I have been quite brave in my thesis. Wandering in the dark – taking risks with diving into new and not the most common landscapes of doing research. But as I have mentioned before, I am curious. I was fascinated by the stories I saw in the kaleidoscope. I refused to let risk be the thing to shut me down and I refused to put down the kaleidoscope. And there it was again – the words ‘shut down’. Writing about my embodied experiences in my thesis, especially from being a soprano, I tell stories of being shut down in various situations, times, places, and spaces. But the stories were not only negative. I love and acknowledge the culture I was and still am a part of. The stories told me that in one way I mastered a western sociocultural context of singing so well, and in another way, I did not feel free. I was shut down. I was limited by the context I was taught within. I see that the limitations of the context are most explicitly articulated through the stories told in *Facing the soprano* and *The voice lessons*. In article one I write that “My performative actions are constructed according to the soprano as a gendered phenomenon, disciplined and constructed by the socio-cultural context of singing. I therefore have argued that female soprano voices are not given freedom to voice” (p. 92). Oh my, did I really write that?

“Female soprano voices are not given freedom to voice”. I read the last part of the sentence one more time, out loud, in my office. Maybe my kaleidoscope made me see different shapes of freedom *and* voice, compared to the beginning of my work – when writing article 1, stating (or overstating?) that “female soprano voices are not given freedom to voice”. Even though article 1 was describing my journey of becoming a researcher, I held on to the singing voice, the soprano voice. I was still situated in the context of singing. What changed during the process of exploring voice through four articles, was the relationship between voice and freedom and how I moved in between different contexts (which ultimately made me think differently about both). My performative autoethnographic investigation made me see and feel freedom to voice in different and more nuanced ways, as a soprano, teacher, and researcher. That made me see that there are different freedoms to voice, depending on the context the voice is situated within, which might be viewed as the limits – and depending on the body carrying, making, and offering the voice. I come back to the story where I am holding my 7-year-old son’s hand at school in the USA. Sweaty but cold hands. Holding



tight, I did not want to let his hand go and I felt he did not want to let go of mine too. But the culture we now situated in had other expectations of what it meant to be independent, strong, empowered, and free. To have a voice in a culture requires a deep listening and understanding, which might hurt. It does not mean that the culture does not want the best for you. It just means it's different. I did not feel free that day at school, as a mother – or as an academic. I felt difference (which I thought I did not hold). I learned that freedom always comes with a cost. I wanted to go home and hide in my sameness. But I did not. I did let go.

In my four articles, I see that I seek freedom for female soprano voices, yes. But I also strive to transgress the limits of what a female soprano voice can become. I stretch and expand the methodology of a 'feminist performative I', to see if there are more *possibilities* with my voice than a 'soprano singing voice', in article 1. I try to set my voice free with embracing the *dialogue*, blurring boundaries of theory/practice, methodology/pedagogy, research/life, creating a 'performative we' – in article 2. From there my voice is released by the imagined – creating an 'imagined performative we' in article 3, where it is possible to *seeing other(wise)*, through an embrace of difference. In article 4, I see that my voice opens for a *multiplicity* of voices, when I create a 'diffractive we' through exposing my vulnerability, starting to believe *in* stories as a way of knowing. There are endless ways of becoming when transgressing limits, and followingly endless ways of experiencing freedom. But, to do that – I needed to *know* the limits. To feel the limits of a western sociocultural context of singing. Yes. Seeing freedom in my kaleidoscope, feeling freedom, was very similar to a knot. A knot of "freedom and unfreedom as a source of perfidy and pain" (Nelson, 2021, p. 8). My performative autoethnographic investigation enabled both loosening and tightening the knot – and through practice, feeling the contexts through my embodied stories as a soprano, teacher, and researcher I started to see glances of freedom, in different situations, places and contexts. Then I saw that I was researching much more than a singing voice (or female voice change) – I saw freedom.

I am a privileged cis, white woman, working in music education. Do I need to feel freedom? According to Braidotti (2011), the ability to express one's freedom is "the ability to take in and sustain connectedness to Others" (p. 95). For me, this resonated well with my methodological anchoring in performative autoethnography. I could hear Madison (2011) whisper in my ear: "We are not simply subjects, but we are subjects in dialogues with others" (p.10). I write about freedom in my thesis through different ways of connecting to the Other.

Creating a performative I in different shapes, in four articles, I also increase my capacity to explore and expand notions of voice, creating different subjects positions to voice from and with. A dialogue, with multiple voices, but always located from within the embodied self.

Thinking with Braidotti (2011), to express the potential of notions of voice is to “increase the subjects capacity to enter into further relations, grow and expand” (p. 96). For me – this is the foundation of how to create and become voice, as a soprano, teacher, and researcher. That has made me understand the complexity one inhabits when living in the world – to have a voice, to become voice. An opened ended project – constantly resonating with the worlds voice is experienced within.

With a deep respect for diversity, desire for social and symbolic justice, and a “politics of everyday life” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 276), freedom is also propelled by feminism. Feminist theories made me understand that my voice is always embodied and embedded in a culture. Asking questions about my situated knowledge can enhance the understanding of one’s limits (Braidotti, 2011). For me, this means that my ways of diving into my embodied experiences, made me feel some of my limits of living in a western sociocultural context of singing. But, for me – this has not been a ‘negative’ experience. On the contrary – my study has been a critical exploration with possibilities. Showing my vulnerability, telling the stories of failure, pain, of being shut down when experiencing voice in different situations and contexts - is also a kind of freedom. I am not sure if I am ‘released’ from the limits experienced by telling the stories shared in this thesis. But I feel I understand the limits and contexts more deeply. I see what the limits of the sociocultural context of singing did to me as a soprano and teacher. That makes me able to change my own performative and educational practice. I was not only released by the imagined, as I experienced in article 3. I was released by understanding some of the limits in a western sociocultural context of singing. Ultimately, this made me release notions of voice. From planning to investigate the singing voice – voice became a philosophy for me, as a practical, lived, embodied philosophy, “where all that expresses and enriches the positivity of the subject is an intensive, affective thinking entity” (2011, p. 283). My embodied way of thinking and breathing with philosophy created a broad and fluid way of thinking voice, which could permeate all the contexts I moved within.

In my kaleidoscopic reading, I see that I write about freedom *and* voice, just maybe not in an expected way. I write about my freedom, but always in connection with Others. What I have found out is that what freedom might be in the time, space, and place for each person, could

feel and look different. The pedagogical implication of this view is multiple – and for me it is hard to see a music education that does not care for freedom, especially in a world where education and research are areas being measured and controlled. There is no one way to ‘be free’ and we cannot ‘put’ our freedoms on Others. That was one of the discoveries I made writing this thesis. There is no one way that can be put on Others when doing teaching or research either. At least not for me.

Now I know why I saw stories of freedom in the kaleidoscope. For me, ‘freedom to voice’ is the overarching goal of education. A philosophy of thinking education. A vision. That vision might be difficult to measure – but listening and dialoging with voices might create the sustainability we need in today’s world. That gives me hope. For future voices to become. And the dress I am sewing? It is really starting to find its shape. I still have some stitching up to do. I think I will need someone to try it on, to tell me how it feels, before I do the last finishing touches. I am even starting to think if this dress I am sewing in *Symesterskapet* is an ‘outfit’ to go with the cape? I am starting to see that these two items do belong together. The cape holding the dress. The dress holding the cape. I am not sure if I am ‘allowed’ to make a dress with a cape in this PhD version of *Symesterskapet*. But why should it not be allowed? A dress alone might feel a bit cold, especially in the harsh Norwegian climate. I will choose to wear the dress and the cape together. I think they belong together. Now, that would be some outfit. Totally unexpected, and terribly bold and dramatic.



*Drawing 11 Stitching freedom*

### **5.2.7 Voicing a kaleidoscopic pedagogy**

After writing four articles and being deep in the discussion of my thesis, I could not help but feel it. The nagging insecurity was back (why could it not just go away?), and it was making me freak out a little (although I am a calm and patient person). Where is pedagogy and music education in my study? What about vocal pedagogy? Was my study even about the singing voice at all? Did my study, the way I conducted it, and lived in it so to speak, have any impact on the voice and music education community? Or was it only about me?

“Hold on. I still have the kaleidoscope. Thank goodness” (again, I am talking to myself). I hold tight to that kaleidoscope to calm my nerves, to reassure me that I had not headed down a dead end, I looked to the kaleidoscope, again (as a sort of last shot to make it to the end of this damn reality TV show, where the clock was ticking fast). It was already fall, the leaves were changing color, and my PhD timeline was reaching the end. Now I totally understood why the participants in *Symesterskapet* were desperately running around, fighting for fabric, fighting against time. Oh gosh, the kaleidoscope is zooming in on the fabric of what I have been working with. I am looking at things so closely now, that I see the fibers and textures of the fabric, the color of the dress is no longer apparent, I seem to be looking at things so closely that the fabric of what I am working with is multi colored. Sort of like when you close your eyes on a sunny day, turning your face to the sun, and shards of multi-colored light filter through your eyelids. Of course, in these multicolored shards, stories are leaping out, pushing their way through the colors I am seeing, the textures, the fibers of the stories. And one story arrives with force.

I once had a student I did not manage very well. His progress was not what he or I expected. I sort of waited for him to ask for another teacher. He did not. I asked him if he wanted to split the voice lessons with another teacher. But he insisted on continuing with me as his only voice teacher. The student had a huge instrument encapsulated in spacious body. I expected a strong and powerful voice. But when he sang and laughed, a very small and light timbre, came out – as his voice was detached from his body. This made me curious. I always enjoyed these rare ‘cases’ with the voice. We worked for hours. He was very diligent – and in the voice studio he sang with a dark baritone voice. So rich, so strong. I was not so surprised about this ‘new voice’, as he called it. His new voice resonated so much better with his body. I was so proud of this new voice he had found and wanted him to sing repertoire very few could do – but he refused. “I do not like my new voice, Runa”, he said. “I like the old one with the light timbre. I want to be a tenor”. “Well, you are given this instrument through your body – and there is not much we can do about that”, I remember saying. “Why don’t you try to sing and show this voice for Others?”. He did. He got huge applause for it. Teachers and students were shocked. But still, he did not want to continue with his new voice. “Why do you want me to sing like this, Runa? Why have you not asked me, what I really want to do? How I want to sound?”. In my eagerness to make him into, in what my opinion was the best choice of a voice, I had totally ignored him. The body of the voice. Still, he continued his loyalty to me – and he did a beautiful exam – as his version of being a tenor. He interpreted

repertoire with braveness I never had. And after the exam concert he said – from stage, “thank you, Runa, for not only teaching me how to sing, but about how life and singing are woven together”. I was flattered by this nice comment, but still, I felt a bit ashamed. Because he was the one who had taught me that. Luckily, he disobeyed me. And I listened. With my whole body.

Thinking back to the opening questions of this section and feeling when writing about pedagogy in this thesis, I relax. I am almost smiling. I feel safe (might be a bit bold to say that, but spending some time in the USA made me embrace good ways of being bold). I have *tried*. I have grappled with many issues of voice (yes, singing voices too) *and* pedagogy. My stories in the kaleidoscope are moving forwards (or backwards, sideways, you name it) as a way of being and knowing in the world. This metaphorical way of thinking with the kaleidoscope might also be transferred into pedagogy. The kaleidoscope metaphor is based on pedagogical philosophy, where something influential, yet unexpected, emerging from a meeting of people with different backgrounds happens (Pässilä et al., 2019).

Throughout this discussion chapter I see I have offered a thinking around pedagogical thinking and concepts that link with pedagogical approaches. Now, writing this section I was desperately trying to make pedagogy more ‘obvious’. I mean, I wanted to make it so obvious that I decided to dedicate a whole section of this discussion to it. But in starting to write an obvious pedagogy section I felt like I was wearing an ‘underdress’ or a petticoat beneath the freedom dress. The underdress does not show, but it is there, and it is close to my body. Did I really have to put the underdress on the outside by writing a distinct pedagogy section, to ‘show’ that pedagogy was *there* in my thesis? Well, the underdress was an important part of the main dress, it must be there for the dress to fit well, to fall just right – and maybe the kaleidoscope tried to push me further into new ways of seeing and analyzing my study, to see that the underdress was attached and vital to the dress itself?

The kaleidoscopic pedagogy offers new ways of teaching and learning (Pässilä, 2019). Reading my stories through the kaleidoscope made me consider my stories differently. I saw aspects I did not expect, as empowerment, embodied knowledge, pain, difference and sameness – even freedom. I moved beyond individual problem-solving (Pässilä et al., 2019), and an individual ontology (Braidotti, 2011). A kaleidoscopic philosophy and pedagogy might therefore challenge and cultivated learning from each Other. As a dialogue.

Where should the dialogue start from? I am back to the body. Again. Dialogues should start from bodies, like Freire's (1970/2018) concept of *conscientization*, where student bodies work as a practice for deep reflection of their own situation – to understand, critique and transform. *Pedagogy of the oppressed* places lived experience at the center of education (see also: Allsup, 2016; Hess, 2019; Talbot, 2018), where knowledge is grounded in the personal experience and interest of the students. I overlooked my student with the body made for singing a certain way. His body was very present, but I had my own idea of how I wanted to approach his voice. That is cool. As a teacher, I need an everlasting toolbox of ideas. But these ideas cannot be imposed on bodies. Ideas needs to happen in dialoguing, as a voicing of dialogues (ok, hence my thesis title!).

I voiced my dialogue with engaging in the imagined (like in article 3). Once again, I must confess that I did not plan to imagine. I read *Releasing the imagined* by Maxine Greene (1995) after I had published article 3. I was stunned and reading her book did not make my article feel less 'valuable'. I started to draw more attention to the imagined, and I saw that Others also drew connection to the imagined in research and into the classroom of music teaching. Music educator and philosopher Randal Everett Allsup (2016) draws on both Freire and Green, using the dialogue and the imagined wrote that it is "not simply the capacity to imagine alternative scenarios but is instead the slow burning fuse of possibility *and* action" (Allsup, 2016, p, 157). Allsup (2016) proposes an open and quest driven teaching model in music education, to reinvent and remix the classroom. An open philosophy of music education, where teachers walk alongside students, as an alternative to the master-apprentice pedagogy, which remains pervasive in music education. That was what the student with the spacious voice meant when he said, "thank you, Runa, for not only teaching me how to sing, but about how life and singing are woven together". I felt I failed reading his embodiment, but I ended up walking beside him. Trusting him. Listening to him. Then I knew what 'tools' we could use. Together.

I must admit that I am not so fond of the word 'toolbox' when used in vocal pedagogy. But I have come to terms with that there are different kinds of toolboxes. My father has a colorful toolbox when he paints. It smells strongly of turpentine (I love that smell), and keep his pencils clean from the oil paint. When he is doing mechanic work on his American cars, he changes the toolbox, but it is still quite overloaded, colorful, yet with a different smell and system. Sometimes I hear him laugh because he put the paint brush in the mechanic's box. I

like my father's toolboxes. They never stop growing. We constantly need to buy him new ones as birthday presents. I thought I had the skill as a teacher to read the embodiment of the student with the spacious body. I thought I had the right toolbox. I was wrong. But I – no, correction *we* – kept trying, and eventually the student and I did dialogue. It was a necessity to make him feel and sing well, on stage and in life. To allow us to learn. To voice a dialogue.

Teaching and pedagogy rests on dialogues, and dialogue is an encounter, where common places might be made, where both reflection and action might happen (Freire, 1970/2018). I agree with Freire's thinking of the dialogue and would like to extend that 'so is pedagogy' (see: Inayatullah, 2022). Like dialogue, pedagogy cannot be imposed on the Other. It is an "act of creation" (Freire, 1970/2018, p. 62), with each other (oh, yes, this is what the methodology of duoethnography enabled for Rose and I in article 2). The point is that to allow for a dialogue to work, we need to strive for seeing the Other. It sounds so easy, and maybe it is? Coming from the arts, I have felt how creation can be at the core of an experience. This creation has an 'intensity', that I tried to describe when working as a performer (which I now felt when doing research). To find this intensity, the arts call us to have a practice of reaching out towards another, arguably and boldly this could be seen as a characteristic of compassionate love (Bartleet, 2019). To see and feel the other in an academic encounter (Kiriakos & Tienari, 2018). Music might allow us to love and learn across differences, because music has the capacity to sometimes create empathy, build connection, and give hope (Bartleet, 2019).

I must confess that I never thought of pedagogy as an encounter of love. But, when I thought back to the story of the student with the spacious body and voice, I saw his flattering comment to me in another way. What we managed in our dialogue was built on a reaching out. I did not manage it very well in the beginning of our encounter – and that also gives hope. Bartleet (2019) writes that compassionate love addresses both human suffering *and* encourages human flourishing. I could not help seeing my whole thesis in slow motion when reading Bartleet. I saw how through engaging with performative autoethnography I had reached out. I had suffered, diving into stories that I never thought I would do in a thesis, and that made me develop, as a soprano, teacher, and researcher. Was it that the dialogue could not happen without the act of love?

Freire (1970/2018) writes that love might be developed when believing in the Other. It seems so simple, yet I know, living in this world, that it is deeply difficult. As Freire shares,



“knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). That means that education must not simply replicate pedagogy. It requires a deep listening and a reaching out as an act of love.

A story of pedagogy and love entangled, which is etched into my body, is from my time in the USA during this PhD journey. Being there during a pandemic was hard. Learning a new language in a new culture through face masks was challenging, especially for my kids. A huge part of a human’s embodiment is removed in covering the mouth, almost half of the face. My daughter, in first grade, tried so hard during those pandemic days at school. What made her stay in the classroom, what made her not escape the new community she was thrown into, was her teacher’s act of love. Every day, for the first three months, the teacher phoned our daughter’s dad in the recess. She called, so our daughter could hear her father’s voice for some minutes. She said she saw how the whole body of my daughter softened during those few minutes. With the sound of a familiar voice and language, our daughter continued with her school day, with the act of love from her teacher, where “love embodies the virtues of caring, courage, fairness, dialogue and respect through the act of reaching out to another human being” (Bartleet, 2019, p. 6). Our daughter found her place in the new community at school, with the sound of a voice resonating in her body.

Both the vocal and music educational community have been with me in this study. I needed to see that voice and music education needs to be seen as a community. A community in transformation and dialogue. Community (Anderson, 2018; Bartleet, 2019; Hast, 2018; Lines, 2006, 2018) had been ‘there’ all along my study, walking beside me, just like pedagogy. Maybe I did not articulate it in the most obvious ways, and maybe I did not always see community – I skimmed past it. I cared about how bodies could be seen and find spaces for dialogues to be created in the community they lived within. How and what kind of pedagogy could help to nurture voices within the communities?

Such a voiced as shared dialogue resonates well with what is proposed as a critical performative pedagogy (Pineau, 2002), where the embodied knowledge is privileged over imposed ideas from the knower. Critical performative pedagogy emphasizes mutuality between the learner and the learned. It is a pedagogy that puts bodies into action because it believes that this is the surest way to help those bodies become active in the social sphere. This ‘active’ thinking of bodies also resonated well with the Freirean view of pedagogy,

where the aim was to resist students waiting to be ‘filled up’. Both Freire (1970/2018) and Pineau (2002) make me see and understand learning and teaching as an embodied and relational processes. For me, this suggests that learning and teaching are performative (Østern et al., 2019). It is a *process* of creating knowledge. The process is not innocent or neutral but values every human and non-human intra-action in the learning process. As such, learning and teaching is an intra-active pedagogy (Lenz-Taguchi, 2012), where there is no distinction between the learner and the learned. It is a Nomadic process, a pedagogy in constant movement. An open-ended project.

I see vulnerability, as the common ground for the dialogue I am proposing above. Sitting in the hallway at my son’s school, when I am waiting in hope, when I am imagining a better future, I learn from and enjoy following Braidotti’s (2011) thinking about the dialogue as a movement of exchange. Breathing with theory, methodology and everyday life as made me see how developing an academic voice might be a form of dialogue, which might “frame and choreograph the space in between self and other” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 3). Voice is the material which moves in between the dialogue, because of its in-betweenness, it is “inextricably bound up with the condition of language and yet is something that is impossible to pin down... Somehow voice and body always elude capture” (Duncan, 2004, p. 285). Viewing voice as material, as fluid, as the space in between, voice might offer vulnerable or safe spaces. Because voice refuses dualistic and dichotomous ways of thought. That means that every Nomadic thought, every voicing subject offers “the possibility of an ethical opening out toward an empowering connection to others” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 3). Each relation, each dialogue is therefore ethical, because it rests on a mutual and not dualistic understanding of each other. Maybe it was a good feeling for me to be a bit angry of Sundberg’s (1989) definition of voice way back in the theory chapter of this thesis. The definition stirred something up in my body. It triggered me to think differently.

A kaleidoscopic pedagogy (Pääsilä, Owens & Pulkki, 2016; Pääsilä et al., 2019) is coming to sight in my kaleidoscope as the over-arching model of the pedagogy I strive for in my thesis. Where emphasis is placed on the relational aspects of reflection, where bodies is at core, developing methods, thinking, and acting in creative ways. The arts bring to research and education methods and ways of being that are concerned with creative encounters between people, through reflection and imagination (Allsup, 2016; Greene, 1995), which might exist within broader pedagogical frameworks.

Maybe these broader and more fluid pedagogical frameworks might give space for marginalized voices in music education? I ask this question, because I see a discussion in music education of marginalized voices (see for example: Hilder, 2022; Sauerland, 2022; Talbot, 2018). It is about time that voices that are marginalized are heard and listened to in music education and research. I applaud this research – and as a vocal performer and voice teacher, I am proud to finally have titles such as *Queering vocal pedagogy* (Sauerland, 2022), and *Thinking outside the voice box* (Sweet, 2021) on the syllabus for students in vocal pedagogy and music education. Yes. I need to feel freedom, to work towards freedom in music education. To strive to find new perspectives – to discuss voice – in affirmative and alternative ways, as a performer, teacher, and researcher. I do *not* want to settle down, with the belief that ‘everyone has a voice’, that voice is a given. That settling might hinder new spaces for freedom to be created.

