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EPHEMERAL REPETITIONS; DECONSTRUCTING VOCAL TECHNIQUE AND FREEING SPONTANEOUS EXPRESSION FOR AUTHENTIC VOCAL PERFORMANCE

By

SHANNON GEORGENE HOLMES

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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December 2019

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I argue that somatic methodologies used in actor and dance training can be applied to a classical singer's process to effectively address the dichotomy of technique to freedom in vocal expression. My research is informed by my multi-disciplined background as a performer and educator and, in drawing on these practices and investigating the liminal spaces between them, I uncover a separation in the pedagogy. In response, I propose approaches which encourage a mobilisation of new multidisciplinary tools that may prove useful in finding a deeper connection in performance.

My research integrates the exploration of phenomenological insights as they relate to vocality. Vital in my findings is how deconstructing traditional texts and forms, through autoethnographic performance practices, can successfully serve as a key method for developing deeper somatic reflexivity, accessing the responses of the body and leading to a more expressive, authentic voice.

These finding are reflected in my praxis through the music theatre piece, *The Crook of Your Arm.* Devised through an improvisational process, the autobiographical narrative that surfaced became key in supporting my assertions that examining the connections between the lived body and voice, through the centralisation of self, is critical in the singer's process.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Mother, Norma Mae (Brydon) Holmes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to my supervisors at the University of Birmingham UK; Dr Caroline Radcliffe for her unwavering patience, steadfast support, and unrelenting motivation and Dr Adam Ledger for his wisdom and always honest (and much appreciated) feedback. Additionally, many thanks to Professor Noah Drew at Concordia University, Canada for his mentorship, and encouragement.

To my many students and colleagues at Concordia University and John Abbott College, thank you for being constant sources of inspiration, sounding boards and supporters of my research and artistic pursuits.

Additionally, many thanks to the teachers who inspired this research and were so generous in their sharing of knowledge. Richard Armstrong, Catherine Fitzmaurice, Saul Kotzubei, and Linda Wise, I am so grateful to have worked with all of you, thank you.

I also wish to express my gratitude to my friend and mentor Laiwan for her guidance; academic, artistic, spiritual and otherwise. Her inspiration was instrumental in launching this journey and her faith in me continues to propel me onwards.

Finally, infinite gratitude to my family. To my husband Agustin Ruiz de la Orden, I can't thank you enough for supporting me (in so many ways) through this challenging time. Thanks for holding the fort, and keeping the home fires burning during my many absences. And, of course, a special thanks to my children, Félix, Raul, Pablo Jesus, Lola Mae, Paloma and Julio. This PhD would have been immensely easier to do without you, but not nearly as worthwhile.

This thesis was copy edited for conventions of language, spelling and grammar by Sally Baggott

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Despite the advances in contemporary performer training, which resist a paradigm rooted in Cartesian dualism, an impediment that is evident in the way in which *bel canto* technique is widely taught remains in the thinking of voice as extra-corporeal (Duncan 285). This is counter to how contemporary voice training for actors orients towards what Schlichter insists should be "the physio-psychological constitution of the voice…" and a "(re)discovery of authentic selfhood through access to a true voice" ("Un/Voicing"). The mind/body paradigm in which "[t]he actor's brain must *be* his or her body" (Linklater and Slob 9. Emphasis in original) lies at the centre of the leading voice methods used in actor training yet remains a radical concept in classical voice training.

This thesis investigates the challenges singers trained in Western Classical singing technique experience in bridging the divide between expression rooted in good vocal technique and that of a free voice unencumbered by technical restraints. The imperatives of my research concern how body-based vocal methods used in actor training can effectively be integrated into a singer's process and function alongside the *bel canto* method to allow a singer full emotional expressivity in performance. Through a practice as research (PaR) investigation, I examine what I perceive as the extant gap between singing and speech as distinct disciplines and scrutinise the separation in pedagogy that often sees one discipline favoured over the other. Composer Paul Barker considers this separation; "Whenever the voice is reduced to words, words reduced to their semantic meaning, the singer reduced to pitches and durations, and music is reduced to sound, separation renders synthesis impossible" (70). To counter this

separation, I explore techniques that disrupt the dividing line between the disciplines of speech and singing and devise cross-disciplinary methods that mobilise new tools for performers to work across this divide.

In order to elaborate my practical exploration, the thesis is structured around the following specific turning points that emerged in my PaR as a means of disseminating "a dialogic framework, a nexus of tensions between logos and voice" (Thomadis, "The Re-Vocalization" 17); Chapter Two centres on the *bel canto* vocal technique and places it in the context of my personal practice, which started at the age of thirteen and continued through adulthood into a career as a professional singer. I include, in this chapter, an autoethnographic account in the form of first-person narratives documenting my recent experience of returning to *bel canto* voice lessons. I then discuss how I introduced Contact Improvisation into my practice as an opera singer and how I integrated these two methods within my practice to reveal a more fully embodied mode of expression. Chapter Three traces my experience working with Linda Wise at Panthéâtre, in Paris, working within the tradition of the Roy Hart Theatre and the voice as an expression of the "totality of the self" (Kalo 182).[1] I discuss how this experience opened up the possibilities to work from an autoethnographic perspective where the 'self' intersects with my vocal practice.

Chapter Four focuses on my process of devising *The Crook of Your Arm*, through the deconstruction of the Kurt Weill song "Je ne t'aime pas" through which I wove

[1] Linda Wise is co-director (with Enrique Pardo) of Panthéâtre in Paris, France. She is one of the founding members of the Roy Hart Theatre, a group, led by Hart and formed in 1969, dedicated to researching the extended capabilities of the human voice.

personal autobiographical narrative to construct a piece of music theatre. I also examine, in this section, the role the performer-audience paradigm played in my process. In Chapter Five, I analyse key moments in working with my mother's recorded voice, using the disembodied mediated voice in my process towards embodiment. In addition, I discuss the creation of the soundscape included in the final performances and its integration into the piece.