I see my son in the kaleidoscope. He is sitting in the classroom, playing the drums – the Cahoon. I see his relaxed, soft, and rhythmical body totally merged with the music he is playing with his classmates and teachers in the classroom. I see children (I can hear them laughing) dialoguing. Not only through words, but with their whole beings. I hear different voices singing together. It is not a homogeneous sound (I can clearly hear different timbres of voices), but I can hear they like to sing together. I see my son has no time to look at me through the glass wall. His knees dangles back and forwards, still sitting on the drum. I can hear the bell ringing and I see how he jumps off the drum with ease. He runs out of the classroom. Into recess. Into the world. I can see he feels free. Or at least, I feel free.

I am still holding the kaleidoscope. Tightly. I don’t want to let it go. I want to hold it a little longer, to linger with what I see and feel. I know that the picture I see of my son in the kaleidoscope is imagined. But maybe what I imagine will become reality? I need to envision that picture. It gives me hope. That is why I believe in a kaleidoscopic pedagogy. It is a place for imagination to take flight. I might pass the kaleidoscope on to someone else, if needed. But right now, I think I will hold onto it a little longer, because I am still not finished seeing and imagining.

### 5.3 A mapping of others

In my study, I desperately tried to see the Other. In article 1, I even claim to see the Other. Do I? But who are all the ‘Others’ in my work? Sometimes I feel like their existence is taken for granted. Like I can say, “oh, you know, the Other”. Again, am I creating divides, instead of trying to bridge them? This reminded me of my grappling with female voice change in the beginning of my study. Regardless of how much I have tried to see and listen to Others, I can decide if I have ‘succeeded’. I think that is for the reader to decide, but I have tried. It was not an easy task. In between I have wondered, is it possible to see the Other?

My kaleidoscopic notions of voice offers an understanding and thinking of voice, which is not fully present in a music educational context. The idea of voice as plural, as constantly changing into many facets, leaves a trace: there are always other possibilities – and yes, change is difficult, but possible (Freire, 1970/2018). Instead of viewing voice as a given, innate, and definitive, voice could be viewed as a fluid material, always shifting, and changing as a shared cultural practice. This entails several movements from the more familiar ways of knowing voice, or ways of knowing in general. It pushes a movement from an individualistic ontology to a process ontology (Braidotti, 2011), where voices are open-ended and always in constant becomings, as sopranos, teachers, and researchers, and everything in-between.

In this chapter, *Resonance*, through seeing my articles in a kaleidoscope, I have been searching for a way of finding a space in vocal education and music education where a multiplicity of voices can voice. I have been trying to see the Other – to dialogue with the Other, “with the same kind of commitment as is afforded the self” (Spry, 2017, p. 46). The complexity, the perspectives made possible through engaging with a performative autoethnographic study of a soprano-teacher-researcher's embodied voice in a western sociocultural context of singing is endless. And, just as my grandmother’s voice continues to resonate in the days, weeks, and months after her departure, my voice will keep resonating after this thesis is written. I will keep trying, keep looking for new possibilities of seeing the Other. Who is my Other? Who guided me in my wonderings?

Francesca

My grandmother’s husky and dark voice

Abelvær, the island with wild nature and weather

Frode, the Sami joiker

Difference, itself

Illi, the cat

Rose, my supervisor

The statue of liberty

Containers in education

Death

Life

Hope



*Drawing 12 A mapping of Others*

The clock has stopped ticking. Time is up. I must let the dress I am sewing in the Grand Finale in this strange PhD version of *Symesterskapet* go. I hope I did it. I hope I finished the task. It feels finished, although there will always be threads to pick up on, some threads might not be well enough fastened. But that is ok. Those things that need to be 'fixed', well that might even be good, because the dress might need to be adjusted for the person who is going to wear it. I improved my sewing at times while working on it. I transformed during the

process of sewing it, because I found courage that I did not think I had. And through that courage I constantly saw new perspectives and possibilities. Do I look at the world in a more multicolored perspective after sewing the dress? Yes. Still, with no clear answers of how to create a perfect world, but with much more hope that it can happen. Vocal pedagogy and music education can be places where a multiplicity of voices can voice, as performer, teachers, and researchers. For me, those roles or worlds are woven together. I can't understand one of them without the other. Vocal pedagogy, music education, the arts – are woven into a wider landscape, which I have reflected on in this discussion chapter. The different pieces, my relationship with an empowered voice, embodied knowledge, difference and sameness, pain and freedom, brought me into a multicolored view of voice, vocal pedagogy and music education. My kaleidoscopic explorations make me consider possibilities, it enables me to see Others.

With a deep belief in the body and the arts, I see all kinds of voices emerge, if we allow the dress to be tailored for each one of us. If we do not have a reflection on our own relationships to our 'dresses' or bodies of voices – how we are tailored – then I am afraid we have no hope of being able to consider or seeing Others. Voicing dialogues, exploring my kaleidoscopic notions of voice, I see that the stories we have etched into our bodies, might be a starting point for understanding (one)self and the Other –in *Resonance*.



*Drawing 13 The dress*

## Chapter 6. Reverberations

As much as I love it, I have never sung the role of Maria in *West Side Story* by Bernstein and Sondheim (1957). I love the music. But most of all, I love the story. The lyrics in the duet, *Somewhere*, between Maria and Tony speak directly to my heart every time I hear them:

Tony:

There's a place for us,  
Somewhere a place for us.  
Peace and quiet and open air  
Wait for us  
Somewhere.

Maria:

There's a time for us,  
Someday a time for us,  
Time together with time to spare,  
Time to look, time to care,  
Some day!

Tony:

Somewhere.  
We'll find a new way of living,

Maria:

We'll find a way of forgiving  
Somewhere...

### 6.1 Last stiches

I am making the last stiches in the sewing of my cape. From the outside, it looks finished, all the seams are smooth, the stiches are even quite tidy. I could just leave it like that – now ready to wear. But it did not feel finished. I just had to add one more thing – I had to embroider the lyrics from *Somewhere* as a finishing touch on the inside of the cape.

As I begin the stitches, carefully starting with the ‘Th...’ of the first line, I think of my grandma. I think about how she was great at embroidery. I got my bunad as a present for my confirmation, I was 16 years old. My grandma had made all the embroidery on the skirt. Since I come from the coastline of Norway, the island of Abelvær, the skirt of my bunad is filled with embroidery from flowers and plants only growing by the sea. These rare and hardy flora fill my childhood memories and form a lovely pattern on my bunad. To embroider all these intricate flowers might be a terribly difficult job I imagine. But not for my grandma. Sitting in her chair in the living room, I could see how much she loved the neat and slow work when making the pattern of the embroidery grow – being filled with colors and details. I loved watching her doing this handcraft and the conversations we often had as a part of it. Now, sewing the lyrics of *Somewhere* inside the cape, I see how entangled my embodied knowledge is in my PhD study. I sense it when feeling the cape, and wearing the cape, both from the inside and outside. Also, I can feel that the embodied knowledge I hold has grown. My voice has grown when sewing my cape. Maybe not in size, but in depth.

My kaleidoscopic exploration of voice is a study of voice and embodied knowledge. Engaging with feminist new materialist theories, theories of embodiment and performativity, moving and breathing with Nomadic theory and philosophy of thought, I have sought to do what the performative paradigm desires: I ask, again and again, how knowledge is created and how the processes of production and expression of knowledge are intertwined. The reverberations of this thesis’s main research question of: *What possibilities might lie within a performative autoethnographic study of a soprano-teacher-researchers’ embodied voice in a western sociocultural context of singing?* has lingered and will continue to linger with me, even after my thesis has come to an end.

I have asked my main research questions so many times – that it feels like a mantra of some sort. The repetition of the research question seems to work as a *retournelle* – where I constantly return to it, and I am reminded of it. My main research question draws me back and leads me to consider if the question is still the same, if it sounds the same with every repetition, and if the territory it creates remains the same (Grosz, 2008). Maybe my main research question is a performative agent living in my thesis, being created from the inside the research process?

But what is the conclusion of my research question, and what is the conclusion of my thesis? I might conclude with saying that just like singing, researching, and writing from the body



needs time, care, and courage. There are no short cuts. This makes me think of our shy kitten Illi. I have learnt to respect that she likes to be around us, in the same room, making sure that the family is there, but not necessarily needing to sit on our laps, purr around our legs, and draw attention. That is, unless she is with Jeremias, our youngest 7-year-old son. In his arms the kitten, Illi, totally surrenders. She completely trusts him, and the other way around. And maybe that was what I did in this PhD study? To be able to see what possibilities there might lie within a performative autoethnographic study, I needed to ‘surrender’ into the arms and love of what the methodology and theory might offer. Maybe we need that in music education as well? Surrendering into the possibilities my research question asked for, I could keep expanding on the methodology, creating a performative I, a performative we, an imagined performative we and a diffractive we.

Growing with the methodology made me able to expand and shake notions of voice to the core. The idea of voice as innate, fixed but improvable, is moved into a thinking of voice as something more fluid, vulnerable but powerful. Something that connects us, as material beings with other beings, other voices, and other worlds. The worlds and voices I have allowed myself to move in between, has expanded notions of voice, not only as a researcher, but as a teacher. As a soprano. As a mother. As a being in the world. Not only am I writing that we are all entangled. I feel it. In my everyday life.

I am sitting in the car with my husband and four children. We are driving home from a basketball kick off at the local gym in Verdal – a small city in the countryside of Norway, where we live. My cheeks are glowing. I can hear the enthusiasm in my own soprano voice: “*This* is what my PhD study is about”. My husband, a very calm guy, and who has been following my roller-coaster PhD life from the inside, always supportive, looks like he is going to drive off the road. “Is your PhD about basketball now? I thought you were researching voice?” (For once, he seems to be the unstable one of us. After four PhD years, he might be hoping that we would get our normal life back. Now he sounded worried). “Yes, but that was exactly what happened at this basketball kick-off”, I answer (he does not look convinced).

My family came to love basketball when living in Urbana, Illinois, for 6 months. Our children got hooked and back home there was no basketball. In our local community there is a lot going on, but on the sport side, soccer was the thing. Soccer is totally fine, but it is not for everyone. That was why we needed basketball. We brought our whole family (included my mom) to the gym, I had baked two cakes and we waited for a few kids to show up. And they

did show up. One hundred kids and young people filled the room. These were kids that I had not seen at soccer training before. They came into the arena with different outfits than the ‘expected’ ones at a sports arena (some even wore jewelry). I loved it. Our 12-year-old son did too. “These kids are those I am hanging out with in the afternoons, outside school. Now we are allowed to come inside. This is a bit like being in Urbana. There are so many different people her. So cool” (I admired how his body moved in between known and unknown kids. How he managed his way through all these new people with his basketball).

I must confess that I have never seen so many people of color at the same time in Verdal. This was also the first time I had seen the local gym, as a space of diversity, where a multiplicity of voices were gathered. That says something about me, about our community, but also about the political aspects of living in Norway. And it tells me something about voice and how I have viewed voice in my PhD study. Because, as I see it. Not everyone “has a voice”. Voice is not ‘a given’. Some voices are heard more than Others. And there are more polyphonic and porous ways of viewing voice.

I wish what happened at that basketball kick off could happen in music education as well. Of course, it is happening in some ways. And to be honest, although I am a soprano, teacher, and researcher in arts education, it is not so important if it happens on the basketball kick off, or the local band. It just *needs* to happen. But as Liora Bresler (2019) writes, the arts have the capacity to see and hear more. I care about voices. Hold on, that’s wrong. I am still *obsessed* with voices. And I think both music education and academia might be a space where a multiplicity of voices can voice *if* we widen our perspectives of what voice is and might become.

In my kaleidoscopic exploration of voice, I have stayed with difference and sameness for quite a time. I revealed that the discussion of difference cannot happen without a discussion of sameness. Even if I come from positions of sameness, it is about recognizing that position, yet still striving for spaces for difference. Even if I sit at the center of society, holding the voice of the majority, I believe we need to consider how we might facilitate, inhibit, obstruct, or open for difference.

My kaleidoscopic exploration brought me into exploring spaces of vulnerability, pain of being shut down as a soprano, and as a woman. I saw the unexpected aspects of freedom. That freedom to voice always will be experienced within limits. That freedom always will be

experienced differently. And that freedom is not something that can be imposed on Others. My kaleidoscopic exploration has given different perspectives and offer potentials to how voices might be heard and listened to.

As an end for this thesis, let us listen to Hannah Arendt (1958/2013) who said that “the end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective” (p.58). The plurality Arendt speaks of demands a variety of dialogues, ways of listening and ways of enacting in and through vocal pedagogy and music education. Exploring voice, Arendt’s words push me to seek a movement from voice as a static identity, into voice as fluid, constantly changing and transforming, which reminds me that I am having my biggest voice change now, as an academic.

How does the cape feel for me now that it is finished? In between all the sewing and threading, I have at times felt that the fit of the cape was not completely right. Then, in other moments it has fitted – to borrow the English phrase – ‘like a glove’. Initially, the fabric was not sitting right – or maybe it was just me getting used to it. Maybe it takes time to get familiar with a cape, since it is not something we wear every day. The cape became a bit different as I continued to craft it and as I wore it – maybe it was not what I expected, but gosh, now it feels good. I wonder if I should keep the cape on? Or should I fold it up and offer it to someone else? Now, I am glad I made the dress and the cape. I feel I should not be the only one to wear it. Of course, I will offer the cape to someone else – to you, dear reader.

Exploring kaleidoscopic notions of voice, embracing embodied knowledge as the foundation, for creating dialogues, seeing possibilities, and seeing Otherwise, I hope I have found a space where a multiplicity of voices can voice, in vocal pedagogy, music education, and academia. I believe we need new and different perspectives of voice, and voice in music education. Always striving to see and hear more. Voicing dialogues, exploring kaleidoscopic notions of voice, together.

## 6.2 Coda: A love letter to the reader

Dear reader,

Verdal 20.11.22.

Since you are reading this, I guess you have found the note I put in the pocket of the cape. I am dying to hear what you think - have you tried the cape on? How did it fit you? How did it feel? I hope you are not allergic to cats, because our playful and curious kittens Illi and Undine Jordan have been playing with all the pieces and threads when I tried to stitch the cape together. I am sure there is still cat fur on the fabric. But I just wanted to add a little something, so I scribbled this note, a moment to carry forward with you:

Even though we are different, it does not mean we cannot voice together. Let's find a place where we can voice our dialogues. Together.

Are the words I write only utopian? Big words with no anchoring to reality? What I offer, embracing both sameness and difference requires a big amount of hope,

of love. But I need these big words - Hope and love. I need these words to be able to get up in the morning. I need these words to create my interruptions and actions, to have the courage to have an unruly voice. Even if my actions are small, they are there. As a beginning - to find a place which offers hope and love for every voice. You know, although I have improved my sewing - I am still not very good at it. My embroidery, although I tried hard, is not perfect. But, I think my grandma would be proud of my sewing.

I ask you now to look again on the inside of the cape. The embroidery is not finished. There are a few more lyrics from 'Somewhere' that need to be shared. But, I don't plan on embroidering them onto the cape. Rather, I write the lyrics here for you. And I hand over the needle and thread and encourage you to make the first stitch. Go on. Give it a try.

Even if you have never embroidered  
before: Be brave.  
I will be beside you as you sew.

Maria and Tony:

There's a place for us,  
A time and place for us.  
Hold my hand and we're halfway there.  
Hold my hand and I'll take you there.

Somehow,

Someday,

Somewhere!



Drawing 14 A love letter to the reader

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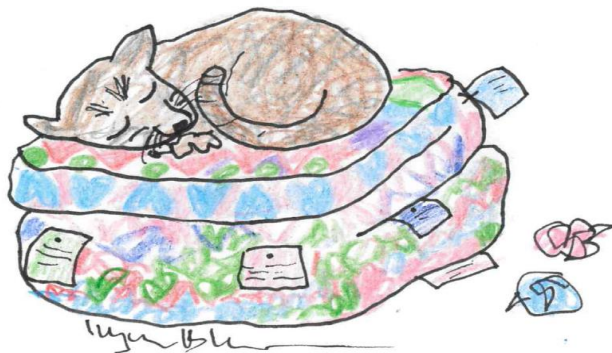
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*Drawing 15 A kitten and a cape*



## **PART 2: The articles**



## Overview of articles

### Article 1:

Jenssen, R. H. (2021). Facing the Soprano: Uncovering a Feminist Performative “I” Through Autoethnography. In E. Angelo, J. Knigge, M. Sæther & W. Waagen (Eds.), *Higher Education as Context for Music Pedagogy Research* (pp. 113–135). Cappelen Damm Akademisk. <https://doi.org/10.23865/noasp.119.ch5>

### Article 2:

Jenssen, R. H. & Martin, R. (2021). A tale of grappling: Performative duoethnography as expanded methodological thinking. *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.7577/term.4683>

### Article 3:

Jenssen, R. H. (2022a). A different high soprano laughter. *Journal of Narrative Politics*, 8(2). Retrieved from <https://jnp.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/default/article/view/163>

### Article 4:

Jenssen, R. H. (2022b). The voice lessons. *Scriptum: Creative Writing Research Journal*. 9 (2). JYX - The voice lessons (jyu.fi)



## CHAPTER 5

# Facing the Soprano: Uncovering a Feminist Performative “I” Through Autoethnography

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**Abstract:** This article unpacks three auto-narratives drawn from my embodied experiences journeying from soprano to researcher. A feminist theoretical performative “I” is created through the use of performative autoethnography, a position of situated knowledge and Judith Butler’s thinking of gender as performative. I explore the query: How is a singer’s feminist performative I created through autoethnography? By unpacking my lived experiences I establish a connection between the I and the context I live in, referred to as “the Other”. This connection then illuminates how my voice has been constructed and disciplined to that of a normative feminine soprano by attaining and repeating actions from the social-culture context of singing. I also leverage off Butler’s thinking and how it may foreclose the attention to the materiality of the body, and lean into a performative embodied, new perspective. Embracing both the soprano and researcher role I create a position that brings me into a “liminal space”. I do this to better understand the intersection of music education and gender, the becoming of a researcher, researching with the “inside out”, and to embrace the material body’s actual contribution in (to) the web of meanings in the sociocultural context of singing. By carving out a connection between *being* a soprano and moving into my researcher voice, I offer this article as an expanded way of knowing – a *knowing* through *being*. In turn, such insights offer epistemological and ontological ways of thinking for those experiencing similar encounters.

**Keywords:** embodiment, feminism, Judith Butler, performativity, performative autoethnography, voice

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## Prelude

I grew up with a feminist mother. She showed me pictures from the streets of Oslo in the 1970s where she went to demonstrations. She sowed feminist seeds in my upbringing – brown clothes, a bedroom painted green, and an admonition to go into every situation with my back raised. “The most important thing is not what you have, but what you are about to become, Runa”. But at that time, I truly loved pink! When my mum was studying and was mostly at university, my dad painted my room, at least the closet doors, light pink, and we ordered floral curtains at Sparkjøp. I educated myself into a profession that is considered feminine. I became a singer and spent six years training to learn how to produce beautiful sounds and move gracefully on the opera stage, in beautiful dresses, and often in the role of the naive and beautiful maid or princess. I loved it!

Now, I am married. I have four children. In a way I have supposedly fulfilled the criteria for society’s normative conception of being a woman. As I was tuning the theoretical lens in my academic work which studies working with the adolescent female changing voice, my mother’s seed began to germinate. Carving out a critical approach, I felt a need and desire to focus on women’s thinking and imprints. My study is no longer “just” a vocal didactic project, but rather it has morphed into a multi-layered contribution: for women in academia and in the arts. Oh, and by the way, I have three female supervisors and a large picture of Simone de Beauvoir hanging outside my office door.

## Introduction

This article shares methodological and theoretical wonderings that sit at the intersections of feminism, embodiment, performativity and autoethnography. Through feminist performative autoethnography as a method of investigation, I specifically lean on the work of Judith Butler (1990) to unpack how my becoming, from soprano to researcher, enables a feminist perspective. Through this journey of becoming I have found a new voice, my feminist performative “I” (Pollock, 2007; Spry, 2011). The notion of a performative I has been articulated by different scholars with slightly different interpretations and connections,



however for the purpose of this article I specifically lean on Spry's use of performative I, which draws this into the context of autoethnography. Actually, it has been more of an uncovering, not too dissimilar to the peeling of an orange, removing the thick skin of the orange to get to the flesh. I often use this orange metaphor when describing my vocal-technical philosophy to my university students – explaining to them how external tensions in the body makes it difficult for a singer to find physical anchorage. Without connection to the core of the body the voice floats alone without the passion, sorrow, hate, or joy to be conveyed in the story of an aria. I believe the way to find the core is to search for emotions and evoke experiences – cry, whine, laugh! Find the primal voice in you. However, this requires courage. At first glance, some singers seem to have “thick skin”. The thick-skinned stand out to be the toughest and dare to throw themselves into the unknown, while the “delicate” ones seem to hold back. Those with a more vulnerable skin, framed with tensions, must spend time finding the core of the singing body. Either way, the singer must find their own ways to “peel the orange”, because when finding the core, the singer discovers, feels and understands their own voice, and the voice and personality merge. In order to find the core, it is necessary to expose one's vulnerability. Now it was my turn to be brave.