In response to what I consider to be an outmoded dichotomy between the various camps of voice training, and a desire to find a more holistic approach to voice training, I aligned my research with Adriana Cavarero's philosophy of a "vocal ontology of uniqueness" (173), wherein the unrepeatable and distinct characteristics of the individual is manifested through the voice. In classical singing training, the voice is commonly signified as a musical instrument (Sundberg 117) and reduced to mechanical expression over which the singer, after gaining mastery over their instrument, attempts to layer emotion. Cavarero contests that what distinguishes the human voice from the notion of 'voice as instrument' is its ability to carry speech and the humanness contained therein: "Speech, no matter how frustrated by song its semantic valence may be, nevertheless continues to be what the song is destined towards" (127). Inspired by Cavarero's theory of the sung voice being inseparable from speech validated the dissatisfaction I encountered in my vocal practice as I sought methods to traverse the mind/body split addressed in actor speech training yet essentially ignored in my experiences in the classical voice studio, where the training centralises the voice as "an autonomous object detached from the body that produces it" (Poizat 35). If the voice indeed "manifests the unique being of each human being, and his or her spontaneous self-communication

according to the rhythms of a sonorous relation" (Cavarero 173), then, as I have determined after many years of personal frustrations caught in the divide between somatic pedagogies offered to me in my theatre training and the more mechanical expectations linked to my *bel canto* training, I needed to accommodate a much broader view of voice. My intention was to transcend the "painstakingly acquired technique to negotiate the taxing vocal tasks performed" (Thomaidis, *Theatre* 35), that the technique for singing opera necessitates and integrate a method of revealing the embodied "whole being — body, mind and heart" (Magnat 16) that allows for the singer's uniqueness to be revealed through vocal expression. Due to a categorical lack of integrated training, where a disregard for exploring the body holistically for the purposes of both singing and speaking, I identified a gap in my development of a comprehensive skill set. Influenced by my actor training, I became curious as to why such a split in the pedagogy existed and determined to investigate how the gap may be bridged.

Research Questions

Arising from the problematics in my practice as both a performer and teacher, my questioning centres on something of a paradox: how can classical vocal technique be negotiated in a way that supports a depth of expression and remain spontaneous enough to communicate what is crucial to the performer 'in the moment', yet remain true to *bel canto* performance aesthetic? This thesis accounts for how an autobiographical devised performance, automatically confronting notions of the self, or what I contextualise as an "integrated being" (Leder 5) — the totality of one's body and mind —

can both provide a process to open up spaces for the manifestation of technical negotiations, yet also result in an overtly personalised performance outcome.

My investigations led me to examine the liminal space between technique and freedom, and develop new physical and emotional economies for negotiating the intersections between speech and singing to free expression. This freedom relates to the ability of the performer to be less preoccupied with the mechanical elements of the vocal instrument in performance. This may be experienced through a greater balance between the technical facets of vocal expression and the ability to 'let go', to achieve an expanded capacity to somatically experience and connect to the material emotionally. Key in my process was the search and employment of "self-knowledge … anchored in bodily sensation" (Pagis 265) to better bridge the mind/body divide. As will be seen, the exploration of such phenomenological insights was pivotal in the research.

Investigating modes of practice that also acknowledge the ephemeral and temporal aspects of vocality have played a crucial role as I integrated psychophysical and more 'coldly' speech-centred actor training methodologies. Finally, the practice embraced autoethnographic performance practices and improvisational dance methods. Simply put, as a classical singer, I searched to uncover a voice free from technical restraints as my self-devised music theatre piece *The Crook of Your Arm* emerged. Here, I argue that somatic practices that centre on opening the body to a more profound reflexivity and examining the self through a deepened sensory engagement can best address the difficulty trained singers have with making contact with truthful embodied expression.

Performances

This thesis traces the development of *The Crook of Your Arm* a considerable process over four years and four iterations.[2] The first stage of development was during a Fitzmaurice Teacher Training, Performance Module in London UK in August 2014.[3] This was a 15-minute solo performance with no musical collaboration. It emerged as a presentation of an assignment in the course which I discuss further in Chapter Four. The second performance, which I termed a 'Work-in-Progress,' was presented at Éspace Pop, a small gallery space in Montréal, Canada in November 2015. Titled *Le creux de tes bras*, this performance applied, as its principle intention in this phase of its development, the primary elements of Contact Improvisation (as discussed in Chapter Two) in a sonic context with co-performer, cellist Kaitlyn Raitz.[4] Key in the investigations was a deepening of reflexive energetic responses through an internal corporeal sensing. The third phase in the development of the piece was a collaboration with New York-based cellist Molly Aronson at the New York Frigid Festival. There were six performances over a 2-week period in February–March 2015. Vital in sustaining heuristic inquiry as central in my praxis in this phase of the research was to investigate the use of 'practiced vulnerability' (as discussed in Chapter Four) to maintain a flexible yet firm footing when working between technique and free expression in performance.

---

[2] Full videos of the second, third, and fourth versions of the show are included in the Appendix. There is no video documentation of the first iteration.

[3] Developed by Catherine Fitzmaurice, this method combines classical voice and speech training techniques with modifications of yoga, shiatsu, bioenergetics, energy work, as well as many other disciplines. It seeks to harmonise the voluntary and involuntary facets of the nervous system, and vocal production.

[4] The title *Le creux de tes bras* came from a line in the Kurt Weill song "Je ne t'aime" which was central in the devising of my piece. I translated the line to "the crook of your arm" for performances in New York and the UK.

The final phase of *The Crook of Your Arm* took place at The Royal Shakespeare Company's studio theatre, The Other Place (TOP), in Stratford-upon-Avon in June 2016. Key developments in this phase included the use of my mother's recorded voice throughout the process as a method towards embodying her voice in performance (as discussed in Chapter Five). My collaborator in this final phase in the development of this piece was Birmingham UK-based cellist Megan Kirwin.