The question that this article explores is: How is a singer's feminist performative I created through autoethnography? This question has emerged from my own lived experiences. I share auto-narratives to establish a connection between the I, and the socio-political/cultural context I live in, referred to as “the Other”. In this article I describe how I started to investigate the I through autoethnography. Doing this I realized that the performative I, was less a dialogue with the self, and more a dialogue with how the self is always and already in sociopolitical formation with and by others and culture. By bridging the performative I and the field of feminist theory, I anchor myself in Judith Butler's feminist theoretical perspective. This has enabled me to investigate my embodied experiences, shared through three auto-narratives, and offer points of departure around the notions of what it means to be a soprano *and* researcher. I embrace subjectivity with a *labor of reflexivity* (Madison, 2011), and

analyze my encounters of becoming a soprano and a feminist researcher through Butler's thinking of gender as performative and from the position of situated knowledge. I also engage with Butler's thinking and how it might foreclose the attention to the materiality of the body. Leaning on a new material feminist perspective I analyse my lived experience to better understand the intersection of music education and gender, the becoming of a researcher, and how a performative embodied and feminist approach can critically investigate and dismantle oppressive norms in the sociocultural context of singing. Towards the end of this article, I embrace both the soprano and researcher role, positioning these roles in what would be viewed as a "liminal space" (Boyce-Tillman, 2009; Butler Brown, 2007), in turn offering an expanded way of knowing, a *knowing* through *being* (Bresler, 2019).

## The Skin of the Soprano

I frame this article around the socio-cultural construction of "the skin of the soprano". The soprano-skin is a border that *feels*, and I envisage this boarder to be porous, responsive to my lived experiences and encounters. Laying bare my soprano skin is a way of *feeling the field* (Martin, 2019), a constant movement between the *inside* through my embodied experiences and from the *outside* from the perspective of a feminist researcher. Being an insider and an outsider of the soprano skin in the socio-cultural context of singing, I create a space in-between where I dialogue with myself and the context of my lived experience. A space of transmission, where the boundaries become blurry and the voices intertwine with each other. I am not just an outsider *or* an insider, as a feminist auto-ethnographer I am both, searching for space between, a liminal space.

As a feminist, I see that I have been socialized into a gendered role in the field of singing. I have known resistance, but it is now with a methodology and theory to hold onto, that I am able to unpack this, redeemed by the autoethnographic and theorized by the feminist. Singing is an action where you *are* the "instrument" a performance where experiences become embodied. The nature of performance is an embodied practice (Pelias, 2018) and as a singer my soprano skin has been inscribed with practices

and experiences. Like Martin (2019), I have found this to continue as I have become a researcher. Bringing experiences forth through embodied memories (Pink, 2015) is my way of using the term embodiment when investigating my auto-narratives. I see that my embodied experiences are not isolated to the context of singing, as Martin writes, such experiences “*travel with us*” (2019, p. 10). Facing my soprano, unpacking my soprano voice, in the narrative below I investigate what has travelled with me through embodied crossroads, exposing my vulnerable self.

## A Silver Soprano Voice

I was one of those children who sang before talking. Memories are carried in my body of moments where my grandmother and I sang together. I would sit on her lap, experiencing ‘musical skin contact’. Grandma had a very dark voice, and was proud of it, but as I grew older, I noticed how excited she was for my bright, light, bell-like and pure high notes. I got to be the princess in the fairytale in theater performances. Apparently, this role suited me – I had long blonde hair and a silver soprano voice.

My father was an opera singer, I loved listening to him, practicing the role of Sarastro in Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*. But best of all, I admired the high notes of *The Queen of the Night*. For hours I could listen to the soaring ice-clear tones.

When I was in my teens, the slight height in my voice vanished. I developed ‘altitude fright’. The height, which had been my trademark, disappeared. I would love to go up there again, but there just wasn’t a sound. My vocal teacher in high school asked me to sing with the alto group. I felt that this was degrading because I could not sing the first soprano anymore. I was crushed. I cried to my dad when I got home. He was, as always, clever, saying: “You don’t need that much power on the notes, Runa. Let them flow freely with more air and with more body. Say a thousand thanks for what’s coming out of your singing body”. My father never had vocal lessons with me, but I remember those words so well.

Anyway, I became a singer. A soprano. I did not become the *Queen of the Night*, but *Pamina* and *Michaela*. Girls with their feet planted on the ground. Innocent, but fair and caring, and with loud belligerent tones, which resonated throughout

the orchestra and in full applause. As a student, I was appointed to one of Europe's leading chamber choirs, as first soprano, as group leader. My voice was the ideal of the Nordic choral sound, the silver sound, which blended easily into the ideal homogeneous choral sound, which the choir was world renowned for. But I struggled. Quickly, my voice was tired and I often experienced huskiness, losing the power of my voice. Was it allergies, or knots on the vocal folds? It was as if my voice was living a life outside of me. It hovered here and there, often a little over-pitched, often with a "boy soprano sound". I had a whistle voice, with almost no vibrato. The vocal teachers asked for me to give more bodily support on my voice, a stronger connection to the core. However, the more I activated my support, the more tired I became. But beware, it sounded fine, it was the sound it was supposed to sound, the silver sound.

When I became a mother my voice changed, especially when I was pregnant with twins. My stomach was big, and I felt a low center of gravity and physical anchoring that I had been looking for throughout my career. Now I felt it! My voice got deeper and richer in timbre. I did not get tired singing the high notes, nor did I take it so seriously. I did not have the time to cry over a role I did not get. My voice changed, but so did life. Four children in four and a half years, and in addition a job at a university to feed them. Not quite what I had imagined. A voice and a life of change. But, now I sang well. My biggest voice change happened late in life, when I was not so occupied on fulfilling others wishes about what the sound of my voice or my appearance should be like. Then it loosened. The voice was part of me, and not a constructed sound, produced to meet the demands of vocal teachers, repertoire, choral conductors and coaches. I sang like myself.

Now I could sing for hours without "getting my larynx in my forehead". When I finally cracked the code, it did not matter anymore. I had other things to do, being a mother and teaching at university, a place where I could dig into literature and share my experiences with students. I could listen, uncover and influence. I could opt out of Western art musical ideals with which from I was raised and explore new sound ideals. And, I could do research. Researching the change of voice, the female voice change. I read articles on feminist autoethnography, feminist theory, and I wrote. My fingers floated over the keyboard. I barely read a paragraph before I had to write again. Yes, it sounds like a cliché, but this was my medium, my language, my movement to become a researcher.

I have dwelled a lot on *what* I can share in such an auto-narrative and *why* I might share my experiences in such a way. I have always told stories. Through my singing, on stage, to my students and my children, however, I have mostly told the story of others. In the following section of this article I elaborate on how writing my auto-narratives became the connection to the methodology of feminist performative autoethnography, and I question why I wrote these auto-narratives, and how much could I share without exposing myself too much? I was afraid I would appear as an un-reflected soprano, but actually, those words made me reflect. I had to take a chance to investigate my own prejudices and being vulnerable and open to criticism was a risk I was willing to take. It is the risk of being a researcher, but this risk also made me capable of making a “*pointed truth*” (Averett, 2009, p. 361), where the practice of telling one’s own story can reveal oppressive power structures in society and offers the potential for change.

## Diving into Feminist Performative Autoethnography

I noticed that my personal experience as a classical soprano could be seen as knowledge that I carried, that perhaps allowed me to have a particular awareness when encountering my research, a performance sensitive way of knowing (Conquergood, 1998). However, experience means little until it is interpreted, until we interpret the body as evidence (Spry, 2016). Autoethnography can enable such a critical examination, but *Facing the soprano* is not exclusively facing the self. I am building over the course of this article to extend beyond the self. I am using the performative I, as a foundation, and as a way of understanding how my embodied encounters resonates within the wider cultural context, in the methodology of a performative autoethnography (Spry, 2011), which is a self-other-culture narrative construction. Performative autoethnography concentrates on this “intra-activity” (Barad, 2003). To voice the embodied sociopolitical construction of a soprano, I rely on the works of D. Soyini Madison (2006, 2011, 2012), Rose Martin (2019), Ronald J. Pelias (2008, 2018), Craig Gingrich-Philbrook (2005), Della Pollock (2007), Tammy

Spry (2011, 2016), Victor Turner (1986) and others who view ethnography as performative. I see, as Turner (1986) notes, performance as “the explanation and explication of life itself” (p. 21), where lived experience, through theories of embodiment such as critical performance pedagogy (Pineau, 2002), where a focus on various bodies are a medium for learning and critical reflection. I view that this can be a starting point for a more porous way of understanding the voice, and a strategy of gaining understanding and empathy for others. Understanding the embodiment of each individual voice also emphasizes the body’s materiality and its significant contribution into the web of meanings in the sociocultural context of singing. An equal way of understanding a researcher’s becoming, researching with the “inside out”, opens up the possibility of a liberation of women’s voices, both as performers and researchers.

Facing the soprano, I engage with an embodied performative autoethnography, to critically speak the skin write the skin abstract the skin, articulate the skin of the soprano. But still, it was all about the I. How could I go beyond the self? Being a soprano, I had spent hours rehearsing in front of the mirror, focusing on myself, my sound, my timbre, my vocal expression and behaviour. Reading Butler (2005) I found a way away from the mirror; “the ‘I’ that I am is nothing without this ‘you’, and cannot even begin to refer to itself outside the relation to the other” (2005, p. 82). Maybe autoethnography was not about the self at all, perhaps it was about “the wilful embodiment of ‘we’” (Spry, 2016, p. 15). Thinking with embodiment recognizes the body as experiential and a way of being in and engaging in the world and constitutes such a position one sees the world from. Space and materiality are also a dimension of the work and help to bring human bodies together with the surroundings – the physical, social and cultural. I engage my bodily experiences, positioning my body within a culture – with the performative I as a foundation, connecting myself with the Other. I seek to capture the nuances in my embodied experience, in my complex interaction in the sociocultural context of singing, in music education, in being in the world, working towards “the texture of a living moment” as Pineau (2002, p. 47) beautifully writes. To do this “we seek the language we trust, one that catches the experience” (Pelias, 2004, p. 122).

Extending beyond the self requires a clear positionality from the researcher, a positionality that demands attention beyond the self. As Madison (2012) writes: “We are not simply subjects, but we are subjects in dialogue with others” (p. 10). Extending beyond the self therefore requires a *labor of reflexivity* (Madison, 2011), that will “lead us to the benefit of larger numbers than just ourselves” (p. 129). Articulating *how* Facing the soprano is created through autoethnography is not “merely an implication of the self or being self-conscious about how the self illuminates the social” rather “it is an implication of the knowledge systems, paradigms, and vocabularies we employ in our contemplations to interpret and speak through the self and the social” (Madison, 2011, p. 129). With Madison’s (2011) labor of reflexivity, I seek to use the performative I, as a starting point to fully acknowledge the embodied experience. I seek an reflexivity beyond the mirror, as Homi Bhabha (2004) describes: “this moment of reflection is never simply the mirror of *your* making, *your* frame of thinking, but a stillness sometimes heard in choral music when several voices hold the same note for a moment – *omnes at singulatum* – as it soars beyond any semblance of sameness” (p. iv). This resonates within my singing body. It is the richness, of every single voice, which blends together. A polyphonic sound, but from a single instrument.

Positioning myself as a feminist performative I, the I is no longer a solo, or as Gingrich-Philbrook describes as a “single call” (2005, p. 306). It is a dialogical performative (Madison, 2006, p. 321), where the I with the other, working as a “rhizomatically spreading architecture of multiple possibilities” (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2005, p. 306), because there is no I before a “we”, or an I without a “you” (Butler, 2005). With such ideas in mind, how is my voice, the performative I, informed by the other, and how does it inform my engagement and representation of others? Instead of asking how the performative I is created, I ask what are the effects of the intra-action between the I with the Other? Intertwining feminist theory with the investigation of my auto-narratives, I seek to reveal the structures in the context of my experience. This has implications for my becoming and positioning as a researcher, a feminist researcher. To situate this further, in the following section I dive into the specific elements of the feminist theory I seek to engage with.

## Positioning my Voice Through Feminist Theory

I write my performative I from an epistemological positioning where all knowledge production is understood as located or situated (Haraway, 1991). Critical feminist theory begins from an assumption that research questions are never neutral, with Haraway mentioning the problem of claiming objectivity as “the god trick” (1991, p. 191). From my feminist research position, I do not claim objectivity. My feminist research voice is always present, making my research voice explicit. Based on the situated knowledge I possess, being a performer, through my soprano voice, I saw that there was a connection between epistemology and a narrative position. This resulted in an autoethnographic text which is performative in itself.

## Gender as Performative

In this article I view gender as performative, leaning on Judith Butler’s (1990) description of it as a “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (p. 45). I use Butler’s theory of performativity as a way of understanding my actions as a soprano and into the becoming as a feminist researcher. By this I mean what behaviors, patterns of action and norms I have learned through repetition, and how they affect me. Through Butler’s thinking about gender as performative, in order to appear as intelligible as soprano, I have imitated what I perceived as a “feminine practice”. Butler claims these imitative practices, both linguistic and physical, help shape gender identities, and this is how they are understood as performative – gender is not something you are, but rather something you do. Butler speaks of gender as something that is created in a culture and society, however, she does not speak of the body as something predisposed. Butler writes from the perspective that there is no I without first a we (Butler & Berbec, 2017). The body is shaped from the practices it is part of, and it appears to be stylized through speech and body actions, and that it is shaped in response to the other, the we. Articulating the theory of gender, or the body, as one that acts and performs according to



the conversations of gender, conversations that are influenced before one even is born (Butler & Berbec, 2017).

My soprano skin is an effect of the discursive practice situated in the socio-cultural context of singing. I question if it is my inner “female core” that becomes visible as a soprano? I was always told that I was “feminine” performing my soprano. According to Butler, this performance acts to fulfil the expectation of a two-gendered model, to maintain the image of the body explaining our gender. According to Butler, bodies should be understood as political constructs and this is related to who has and does not have power and has consequences for our way of acting. This is how I see gender playing a crucial role in singing, because it both restricts and opens up for creating a soprano voice. The soprano can be regarded as a fixed gendered phenomenon, an object unable to make resistance. But I ask: How might a more porous way to understand the socio-cultural context of singing enable further space, diversity, freedom and voice for those engaged in these practices? In the following auto-narrative, I voice this from an embodied experience on stage.

### *Without the Operatic Voice*

I have been lucky to perform the character of Michaela in Bizet’s opera Carmen. I recognized so much of myself in this character. A country girl, down to earth, caring and good at fulfilling the wishes of others. I loved my costume, the fabric, lace, was almost like a national romantic image. Curly hair, red mouth, but innocent. I experienced the visual and theatrical part of the role well. Having received the part, I started to worry about not fulfilling the aesthetic ideal of operatic singing, not reaching the high notes. I felt I lacked the expected sound. Sure enough, after the performance I overheard someone in the audience (this someone being an authority in the field): “Oh, Michaela was beautiful on stage, but she was the one without the operatic voice”. My heart sank like a stone to my stomach. I had not met the expectations of how to sound in this role. I had failed.

I never told the story of “Michaela” to anyone, until now. I felt ashamed of it. I still do. It punched my stomach, my diaphragm – the singer’s most crucial place for finding the core, a vulnerable place. Viewing my Michaela narrative as an embodiment of possibility and of error (Pollock,

2007), my failure with not producing the expected sound, was an error, but an error of possibility, an error that does not solely exist for me, but for others. My embodied experience, the error, could be used to dismantle and deconstruct normative behaviours from the socio-cultural context of singing. Who was the Other sitting in the audience, punching my stomach? Why did I listen to this one person, who was an authority in the field, and not the other 799 people in the audience?

From the auto-narratives I have shared thus far in this article I see that I perform with a voice that is significant for me. I perform within a discourse which binds members of the socio-cultural context of singing in Western society. I view my performance in the socio-cultural context of singing as repeating acts of the soprano skin. As Butler states, these repeated acts are performed within highly ridged regulatory frames. My voice performs within the frame of the socio-cultural context of singing. My grandmother still worships my light bell-like soprano. I still love to get applause for my *Pamina* and I love wearing a princess costume, but, I am also aware of the acts that do not fit into the repeated stylizing of the culture. With an embodied performative approach I see that the acts that marginalize a part of my voice because they dissonate with the expectations from this discourse. As such, the socio-cultural context of singing can be understood to encourage disciplining acts. I see that the expression *dissonance* is important for me to consider. In music, dissonances are viewed as moments of disruption, a tension of sounds, which require further development or a dissolving resolution. In the previous narrative, *Without the operatic voice*, I experienced a dissonance, a strong tension, a sound that did not fit, which may never have resolved.

With this theoretical terrain as a backdrop, I recall the repeated stylization of the skin of my soprano. As a researcher, I can now see my development from another perspective, an embodied performative, new-material feminist perspective. Dwelling on my auto-narratives, I see they are closely linked to feminine performance, especially in relation to sound and gesture. I can now shed light on aspects from the frames around me, that confirms something, and marginalizes something else. Butler's notion on gender as performative, provides a ground to investigate the discourses *about* the soprano, and how the soprano is a result or a product

of the discourses in the sociocultural context of singing, by performing the discourse. But, as Alaimo and Hekman (2008) state: “this discursive realm is nearly always constituted so as to foreclose attention to lived, material bodies and evolving corporeal practices” (p. 3). The materiality of the body is in fact what makes the body produce sound. Butler talks about the “act” of the body but does not elaborate on sound. Without the materiality of the body, the flesh, the primal sound of the human being, sound cannot be produced, and the singer is left with no instrument, only the discourse. Schlichter (2011) states that Butler’s notion of gender performativity ignores the performative aspects of the voice, asking what it means to think of a body without a voice. The “core” of the voice. Peeling the orange is finding a more porous way to talk about the female singer body and the materiality it inhabits. This is actually what is exclusive with the voice – it is not a pair of strings you can change, it *is* “the I”. Not the I as a representation, but rather the human living body as material, in intra-action with the discourse. It is “material-discursive” (Haraway, 2008, p. 4), which refuses to separate the two.

Making me intelligible as a soprano, I see that there are three repeated acts that arise from investigating my narratives through Butler’s thinking of performativity. These acts are connected to norms and values existing in the socio-cultural context of singing. In the following sections I describe these three acts as: expectations in performing a normative feminine soprano, disciplining, and constructing my soprano.

## The Normative Feminine Soprano

It is in appearance that gender can be performed, and the appearance of voice is part of this. Coming back to my narratives, I see I behave to fulfil norms that expect a soprano body to express itself with a “quiet body”. I see historical norms formed by the patriarchy, in how to perform the role, how to take a submissive position, how to experience failure when not producing the correct and expecting sound. What freedom does the soprano then have to perform her own voice? By maintaining these norms not all bodies are given the right to sing. Some will be excluded, because they do not fit into the fixed pattern. And, why did I not think of

these as oppressive norms when performing the role? Being in the role, I experienced the norms as natural habits. My body was deeply culturally constructed. Pineau (2002) advocates for *refreshment*, that appeals the body's innate ability to learn alternative behaviours. Because, habits can be broken.

With a *Critical Performance Pedagogy* Pineau (2002) advocates for a pedagogy that “embraces performance as a critical methodology that can be fully integrated throughout the learning process” (p. 50). This requires consideration of the body as a medium for learning. From where I stand, I view that teachers and students in music education are well suited for such an investigation, given that they have experience and practice of being “performance sensitive” beings. With Pineau’s (2002) perspective in mind, there is the need to consider how those of us in music education might work to free ourselves from rigid frameworks that I see are embedded within music education (Nerland, 2003), and within this from oppressive norms, from dichotomous thinking that separates subject/object, body/mind, nature/culture, female/male, into an “willful embodiment of ‘we’” (Spry, 2016, p. 99). As Pienau (2002) notes, we must strive into a pedagogy that acknowledges that inequities in power and privilege have physical impact on our bodies, that put bodies into action, to help bodies become active, to help them break habits and structures. In this way music educators and researchers can “explore how socio-political relations are simultaneously reflected in and constituted through educational practice at the macro level of public policy as well as the micro level of classroom interaction” (Pineau (2002, p. 41).

Within my soprano self my voice is an instrument that is shaped to adhere to gendered norms. In my auto-narratives my voice is constructed into a porous silhouette of a soprano. In my experiences there have been guidelines for what this silhouette should be like. Through my auto-narratives I see that I have been fulfilling demands for a normative feminine soprano. First and foremost, I see that this is related to two aspects; appearance and sound. The skin of the soprano that I meet the criteria for, is linked to a “girly” look – an innocent and docile behavior is pervasive in the narrative of the female singer articulated within the literature. According to Green (1997) and Rosenberg (2012), singers risk being

“double exposed” to an inquisitive, normative gaze. Borgström Källén and Sandström (2019) points out that it is clear that the voice as an instrument is constructed on the basis of special terms and conditions and can be linked to the singer primarily using her own body in her musical performance. I have experienced this expected sound and behaviour of the soprano as a normative feminine sound. These particular feminine aspects of the voice require discipline of the voice (Björck, 2011; Borgström Källén, 2012, 2014; Hentschel, 2017; Strøm, 2018), and I have disciplined myself through imitating how a soprano “should” be and sound. I have performed my soprano voice within a fixed two-gendered category. Within this category I have fulfilled and repeated the patterns that exist in the socio-cultural context of singing. Only when I step out of the rigid frames of the socio-cultural context of singing do I see what kind of repeated acts that dissonate, and why. When I step out of the frame of the culture, my voice is released. I find my own way, from within my core, because I do not repeat expected actions, but rather, I find new actions. I am aware that my inner core is also sociocultural constructed. My voice is externally and internally co-constructed. Through the process of working on this article I have actively tried to dismantle and deconstruct the normative behaviour that exists in the sociocultural context of singing.

The skin of the soprano is such a gendered phenomenon, that the subject is performed into a socio-cultural context, without being aware of it. This resonates with Butler’s theory that norms cannot be embodied without an action and they cannot continue without an action (Reddy & Butler, 2004). In this way I can act and refuse the norms through action, an action of release. In my second narrative, *A silver soprano voice*, I describe how my vocal teachers asked for more bodily support because my voice sounded like a “boy soprano”. Of course, I did, and this resulted in a silver voice. It was a voice that gave me a lot of vocal challenges, but *it sounded the way it was expected to*. When my focus changed, because life changed, and I stepped out of the ridged frame of the culture, the pieces of my voice “fell together”. Now I was not trying to repeat acts from the social culture of singing. I performed my own voice, finding my core, but now within a different context. I focused on singing repertoire such as folk music, that did not focus so much on timbre, but the text.