Methodology

Central in my PaR is the inclusion of a heuristic analysis of the practice. The reflective nature of the heuristic process facilitates what John Freeman, in his article "Writing the Self: The Heuristic Documentation of Performance," calls an "embrace of notions of self-discovery" (99). This has been pivotal in addressing the influence examining the self plays in the negotiation of technique and freedom in vocal expression and in the context of my research. I contend that all voicework that allows full emotional connectivity is indivisible from heuristic thought. As Freeman maintains, "[h]euristic research begins when that which has been hitherto buried is unearthed…" (105); this aligns with my intention of understanding the practice through a phenomenological lens. Praxis in the context of my research therefore functioned as the place where theory and practice intersected through experiencing.

Pivotal in my process was redefining the reflexive quality in which I was accustomed to working with my voice. My history of voice training indicates that the dichotomy between body-based voice methods for actors and classical singing training lies in what sociologist Michal Pagis identifies as two distinct modes of reflexivity. The

first, “discursive self-reflexivity” (266), is a practice based in language where the ‘self’ “unfolds through a symbolic medium” (266) and words are used to disseminate empirical knowledge, much like in the *bel canto* method (I will address this in depth in Chapter Two). The second process, “embodied self-reflexivity”(266), is based on “feeling the body, in which the relation with oneself unfolds through a corporeal medium by way of practices that increase awareness of sensations” (266): or more simply, a means of examining one’s own reactions or motives. While this is implicit in the somatic practices I engaged with throughout my research (including but not limited to Fitzmaurice Voicework®, Roy Hart Voice, Stanislavski’s sense memory, and Contact Improvisation), my aim was to question how I might attend to the demands of singing *bel canto* with this same embodied self-reflexivity.

Approaching my PaR with a distinct and fully formed inner awareness of the void I perceived in my practice led directly to a reflective process underpinned by a heuristic research approach of “self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery” (Moustakas 11), all of which allowed the threads of inquiry to develop from “inner awareness, meaning and inspiration” (11). Sufficiently supporting and articulating the empirical and theoretical frames of knowledge implicit in a PaR thesis that centres specifically on voice has revealed that the two are not mutually exclusive and require significant focus in maintaining the delicate balance required to disseminate the research through, what interdisciplinary voice scholar Konstantinos Thomaidis calls, “a voice for voice” (“The Re-Vocalization” 18). As the transmission of my investigations moved through the "tension between the practical and the exegetic” (17), retaining the body as a site of

knowing persisted as a crucial constituent in my investigations and in the development of methods to support the holistic singer-actor-creator.

CHAPTER TWO

BEL CANTO AND IMPROVISATION

> [T]he New Vocality not only refers to contemporary music but also to the new way of approaching traditional music, exploiting the past experience of sound with the sensibility of the present…. (Berberian 49)

Although my early vocal instruction was firmly planted in traditional *bel canto* training, my theatre and dance training led me to integrate disciplines beyond singing training into my vocal practice to arrive at what American contemporary music specialist Cathy Berberian would call the "new vocality" (49). I achieved this by combining my multi-disciplinary performer training, my *bel canto* training, and the varied somatic methodologies I studied in the context of theatre and dance into one holistic practice. This process demanded the development of methodologies that would still allow me to use the classical vocal technique that I had spent years practicing, while permeating it with a multi-disciplined performance practice that correlates with Berberian's notion of "exploiting the past experience of sound with the sensibility of the present" (49).

This chapter focuses on how I integrated the dance form Contact Improvisation with traditional *bel canto* singing training as a means of addressing the Cartesian dualism evident in *bel canto* voice training. By directly confronting the lack of a mind/body connection offered in my classical voice training, I turned to Contact Improvisation as a core influence in developing methods that may encourage a mode of embodied self-reflexivity to reveal a deeper somatic connection leading the performer to reach a more profound depth of emotion in performance. Included in this chapter are autoethnographic accounts in the form of first-person narratives documenting my recent

experience of returning to classical voice lessons after 10 years exploring various other methods. Additionally, I frame the historical context of the *bel canto* method as it relates to the training I received. Subsequently, I discuss how I came to bridge the dance form Contact Improvisation with *bel canto* technique to realise a more fully embodied and emotionally connected mode of vocal expression. Key in these investigations was maintaining integral classical singing performance aesthetics, or what noted American vocal pedagogue Richard Miller has deemed "[v]ocal timbre that results from the well-formed, well-coordinated instrument without maladjustment of any of its physical parts or functions" (205), while developing a more somatically aware vocal process.

Revisiting the Classical Voice Studio

An audio version of this section may be accessed via the link to AUDIO 1 in the Appendix.

I enter Dr. Irene Feher's studio for the first time and position myself next to the upright piano, awaiting her instruction. Dr. Feher knows my background, we have been corresponding by email, and I have filled her in on my history with voice. She knows I am a trained classical singer; that I started my training as a teenager; performed in opera, oratorio, and concerts; and did the competition circuit well into my 30s. She knows that I became frustrated by the rigidness of the training. I have emphasised to her that my struggle has centred on reaching the same depth of emotional connectivity while singing an aria with 'correct' bel canto technique as when I 'let go' of all the rules of the technique that I felt were binding me and holding back my ability to sing with true freedom of expression. I have already explained to her that I felt the very traditional bel canto methodology seemed to be somehow creating tension in my body and voice. She

knows I became disillusioned with my traditional singing training. Why did I feel like I could truly communicate through song only after I began working in other disciplines? What did they offer that bel canto did not? I certainly acknowledge that the bel canto training allowed me to reach a certain level of proficiency as a vocalist, but I still did not feel complete as a performer. Before this lesson, I communicated to Dr. Feher that the focus of my doctoral research is to integrate somatic methodologies used in actor and dance training into my practice as a classical singer to engender a greater sense of freedom in performance. However, I have asked her to treat this lesson as if I am a beginner with no prior training in the technique so I can begin to unveil what in the methodology became prohibitive to free sung expression.

She begins by standing in front of me and informs me that we are going to start by finding 'proper alignment'. She asks me to balance my hips and legs over my feet and allow my feet to feel rooted into the ground. Placing her hands on my shoulders, she instructs me to release them, while encouraging me to open my sternum and maintain a 'calm neck'. I am somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of information but try to follow each instruction as precisely as I can. I am not completely certain what a calm neck should feel like, but I guess it should be a neck free from tension? Dr. Feher uses her thumb and forefinger to grab the back of my head at the base of my skull, and she pulls up — she explains that I should feel the neck lengthening — a spaciousness — which I do, although having someone pull on my neck like that is somewhat disconcerting, and it does not necessarily aid me in feeling calm, or released, or free.

I am beginning to realise that my experience in somatic actor and dance methods inform me of what she is getting at. My body knows what this 'calm neck' feels like when it is 'right', when it makes me feel 'grounded' and not stiff.

As a 13-year-old student, I was similarly instructed in 'proper alignment' by my first voice teacher, Nikolai Kolesnikov. He stood in front of me, just as Dr. Feher is doing now and (with considerably more force than Dr Feher), pressed down on my shoulders and commanded that I "rea-liz!" He would then step back and demonstrate the desired effect by pulling his arms down by his side, elongating his neck, and puffing out his chest to show the space created when the shoulders were released. I would do my best to mimic his physicality in my 13-year-old teenage-female form; however, the resulting posture was stiff, inflexible, and unnatural. For the first few months I studied with him, most of my lessons would start like this — I remember feeling like I was taking on a persona. Nothing about the way I was being taught to stand felt 'natural', but I quickly determined that in order to sing opera, I had to become someone other than myself.

This memory takes me to another. Several years later, at age 20, I am standing in my university voice class with my teacher, mezzo-soprano Jocelyn Fleury. I get a very similar demonstration. Again, I pull my shoulders down — I try to create the spaciousness she speaks of. Yet it feels tight, unnatural, but she does not correct me so I assume this must be how it should feel. It isn't until several years later when I have transferred my major to Theatre Performance from Music Performance that I get my first inkling of what a 'calm neck' feels like. I am standing in a movement for actors class, and our teacher Lucie Bertrand, spends weeks working with us on alignment. Lucie's work is inspired by the work of F. M. Alexander. We are instructed to stand with our feet parallel,

knees and hips 'stacked'. I am told to be careful not to lock the knee joints — we are encouraged to imagine each vertebrae of our spines stacked on top of the other. I focus on my lower back feeling wide and neither excessively curved or too flat — my shoulders also feel wide, and I imagine I am opening my body both in the front and in the back (Dayme 27). My neck feels long and my head balances lightly on top. We spend hours doing this. We start by lying prone on the floor, releasing our bodies of tension, allowing the floor to carry us. We then spend much time doing 'spine rolls' — an exercise performed standing. We start by dropping the head to our chest and then allow the head to lead as we slowly drop down — each vertebrae in the spine curving until the body is folded with the head hanging close to the knees. We then roll up by stacking the vertebrae mindfully, allowing the head to come up last. A few weeks into the semester, and I feel like I can stand quite simply in a way that does not feel tense. I can be still and balanced; my body feels open and alert. I remember wondering: is this similar to what my early singing teachers were trying to achieve with me?

I think about this now as I stand trying to embody Dr. Feher's mechanically based description of the preferred classical singer's posture — emphasised to me as being essential in producing a technically proficient sound.

***Bel Canto* as Oral Tradition**

> Why not just put ourselves in the hands of someone who teaches 'The old *bel canto* method' and be done with it? We cannot because there is no specific codified system of bel canto waiting for the vocal neophyte to pick up and assimilate. Despite some claims that certain teachers have a direct

> link to ‘the old Italians,’ no modern teacher can honestly profess to teach some clearly delineated method that is universally recognized as being ‘the *bel canto* method’. (Miller xx–xxi)

Bel canto is an oral tradition passed down from teacher to student and, as Miller outlines above, as such, it is not a precisely codified method. Numerous treaties were written, mostly by nineteenth-century performers and teachers of vocal pedagogy, such as Tosti (1723), Mancini (1774), Marchesi (1901), Sedie (1876), and Lamperti (1871), yet, as Miller professes, no modern teacher can claim a direct connection to the original techniques presented. My teachers, and all those claiming to be teaching *bel canto* technique, however, accept a claim of lineage which allows them to interpret these texts and disseminate the knowledge. As Miller asserts, “[a]nyone who has studied with teachers who trace a historical lineage to other persons often cited as major teachers of *bel canto* … must admit that the specifics, the actual techniques of acquiring the art of beautiful singing, are only imprecisely enunciated by them” (xxi).

After numerous years of studying voice in other contexts, my return to the classical voice studio highlighted the barriers inherent in fully embodying classical vocal technique. This became most evident in my struggle to fully understand ‘proper’ singer’s posture. Renowned singing teacher Giovanni Battista Lamperti wrote *The Technics of Bel Canto* in 1905 and in the first chapter “Preliminary Studies of Vocal Gymnastics” details the singer’s posture;

> The position of the body must be easy and natural. Throwing the weight on the right foot, which should be slightly advanced, let the pupil look straight ahead, much as if gazing on a picture, and in a wholly

> unconstrained posture; the expression of the face composed and pleasant, and the head erect, inclining neither forward nor backward. Take care, above all, the muscles of neck and throat are not unnecessarily tense; the entire attitude must be easy and unconstrained. Hold the shoulder-joints free and loose, with the shoulders slightly thrown back to allow the chest due freedom in front without raising it. For the present the arms may hang loosely. (Lamperti 7)

Lamperti articulates what Dr. Feher and my previous teachers described; however, the prohibitive barrier in my practice was the lack of somatic experiencing through personal physical explorations (such as the ones I recalled from my movement for actors class in the personal narrative above) making the elusive concepts difficult to embody or establish as physical responses in the body. Theatre Performance theorist Richard Schechner defines embodiment as "[e]xperience as the basis of indigenous knowledge that is shared through performing" (60). My experience was that embodiment of the concepts being presented to me in a pedagogical context of discursive self-reflexivity only became possible by unifying the somatic experience of singing with the cerebral understanding of the technique and the act of vocalising.