Butler claims that; “our responses to social environments over time are part of what produces the so-called ‘facts’ of the biological body” (Reddy & Butler, 2004, p. 118). I was trying to not repeat actions of the culture, but *now* knowing and reading my experiences through Butler’s work, I cannot separate the body, the I from the Other – the sociocultural context of singing and its discourse. Reading my experiences through the lens of Butler’s work, I cannot separate my body from the cultural discourse.

## Disciplining the Soprano Skin

In the auto-narratives I share I see a clear disciplining of my body. I moved with femininity on stage in the roles of the naive princess or maid. These feminine traits were often confirmed as correct by conductors, directors, vocal teachers and colleagues. The repertoire I was assigned was adapted to this expected expression as a female singer. In my auto-narratives I see that I can confirm the discipline of the body through my actions. The performative, to make a soprano voice, is rooted in the actions of the body, inclusive of the body’s audio. Meeting norms for a feminine soprano also involves disciplining the vocalizing body. I experienced this as dissonance between my bodily actions and the vocal expression. My voice, in some discursive practices, was considered as a dissonance, as it did not meet the requirement set by the expectations of Western music’s requirements. Trying to fulfill this criterion I got tired in my voice, I could not find my core, my support, because I did not connect to my body. Schlichter (2011) argues that Butler’s notion of gender trouble remains fully contained by the logic of the visual, because Butler focuses on the picture of gender and in this way excludes the voice as “one of the relevant aspects of ‘significant corporeality’” (p. 33). Schlichter continues to argue that this use of gender performativity as a theory “make bodies speak but simultaneously mutes their voices” (p. 33).

Voice is an extension of the soprano skin, from the inside to the outside. My point is that the skin, as a border between the inside and outside is porous. Voice as material, and the body as material, has its own agency. A more porous way of exploring the soprano voice, would be acknowledging the body, the instrument itself with agency. An intertwining

of the I and the Other. Because the suppression comes from the outside, from the socio-cultural context view of the voice as fixed gendered categories, and thereby constructed into a normative feminine voice. Drawing back to my auto-narrative, *Without the operatic voice*, I see there is a “mismatch” between the appearance and the sound; the picture of *Michaela* was perfect but the soprano skin did not sound the way it was expected to. The voice did not support the message in the act of the communication. It interrupted it. It dissonated. Butler’s theory enables me to notice this, as well as to create resistance and further work to develop new flexible concepts. The voice demands it, because of its complexity.

From these embodied memories, as mentioned earlier, I analyze that I perform with a voice that is significant for me, but I perform it within a discourse, which is binding for those within the socio-cultural context of singing in western societies. As a result, I dissonance with the expectations from this discourse. In the literature Schei (2007) describes from a Foucauldian perspective how social structures and cultural patterns shape singers during music education and professional practices. While Nerland (2003) investigates how one-on-one music lessons constitute a cultural practice in relation to the work of Foucault and Bourdieu. When I experienced dissonances – when my soprano sound was not operatic enough, or that my biggest voice changed happened later in life when I became a mother, getting into a teaching position at the university – I was no longer occupied with fulfilling the norms of how my voice should sound and within the dissonance I could break out of the patterns I was accustomed to. Suzanne Cusick (1999), inspired by Butler’s notion of performativity, analyzes speech and song in western culture as forms of discipline of the vocalizing bodies. In relation to Cusick’s work, I see that my soprano body has been subordinated by the vocal and choral field, disciplining me to fulfill the image of the normative feminine soprano. My embodied experiences have created a dissonance, between the expectation and the sound I produced.

My construction as a soprano is based on traditions, where the focus on bodily discipline is taken for granted (Borgström Källén & Sandström, 2019, p. 87). My becoming as a feminist is rooted in these invisible “taken for granted” moments. My feminist position also creates a theoretical

frame for further research exploring possible “hidden” socializations in cultures that contain vocal practices where the female gender is over-represented in its participation. Drawing from Turner’s (1982) thinking, liminal space is both a cultural and personal place where transformation can be made. I have experienced that positioning me as a feminist researcher through autoethnography, has empowered me both as soprano and researcher, because I am able to break out of patterns and thus create a change. A liminal space is therefore a transformative position to hold.

## The Construction of my Voice

My soprano voice is constructed by expectation to the skin of the soprano – expectations that come from a thinking of the voice as a gendered fixed category. Applying Butler’s (1990) idea of gender as performative, the soprano has limited possibilities for action and performance outside of “meanings already socially established” (p. 191), and thereby the soprano has no full freedom “to voice”. As a feminist thinker, I see that I am disciplined to fulfill femininity requirements; a constructed normative feminine soprano. The social construction of the soprano also focuses on constructions of gender. There is a preconceived way of viewing and disciplining a soprano, which therefore constructs the soprano’s gender. The imperceptible construction of me as a soprano led to little resistance of such stereotyping. Through Butler’s thinking of gender as performative, *A silver soprano voice* appears willingly to accept the position she is given. Subordination is thus the precondition for resistance and opposition (Davies et al., 2001).

As a soprano I accepted the position of subordination, fulfilling the demands from vocal teachers, directors, and orchestras. This acceptance of the conditions of possibility, does not come from me, but from the power of the practices I have lived in. This tells me something about the power of the practices I have embodied. But, I now face this subordination as a feminist researcher, and I have the possibility of seeing otherwise, as soprano *and* researcher. The position of seeing otherwise leads me to a liminal space, a place of *wondering in the dark* (Bresler, 2019). Carrying my soprano skin with me, I embrace my experiences as



a situated knowledge into my becoming as a researcher. Moving into the end of this article I show how my positioning as a researcher, moving in between knowing and unknowing take me into a liminal space, being both a soprano *and* researcher, into a space of *wondering* and *wandering*.

## Moving Into a Liminal Space

I carry my soprano history with me as I become a feminist researcher. I argue that, performing a gender, being a soprano or researcher are not fixed categories, and these roles are also performed. I am the one who brings Butler's ideas on gender as performative into my context, not as soprano or researcher, but as both at the same time. Moving between the fluid and porous border of the skin of the soprano and the feminist researcher, I find my space in between – a liminal space. Music has the possibility of creating a liminal space because it can take us into another dimension (Boyce-Tillman, 2009). Facing my soprano, using autoethnography as a method, I make myself vulnerable, and I throw myself into the unknown. However, as I throw myself into the unknown the boundaries between the soprano and researcher start to dissolve.

In writing this article I have been able to see what an exciting and vulnerable place this is to hold. By carving out my journey from soprano to feminist researcher, I offer a methodological path, a way of investigating, but also an example of positioning research from within a performative practice for those who experience a requirement for research-based teaching and practice in higher music education – for who is perhaps better qualified to see and know in new ways than performers? In this article my emphasis has been on how norms of being a normative feminine soprano has affected my becoming into a feminist researcher. Being a feminist researcher I can challenge the power such norms might hold – not only for the sake of my own change but also to incite change for others too. Not claiming objectivity or using “the God Trick” (Haraway, 1991), but merely writing with my honesty, and questioning my position as a product of the discourse I am investigating. From such a position of situated knowledge and through Butler's thinking of gender as performative, I now rearticulate my voice, from another perspective.

## Coda

This article emerged from my porous soprano skin and is a contribution to understanding the performativity of gender that exists in the practice of singing. I continue to ask: How is a singer's feminist performative I created through autoethnography? By revealing how my soprano has been constructed, and through the thinking of Butler's concept of gender as performative, I have stitched together my becoming a feminist researcher. Investigating my journey *is* the becoming as a researcher.

Returning to the orange metaphor I shared at the opening of this article, I see that an orange has no firm core. By peeling the skin of an orange, the pithiness is revealed showing us that there are many more complex facets to the orange, the orange is not simply a mass of flesh, but rather it is the intricate pith that holds it together. Peeling my orange, making myself vulnerable, has enabled me to feel the field and listen to the field with an *expanded way of knowing* (Bresler, 2019) into a transformative position in a liminal space. Perhaps my voice resonates with others, or it strikes out of the homogenous sound of the ensemble, as a solo, with a dissonance. What a dissonance is cannot be determined; it changes based on our context of living and situated knowledge. But, after a dissonance something new might happen – a change, a new timbre and texture.

In writing this article I have tried to better understand the intersection of music education and gender, the becoming of a researcher, researching with the “inside out” and to embrace the material body's actual contribution in (to) the web of meanings in the sociocultural context of singing. My performative actions are constructed according to the soprano as a gendered phenomenon, disciplined and constructed by the socio-cultural context of singing. I therefore have argued that female soprano voices are not given freedom to voice. Drawing on my first auto-narrative, and the words of my feminist mother: “the most important thing is not what you have, but what you are about to become”. Thinking as a soprano feminist, I see that I am in a liminal space of becoming, throwing myself into the unknown, seeking a feminist performative I – a voice that might resonate with other voices, creating a complex melody of the self.

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## A tale of grappling: Performative duoethnography as expanded methodological thinking

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### Abstract

This article is a tale of two researchers, teachers, and artists grappling and playing with duoethnography. By expanding the methodology, we aim to bridge duoethnography into pedagogy. Grappling with the methodological to pedagogical bridge, we found that intertwined performative aspects of doing a duoethnography could challenge our knowledge production and roles as researchers and the current and more dominant practices that we operate within. We engage with a performative paradigm (Bolt, 2016) and lean on relevant theories from new materialist feminist thinkers such as Karen Barad (2003, 2007), Lenz Taguchi (2009, 2012) and Tami Spry (2011, 2016), while dialoguing with Joe Norris and Richard D. Sawyer's (2012) tenets of duoethnography. Our embodiment of these tenets, intertwined with our theoretical positioning, allows our investigation to expand into a performative duoethnography. As an end, we propose duoethnography as a critical performative pedagogy (Pineau, 2002) and offer this article as a playful impulse connecting methodological considerations with pedagogy.

**Keywords:** duoethnography; new materialism; pedagogy; performative duoethnography; performativity

## Prelude

### *The two of us together in this twilight borderland*

To the reader:

This 'Prelude' opens with a line from the poem "Dialectic Lullaby"<sup>1</sup> by Norwegian Professor of psychology, Ragnar Rommetveit (1924-2017). Runa (PhD Candidate in Music Education) thought of this poem in the early days of developing this article. The poem spoke directly to her about the relationship with her co-author and supervisor, Rose (Professor of Arts Education) and their shared experiences with the methodology of duoethnography. At the same time, inspired by the work of Esther Fitzpatrick and Sandy Farquhar (2018) where they used images as a starting point for a duoethnographic investigation, Runa and Rose thought of this poem as one of their impulses and points of departure. Therefore, we offer lines of this poem throughout the article, as a rhythm in our text - a pulse of sorts, propelling our process. We hope that this article can be an impulse for you, the reader, as well.

## Introduction: A tale of grappling

This article became a tale. As researchers we both seem to come back to stories, time and time again. But this is not only a story of the past. It is also a story of the present. It is a story of living and doing. This is the tale of two researchers grappling with, playing with, and moving with the methodology of duoethnography.

We, Runa and Rose, are two women. Two teachers. Two academics. Two artists. We come from two different geographical locations, Norway and New Zealand, and we also have our artistic 'homes' in two different disciplines – Runa in singing, and Rose in dance. Between our similarities and differences, we have found a dialogue dwelling around the idea of how duoethnography might bridge with pedagogical practice. Grappling with this idea, we found that the process and performative aspects of duoethnography could challenge our knowledge production, our roles as researchers, and the dominant practices and approaches of our teaching, research, and artistic work.

This article explores how a performative duoethnography can be understood as an expanded way of methodological thinking - not just a framework or a tool, but how it can expand into pedagogy and can be lifted into pedagogical practice. The purpose of such an article is to offer impulses for the reader to think about how methodology can be playful, dialogical, and involve risk taking, and how such methodological considerations can connect with pedagogy. The entanglement of theory, method, and discussion in this article reflects our philosophies of teaching. We see that there are no fixed borders between theory and practice, and, as Norman Denzin (2018) explains, there is no separation between the ethnographer, writer, performer, and the world, they are intertwined and

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<sup>1</sup> *Dialectic Lullaby* is an unpublished poem found through the personal notes and archives of Ragnar Rommetveit. It was shared with Runa by a colleague.



entangled. Therefore, this article takes a winding approach, weaving identities, theories, and practices.

We use Joe Norris and Richard D. Sawyer's (2004a, 2004b, 2012) tenets of duoethnography as a framework for this article, which we purposefully interrupt with 'stop moments' (Fels & Belliveau, 2008). These stop moments are moments that have piqued our interest and are understood as moments where change or challenge took place. At the same time, a stop moment can be seen as "[...] a moment of risk, a moment of opportunity that calls us to attention ... it provides a way to focus on the learning that emerges" (Fels & Belliveau, 2008, p. 36). We draw in these stop moments as locations for reflection and action, together with theoretical and methodological considerations. To challenge us and our views of duoethnographic research, we engage with the positioning of a performative paradigm (Bolt, 2016), and apply relevant theories from new materialist feminist thinkers such as Karen Barad (2003) and Lenz Taguchi (2009, 2012). We purposefully add challenges and critiques to our performative duoethnography as a precursor to the conclusion we offer to this article. As an end, we propose a critical performative pedagogy (Pineau, 2002) as a way that such methodological and theoretical thinking could be applied by those engaging in similar practices in a variety of disciplinary contexts.

We clearly align ourselves with Norris and Sawyer (2012), the founders of duoethnography, but also with other duoethnographers such as Aerial A. Ashlee and Stephen John Quayle (2020), Rick Breault (2016), Hilary Brown (2015), James Burford and Catherine Mitchell (2019), Esther Fitzpatrick and Sandy Farquhar (2018), M. Francyne Huckaby and Molly H. Weinburgh (2015), Judith Mair and Elspeth Frew (2018), Kakali Bhattacharya (2020), and Richard D. Sawyer and Tonda Liggett (2012). Our senses became heightened to the idea that sticking too closely to the terrain of one methodology can be a risk, and we became aware of other scholars working and grappling with the same issues as us – though not framing their work as a duoethnography. Therefore, we engage with scholars such as Maggie MacLure (2018), Mirka Koro, Maggie MacLure, Jasmine Ulmer (2018), Jasmine Ulmer (2017), Camilla Eline Andersen, Hanna Guttorm, Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, Teija Löytönen, Jayne Osgood, Ann Merete Otterstad, Teija Rantala, Pauliina Rautio, Anita Välimäki (2017), and Anne Beate Reinertsen and Carmen Blyth (2021). We acknowledge that the scholarship we draw on comes from diverse contexts and has been written by authors who might have very different experiences and worldviews. However, the existing theoretical and methodological work we have chosen to engage with resonates with us and has propelled us to do the work that we do in this article.

For some time, we have both worked within autoethnographic spaces (see for example: Martin, 2016, 2019; Jenssen, 2021). Autoethnography embraces the significance of exploring the self to gain insight and understanding of Others, and that this engagement of self and Other gives potential to understand broader cultural concerns and phenomena (Adams et al., 2014; Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). We are now, in writing this article, challenging ourselves by stepping into the space of duoethnography - a collaborative methodology where two or more researchers engage, share, and draw from their life experiences to provide understandings of a

social phenomenon (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Duoethnographies often contain a script from the dialogue between the two researchers (Breault, 2016), as part of the ‘data’ collected, though this is not always a requirement, because there is no single way of doing duoethnography (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Our duoethnographic meanderings began months before we even thought about writing an article together, and well before we became conscious of the methodology that was being formed. We folded in and out of each other’s stories and experiences. When one of us had a moment or story to reflect on, the other would so often say, “that makes me think of the time I...”. As a beginning for this article, we wrote auto-narratives. From the auto-narratives we investigated each other’s stories. We dialogued but understood that there was ‘more to it’ than a bouncing ideas and comments back and forwards. Then, there was no longer a need to include the narratives in this article - they had served their purpose, and the article itself became duoethnographic.

Therefore, throughout this article we show occasional small slices of our conversations. Entangled with this conversation, we share drawings from Ingvild Blæsterdalen<sup>2</sup>. After having informal chats with Runa about the experience of working with duoethnography, Ingvild sent Runa sketches ‘storying’ what Runa had shared. In the process of building the article, we experienced that our conversations were eventually completely intertwined with theory, stories, and methods. Due to these intertwinelements, many excerpts from our conversations were phased out, and gradually the article shapeshifted into the discussions about the method – and perhaps that is also why we finally acknowledge that the method of duoethnography can be considered an ontology. A quick look at some of the comments shared between us show how we experienced the unfolding into something more than an application of the method of duoethnography. Below we share a slice of dialogue from one of our conversations when developing the article, which we experienced as a stop moment:

*Runa: I have a suggestion that I take out the auto-narratives. I don’t feel we need them anymore. They are somehow disturbing our conversation. They are living a life ‘outside’.*

*Rose: Yes, yes! I experienced a tension with the auto narratives, feeling that they served as a way for us to get into the article - a way for us to get to know each other more, the places and experiences where we come from. But maybe we don’t need them. Maybe they are not a ‘thing’ anymore.*

Inspired by Ashlee and Quayle (2020) where they highlight and embody the tenets of duoethnography (Norris & Sawyer, 2012), we purposefully decided to use Norris and Sawyer’s tenets as a guide and frame for our work in this article. We felt a need for something to ‘hold onto’, a plan to stick to, and the tenets offered this. However, ‘sticking to a plan’ was quickly a

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<sup>2</sup> Ingvild Blæsterdalen is a Norwegian cartoon painter, musician, and violin teacher. Her work often engages with humor, exploring daily encounters of everyday life while also seeking a deeper understanding of people and being in the world.

challenge. In a moment of frustration and tension, working on the tenet of “Disrupting metanarratives” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 15), where the voice of both researchers should stay strong and not rest on one of the researcher’s story, Runa experienced a stop moment, and wrote in the article draft to Rose:

*Now I am almost answering the tenets, just to fulfil them. That can be a challenge in duoethnography (though Norris and Sawyer write that these tenets should be seen as guidelines, not steps), tweaking the process to fulfil some tenets. Isn't that the thing with this methodology? There is no recipe. You can 'play' with it. This is our purpose with the article. We encourage the readers to grapple with multiple auto narratives and dialogues, to resist one conclusion or one voice.*

Rose answered:

*Interesting! I wonder if there is space for these tenets to be 'played' with, as in, do we 'stick' to them, or do we see and suggest them in another way? Yes, so here I see you want to dialogue in relation to the tenets...*

So, we played with the tenets. We made a mess, we tested out possibilities, and then we sought to refine our work. Along with Norris and Sawyer’s (2012) tenets of duoethnography, we considered Breault’s (2016) recommendation for duoethnographers to create an integral methodological core without becoming prescriptive. Therefore, we anchor ourselves in the methodology of duoethnography, but at the same time we have looked for opportunities to stretch and expand the methodology. Our desire to stretch and expand has taken us into a performative duoethnography. In the following section of the article, we invite the reader into our duoethnographic experience. We lean into theories and concepts that allowed us to view the methodology as pedagogy and position our duoethnography in a performative paradigm. Maybe it was our being as “performance sensitive ethnographers” (Conquergood, 1991, p. 187), embodied through our artistic lives, that led us to dive into the notion of performativity? But, we dived into performativity, headfirst, so to speak.

### **The force of performativity within duoethnography**

*We need the performative paradigm because we take the view that other approaches cannot capture what we hope to be able to share, experience and challenge!*

Rose, answering Runa in a conversation discussing different theoretical worldviews when developing the article.

Leaning on the work of Barbara Bolt (2016) that “performativity is not first and foremost about meaning. It is about force and effect” (p. 139), we engage with performativity where performative acts do not describe something, they *do* something, and “this ‘something’ has the power to transform the world” (Bolt, 2016, p. 137). Positioning ourselves in such a way, we see that the notion of ‘performative’ needs to be understood in terms of “the performative force of the

research, its capacity to effect ‘movement’ in thought, word and deed in the individual and social sensorium” (Bolt, 2016, p. 129). In our article we do not expect to provide answers or be able to ‘settle’ duoethnography from a performative lens. Rather, we seek new entrances through duoethnography to view the world – to see how our past stories inflect the present in different layers of our work.

### Tenets: Potentials and openings

Runa in the comment box to Rose: *“Duoethnographies portray knowledge in transition, and as such, knowing is not fixed but fluid. Truth and validity are irrelevant. What exists is the rigor of the collaborative inquiry that is made explicit in the duoethnography itself”* (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 20). Rose, this is SO performative.

Rose: *It is! Gosh, that really does capture things. I think it has propelled us, that we are not looking for a truth, rather than we are situated in a time and place and things move, change, shift, and our stories also move and shift as does our relationship to them...*

In the following sections we offer how we have embodied the tenets of duoethnography, while weaving, reading, and thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2017). With performativity as a force, we seek to see the duoethnographic tenets as foundations, potentials, and openings for our work. We seek to create a dialogue to bridge expanded methodological thinking into pedagogy.

### Currere: From self-interrogation to a performative ‘we’

*... our boat drifting along on a sea of dream.*

From the first time we met, stories have been a core of our relationship and work – framing our dialogue and acting as impulses. With stories propelling us forward (and sometimes backward), we ask ourselves: Why do we need our stories? What do they tell? What do they bring into our research? How can they challenge and transform us? How can they tell us something about the present? *Currere*, the first of Norris and Sawyer’s (2012, p. 12) nine tenets of duoethnography, therefore resonated well *in us*.

Building on William F. Pinar’s (1975, 1994) concept of *currere*, which views life history as curriculum, “*currere* is an act of self-interrogation” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 13). In duoethnography the researchers are the site of research and “use themselves to assist themselves and others in better understanding the phenomenon under investigation” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 13). Together we investigate how expanding the methodology of duoethnography into a performative duoethnography can open spaces for thinking of this methodology as pedagogy. We do this by dwelling around each other’s stories as a site “to better understand oneself and the world in which one lives” (Norris & Sawyer, p. 13).