As classical singing vocal researcher Päivi Järviö attests: "[g]azing inside and listening to what is unfolding in one's body is characteristic of studying singing. Learning to do this is one of the challenges for inexperienced voice students: the interiority of the body does not seem to exist for us unless we concentrate on it" (26). Revisiting the *bel canto* voice studio reinforced my position of the need for there to be reliable methods included in the pedagogy to allow students to recognise and work with what is unfolding

in one's body and gain specific techniques for negotiating these "unfoldings". In doing so, the student's process may shift from the language-based discursive self-reflexivity inherent in the *bel canto* method to the somatically-based embodied self-reflexivity found in somatically centred dance and actor training methods.

My most recent experience in the *bel canto* studio illuminated the disconnect between approaches to classical vocal pedagogy and embodied learning. What became clear was that the pedagogical strategies most commonly employed in *bel canto* consist of tacit knowledge, which becomes problematic in the context of integrating technical proficiency with embodied knowledge. As an oral tradition, the *bel canto* method is prohibitive in that the concrete steps towards achieving the technical proficiencies required to master the technique are elusive. Considering the definition of embodied learning by Duby and Barker, in their article "Deterritorialising the Research Space: Artistic Research, Embodied Knowledge, and the Academy," as that which is "grounded in sensorimotor experience and action, accessible through the whole body and largely unconscious" (2), I was able to identify the gap in my own *bel canto* training where a whole body awareness and accessibility was scarcely considered.

An audio version of this section may be accessed via the link to AUDIO 2 in the Appendix.

Standing in my learned singer's posture in Dr Feher's studio, I feel a familiar tension creeping into my body. It is a feeling of holding and tightness. I am aware of the muscles at work — they are holding me in this carefully constructed position. Dr Feher continues the lesson with instruction on bel canto breathing technique. She explains that the heart of it lies in 'la lutte vocale'. Translated from the Italian as 'the vocal struggle', it describes the action of the expiratory muscles against those of the inspiratory muscles.

(It eventually became known as 'appoggio' — Italian for 'support'). The aim, she explains, is to strive to retain air in the lungs while, at the same time, expelling the air necessary to produce sound. Dr. Feher's explanation is well defined. She is a capable vocal pedagogue, yet the system of imparting knowledge remains flawed as I have had little instruction on how to thoroughly integrate the steps required to embody the correct position. How do I actually make this happen in my body? What should it feel like? During the class, I am reminded of the many vague instructions I have received over the years on how to breathe 'properly' when singing. I have heard repeatedly "sing from the diaphragm!" "Expand the ribcage!" "Don't collapse!" or the ever-popular command to "support the voice!" Even though I now feel, after many years of practice, that I negotiate the art of appoggio well, breaking it down in this purely mechanical way draws tension into my body. She demonstrates by inviting me to place one hand on one side of her ribcage and one hand just below her navel. As she inhales, I feel her ribcage expand and her belly move outwards; as she sings a single, extended note on an 'ee' vowel, the belly draws inwards with control while her ribcage moves minimally. She explains that while I should feel pressure against the ribcage, I should not push against it. It is my turn to try, and she places her hands one each on my ribcage and lower belly, and I repeat the action that she has just demonstrated. This action feels 'natural' to me — it is automatic. When I feel the impulse to sing, to produce an elongated vowel on a pitch or even to yell or speak in an extended way, this is what my body does, but my arrival here was not without struggle. In my early years of bel canto training, I never felt completely free with my breath. The mechanical approach was binding. I remember a teacher chastising me for trying to "muscle my way through" a particularly high colouratura

passage in a Mozart aria I was working on. I recall being somewhat confused as to what that meant exactly. All the instruction I had received on managing the breath in this difficult passage had to do with the engagement of muscles, but now I was being told that what I was doing was too much. How do I use the muscles less and still meet the technical requirements needed to sing the passage correctly?

Standing in Dr. Feher's studio, I try to reconcile the mechanics of breathing being explained to me with my already embodied knowledge of creating a supported sung sound. As I draw the breath in, I realise the sole impulse of this action in this moment is to make a 'correct' sound — and by that I mean one that is on pitch, does not wobble, is sufficiently round in shape, yet has a lovely forward placement (all essential elements of the bel canto style) as to be aesthetically pleasing. It is a mechanical action. As I experience the sound emitting from my body, I think of how automated it feels and sounds. The way I have been accessing and applying my breath to producing sung sounds, since integrating my actor training (Linklater and Fitzmaurice voice methods in particular) has become assimilated into my application of appoggio. My habitual response connects to the feeling of what Fitzmaurice would call the "spontaneous breath" (250) — the same breath that allows me to giggle, laugh, and sob with a fully expressive voice — free of tension that would inhibit the movement of the breath. The mechanics of 'la lutte vocale', or appoggio, are still fully active yet only make sense to me somatically, when I make an embodied connection. How does it feel when I allow the breath to enter my lungs when I prepare to sing? How does it change when I release the breath to phonate or make sound? The descriptions and images that are offered to me

from teachers in describing the sensation of appoggio, include words like 'hold', 'retain', 'contract', and inevitably lead to a tense, held body.

Dr. Feher plays a five-note descending scale on the piano and directs me to sing the same scale on "zaaaaah" — I sing several scales, as we ascend higher in my register, and she assesses that my onset could be more precise. 'La coupe de la glotte' is a bel canto pedagogical concept that is focused on a healthy closure of the vocal folds which occurs after the inhalation of breath and allows for a clean sounding beginning of the sound without the breath escaping. She informs me that the way in which I initiate each note can be 'cleaner'. I attempt to be more precise with my onset — but I feel my body tensing as I try to get it right. She demonstrates. I try to mimic what I hear and see her doing. Sometimes I am successful, I know this, partially because she tells me I have done it correctly and partially because I am experienced enough to feel and hear when I sing the notes to get the desired bel canto sound right. I cannot deny that I am relying on my already embodied knowledge as I discover, in that moment, that this knowledge cannot be easily forgotten. I do this through negotiations of the breath, shape of my articulators, and the intentional way I am directing the sound. Doing this, I rediscover that knowledge and acknowledge that it is persisting within my body/voice.

My lesson with Dr. Feher follows closely in its thematic structure to Lamperti's treatise. In my lesson, we cover three of the major concepts in *bel canto* pedagogy; the posture of the body, breath through *appoggio* (*la lutte vocale*), and onset. Lamperti's first section of *The Technics of Bel Canto* is titled "Position of the Body" and is followed by "The Breathing." The third section is "Tone-attack and Resonance." Much of the information that Dr Feher shares with me corresponds quite closely with each of

Lamperti's short chapters, and the information is similar in content. Breath-control, Lamperti asserts, is "the foundation of all vocal study" (9). This was emphasised to me throughout all my training. Specific attention to *appoggio*, on how the breath should be used, was repeatedly affirmed as the essential element in *bel canto* singing. Vocal pedagogue James Stark echoes the emphasis on breath while specifying the important factors that contribute to good singing. Stark attests that while posture and breath are important, "it is ultimately the way in which the breath is turned into a singing tone that is crucial" (92). Clearly, this oral tradition has not shifted significantly as the core concepts of the technique are maintained consistently through history, yet the embodiment of the technique remains desultory. The history of my endeavours to master *bel canto* technique determined that breath and the managing of it is essential in producing what was deemed to be a correct *bel canto* sound; however, what became most vital in my investigations was how this technique could be intertwined with approaches that may establish a significant kinesthetic connection. As Järviö observes, "[a] singer lives and works in her body or as her body, and senses the resistance offered by her body and by the world" (29). Working with my own unique living body, homing in on my own specific sensations, rather than attempting to fit my singing body in the shape of my teachers' through mimicry, became key.

Vocal pedagogue Jean Callaghan summarises what I have been led to argue should be a teacher's objective in *bel canto* training that of an engendering of sensation. It is, however, this constituent that is most often neglected: "Because many components of the vocal mechanism could not be seen, teaching relied on expert practitioners conveying experiential knowledge to students through demonstration and description of

the results to be achieved and of the accompanying sensations" (25). The void existing in the pedagogy is a direct result of the 'demonstration and description' mode of instruction that is the norm in *bel canto* training. I contend that what is lacking in the pedagogical strategies used in classical singing training are reliable methods to aid in realising the felt accompanying sensations.

My position is that negotiating a more sensate and kinesthetic awareness while training the voice in technical proficiencies can facilitate more skilled singing and allow a greater opportunity to access a deeper connection to emotional expressivity. Phillip B. Zarrilli describes the approach I was searching for in my classical voice training as one in which the actor "kinesthetically and mindfully attends to the texture/touch of voicing" (4), further emphasising the considerable shortcomings of the describe and demonstrate methods based in the discursive self-reflexivity of the classical voice studio. The type of kinesthetic awareness in dance training is de rigueur;

> [it] refers to a mode of intentional consciousness … which includes a number of elements, such as listening to the body's movements, problem solving with the body, a curiosity about bodily feelings in conversation with different choreographic and performative contexts, and various types of embodied translation processes, such as a dancer translating verbal descriptions, which are heard from a choreographer, into kinesthetic sensations in the dancer's attempts to match what the choreographer describes. (Ehrenberg 44)

Of most interest was the potentiality of using the body as the site to 'solve problems' in a singing context, moving beyond the more external and intellectualised mode of trying to negotiate technical requirements through a cerebral understanding.

Between Technique and Expression

Negotiating the divide between the technique required to sing *bel canto* and the depth of expression necessary to express what is crucial to the individual performer 'in the moment' is further impeded by the outmoded notion of the elusive nature of the voice pervading in the *bel canto* aesthetic. As Stark states: "[d]espite the best vocal training and the best understanding of musical styles, truly expressive singing is ultimately a matter of the heart and in this lies its mystery and its beauty" (188). This sentiment underlines how elusive the pedagogy is in relation to the integration of expressivity into the technical constituents of classical singing and further supports the frustration I felt in my studies. Moreover, Stark has termed the expressive power a trained singer is capable of as a "vocal aesthetic" (188) and outlines that besides the words of the text (which communicate meaning), there are properties including timbre, tone, flexibility, pitch, and onset that define the particular idiom of the classical vocal aesthetic while contributing to creating expressive vocalisation. This further demonstrates the complexity of teaching the essence of the 'expressive power' of the voice. In addition, it supports the exigency to develop methods that allow the singer to integrate all these properties to produce an emotionally connected vocal performance. This gap in the pedagogy corresponds directly with the dissatisfaction I felt as a student where the prevailing position, in relation to the integration of technical proficiency and emotional expressivity, could be reduced to the 'either you have it or you don't' school of thought.

It is important to note that I do not suggest that technique is wholly responsible for the inhibition of a free vocal expression, and I fully recognise that the consciousness of technique opens up space for the spontaneity of emotion to navigate in. However,

what became clear in my investigations was that, in my experience as a singer, I was often encumbered by the desire to be in control technically, making the spontaneous nature of an authentic vocal response and connection to the material extremely difficult. I consider the 'authentic voice' as an utterance free from self-judgment, capable of revealing the whole being of the person expressing. In the context of my vocal practice, established within the highly cultivated *bel canto* aesthetic, my research aimed to reveal how authenticity may be allowed to permeate through a classical singing practice while maintaining the integrity of the form.