Like Tami Spry’s (2011) creation of a Performative -I, duoethnography is less concerned with the self, and more with the co-construction in the relation of the self/other/we, and “it is, ultimately, not about the self” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 13). Expanding on this thought we create a

performative “we” are resting on Spry’s argument that maybe there is no performative -I, but instead “a willful embodiment of ‘we’” (Spry, 2016, p. 99). We argue that it is in the “coperformativity of meaning with others” (Spry 2011, p. 39) that we find ourselves as performative duoethnographers. In duoethnography we are intimately connected, through and in our stories. MacLure (2018) uses the word “intimacy” (p. 233) to describe how attending to the flesh and materiality of the researchers can consider each instance of our ‘data’ – non-human and human. Our view of currere includes our intimate relationship with human and non-human entities, and as such, a ‘performative we’ expands our understanding of what life history as curriculum entails. As researchers we do not rise above our data – rather we dwell with and are intimately connected to it (MacLure, 2018; Koro et. al., 2018). In this drifting and dwelling with others, trust and ethics is required.

### Trust and ethics: Empowerment and agency

*You seeking comfort in my big and – you trust – strong hand.*

Trust is a vital element in duoethnography (Norris & Sawyer, 2012), and it is considered a prerequisite between the co-researchers (Breault, 2016). Duoethnography is about trusting the Other, but also trusting oneself to let go (Brown, 2015) and ultimately moving and transforming. But where does this trust come from? We experienced vulnerability. We listened to each other, and we feel that we created a deep trust, from within. Rose reflected on feeling trust, writing after a chat on Zoom:

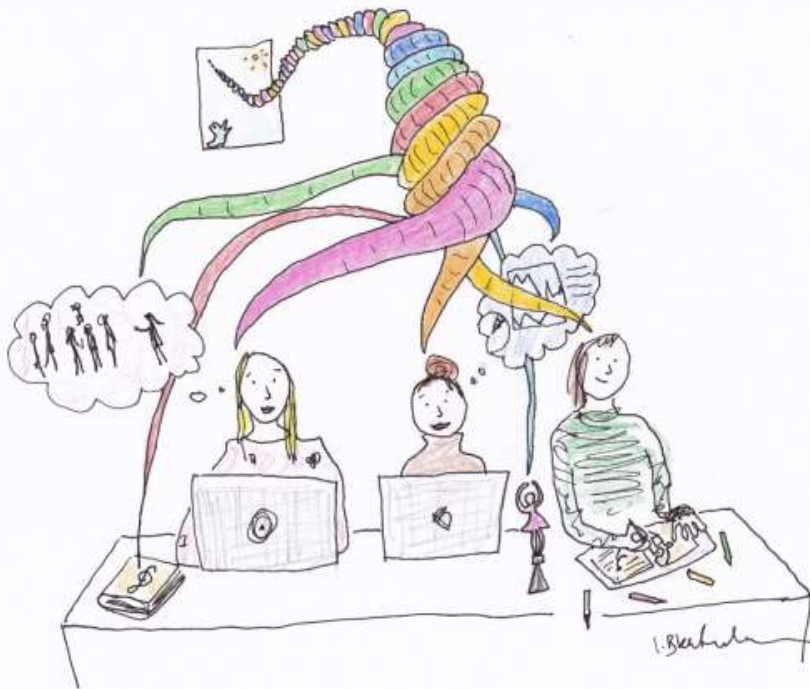
*I feel trust, trust is a feeling for me. But it is also based in actions, in my experience they go together. E.g., I trust Runa because I feel I can, because I feel a connection to our ways of being, but I also trust her actions, that she will follow up in action.*

Runa answered:

*From our encounters of similarities, trust has grown. I’m not sure what came first, trust, respect, interest, curiosity. It felt intertwined. Intertwined into a strong rope, a safe line, a feeling of trust.*

Rose replies:

*I love the metaphor of a strong rope, a safety line.*



Duoethnographies are conversations that positions the Other in dialogue, making the status one of equals, because we research ‘with’ and not ‘on’ each other. As duoethnographers, we do not examine the Other, rather, “we examine ourselves, partly through the perspective of another person” (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012, p. 646). As such, the methodology is ethical in nature (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). We experience the methodology to be empowering for researchers, and this is a similar experience that could be seen in how we as educators encourage our students to work together. With trust and ethics there is the potential to empower students and give them voice.

Similarly, the reader in duoethnography is an active participant in the knowledge production. The reader is “an unknown future partner” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 22), not merely a recipient of our ‘truth’. When our article encounters the reader something new happens. All participants in the process are given empowerment and agency, leading to new actions as an ongoing process. As theoretical physicist and feminist theorist, Karen Barad (2007) explains: “existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating” (p. ix). The participating intra-active process is the pedagogical ethical stance in a performative duoethnography, where participants are given power over their own knowledge production and practices as a ‘way’ of be(com)ing in the world. A core aspect of Barad’s (2007) theory of agential realism is refusing the dichotomy of epistemology and ontology. She argues that knowing does not happen outside the world, from a distance, but with direct engagement in the world – in the entangled nature of knowing and being. Barad (2007) calls

this onto-epistemology. In this entanglement of being and knowing we see that our performative duoethnography is created.

## **Polyvocal and dialogic: From polyvocal and dialogical into intra-actions**

*You are a native, I am intruder in this borderland*

Throughout this article we include occasional small slices of our dialogue, drawing out the performative, polyvocal, and dialogical conversation within our work of playing with and thinking through the tenets of duoethnography. We were especially conscious of the dialogical aspect of our relationship because of the power relations that exist between us that cannot be removed, being a supervisor and a PhD student writing together.

Our dialogue has not only been between us as researchers but has been with other materials and artifacts (Norris & Sawyer, 2012) – this text, the poem by Ragnar Rommetveit, comment boxes in the ‘review’ function of Microsoft Word, emails, online Zoom conversations, drawings, and photos. Not all elements are shown in this article, but they propelled us, moving our polyvocal dialogue into “higher forms of consciousness” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 13) and what might be understood as an intra-active dialogue. Our creation of a performative duoethnography therefore resonates with Lenz Taguchi’s (2009, 2012) notion of an intra-active pedagogy, based on Karen Barad’s (2003, 2007) concept of intra-activity. According to Lenz Taguchi (2009, 2012), the learner and what is learned is entangled, there is no distinction between. The kinds of learning that can happen in a performative duoethnography cannot be planned, and it depends on what and who is ‘brought into the room’. Learning does not happen with repeating already established knowledge, but it is created in encountering knowledge (Østern et al., 2019). In intra-actions, something new is created and those involved create the ‘new’. The notion of intra-action made us realize that “everything is connected with everyone, always” (Ulmer, 2017, p. 837), human and non-humans.

Runa felt lost, asking herself: What does it mean in the performance of my everyday life, for example being a teacher? Runa wrote to Rose in a comment box:

*In the last draft you suggested that we could search for stories from our beings as teachers. I have had some problems (or to be honest, deep worries), finding out what my contribution is, as a teacher. I have read so many impressive articles on how teachers use performance in the classroom, but in my own practice and teaching... I am ‘just’ the vocal teacher (though I really love that), the soprano. I make the students sing well, with a healthy embodied technique. Then, reading my own writing, searching my memories, I remembered this following story. You so often speak of the ‘feeling’, and this story really sits as a feeling etched in my body. I just wanted you to read it. I have called it “Diving into Ella Fitzgerald’s version of ‘Summertime’”.*

*I once knew a vocal student with an impressive voice and attitude. However, I always felt worried when she sang. A timbre in her voice disturbed me, as though the voice was living outside her body, struggling like a fight between the singer's body and the voice. I could almost feel my own larynx tensing after I listen to her at concerts. After some time I became her teacher. I was so looking forward to work and develop her voice. I started out, as I always do, searching for the core, searching for the organic part of the voice to work 'naturally' and to work with the body. Seeking a space for her personal timbre to shine. We worked from within the body, trying to let the tensions in her muscles go, opening yet finding a core to hold onto. Diving into Ella Fitzgerald 's version of 'Summertime' I tried to let her find her own way. But she did not. Her voice did not respond in the way I expected. Her big voice was getting smaller and smaller. At the end of our lesson, it was like I was only hearing air - a breathy voice with no connection to the body. She lost control over her voice. She started to cry, and she could not breath. Giving her a bag to blow in, I ran out of my office to get her a glass of water. What had I done? I was almost panicking myself. I felt like one of those 'old school' teachers breaking the student down to build her up again. I returned to the room still not knowing what to do. I sat down beside her on my grey sofa. Silence. Then she started to tell me about her younger brother, who had Down Syndrome. How deeply she loved him and was fighting his fight to find his place in school and in society. They both loved listening to jazz, especially to Ella Fitzgerald's version of 'Summertime'.*

This was a stop moment. But this time, the stop moment did not only stop. It continued. First, with action from Rose in her response to what Runa had written. Rose wrote:

*Runa, this is such a special story. I think what is revealed here, is that we ALL have stories. Your stories matter, my stories matter, the student, her story mattered because that is what gave your insight to why there might have been struggle, why she wanted to sing that song, and why as a teacher you only could understand what was going on when you gave space for dialogue.*

Our stop moment over Runa's narrative, was revealed with new action, an intra-action. At the same time Runa's narrative reminded us that the stories we bring into spaces for learning matter, and they have the power to transform us. We are not alone in such thoughts, as others have also explored how stories and learning have significance and can offer transformative potentials (see for example: Barlett & Chase, 2013; Bron & Thunborg, 2017). The force of the performative was in Runa's everyday teaching with vocal students - through music, through the body, the soundwaves, the gaze, the breathing, and flow, even the smell in the room. She could see the roles of student and teacher switching. Now she was the student waiting for the reaction on her actions, from her supervisor – from Rose.

A duoethnography offers at least two ways to see the same issue, facilitating a viewing and reading of each other with space for a dialogic conversation. But a duoethnography is not only a



dialogue between the researchers. We invite the readers to enter an intra-acting relationship with the Other and with the self, and with artifacts. This intra-action produces complex and multi-layered texts, that are performative, involving in the body of the participants, in their being in the world. The reader intra-acts with our work within their own world(s). Therefore, readers can enter and grapple with the openings this performative duoethnography makes visible, and within this we see that the methodology provides opportunities for a polyphony of voices.

## Difference: Or even diffractions

### *The two of us together in this twilight borderland*

The difference between duoethnographers is not only encouraged, but expected, as “through the articulation of differences, duoethnographers make explicit how different people can experience the same phenomenon differently” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 17). Difference was challenging for us, as we felt sameness in between our cultural borders and experiences.

We had to confront the questions: Is the embodiment of sameness so strong for us that it is foreshadowing something? Runa wrote in a comment box:

*How to find different perspectives within a topic that we find deeply familiar?*

*Embodiment of difference. This is what I experience we do Rose!*

*Rose answers: YES, there is a difference in how we embody this sameness (and it highlights that sameness and difference are coexisting...).*

And what are differences? Mohanty (1989) led us on a more porous thinking of the concept of difference noting that “difference seen as variation rather than as conflict, struggle, or the threat of disruption, bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious, empty pluralism” (p. 181). Mohanty’s view made sense to us, and the difference we came to see was that there were small differences, or what might even be considered as micro-differences, differences that might in the first instance appear as hidden or obscured, but no less important.

Through this consideration of difference, we asked each other: Why are differences important in research and pedagogy? In our exploration of difference, we stepped into Barad’s (2007) concept of *diffraction*, which she explains as an approach “[...] of reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter” (Barad, 2007, p. 71). Working with a performative duoethnography is an entangled relation to the Others difference. We are searching for moments of difference to see how and why these differences – or using Barad’s concept *diffractions* – matter. Barad (2007) writes that “a diffractive methodology provides a way of attending to entanglements in reading important insights and approaches through one another” (p. 30). Understanding the Other through diffractions – dwelling on each other’s differences is at core in our performative duoethnography. By reading each other’s embodiment, through sharing stories, we intra-act, and we diffract. Our stories are not mirroring the past. After we encounter each other as obstacles, we change - the

stories change into the present. However, change does not happen in the same way, we change differently because we read differently - from our situated knowledge and positions.



Diffraction is concerned with difference that makes a difference. Consequently, diffraction allows and gives space for reflection. Diffraction is focusing on *how* differences are made, how the relations of difference matter to each other, as in an ongoing flow of intra-actions (Barad, 2007). Because differences are not always opposites or compartmentalised, differences can be a space of unknowing (Bresler, 2019). This idea of unknowing is familiar to us coming from the arts - as artists we never entirely *know* in our arts practices. Spry (2016) suggests that Barad's methodology of diffractions applied to autoethnography "develops the relationality to otherness in autoethnography beyond a representation of differences" (p. 41). Rather than seeking difference as a representation of polarities between us, between self and Other, diffraction is "to study the entangled effects differences make" (Barad, 2007, p. 73). Bringing this into pedagogy, difference matters, because we can draw on difference and give students, teachers, and researchers agency to act with difference. We encourage an embrace and unpacking of difference in learning spaces. Then we see that difference will not lead to an exclusion of the Other, but as an inclusion. As such, the methodology of duoethnography not only juxtaposes the voices of the participants, but it

juxtaposes each other's differences, keeping the text open for the reader. Readers can form their own synthesis through their own diffractive reading.

In our duoethnographic work we explore new ways of *performing* in and through duoethnography. Bolt (2016) writes that the performative paradigm operates according to repetition of difference, that this is the generative potential of artistic research. From Barad (2007) we learned that creating knowledge happens in the creation of new patterns – in diffractions. If we view pedagogy as performative, then we should encourage difference. Investigating differences enables us to think critically, and like in art, we *need* differences in pedagogy. We need more than representing dominant cultures and dominant paradigms, we need to disrupt performed habits as researchers and educators (Andersen et al., 2017). A performative duoethnography can be understood as pedagogy – where the curriculum includes *currere* and recognizes the relation between knowing in being – a holistic, relational, dialogical, polyvocal, critical performative pedagogy, where human and non-human intra-act, and are given empowerment and the *agency of voicing*.

We argue that this is the potential of performative research more broadly, not only within research but in education, as method and as pedagogy. As Barad (2007) writes, “we don't obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming” (2007, p. 185). We remind ourselves that knowledge and being are not dichotomies and separate entities, but we learn by being, being influenced, and influencing that world we live in (Barad, 2007; Lenz Taguchi, 2009). Valuing the performance of difference in research and pedagogy can disrupt the dominant conversations of learning and the creation of knowledge.

## **Disrupts metanarratives - Humble listening disrupting the status quo**

*where one and one don't make two*

By being polyvocal duoethnography challenges and potentially disrupts the metanarrative of self at a personal level by questioning beliefs (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Juxtaposing our voices readers can witness stories and meanings under construction through taking part of the dialogue between us, and importantly, no representation holds supremacy (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). In our conversations we have encouraged and challenged our perspectives. From within our dialogue, rather than 'after' a conversation or sharing a narrative, we discussed and analysed our experiences 'through' and 'alongside' as they happened, constantly aiming to disrupt metanarratives. We listened and we asked each other critical questions without 'interrogating' each other. Investigating these moments of action (but maybe more importantly what happened after moments of action) caught our attention. Not as a period of time as such, but rather as a hyphen. Not as a polyvocal dialogue, but as intra-action, reading diffractively.

Runa writing to Rose in the comment box:

*As Francyne et al. (2015) explains, we experience that differences are not about finding polarities, but one of intersectionality and interstanding. Or is it even intra-action?*

*Rose: YES! Action AND interaction – that it is between, back and forth, but also that there is a reciprocity, it is not a one-way street for either of us (I think anyway).*

In this way we could unpack and stretch the tenet concerning *disrupting metanarratives*, where we try to challenge assumptions. Juxtaposing stories we sought to create a third space (Bhabha, 2004) inviting us and the readers “to add and rethink their stories to the ones being told” (Norris & Sawyer 2012, p. 24), finding a more porous border between theory and practice, methodology, and pedagogy. Norris and Sawyer’s (2012) tenet of disrupting narratives can be an entrance for such thinking. The stories of the performance of everyday life, as teachers, researchers, and artists can be a source of knowledge to draw from and expand into.

Bridging our performative duoethnography into pedagogy, we invite the self, the Other, and the reader as participants. We do not advocate for having the perfect ‘answer’ or a single ‘truth’, but we offer our expanded methodological thinking as a possible stretch into the pedagogical practices of Others. When teaching students in arts education we experience that it is impossible to separate students from their life history, *currere* –just like in a duoethnography where separating the researcher from the researched is impossible, and separating the reader from the text is impossible. As duoethnographers we see how this ‘connectedness’ remains in the body, long after the teaching or research happens. The blurred lines between self and Other also offers something for education. It takes away the line between theory and practice, between the past and the present, perhaps allowing students to understand self in relation to Other in the context performative research where “the distinctive qualities of practice-led research is its propensity to disrupt the status quo and produce research that is novel both in its contribution to research and in its very nature” (Bolt, 2016, p. 185). Doing a performative duoethnography can open spaces where those involved can begin to conceptualize who they want to be in relation to Others. By listening with humbleness to Other’s stories, those participating may understand the Other, and those involved can disrupt their own metanarratives. Readers and listeners can critique the relationship between personal and cultural narratives – and potentially perform differently than the norm. The expanded methodology can disrupt status quo. Disrupting metanarratives is an ethical entanglement of and with different voices – where new perspectives and entrances can be made and be disrupted again. Potentially this might lead to transformation and change.

### **Dialogic change and regenerative transformation: Creating an unsettled performative ‘we’**

*Our boat is drifting ashore*

Using our past stories to inform the present and by retelling our stories to each other, we gained new meaning in reading the Other’s story and listening to how the other responded to that story. But, in this process have we changed? We can say that we experienced a deeper awareness of the

embodied and dialogical research process of the method. Very often, we just listened. However, listening is not an innocent or passive act. From our artistic lives we had both, in different cultural contexts, been silenced and labelled. We believe we had an awareness of trying not to 'label' the Other, or the self, when listening.

Runa had never thought of the methodology of duoethnography as a pedagogy. But feeling her transformation into a researcher, within the conversations and dialogues with Rose, she changed. We both changed. Through writing, feeling our dialogue form in a dissolving space, where we could think out loud in conversation with each other, where theories were set in motion, and connected and disconnected into embodied experiences from the past, we saw the present. We saw that what we do with our teaching was not far away from our research. It was there, hand in hand, through our performance in everyday life. Our past stories were what led us into the notion of the methodology and pedagogy. We saw that our past stories informed the present, and that our present pedagogical stories were already in transformation.

Duoethnography attempts to "turn knowledge into "an act of unsettling its own natural condition" (Norris & Sawyer, p. 18). This unsettling leads us back to Spry (2016) and "the unsettled -I" (p. 163). The unsettled-I is a "continued development of the performative-I, emerging from a profusion of qualitative research where, as Goltz (2011) contends, "I have come to understand that 'I' cannot tell my own story. 'I' can craft a story, but the story will always be limited, fallible, and requiring of forgiveness for what 'I' do not know" (p. 392). Creating a performative "we" is perhaps not enough; we need to stretch even further into a suggestion of a performative and unsettled 'we'. It is in the unsettled that the performative force lies. In our performative duoethnography we rely on, and we trust in, the notion of performativity. In pedagogy we could benefit from relying on performativity – of the constantly changing and transformative knowledge (Bayley, 2018; Østern et al., 2019; Østern & Knudsen, 2019). With performativity we can learn to think differently. We can be open to the unfamiliar and that can bring us into change. However, to do that we need to leave our own territory – drifting into the borderland of the Other. Making us understandable for the Other, making a porous border for the reader, our audience.



### **Audience accessibility: The reader as an active participant and part of an entangled intra-relating**

*...yet at this blessed moment privileged to share*

Who are we writing for? Or more precisely, who are we writing *with*? As Norris and Sawyer (2012) write, “duoethnographies do not end with conclusions. Rather, they continue to be written by those who read them” (p. 21). We have asked ourselves: How can we make an entrance for the reader to participate in our work? We talked of *distance*. We sought to diminish the distance between writer and reader. We talked about *relationships*. We wrote stories and commented on them in our supervisor-PhD candidate relationship, often ‘outside’ the text, in comment boxes, in

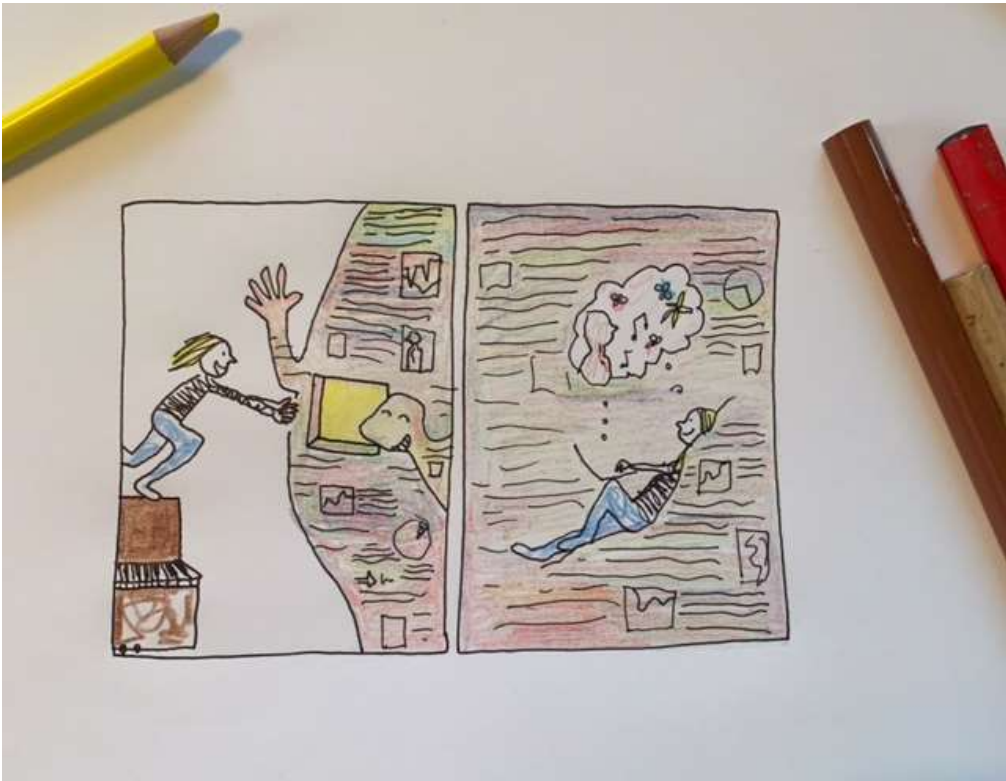
e-mails, not meant for an audience. By sharing our story of a performative duoethnography we sought to stretch out of how conventional academic articles might be formed by using poems, drawings, and material from our comment boxes to diminish distance.