As Musicologist and classical singer Nina Eidsheim attests the voice is "an accumulation of experiences which allows us to find and articulate individual agency within a structure that itself consists of many nuances" (*Voice as Action* 22). This further supports how all the properties of vocalisation may merge to express the totality of the self. The structure on which vocal expression is built must therefore support the expression rather than inhibit it.

Miller underlines the importance of merging technique and artistry in order to effectively express vocally through song; "traditional vocalism is based on efficient vocal production. Artistry cannot be realized without the technical means for its presentation. Systematic vocal technique and artistic expression are inseparable; they comprise all the structure of singing" (xvi). Although he is advocating that the two facets of singing be incorporated, by accentuating his claim that vocalism is based on efficiency and further emphasising that artistry requires technique, he also suggests that technique is non-negotiable, yet artistry is. Miller's claims do enforce, however, what I have identified as a

lack of systemised training for singers to learn how to effectively access a more profound artistic expression.

Influential voice and speech teacher, Kristen Linklater, speaks of the dichotomy of a voice encumbered by technical restraints and one free of such obstructions by describing the need for the performer to sense the voice dually, in order that it; "connects both inwardly and outwardly, and the depth of the art with which the voice is deployed by the actor depends on the depth to which it plunges internally in the creative process and the scope of its outward journey. Voice is air and vibration; it is infinitely malleable, transformable, and expressive" (*Thoughts* 2). I maintain that through this dual approach of the practical voice being "air and vibration" and the exploration of the actor's inner world, that a true convergence of technique and free expression may happen. This approach, while widely used in voice training for actors, remains a radical approach for singers.

I am confident that my teachers were striving to provide me with reliable technique; however, focusing on singing "without maladjustment' (205) of any kind (as Miller has suggested) has also resulted in a preoccupation with creating flawless or even perfect sounds. By highlighting the core aim of classical singing pedagogy as the production of aesthetically pleasing sound, what is ignored is sound which may fall outside of this systemic organisation. I argue that by integrating more spontaneous and less systematic forms of vocal expression with the more organised technical facets of vocality, the performer is better able to reveal the uniqueness of their self through their voice and feel free in their expression.

The established singers my teachers assigned me to study were often described as having a ‘free sound’. But what did that mean exactly? Celebrated British voice and speech coach Patsy Rodenburg defines a free voice as one that “can move and express every nuance of thought and feeling … [and] unmasks the words and the truth in a way that a tense or tight voice hides…” (21–22), which contrasts considerably with the *bel canto* view of voice as the production of beautiful sound through carefully cultivated technique.

The Body as Archive

Returning to the classical voice studio revealed that the acquisition of vocal technique as experiential knowledge relies on the negotiation of the actions of “the interiority of the body” (26), as Järviö has suggested. Yet, my experience underlined the lack of pedagogical strategies offered that situate the body as the primary site of knowing. A key aspect necessary for performers to access specific sounds and sensations that are capable of carrying emotional response is a more thoroughly embodied understanding of technique. Canadian theatre scholar Susan Bennett affirms this concept in her essay “3-D A/B” on autobiographical narrative in theatre, which discusses; “the signification of the body as archive, the literal vessel of a somatic history. The body archives a history that may or may not be of the performance narrative, explicitly or implicitly: it also enacts that history irrespective of the other constituents of performance and irrespective of the autobiographer’s intentions for it” (35). The lack of embodied methods, which promote a clear pathway to accessing the body as archive, impedes the performer’s ability to precipitate a visceral reaction or phenomenological response, thus inhibiting the

expression of the unique self. By considering the unique self as a repository of lived experiences, singing with a heightened awareness and gaining the ability to make contact with and use one's bodily knowledge can serve to realise more nuanced truthful expression.

Knowing through Our Senses

Identifying methods that may be useful in embodiment is further complicated when considering what Miller suggests is the "largely invisible nature of the vocal instrument" (211) giving vocal technique an elusive character and suggesting that this invisibleness may be an obstacle in our ability to use our voices effectively as performers. Performance researcher and director Eugenio Barba, however, maintains that the voice is inherently embodied: "[t]he body is the visible part of the voice, and one can see how and where the impulse which will become sound and speech is born. The voice is body— invisible body operating in space. There is no separation—no duality: voice and body" (*Theatre: Solitude* 73–74). This is further affirmed by Yvon Bonenfant who theorises in his article "Sound, Touch, the Felt Body and Emotion: Toward a Haptic Art of Voice" that sound corresponds closely to the sense of touch, or what he terms the "haptic voice" or "the voice that touches." He endorses the penetrability of the voice by asserting that "the perception of sound is therefore a physical experience." Bonenfant defines the sounds we make as "sonic symbols" that emblematise our inner selves through a specific type of touch made through sound. The vibrations of the performer's voice touch the bodies of the audience, who in turn have a physical response creating what he calls "a haptic form of dialogue" Bonenfant's vocal practice necessitates a

considerably developed relationship with kinaesthetic awareness, and with the "gestural qualities of vocal sound" ("Enskinning" 67). By focusing on the body as a site of knowing, the singer must learn to sense voice somatically, rather than 'just listening' to it.

Returning to *bel canto* lessons prompted me to consider the aspects of my body-based theatre training that would be most useful in addressing how to negotiate a more kinesthetic relationship in sung vocal expression. More specifically, it highlighted the need for methods that heighten the singer's sensory abilities in embodying the once extra-corporeal voice.