In our relationship we have sought to diminish the distance between student and teacher and see the border between student and teacher as porous, like the border between methodology and pedagogy. A performative pedagogy reaches out to students, empowering and giving agency as *compassionate teaching* (Hendricks, 2019). The privileged moment of sharing stories to an audience, as a researcher, teacher, or student is *listening* to the embodied story of the Other with trust and empathy. Such an approach to the audience can diminish distance in research and pedagogy, where no participant claims a particular truth. But, within our grappling, we also ask: How can we trust a performative duoethnography?

### **Trustworthiness found in self-reflexivity: Reflexivity as listening**

*In your eyes, behind that beam*

Through the transformative, emergent, and dialogic nature of duoethnography, “positivistic notions of truth and validity is redundant” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 19). With rigour and with the *reflexivity of listening* (Kallio, 2021), we have tried to encourage the reader to witness our process of thinking and transforming. We acknowledge that our recalled stories are recalled in the present, and these stories are constantly intra-acting and changing. As a reader you have witnessed our conversation and maybe your story has been changing alongside this article, in turn portraying “knowledge in transition” (Norris & Sawyer, 2012, p. 20) where knowing is not fixed but fluid. How well we have enabled each other to perform our stories as curreres, and how well we have enabled the readers to perform their stories, we cannot tell. But, inspired by Spry (2016) we have been seeking an intentional and reflexive embodiment of the relationality of an ‘unsettled performative we’ within a social context, within pedagogy. As the prelude of this article suggested, we offer this article as an impulse – empowering reader agency into a flow of actions and intra-actions with Others.



Again, we visit the work of Barad (2003, 2007) and remind ourselves that emphasis does not lie in knowing who we are, but rather who we want to become. The tenet of trustworthiness found in self-reflexivity helped us, or maybe it propelled and pushed us to seek a theoretical landscape where there are no ‘truths’. Our stories are of a particular time and place. Our stories can function as impulses, as feelings to be recognised. It is a way of valuing the *unknowing* that we so often experience in the arts and in education, because the *experience* of unknowing “has a richness, vibrancy and range of conflicting emotions that defy neat categorization” (Bresler, 2019, p.80). Therefore, our duoethnography becomes what Denzin (2018) describes as “the site of resistance, a place where performative -I’s confront and engage each other” (p. 55). *This* site, this stage, is what we seek - not solely as artists, teachers, or researchers, but with these identities and practices intertwined. As Spry (2016) explains, for the researcher this means how the material and socio-culturally constituted body also articulates being with Others. The quest of duoethnography is pedagogical by design, simultaneously methodology and a pedagogy. This practice allows us to not only report, but to critically unpack and expose the stories we carry, and as Wilson and Shields (2019) suggest, pedagogy also should do this – disrupt, diffract, and contribute to change.

### **Methodology as pedagogy, or even ontology?**

We embrace what happens by being in the world as part of our knowledge and learning as intra-actions. Through these intra-active moments, we experience that performative duoethnography embraces a diversity of knowledges, with entanglements of perspectives, where being and



knowing seem to exist in the same horizon. We do not seek sameness or uniqueness, but diversity. In this space of diversity and difference, we see that the melting between the epistemological and the ontological makes sense, and we argue that as educators we need to focus on both. As Lenz Taguchi (2012) writes, “we must create knowledge in the midst of our dependence on the world. We must try to understand the world while acknowledging and showing how we are part of the knowledge-creating process” (p. 45). Therefore, we must seek new ways of viewing the world disturbing more ‘traditional’ ways of researching and teaching, and we can rely on the force of performativity as a possible entrance – performing with difference. We seek a reflexivity that invites us to engage in the diversity of the Other, through showing our own transformation. Through our performative duoethnography we have been looking at ourselves in a ‘mirror’, but we also have been tempted to see what is behind this metaphorical mirror. Our biggest change over the process of developing this article is the experience that there is not a sharp boundary between research and life, practice and theory, methodology and pedagogy. Our performative duoethnography offer a space in between the boundaries. We see the connection of this in our everyday lives. Perhaps the ‘answer’ has been right in front of us all this time. As such, we believe the thinking of methodology as ontology is ethical, holistic, and reciprocal.

#### Challenges and critiques of stretching methodology: Making ‘something out of nothing’?

What can be shared between researchers in a duoethnography and what can be shared for an audience is an ethical challenge that must be considered carefully. Although we have not known each other for a long time, we found our relationship grew when working on this article. We have shared stories, but we have also left stories – as they were not meant for an audience, or at least not in this article. Stretching to pedagogy, applying duoethnography within our teaching practices has been an important concern for us and an issue necessary to talk about.

Sawyer and Liggett (2012) discuss the issues concerning representation, trustworthiness, and self-reflexivity doing a duoethnography. We have tried to be aware of such issues, especially because we present our stories, our ‘data’, as believable because of its embodied nature. Embodied knowledge is not value free or innocent. As teachers and researchers, we may think that we are doing our duoethnography in a “culturally neutral way” (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012 p. 647) but this is not possible. We have both been raised in and though cultural contexts and practices that hold particular worldviews that we carry in us. Even though we are seeking new ways to view the world, our constructed bodies never leave us. As Martin (2019) writes, these experiences and histories travel with us. However, while embracing this history, it is also our responsibility to create new patterns, in research and education.

Working on expanded methodological thinking within a duoethnography has indeed been valuable for us as researchers and teachers. But will others care and find such work valuable? Writing this article and involving theory from Barad (2003, 2007) and Lenz Taguchi (2010, 2012), we are no longer so worried “that the presence of our own voices might invite a reading of two selves which are stable and whole” (Burford & Mitchell, 2019, p. 40). We are constantly in transformation being in intra-actions with and within the world. We do not view ourselves or knowledge as fixed and

whole, but porous and fluid. We have tried within the limits of this article to show as transparently as possible our process of expanding a methodology. As Kinnear and Ruggunan (2019) eloquently suggest, “we do not offer conclusive objective findings, but rather suggestions for further scholarly exploration” (p. 2).

## Coda

After grappling with the tenets of duoethnography with theories of performativity, intra-action, and diffraction, we returned to the poem of Ragnar Rommetveit. And of course, we returned to stories. Together we were reminded of a story shared by Runa in our duoethnographic conversation. Runa’s story, reflected on in conversation with Rose, speaks from the past, but has transformed and changed in the present of being in this performative duoethnography. Runa’s story intertwines with her performed life, with theory, and with the expanded methodology, the learner and the learned is entangled:

*I come from a small island, Abelvær, with only 200 inhabitants, where strong winds and dangerous oceans surround us. My grandfather taught me how to swim in the cold water and waves at an early age. I learned the importance of deep respect for the ocean, the importance of sitting still in the boat, but acting if necessary. I learned to listen to nature. That my body was nature. Without listening nature would drown me. As a researcher and teacher I also need that skill. To sometimes sit still in the boat, to listen to the different voices, human and non-human that surround you. Our proposition and provocation of expanding a performative duoethnography into pedagogy, sits well within a critical performative pedagogy (Pineau, 2002) that disrupts, exposes, and critiques structures of injustice. If we seek a critical performative pedagogy, we seek a pedagogy that challenges and shifts power relations. We seek a space where everyone can come to learning spaces with their unique voice, full of timbre and colour – with their resources and opinions - and be able to raise their voices. To be able to do that, those of us speaking from privileged positions needs to be humble and listen more. Listen for voices seldom heard. We do not say it is easy. We have no recipe to follow that will give a perfect result. But, through our performative duoethnography, we have offered a suggestion for one entrance. We hope readers can find an impulse to grapple further in their own practices, because:*

*The two of us together in this twilight borderland,  
our boat drifting along on a sea of dream.  
You seeking comfort in my big and – you trust – strong hand.  
In your eyes, behind that beam  
of light and delight from play under today’s sun:  
a futile struggle against yielding to that night you shun.*

*But –  
Lullaby – lullaby – lov,  
our boat is drifting ashore*

*where one and one don't make two  
but something mysteriously more*

*You are a native, I am intruder in this borderland,  
with old and weak hands, stained and stigmatized by  
adult disillusion and despair,  
yet at this blessed moment privileged to share  
that beam in your eyes, that residual of last  
day's joy and hope for tomorrow's delight,  
as I am sitting here, singing you into sleep tonight.*

So –  
*Lullaby – lullaby – lov,  
our boat is drifting ashore  
where one and one don't make two  
but something mysteriously more*

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## A different high soprano laughter

Runa Hestad Jenssen<sup>1</sup>

### Characters:

Maria Callas<sup>2</sup>

Rosi Braidotti<sup>3</sup>

Runa Hestad Jenssen

**Location:** An unnamed café in the Marais district of the 4<sup>th</sup> arrondissement of Paris, France

*It's early on a Friday afternoon. A strikingly beautiful lady, slim in frame, sits alone at a small round table, smoking incessantly. She wears a jet-black dress, and sky-high heels. A large hat and oversized sunglasses hide much of what can only be assumed to be a stunning face. Between her dedicated cigarette smoking, she sips a glass of champagne. A tall blonde woman walks towards the table. She seems to be lost in her own thoughts, smiling to herself, breathing in the Parisian air, the skirt of her long floral dress floating in the light summer breeze. The two women greet each other with a warm hug, an embrace of friends who have not seen each other for years, kisses on each other's cheeks, and shrills of laughter – high 'soprano' laughter. Maria exclaims that she loves Runa's Nordic look with her long blonde braided hair, and how she can't believe that Runa is hurtling towards the end of a PhD with four small lively children, who Maria has not seen for two years because of these horrid Corona times. Runa admires Maria's new hat from Chanel, and silently thinks about how much it might have cost and if she might ever be able to afford one herself. Runa and Maria finally sit down at the table, and they wonder when Rosi, the rock'n roll star of philosophy, might arrive to join them. While waiting, they are occupied by discussing the state of their singing voices. Maria has been smoking too many cigarettes lately and is totally not in the shape she wants to be. Runa tries to work as a vocal performer at the same time as she is doing her PhD. It's hard. She is talking of nearly giving up her career as a singer, but Maria urges her to continue, saying that voice is a part of who Runa is, as unique as her fingerprint. Runa is not so sure about the idea of a 'voice as a fingerprint' anymore. Currently her mind is filled with a multiplicity of voices - her voice as a soprano, her voice as a researcher, and her voice as a teacher – voices that overlap, merge, and are tricky to sort out, leaving her to think: What does it mean to have a voice? Who is given a voice and who is not? She is hoping that Maria, with her long experience in the sociocultural context of singing and Rosi's philosophical thinking can help her to find some*

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<sup>2</sup> Maria Callas (December 2, 1923 – September 16, 1977) was an American born Greek soprano who was one of the most renowned and influential opera singers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her musical and dramatic talents led her being hailed as La Divina. For more information visit: [Maria Callas - Official Website \(maria-callas.com\)](http://maria-callas.com)

<sup>3</sup> Rosi Braidotti (born 28. September 1954) is a contemporary continental philosopher and feminist theorist. Braidotti was born in Italy and grew up in Australia. She has her degree in philosophy from Sorbonne and was the founding Professor in Women's Studies. Braidotti is Distinguished University Professor and founding director of the Centre of the Humanities at Utrecht University. For more information visit: [Rosi Braidotti](http://rosibraidotti.nl)

*clear answers. All Runa can see right now are too many possibilities, connections, and pathways. Maria's voice brings Runa out of her deep thoughts...*

**Maria:** Should we order some wine while waiting for Rosi?

**Runa:** Yes, please! What would you like?

**Maria:** What about a Retsina?<sup>4</sup>

**Runa:** Oh! I love this strange wine you only make in Greece with pine sap. Does the wine make you think back to your times in Greece, Maria?

**Maria:** It's been years since I visited my country....

*Maria looks out into the distance, with sadness in her eyes. She retreats into herself for a moment, sighs heavily, and recovers with a forced smile.*

**Maria:** But, where on earth is Rosi? I hope she will be happy with the Retsina – she can be a diva sometimes when it comes to wine.

**Runa:** I'm sure she will be just fine with the wine – she is probably still talking about her book, *Nomadic Theory*,<sup>5</sup> at her guest lecture at The Sorbonne. I wish I was there....

**Maria:** Really? You'd rather be at a lecture than drinking wine with me?!

**Runa:** Oh...no...but, it is just that I am trying to use Rosi's Nomadic thinking in my research – I think the nomadic can open...

*A woman in her mid-60's, with grey unruly hair, enters the café with fluster and attention, making a beeline for Runa and Maria.*

**Rosi:** Did I hear 'nomadic'? And is that a Retsina? You know I can't stand that wine!

*Rosi laughs and winks at Maria with that comment. She seems a little stressed and short of breath. She pulls over another chair to the tiny table and takes off her well-worn black leather jacket – a terribly impractical item to wear on such a warm day. Sitting down, Rosi exhales a sigh and offers a cheeky smile to Runa and Maria.*

**Maria:** Finally, you are here! Now, we can actually drink the wine. And how very nice it is to see you, Rosi! Salut!

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<sup>4</sup> Retsina is a Greek white or rosé wine, which has been made for at least 2700 years. It is perhaps the most widely drunk wine in Greece (although it is not popular in all areas of the country), and due to its strong taste, it is best suited with Mediterranean dishes with lots of herbs.

<sup>5</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).



*The three women raise their glasses.*

**Rosi:** So, what have you two been talking about? Me, I guess? Or our last encounter in Oslo, now that was something... I will never forget that one. But I'm sorry I interrupted you both – please, keep going.

**Maria:** Runa was talking about her research. She has actually read your book on Nomadic Theory, and wants to engage with it...

*At that comment Rosi cracks a generous smile, sits firmly upright, and slaps the palm of her hand on the table, making the glasses jump.*

**Rosi:** Really, Runa? I am flattered.

**Runa:** Well, let's just say I spent a few hours with that book... is it weird to say a book can be your best friend? Because this one feels like it has really become mine - I am writing about how nomadic theory might give new entrances to think about voice, and how this re-thinking might give diversity in vocal pedagogy...

**Maria:** Diversity? Why on earth is diversity in voice pedagogy a good thing? I always found the skill of adapting to the norm in the conservatoire to be productive. The teachers often have long careers as performers to draw from, and training voice is individualistic, so...

**Runa:** Oh Maria, I really know where you are coming from – and I have experienced voice pedagogy as highly individualistic too, and also, well, disciplining, and normative.<sup>6</sup> But, you know what? I am just so tired of reproducing sameness in the vocal field, which consists of such diversity. You know, when I sang in my vocal ensemble, I always enjoyed preparing the repertoire. Alone in the voice studio, I sang so well. But, after I rehearsed with the ensemble for days, my voice got tired. Alone, I could sing for hours, but in the ensemble, I often lost my voice. When the concert came, I sang really badly. That was so frustrating!

**Rosi:** Did you talk to someone about this?

**Runa:** I talked to my speech therapist about it...

**Maria:** Your speech therapist? Why the hell did you not confront the conductor?!

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<sup>6</sup> Runa H. Jenssen, *Facing the Soprano: Uncovering a Feminist Performative "I" Through Autoethnography*. In E. Angelo, Jn. Knigge, M. Sæther & W. Waagen (Eds.), *Higher Education as Context for Music Pedagogy Research* (pp. 113–135). (Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2021)

*Maria leans forward lifting herself out of the chair to show her investment in the conversation when interrupting Runa.*

**Runa:** Well...

*Runa hesitates, she does not want to appear to be un-reflected or weak, but that question makes her think. She pulls herself together and answers.*

**Runa:** I guess I was afraid that I was developing knots on my vocal cords, so... I guess, the speech therapist was not surprised. She said, 'You are adapting a sound that is not yours'...

**Rosi:** But, is that not that the whole point of singing in an ensemble?

**Maria:** My voice would certainly not fit in an ensemble! I would have drowned everyone out with my big voice, and there is no way that I would adapt to a homogeneous sound.

**Runa:** You know, not all singers are in the privileged position you hold, Maria. So, I totally understand that singing in an ensemble adapting and struggling for a homogenic sound is 'part of the game', but now as a teacher and researcher I want to change this 'game'. I want to re-think what voice is.

**Rosi:** Hmmm, so, what do you really want to explore?

**Runa:** Well, I think I am exploring something about pushing boundaries and conventions, how boundaries and conventions of the context of singing might be transgressed through an embrace of difference.

**Rosi:** I like that, you can even make connection with the notion of voice into a nomadic subject, to show the transgression of voice, how...

*Frustrated with the academic jargon, Maria thinks to herself while quietly rolling her eyes, "and these two want to embrace difference..." , then interrupting with:*

**Maria:** Oh, cut the crap, Rosi. Why do you always talk as if everyone is writing an academic article about the topic they are talking about? The beauty of your thinking, Runa, lies in the connection to your everyday life. And, I actually have a suggestion.

*Runa nods with curiosity, while Rosi, still a bit surprised at being cut off in the middle of her reasoning by Maria, sits back into her chair.*

**Maria:** Why don't you just tell a story? We singers are storytellers after all. You need to be grounded before you let your melody of line flow – grounded in your everyday life.

**Runa:** A story... I like that suggestion, Maria

**Maria:** Me too! The singing voice not only resonates on stage, but it keeps resonating – in the life of the listener, the worlds it inhabits. What do you think about that, Rosi?

**Rosi:** Good.... I can hear that you both are in the process of changing, engaging with processes. Not what voices are, but what they are becoming... Maybe you are grappling with the notion of difference?

**Maria:** Ha - difference is my middle name! What's on your mind, Runa? – I can see you are about to burst out with something.

**Runa:** Oh, yes, your comment on embracing difference made me think of a memory, an experience from a vocal ensemble I sang in... maybe there is a story to tell, Maria.

**Maria:** Finally! I am dying to hear a story. Spit it out!

**Runa:** Singing and being part of a vocal ensemble's culture, being exposed to a variety of repertoire, meeting other singers, soloists, orchestras, and conductors was like a school of its own, an experience I could never get at the Music Academy. Life in the ensemble became important to me – I was good at adapting to the norms and expectations. The demands that were not explicitly expressed by words, but by sounds – a homogeneous sound was ideal. As a diligent first soprano, I was 'exposed'...

**Rosi:** Exposed to what?

**Runa:** Well, literary, first sopranos are exposed in the sound picture with high tones, but also by standing at the far end of the line, since the first sopranos often are standing at the end of the first line in the choir, a position I always found a little scary. It always felt like I was waiting to be pushed out of line.

**Rosi:** Hold on, what line are you referring to?

**Runa:** The line - as in the hierarchy, there is always a newer and younger first soprano waiting to step into that line, and gosh, the newer and younger sopranos are seen to be appealing, so fresh faced and willing. I knew there was that line behind me, and it was a long line!

**Maria:** I totally get it. But, I thought you loved to sing in an ensemble, Runa?

**Runa:** Yes, I did, and I fitted well in the homogeneous sound in the choir - a light Nordic voice with little vibrato. Singing in this ensemble I travelled the world, singing early music

and contemporary music – repertoire I loved. That lonely feeling I had at the Music Academy, of working hour after hour alone in the voice studio – talk about an individualistic and self-centered practice! – was finally gone. I had colleagues in the ensemble, and some of them are still my closest friends. I became an experienced singer, rising in the hierarchy. I changed...

**Rosi:** How? What made you change? Tell me more...

*Rosi is curious, and gestures Runa on while also topping up water glasses.*

**Runa:** I changed from having an individualistic focus – to opening to and with others, and my voice changed. I sang with more confidence, yet at the same I felt more restricted because I had to adapt to the norm of the ensemble. After a few years my body also changed. I was expecting a baby. My second, only a few months since I last gave birth. I was, in retrospect, returning far too early to my place in the soprano row. I neglected my body.

**Maria:** A neglected body. Now, THAT is something I can relate to... But how did you neglect your body?

**Runa:** I did not listen to my body – there were now centimeters of distance between my core muscles, the pelvic muscles were not trained back to their usual shape. But not least, I was longing to hold my child in my arms - not a piece of sheet music. But I was afraid. Afraid of losing my place in the hierarchy. Afraid of not doing what was expected of me.

*Suddenly it becomes quiet around the small table. It is like Runa's story is resonating with the sound from the others in the small café. With laughter, tears, the smell of wine and coffee. In the space of the silence, Runa continues...*

It is the porous, fluid, and complex notion of having a voice – a changing voice, that I am so curious about. The entanglement of having a voice, what does it mean to have a voice? And, how can change and difference help to think differently about voice and vocal pedagogy? This is really an open-ended project, as like the act of singing – it keeps resonating. I want my research to resonate with others – with ‘the Other’ – the socio-cultural context of singing, even on a political level. I am sounding crazy now?

**Maria:** No, no, Runa, not at all. Listening to your story I can really feel the structural demands from a culture I have experienced myself. Oh gosh... Rosi, can you pass me the wine?

*The wine bottle is empty. Maria waves at the waiter to order another bottle.*

**Rosi:** Oh, Runa, thanks for sharing your memory – honestly, I am amazed that you could sing at all.

**Runa:** Me too... Oh, that makes me think of the time the ensemble performed Luciano Berio's 'Coro'<sup>7</sup> - a masterpiece of music, written for voices and orchestra. Each singing voice was 'paired' with its own instrument in the orchestra. During the rehearsals, we sat mixed with the musicians. Not a common way to work.

**Maria:** Oh, I agree with that – talk about being exposed.

**Runa:** Actually, I loved this challenge. I even had a little solo, titled "It is so nice, a nice one gave a sound". One of my performances that I really remember. I embodied the music and lyrics with my life, as an exhausted mother of small children, who tried to convince herself, and especially those around her, that 'everything was fine', but inside her body it was chaos.

**Maria:** I never had children, but totally understand the feeling of an inner chaos and putting a mask on to pretend that everything is fine, well, that is the story of my life. But, how did that aria go?

**Runa:** Berio writes this solo as a duet with the first violin in the orchestra. I remember the intensity of the melody, the complex rhythm, which I rehearsed for hours, and the interaction until the sound of the violin was etched into my body. It was as if Berio captured the structural demands of the socio-cultural context of being a female singer, but also a mother. The contradictory and imposed feelings of ignoring the body, of wanting to scream out as ugly and intensely as only my voice could, but rather camouflage and overshadow this feeling by trying to make the voice sound natural, relaxed, and beautiful – making a nice sound, in the way I was trained to.

**Rosi:** Again, I really wonder why and how you could sing – being in that state?

**Runa:** But that was the problem. I failed. Hormones from pregnancy, no sleep, and a body not recovered from giving birth meant that I felt like I was screaming, near to the most primal voice of the body. I have never sung so 'ugly', yet so well, at a concert.

**Maria:** Ugly and well, that's fascinating. How did you do that?

**Runa:** I believe it is do with opening the body, letting feelings flow, but at the same time finding resistance in that flow – with the surroundings. Connecting to primal sounds,<sup>8</sup> often with that 'ugly intensity' at the core. To connect to primal and 'ugly' sounds is a tricky but

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<sup>7</sup> Luciano Berio (1925 – 2003) was an Italian composer noted for his experimental work and pioneering work in electronic music. His work 'Coro' was written for forty voices and instruments between 1974 – 1976. See [Coro \(author's note\) | Centro Studi Luciano Berio - Luciano Berio's Official Website](#) for more information.

<sup>8</sup> Brown (1996) refers to the reflexive sound as primal sound. It can be sounds such as crying, laughing, sighing, moaning, screaming and babbling.

beautiful combination. Honest and naked, and certainly different from how I was trained to sing, that is for sure.

**Rosi:** You know, having difference is very often connected to negative connotations, to being different from, meaning being less worthy than. That is certainly what my philosophy on Nomadic theory tries to rethink. What if difference is viewed as a positive space to hold...

*The crowd in the café had swelled, people's voices were raised to be heard. Runa interrupts Rosi, loudly:*

**Runa:** If we are to rethink difference as a term in trying to rethink voice, I believe vocal pedagogy is a space to begin. A useful, but also new way of looking at difference, offering a new way of relating to concepts, processes, and being in the world.

*The three women pause for a moment of contemplation, before Maria and Rosi begin discussing rumors and scandals. About Onassis and Maria, and the latest news at the Utrecht Academy. Runa is in her own thoughts, scribbling notes furiously on a scrap of paper she found in her handbag.*

**Rosi:** But, getting back to Runa's work... With your embodied experience you are starting from the most intimate location, which is also the most political, opening to broader issues – violence, freedom, dignity, democracy...

**Maria:** Oh, please! Can you both just explain things clearly! Maybe we should have some Rakia<sup>9</sup> to help us out?

*Maria goes to the ladies' room to reapply her makeup. Runa orders Rakia and checks her phone to see if everything is ok with the kids back at home, and Rosi takes a phone call where she explains she simply cannot be in Rome tomorrow to give a lecture... Maria returns, Rosi abruptly ends her call, and Runa puts her phone in her handbag. The Rakia is served, the three women raise their glasses and toast. Maria sings a few lines of an old Greek drinking song.*

**Runa:** Well, Maria - don't you think how you and I think about voice and how we relate to the sociocultural context of singing, of voice pedagogy is political? I believe the culture we have embodied and been embedded in tells us how to relate to others in the wider drama of social life.<sup>10</sup> That's what you mean by embodiment, right Rosi?

**Rosi:** Definitely! Embodiment is no longer one condition that rests on one specific concept, embodiment is a situation that we inhabit. We should think of our bodies as situations we

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<sup>9</sup> Rakia is a sweetened, often anise flavored, alcoholic drink that is popular in Greek Islands and Balkan countries.  
<sup>10</sup> Phil Weinrobe and Naeem Inayatullah, *A Medium of Others: Rhythmic Soundscapes as Critical Utopias*. In: Franklin M.I. (eds) *Resounding International Relations*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

move in and out of. We should think of our bodies as a performing set of actions. We have many bodies – negotiating with other bodies.<sup>11</sup>

**Maria:** You have written books on nomadism Rosi, so you perhaps have the upper hand in this conversation. But what does nomadic thinking really mean in your study on voices, Runa?

**Runa:** Hmm... Well, what I really enjoy with nomadic thought is that it decenters the focus on the individual, moving away from the static identity, and turns towards a thinking that emerges from embodied relations. In doing so, nomadic thought empowers the Other. Nomadism empowers voices, or others who are holding marginalized, sexualized, or racialized positions. Becoming voice has to do with “emptying out the self, opening it out to possible encounters with the ‘outside’” – as Rosi puts it.

**Maria:** The fact is... there are many shades of voice.

**Runa:** Yes, exactly! Voice is not a passive or static identity. Voice is fluid. The institutionalized voice identity of a choir, of voice pedagogy, in music education is missing something... the borders are too strict, too normative. If voice is to be self-organized and relational, and make a connection with Others, we must certainly strive to rethink voice in music education, but also in society generally.

**Rosi:** You are starting to think rather nomadically, Runa! Thinking through and moving across established categories and levels within categories, enabling the subject to resist settling into already socially coded modes and acts of behavior...

**Maria:** This is not my language – can you please translate to how this relates to the singing voice?

**Runa:** As a soprano I had to conform to the homogeneous ideal sound in the choir, but at the same time I was rebelling and moving towards the heterogeneous ideal sound. That became a dilemma and contradiction. By rethinking voice through difference, I can show that difference, movement away from the norm, is a resource, yes?

**Maria:** Yes! Okay, I am starting to get it. We will need coffee to continue this. Thank God for coffee. Let's have three double espressos...

**Runa:** ... and chocolate cake! So, coffee and cake for all of us – my treat.

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<sup>11</sup> This response is inspired by the lecture [Cyber Space and Sexual In-Difference | Rosi Braidotti](#) and draws in direct quotes, particular words / phrases into the text.

*Runa dashes to a little pastry shop across the road to get cake. Maria asks the waiter for three double espressos, before continuing to chat with Rosi. Maria looks around to check Runa is out of earshot, and she whispers:*

**Maria:** Why in God's name are you always triggering Runa to go into the world of unknown theory and methodology? Isn't that a risky place to go into as a PhD student? Why can't you just lead her into something a bit safer so she can get her work done without too much resistance.

**Rosi:** Oh, Maria, how can you say that?! Especially as an artist who always went into the unknown.

*Rosi suddenly stops her usual long argument – she pauses. Maria's words make her think. Rosi is a Professor, and her academic career is somewhat safe now. Off course she wants Runa to be brave, but also to have a job, to write applications, and be rewarded.*

**Rosi:** You heard, Runa. She is looking for alternative ways of knowing.

**Maria:** It is a cruel world Rosi, and you know it! She does not have to gamble as I did. That got me in a lot of trouble. I was completely crushed. I could not live up to the Maria people were expecting to hear.

**Rosi:** Were those your own expectations, or someone else?

**Maria:** You are starting to sound like my psychologist...

**Rosi:** Ha! That's what happens when you come from the French post-structuralist thinkers from the 80's ...

*Runa returns to the table with three pieces of chocolate cake, smiling at Maria and Rosi, while shaking her head, saying:*

**Runa:** What are you two quarrelling about? You are just like my kids – can't leave them for two minutes ...

**Maria:** Oh, nothing ... Shall we just say that Rosi might have some good advice for your PhD study, Runa...

**Rosi:** Fine. I'll give it to you. Read, read, and read some more. But, do not only read the work of dead white men – we don't need more of that. My main message: don't be faithful, don't be a doormat, betray, I was trained to being undutiful!

**Runa:** Oh! That is easy for you to say .... I was trained to duty, loyalty, faithfulness – an obedient soprano. You should join me at a class at the Music Academy. You know, I have



always been a thinker. Being a student at the Music Academy, I was often told to stop thinking and asking so many questions; “Can’t you ‘just’ sing”, I often heard. Maybe it was this ‘thinking’, that made me feel singing with a voice, but without a body. I also loved to talk during my concerts. I wanted to erase the distinction between hall and stage, between language barriers, between the notes and the text. But again, I was told to “shut your mouth, and just sing”. I was also told that since I was studying in a big city and coming from the countryside where my dialect was a bit unusual, that listeners would not understand me anyway. And, not to speak of the position of the larynx! With all that talk, I had degraded the space of resonance before I had sung a note. “Just sing”. This dualistic thinking of my voice, where I should ‘just sing’, without all the thinking, only made me feel disconnected to my body, which is the instrument of the singer.

**Maria:** Oh, I can so relate to your experience. I was certainly trained to obey, to not ask questions.

**Runa:** The master-apprentice pedagogy that is still holding the fort is so dangerous, because it keeps repeating the same patterns that history has taught us. The idea that voice is fixed, that we have ‘a’ voice, as a fingerprint – using your words, Maria – is becoming problematic for me. Voice is not singular or innate. Voice is cultural, a shared practice.

**Maria:** If there are costs to such reducing of the voice, are there not also benefits? Likewise, if establishing difference in voice has benefits, will it not also have costs?

**Runa:** Yes – both ways are risky! But I believe by being in a position of risk is where change can happen – as a researcher, singer, and teacher.

**Rosi:** I believe you both need to detox yourself from bad habits, of thinking in relation to each other. Free yourself from the communities by imagining new communities<sup>12</sup>.

**Runa:** You know, I see singing as a cultural practice<sup>13</sup> enabling the creation of identities. But is the sociocultural context of singing enabling a myriad and variety of voices? Maybe the voice is not a fingerprint at all? And is vocal pedagogy really open for a diversity of voices? What about music education? Maybe voice is not innate – it is cultural, it is collective – it is an engagement with the Other. I am so sorry! I am being a real diva here, going on and on about my own work ...Becoming a researcher, I am more self-centered than I was as a soprano!

**Maria:** That’s what friendship is all about – listening. And, I don’t think you ‘only’ talked about yourself – your experiences certainly resonate with mine. I think I will go home and

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<sup>12</sup>This response is inspired by the “Revolution is a fascist concept” on YouTube, 2 April 2019 and draws in direct quotes, particular words / phrases into the text.

<sup>13</sup> Graham Welch et. al, *The Oxford handbook of singing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

write my memoirs about being an opera diva with another punch now – with a critical view not only to myself, but also of the culture I experienced.

**Rosi:** I agree with Maria– listening is vital, also in research. With your work, Runa, you are listening to changing voices, and listening to voices seldom heard. While listening to these voices you are trying to rethink, to change the notion of voice. Let’s do that more often. But first – let’s have a good gin and tonic – and then we can all go to the punk concert with the famous Nina Hagen, the mother of punk.

**Maria:** Oh Rosi, but it is so noisy, why can’t we go and listen to Bach?

**Rosi:** You can have your Bach Maria, but you should really explore punk sometime - they are expressing the same message I believe. The next time you are buying a new hat, Maria, buy a balaclava as well, and be inspired of Pussy Riot.<sup>14</sup>

**Maria:** Ha! Rosi, you can hide behind the language of philosophy and theory all you want, but I think we should head to the opera house and see how they use imagination as a connection to real life there – now *that* is some connection.

**Runa:** Oh, can you two please stop fighting? Let’s enjoy the Parisian air, art, and life. Isn’t that what we all are here for?

*While leaving the café, Runa is borrowing Maria’s Chanel hat, while Rosi forgets her leather jacket at the table. Maria has given up on her sky-high stilettos, carrying them in her hand. Her oversized sunglasses are gone, and she looks as beautiful as ever. Runa seems to be lost in her own thoughts again, while walking between her two friends. Her braided hair has fallen out and billows behind her in the warm breeze. Did she get any clear answers? Maybe? Maybe not? Possibilities and stories from an inner world are powerful. She is thinking to herself how next time she performs she will definitely not shut up and just sing, but create a long monologue, showing her entanglement and bodily engagement in voices – a multiplicity of voices. The three friends wander through the cobbled Parisian streets with conversation and laughter, and in between you can hear Runa’s high laughter - a different high soprano laughter.*

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<sup>14</sup> Pussy Riot is a Russian, feminist punk rock collective formed in August 2011. The group has its origins in the artist association Vojna, and is inspired by, among others, the Riot Grrrl movement. Around 25-30 women have participated in Pussy Riot’s performances - all under a pseudonym and with knitted balaclavas.

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*Runa Hestad Jensen*

## The voice lessons

### ABSTRACT

In this text I invite you to join me in a series of voice lessons, where I shares stories from my embodied experiences as a soprano, teacher, and researcher in the Western sociocultural context of singing. If you are expecting a traditional voice lesson, of ‘How to sing, 1, 2, 3’ you might be disappointed. But, if you are interested in how *voicing* (auto)ethnographies might be one way of producing, analyzing, and representing voice, I will happily dive into the voice lessons with you. For me, writing stories has become a way of knowing as a researcher, as through my writing I was able to discover new perspectives of voice – ultimately allowing me space to re-think notions of voice. Through the voice lessons I show how I zigzag through the worlds of the material voice and theoretical-philosophical-‘academic’ voice, guided by new materialism and performative autoethnography. My voice lessons can be seen as a performative utterance, which rests on the belief in the embodiment and the materiality of the writing body, an open-ended way of (re)thinking voice. Voice lessons for singing voices *and* academic voices.

**Key words:** creative writing, embodiment, new materialism, performativity, performative autoethnography, stories, voice, voice studies.

### AN INVITATION

Have you ever dreamt of having a unique voice? To be in control of your voice, to feel it, to know how to shape it, to master it? I certainly have. As a classical trained soprano, ‘voice’ was all I could think about for much of my life. I was obsessed with the voice, and honestly, in many ways I still am. I am obsessed with voice when I teach students how to sing, when I grapple with my PhD research about notions of voice (Jenssen 2021, 2022; Jenssen and Martin 2021) and when I perform on stage. Voice seems to be at the core of my being and doing. Now, as I write this invitation to you, I am curious if you have ever wanted to tell a story with your voice? Have you dreamt of doing that, but never found the opportunity or courage to try? Would you like to have a go at working with your voice now? If you are thinking ‘yes, I would be willing to give it a go’, or perhaps even a tentative ‘maybe, I can give it a try’, I invite you to join me into a series of voice lessons over the next pages. If you decide to join my lessons and are expecting my voice lessons as a formula of ‘How to sing, 1, 2, 3’, you might be deeply disappointed. But who knows? If you are interested in how voicing (auto) ethnographies can rethink notions of voice, and in this rethinking, there lies a possibility for transformation, I am ready to dive into the lessons with you.

But wait, before we enter the voice lessons it is important to tell you that I am not alone in grappling with notions of voice. Yes, I know, voice is such a huge topic. There is a rich knowledge and many other ‘voice lessons’ to dive into. Dialoguing, through reading the works of of Anette Schlichter

(2011, 2014), Elisabeth Belgrano (2016, 2020), Heidi Fast (2010, 2020), Kathrine Meizel (2011), Milla Tiainen (2007), Nina Eidsheim (2008, 2011, 2014, 2019), Nori Neumark and Virginie Magnat, amongst others, has made it possible for me to create the following voice lessons. These scholars have given me awareness of the common ways voice has been viewed in western culture, where it has been ‘divided into two camps: the symbolic and the material’ (Schlichter and Eidsheim 1), and that such a divide could be challenged by less dominant views of voice through post-human and new materialist perspectives.

Following the theoretical landscape of new materialism, I have found (and fallen in love with) Rosi Braidotti’s nomadic theory, the heart of which is movement and mobility. Braidotti’s philosophy of thought has guided me through this article, zigzagging between world(s) of voice. The central figuration of nomadic theory is that it ‘expresses a process ontology that privileges change and motion over stability’ (29). The nomad moves, settles, and resettles. Such, these voice lessons are a movement of exchange. Through dialogue, it is possible to open out toward an empowering connection to others. When you enter my voice lessons, I will not offer an analysis of each story as an ‘outcome’ of every lesson. I will let the stories flow to you, whole. After we end the voice lessons, I will offer you my experiences of doing these voice lessons.

Is that all? You might ask. Should you just encounter my voice lessons? No analysis, no questioning? Well, my voice lessons are personal. But, should you just expect to meet and engage with the personal? Leading question, you might answer. I agree. Diving into my voice lessons is about encounte-

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ring the self, but the self is always situated in a context, in a world, with the Other. I anchor my stories in the methodology of performative autoethnography (Spry 2011, 2016), in which the embodied knowledge is the researcher's home, performed in a self/other/we construction, with no I, but a performative we. If performative autoethnography is not about the self, but a dialogue with Others, my voice lessons is made from the intra-action (Barad 2003) of things which include both the material and the symbolic/philosophic 'worlds' of voice. This is where my personal experiences emerge with yours, the readers world(s). Let us visit my voice studio, together.

In my voice studio I have a full body length mirror with a thick black frame, leaning towards the wall. Actually, it looks a bit shaky where it is, perched on top of a chair. I have not found the time to hang it up and I was not sure exactly where to place it – or even if I wanted to keep the mirror there at all. In my experience, voice teachers often use mirrors when teaching, and so it is sort of expected I have one, since I am a voice teacher. Working with the voice, the body is often perceived as 'the instrument', and the mirror can be used to see, adapt, and 'correct' how the body moves when producing sound. But lately I have been thinking about what do we actually see in that mirror? If voice is unique, why do we try to adapt and adjust what we see in the mirror? Is it that the frame of the mirror holds a norm for what to see and how to act? I know, so many questions – and the voice lesson has not even started yet.

The voice lessons you are about to enter will take you on a journey through my experiences of working on an autoethnographic study about voice change. I guess you have



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heard about voice change. We all experience voice change. The most ‘famous’ one is the one that happens during puberty, especially for males – although females also undergo voice change. Again, voice is divided into two ‘camps’, but there are many voices in between these, and there are many forms of voice change, emerging from transformation in life. Writing these voice lessons for you, I show how I bridge the worlds of the material voice and theoretical-philosophical-‘academic’ voices, guided by new materialism and performative autoethnography, to seek new perspective(s) of voice. To be able to rethink voice. In the voice lessons I stitch together how I produce, analyze, and represent autoethnographic data through voicing. I do this by sharing stories, drawn from my embodied knowledge as a soprano, a teacher, and as a researcher, in the Western sociocultural context of singing. The stories shared from my experience as a soprano come specifically from the context of Western classical singing – a culture well-known for its rigid criteria for technically and aesthetically acceptable vocal expressions and behaviour (Jenssen 2021; Vesterlid Strøm). Many others have dug into this context as well, and I have found those who see it through theories of gender and performativity (see, for example, Borgström Källén 2012, 2014; Borgström Källén and Sandström; Cusic; Green; Hentschel; Schlichter 2011; Schei 2007) particularly interesting. Some of the voice lessons share just one story; others share multiple stories. Common for all the stories shared. Writing out these stories, has become a way of knowing as a researcher, as through my writing I was able to discover new perspectives of voice – ultimately allowing me space to rethink notions of voice.

Will you like the lessons? Well, that I can’t promise.

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Maybe you will. But you could hate it. Singers (and teachers and researchers) do the craziest things to sound our 'best'. In my voice lessons I am curious about what you and I see in the mirror placed on the chair in my studio – not so much if we see the same thing, but if we see something different from each other. Through that way of seeing in the mirror, we might even imagine new perspectives of voice.

To welcome you to your first lesson I want you to imagine me, singing height of fame 80's Madonna. I always liked to sing along with her. Her music made me sing loudly and out of control. Oh – and what to wear? That's totally up to you. Dress up like Madonna if you like. I am going to wear a long dress, with matching gloves, for sure – and maybe a large black and impractical Chanel hat, because why not?

### *Voice lesson one: Material girl*

As a child I loved to listen to music and to sing. I used my hairbrush as a microphone and played tapes at full volume on the cassette player that I got as a present from my grandfather because my parents could not afford one. I listened to a wide range of genres. Opera – high coloratura arias were the best and Kiri Te Kanawa was my favourite singer. The high notes in Porgy and Bess gave me goosebumps and I imagined I was performing on an opera stage. I loved to watch the European song contest with my mother (I can hear Sandra Kim's 'J'aime, j'aime la vie!' in my head now). I recall the feeling of singing with the hairbrush in my hands, it was as if I became another person. A sort of freedom, an openness, a transformation – as if my body opened and was released in a

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way. 'Cause we are living in a material world, and I am a material girl - You know that we are living in a material world, and I am a material girl'. I am singing loud in my office writing this now. Smiling. Wondering. Madonna was SO right. If voice IS something – it certainly is material.

### *Voice lesson two: Relief, but still shame*

'Hello, Runa. How are you doing? I can hear celebration in the background'. 'Well, fine, thank you, Professor. I am celebrating my exam with my friends and family. We all passed and are so proud of each other! You know, we have worked with each other on everything for the last four years.!', I say, with pride in my voice. But as I spoke, I wondered why this teacher, an authority in the vocal field, was calling me late in the evening. She had never called me before. 'Yes...' She answers – I hear in her voice that she is about to share something not so pleasant. 'I just wanted you to know that we were really surprised that you were the one getting an A on the final exam in vocal performance. Don't misunderstand me, you have a nice voice, you did a fine concert with a little unknown and demanding repertoire, really different... but... you do not deserve an A in our opinion'. I have no idea how to answer. Why is she telling me this? 'Our' opinion? Who is 'our'? We had an examiner from another university, from another country - had that examiner changed her mind? My thoughts are interrupted: 'My student, though, should not have a B. My student, was a clear A. She did perform what we expect of an A. I just wanted to tell you that. Have a nice evening and celebration'. 'Thank you' I answer.

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I wander back to my friends. 'Are you ok, Runa? What was that all about?' they ask. 'Nothing', I answer. Two months later I receive my Diploma in a Master's of vocal performance in the mail. I open it nervously. An 'A'. I feel relief, and shame.

### *Voice lesson three: Give it to me*

I am not good at shouting. I do not feel good when people are shouting – at me or at others. I do not perform better or behave better when someone shouts at me. It makes me feel small. I want to hide. I guess such feelings are not especially unusual, but this dislike for shouting is not a good 'skill' to have as a performer. In my experience, directors often shout. Especially this one. He seemed to believe shouting was the way of making anyone on stage give more, that little extra. I am sixteen years old. I have a role in the local theatre group. I am *dying* to stand on stage. To sing, to tell a story to the audience, to put on a costume. I was late in puberty. I prayed to God that I would have breasts. Something happened to my body this year. I was changing. My voice changed. My soprano was cracking, but I found ways of coping with my cracking and changing voice. I hid my hoarse voice by finding another sound and way to sing. It was painful, I sometimes had no voice after a rehearsal, but my new way of producing sound made me sing. I am struggling with my voice this evening. Trying to sing my part as well as I can. My favourite part from *West Side Story* – 'There's a place for us'. I start, trying to control the crack about to arrive in my voice. 'I have never seen someone with less charisma on stage than you!' he shouts to me. 'I am not sure if you should be on this scene',

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he continues, still with the loud voice. 'Ok, Runa – try again. Give it to me. Show me your skills!'. 'Give what?' I wonder.

### *Voice lesson four: I am sure you understand*

It is 5am, pretty much the middle of the night, and I cannot sleep. I am getting up. I *must* rehearse. Someone has called in sick, and I have been asked to audition for a role in an opera I have never sung. Why on earth did I say yes? They said they had heard I was a fast learner. Well, I feel the opposite. I learn slowly, but I do spend time learning. Not only is this part new, but it is also a 'big' role demanding a 'richer' voice that I have. Certainly not the kind of role I was categorized to do in the Music Academy. But I am older now, more experienced. My voice has changed from a lighter voice into a more mature sound. I feel safer. So, I said yes to audition for the role. Why should I not?

Anyway, I did it. I got the part. I was thrilled and I was thrown into the middle of the rehearsal period, only two weeks until the premiere. After four days of rehearsing, another soloist in the ensemble and I are called to sing on the 'mainstage'. 'Why?' I ask. I am trying to rest my voice as much as I can between all the rehearsing. 'We just want to listen how your voice resonates in the big room'. 'Ok', I answer. The other girl in the ensemble sings before me. Oh. She sounds brilliant. Her voice fills the whole room. I give her a thumbs up from side stage. Then it's my turn. I walk out and try to 'own' the room. There are only two people listening. The director – sitting on the very back row of the stalls, and the conductor for the orchestra – sitting in the front row. These

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two guys have been in the profession for years. I can feel my voice shivering. I am losing my core. My breathing is bad, and every phrase is cut up into pieces – losing any sort of beautiful line in the music. I am losing it. I try to pull myself together and I finish a little bit better than I started. ‘Ok... Thank you. Let’s have a chat outside, Runa’. The singer before me is gone. They did not need to chat with her too? The two men sit in front of me. ‘You are such a beautiful girl, Runa. We love having you in the ensemble. You bring such a nice atmosphere into our group’, he starts. ‘Thank you’, I answer, feeling there is more to come. ‘However, we are having concerns that your voice is not big enough. It lacks a quality. I am sure you understand. Let’s give it a couple of days and if you can’t make it, that’s fine. We have someone to call. See you at tonight’s rehearsal!’. The two men leave the room.

### *Voice lesson five: Bodyless*

The body has always played a central role in my vocal performances. At least for the directors. I once played the role of Pamina in *The magic flute*. A role I had been dying to sing. It was something very playful with the music in that opera that appealed to me, the peculiar characters, and the fairy-tale-like story, which made it easy to act and sing. Besides, I was often categorized as a ‘Mozart soprano’, which I was told involved a having a purity and flexibility in my voice. I had high expectations to myself doing this part. I was still a master’s student at the Music Academy. I was told I was really privileged to have this role. The director wanted me to act the role as ‘a barbie doll’, and I was given a ‘doll-like’ look, in a

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dress I was uncomfortable in. Not so strange, I had just given birth to two children. There was nothing that could be done about that. 'It's not personal', he said. (The dress was beautiful though. Long, white and innocent, with small flowers around the neck). Luckily, I loved singing the part of Pamina. After the premiere, the opera received great reviews, but I could only see my breasts all over the front page of the newspaper. A LOT of body, all over the front page, but still feeling bodyless.

Only breasts, no voice, no core.

I felt 'bodyless'.

### *Voice lesson six: So natural*

'Thank you', I answer – feeling blood in my mouth. I have just been told that I sound so natural after singing on a master class at the summer academy. That special summer academy I applied to and got in as I was one of the few chosen ones. 'You sound so natural when you sing this repertoire. It suits you perfectly. The register, the lightness and pure sound – it makes your personality come through. So good. So natural.' She continues. I waited forever to sing with this teacher, and all I can think of is pain. Blood. I taste blood in my mouth. 'Thank you'. I answer. And I repeat the whole aria again.

### *Voice lesson seven: Waiting for the moment*

Studying the art of vocal performance at the Music Academy, I was often reminded that I started to sing 'late'. How

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could that be I often wondered - I was one of those children who sang before they could talk. However, my young and innocent look, sound and behavior suited the norms and expectations at the academy well, and it seemed that being a 24-year-old woman when going to School of Music was not so bad, after all. I had almost no formal voice training before I started, but I had hours of listening to music, of being on stage with the local theatre group, of singing solo in the church, of visiting art galleries and diving into art literature with my father, of being the captain on the handball team, and years at university studying Music appreciation, the philosophy of science, drama, and theatre... Well, ok, I decided to go to music school 'late'. It was not until my father said: 'Is there no other way?' and my answer was clearly 'no', that I applied and got in. Being in the School of Music was wonderful. I loved every minute of it. One day I was even accepted to visit 'THE' voice teacher. It was like going to meet the Queen. I waited outside her studio, in the line with others. Through the porous and old walls, I could hear a fantastic coloratura soprano easily reaching high notes. I could feel my heart rate rise. Soon it was my turn. I had been waiting for the moment for so long, to be included as one of her vocal students. My name was called. I jumped up from my chair and danced into the voice studio in my long green floral dress. 'Hello, I'm Runa. I am so very happy to be here. Thank you for having me!', I phrased with excitement. 'OK. So, let's try that again' she replied. 'You can go out back in the hallway and have another go'. I froze. I had not sung a note, and I had already failed (was she literally kicking me out?!). I did not question her but went back to the chair I had been sitting on. On my second try, feeling tears in my eyes, I had



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problems talking. I only whispered. When I got into the studio, she pulled me in front of a mirror. ‘We shall now train your voice to be an expression of what you see in that mirror’.

*Voice lesson eight: The breath of my writing – and singing?*

I like to plan. I am organized. I am not very good in improvising. I blame my classical training as a soprano, completely grounded in Western music traditions, where I learnt to reproduce music chosen for me – music that someone else has made, usually dead white men who lived in on another century, to put it bluntly. Diving into the book ‘Nomadic theory’ by Rosi Braidotti, I was captivated. It was something about her voice in the text that spoke to me. I quickly saw that the idea of nomadism, movement, could be seen as a valuable knowledge for my work. That situated knowledge – human and non-human mattered. The processes. The language. I just loved Braidotti’s writing. The book became my best friend.

I was so enthusiastic about the ideas that I went to a summer school with Rosi Braidotti and friends – over Zoom, of course, since I am living in a pandemic world. But in this summer school, the literature and the language made me feel like an outsider. Although I was so passionate about the topics discussed – I did not have the ‘right’ language. But I did have the required book, ‘Post-human glossary’ (Braidotti and Hlavajova) , (a really thick book!), and it sat on my shaky desk. But I was too slow to look every new word up, and these words and expressions came at high speed, I tell you. I felt I was standing outside, watching a really hip group of people I desperately wanted to know and be friends with, but

I did not have the ‘right’ language to be accepted. It reminded me of when I was 9 years old and I moved from Abelvær (a very small Norwegian island with just 12 students in the whole school, and my cousin and I were the only students in our class), to a bigger city on the mainland, Verdal. I still remember the feeling when I arrived at my new school with 350 students. I thought every child in Norway was gathered in that schoolyard. I felt lonely. I was a shy child, but social. I desperately wanted friends. Since we had moved to a farming district, I imagined the children were interested in horses. So, I lied and said I had a horse – that I was ‘a horse girl’. The truth is that I have always been scared to death of horses. But I had read a lot of young adult fiction about girls and horses – and it seemed to me that ‘horse girls’ were super cool. Although I found my lie about owning a horse convincing, my lie was of course discovered, although it took a while. It turned out that the friends I was trying to impress did not care so much about horses. Also, they did not judge me for my lie. They had heard me sing when I was bicycling to school. They found my ‘singing when bicycling’ a bit peculiar and fascinating. I had long legs, long hair, and a small bicycle (I learned how to bicycle late. I was a careful child. Really afraid to lose control and hurt myself, so I needed a small bike to handle my fear and I comforted myself by singing). They listened to me sing – and they became my friends – some of them are still my best friends today.

What does this story have to do with my creative writing, you might ask? And even more importantly – what have all these stories to do with my voice lessons? Well, I think I’m pretty good at imagining, or at least, I find it fun and easy. It gives me a connection to Others I want to learn from, to

know. For me, imagining does not present ‘a truth’ – I have never believed in the truth with a capital T. But, imagining does create a perspective, a connection, to start a new phrase – when speaking, singing, and writing.

So, back to my encounter with post-human philosophy. I started to imagine. I created an inner dialogue with Braidotti, and I started to dialogue with her. First loud in my office, then on the screen, writing. I felt Braidotti had the upper hand, so I invited another person to join us. A person I had always admired, listened to, and watched, who seemed strong but vulnerable at the same time. This person was a diva, the famous soprano Maria Callas. She passed away in 1977, so there was no way she could join us for a conversation in ‘real life’ anyway. I started to imagine that the three of us were friends, and that we met up in a café in Paris, eating brunch, drinking coffee and wine. Over this brunch, we discuss voice and how I could push some of the boundaries I had experienced in the sociocultural context of singing. We discuss for hours the Nomadic theory that I was struggling to understand in connection to our lives.

I submitted the article and quickly got it back: ‘So much power... Do you need all this jargon? Trust the story! Show don’t tell. Do *not* be analytical at *any costs!* Do *not* explain the reader your text. Do *not* be analytical. Do *not* hide behind the jargon of social theory. Make your academic references to a minimum.’ What the fuck?? (and I very seldom swear!). I must admit I was in a state of being shocked, surprised, and fascinated by the words from one of my reviewers. A lot of ‘not’s’! Should I throw out ‘everything’ I had learned on my PhD courses – of doing ‘proper’ research – showing the reader that I have the academic skills, that I know the concepts

and the jargon of my chosen theoretical framework, and that I certainly know how to do research with rigor and transparency!

Was I seeking power? Was this why I invited Rosi Braidotti into my conversation? Was I desperate to be ‘friends’ with her? If I could just ‘own’ her words as the way she did, would make my research glow and be heard? Was I silencing my own voice by bringing Braidotti into the conversation? Maybe I just had to trust my own voice as ‘power enough’ – just trust my story through my writing. Because the voices of my ‘friends’ Maria and Braidotti were my own thoughts – it was my imagination having this conversation, after all. Does writing stories from my embodied experience come without ‘restrictions’? When writing my conversation with Braidotti and Maria, could I go ‘all in’ and write what came into my writing body? To a certain extent, yes. It does not mean that it was without resistance and disruptions – experiences I feel are needed and valuable when writing. But, within all that creative space there were still rules and expectations. I edited ruthlessly and I saw my text becoming more refined, clearer, and more naked with every comment I got from the reviewers. Still, did I lose something? Of course. I lost the printed word on the paper that told the reader about my choices of methodology and theory. Of course, I understood that it was still ‘there’. But I could not tell the reader explicitly *why* I wanted to write like this, and *how* I had found support in others (the Other) scholars grappling with the same issues. I had to trust the reader. Ok. Trust the reader. But, by removing all these academic references, did I give ‘credit’ to the shoulders I stood on? Or, was it only me, feeling I had to let go of the ‘academic jargon’ I spent hours obtaining? I

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discovered there were ‘other ways’, but those ways seemed foreshadowed by more ‘dominant’ ways of writing by using ‘academic jargon’. The dominant way was, after all, how I was ‘trained’ to write, or maybe this is what I saw in my training? I have no clear answer. I very often just have many more questions.

Did it work? Well, I wrote the conversation as an article, and it has been accepted to be published in a peer reviewed journal (Jenssen 2022). Does that mean that it worked? It ‘moved’ my work and way of writing as a scholar. It was hard and fun. I got to know the ‘characters’ better. I found my own way of understanding theory better because I found a way of expressing how I understood the theory in connection with my own experiences, in the sociocultural context of singing. I found a language that felt genuine but vulnerable. I felt I could hear my voice in my text. I created an academic monster out of the philosopher I had an academic crush on (that was certainly not my intention... or was it?). Did I ‘plan’ how to write the article in the way it ended up? No way, although I tried very hard. As I mentioned before, I like to plan, but imagination became a space where I could lose control. Anchored in my embodied knowledge as the ‘researcher’s home’, I found the ‘breath’ in my writing.

### *Voice lesson nine: Behind the mirror*

Did any of the stories in the voice lessons resonate with you? Although you might not be a singer, maybe you may have experiences yourself that you thought of as you read my stories? Maybe the feeling of recalling a specific memory of

learning? Of your body? Of a relationship with someone? Or a feeling of holding an object, as an instrument, a book, a pencil, a ball, or a costume in your hands? I guess what I am trying to say, is did you feel how these stories might allow for an entrance to write from, to research from, to voice from, to find meaning in the world from? I must admit that I am in the process of discovering this myself – finding meaning in listening to, writing and sharing stories. Before writing my last voice lesson for you, I prepared myself by reading an article by Betsy Hearne. She writes, ‘My self-knowledge evolved through stories. I came to believe in them—not necessarily believe stories, of course, but believe *in* stories. What is a story? What is the relationship of stories to self-knowledge, and what does any of this have to do with what the arts teach us about research methodology?’ (154).

I was stunned. It made me think of why I always keep writing stories – and why I love to *listen* to stories. I believe *in* stories! Stories are the core of my voice, as a soprano, teacher, and researcher. The love of stories is the heart of it, and then there is the communication, which is *voiced* through everyone’s unique voice. When the voice from my voice lessons, from the ‘material’ world and the symbolic/philosophic world meet, intra-act, – then my stories are no longer ‘just’ personal stories. Stories that are embodied and embedded in the local speak, share and point with critique into the global – as feminists aim to do (Braidotti), and as performative autoethnography aims to do (Spry 2011, 2016). Voicing stories through performative autoethnography and new materialism can be one way of bridging ‘worlds’ of voices. In between categories of voice many shades of voice exist. With mobility and change as heart of our thinking, we

might even move the oppressive and normative understandings of gender that constructed my singing body. Like the nomad, we can resettle and transform. Through voicing dialogues. Voice is not static. You are not given 'a' voice. Voice is constantly changing. Changing with life. Writing this article is my way of seeing the possibility of producing, analyzing, and representing ethnographic data – through voicing stories from the mirror in my voice studio.

Ok, so let us 'wrap up' our voice lessons. What happened. How did you experience them? What did you see in the mirror during the lessons? What did you pay attention to, and maybe more importantly – what did you not see or hear when looking in the mirror? Maybe it is the stories that have not yet come, that are the ones we are looking for, desperately seeking for. But what is the 'result' of these voice lessons? As your voice teacher, I can only hope they resonated with you in some way. What I strive for by offering these lessons is to allow the reader feel that what I share in my stories can be applied beyond my personal story. So, what did I see in the mirror, you might ask? I see a soprano seeking and struggling for voice in a highly rigid, disciplined, and normative culture. I see a female voice seeking for an academic voice with hope, confusion, insight, and liberation. Confusion, because the same rigidness and hierarchy also exists in this culture. Insight and liberation, because writing the stories, thinking them through the material body (the physical and philosophical), allows for a perspective of the I that is open, transformative and a part of a larger whole. Singing voices *and* academic voices.

Writing this article I see the interrelationship between voice, culture, and life, in flux, particularly as potential bor-

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ders between ‘categories’ are crossed. The sound of the voice from my material body, performed through the singing voice or the phrase of my writing on the screen, cross borders and resonate with different cultural and social conditions as people engage with, making meaning of and, perhaps, have feelings connected with the performance of their voices. The performance of voice – *voicing* – has the possibility to *do* something in the world: ‘in their capacity to be both actions and generate consequences, performative utterances enact real effects in the world’ (Bolt 133). I believe in the performative moment and movement in between borders when singing, teaching, and researching the voice. The slippery alleyways between the norms, where slithers of something different, something unique could emerge. My belief in such movement between borders is because I see that singing and writing can demonstrate the open materiality of culturally embedded bodies (Braidotti). Performing bodies are ‘open’, and through that openness, constantly changing and becoming.

Now, after these lessons with you, I am not sure I will call the caretaker at the university to get my mirror placed on the wall in my office. Maybe I will do it myself (strictly against university rules and I used to be so good in following rules) and bring a hammer to work and put the mirror up on the wall. I will put it where I want. I think I will do that. Long after these nine voice lessons I have offered here, I hope that you keep working on your voice. To feel it, to nurture it, to master it with finding the body, breath and let your sound flow, into your unique voice – maybe by looking behind the mirror, moving the mirror, or even throwing the mirror away.



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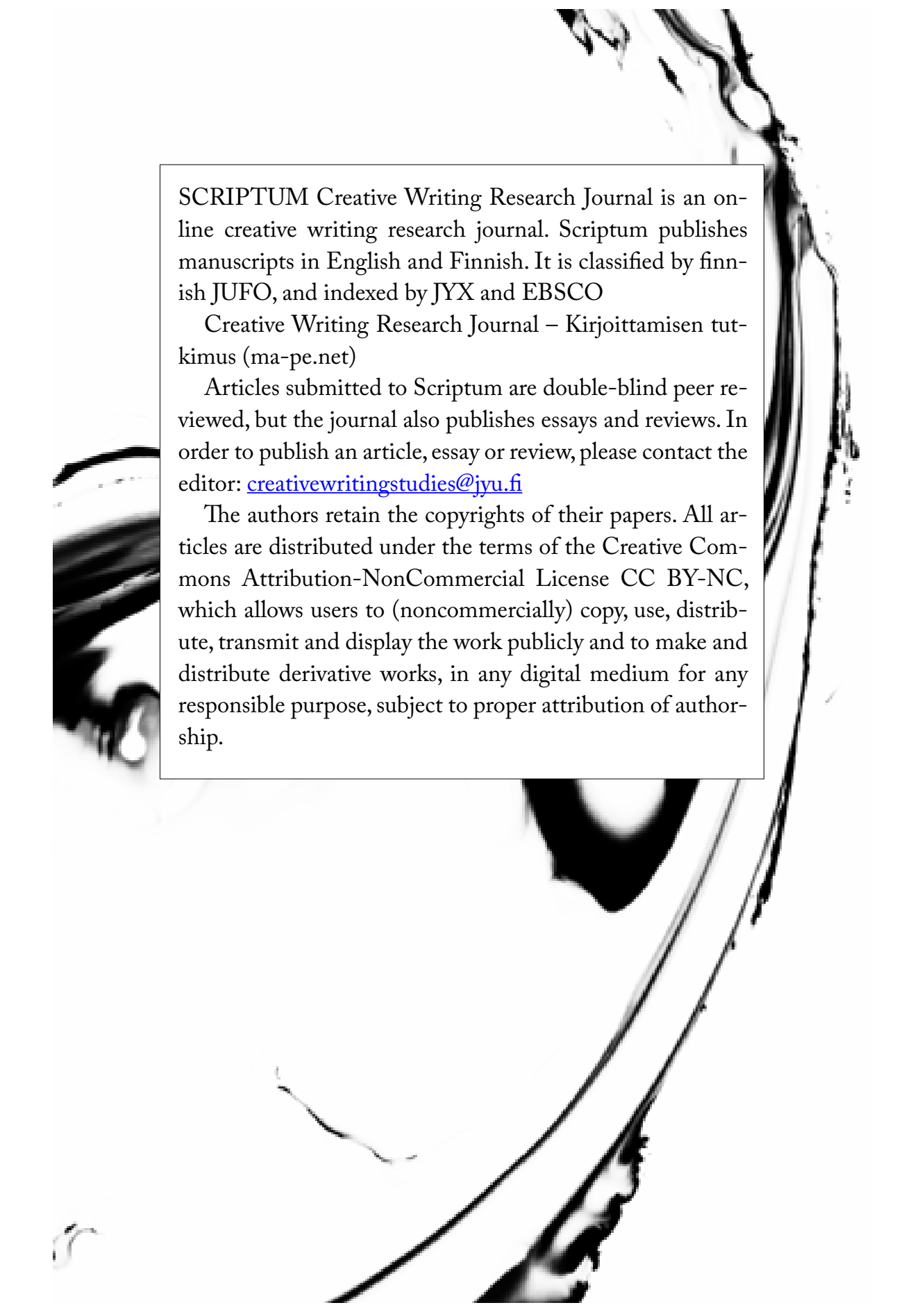
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