Reimagining My Vocal Practice

> [T]he enviable moment always arrives when we must leave the security of the old life in order to be able to create a new one. (Berberian 48)

In reimagining my vocal practice, influential theatre practitioner Jerzy Grotowski's theories on the connection between body and voice became especially relevant as he believed "[b]odily activity comes first, and then vocal expression" (151), thus maintaining the importance of a somatic vocal process when searching for authenticity in vocal expression. I became acutely aware of Grotowski's belief that an actor's failure to embody their voice fully leads to vocal strain, and I argue that it applies explicitly to the singing voice as well. This coincides with my struggle to negotiate the challenge of integrating technique and emotional connectivity to produce a sound that communicates "the acoustic, empirical, materiality of singular voices" (Cavarero 13). Authenticity in this context is defined as that which may transcend the technical proficiency that is required

to sing *bel canto* in order that one can access one's somatic archives and reveal the whole-self through vocal expression.

Vocal pedagogue Thomas Hemsley articulates how the integration of technique and 'the whole self' is lacking in singing pedagogy and underlines the necessity of considering a more holistic mind-body-voice connection suggesting the voice not be thought of as; "separate from the singer. ... Any form of training which forgets this essential difference, which tries to train the voice as if it were an instrument, an object to be played upon, must result in a form of singing which, divorced from its emotional origins, cannot have the same direct emotional appeal" (20). While Hemsley provides sound theoretical grounds for the need to better balance vocal production with emotionally infused expression, a clear methodology, through practical applications, is not fully realised.

Grotowski's practices, when applied to classical singing, can be useful in this regard. His methods are not taught as an independent vocal system, but as part of holistic actor training, encouraging the performer to consider the body as a fully holistic expressive instrument. In his seminal work *Towards a Poor Theatre*, he states: "[the most elementary fault, and that in most urgent need of correction, is the overstraining of the voice because one forgets to speak with the body" (85). I argue that this central theory applies equally to singing as it does to speech. While Grotowski's work, in his final period of creating work, was primarily with the speaking voice, he focused specifically on how the vibratory qualities of singing influenced bodily energy in the actor. Through this period, he contended that singing was the most effective exercise and that "the actor should sing at every opportunity; sing while driving, while doing the

dishes, cleaning the house or walking to class. Just sing" (quoted in Slowiak and Cuesta 156). What is significant, however, is that he explicitly specified that the actor should not study singing in a formal manner but, rather, just sing songs that have been learned by ear only (not through the study of a score) so as to fully experience and embody the piece from a vibratory perspective. Grotowski believed that singing may be most useful when "freed from the restrictive conditions that so many voice teachers place on it and when approached as a tool to challenge the body and to unblock its living impulses" (156). He was deconstructing the singing paradigm in a training context. The intention was not necessarily to discover general vocal freedom, or openness, or a 'good sound', but to instead aid in the discovery of the "song-body" (156), or a state where one does not know if "I am finding the song or if I am that song" (quoted in Slowiak and Cuesta 156). His reflections on the restrictive conditions that singing teachers create affirm my own experiences in the *bel canto* studio.

Physical States and the Breath

As I began to investigate how I might integrate a more somatic experiencing of singing into my process, I was led to scrutinise physical states that correspond to vocalising with a free and fully expressive voice. The common thread I identified was methods that centred the breath in the process. Just as Lamperti emphasised breath or *appoggio* as central in good singing technique, Hemsley describes the flow in sung vocal expression as one centred on the conscious merging of breath and impulse:

> it is this vital breath, not a bellows full of wind, that is the true source of vocal sound. It is to be transformed into art; this energy must be consciously

> channeled; the energy must become sound … Developing this impulse, tapping this energy, while maintaining the poise necessary for freedom of expression is, or should be, one of the first duties of any teacher of singing. (22)

Allowing this “vital breath” functioned not just a mechanism in producing sound but also served as a vehicle for truthful communication providing an authentic impulse or the moment where a “fusion of intention and action” (Callery 117) takes place. Similarly, Fitzmaurice recognised the breath as having “spiritual and transformative potential” (247), which runs counter to the more rigid rote-based breathing exercises, focused on muscularity, that I had experienced in my classical voice training.

Breath support is so vital in singing training that “chi sa respirare sa cantare” (Italian for “he who can breathe, can sing”) serves as a well know adage for voice teachers and students alike. However, the ‘impulse’ to tap into energy that Hemsley references is given far less attention. This energy, born in the breath and activated through impulse, dually incites the sound and the thought, making for more emotionally charged vocal expression.

Motivated by a desire to uncover how I could most effectively hone and access this energetic impulse, I again turned to my theatre training where I had first encountered the dance form Contact Improvisation and began to consider how it could be integrated into a vocal practice for this purpose.

Contact Improvisation

Created in the early 1970s by contemporary and experimental dancer and choreographer Steve Paxton, Contact Improvisation is a form of postmodern dance.

Influenced by Paxton's training in gymnastics and Aikido, Contact Improvisation first emerged as a way to help dancers develop movement skills based on the natural movements and mechanics of their own bodies. It has since become a dance technique in which points of physical contact between partners provide the starting point for movement improvisation and exploration.

What became most significant in the context of my investigations was the responsive nature of the practice. Spontaneity is key to the form. The reactive physical movements are not preplanned, and each participant must rely on a heightened reflexive awareness. The form, most often performed without music, centres on partnered explorations of falling, gravity, touch, momentum, and responsiveness and includes an intentional awareness of the breath. In the 1972 documentary, "Chute," Paxton explains a key element of Contact Improvisation: "for every action several equal and opposite reactions are possible" ("Chute Transcript" 16–17). In very simple terms, what Contact Improvisation is aiming to investigate is how it may work as a dialogue between performers, as each one reacts physically to the touch of the other.

In practice, the participant is invited to observe themselves without judgement and transcend their habitual reactions, fixed patterns, and ideas, contrasting markedly from the mode of practice centred on repetition and rote-learning that I had become accustomed to in my classical singing training. A core aim of Contact Improvisation is to develop somatic awareness by extending the possibilities of what an energetic response might be.

Centring on what Paxton describes as "touch events" ("Fall After Newton Transcript" 38), he frames these "events" as a means to create continually changing

relationships which blend into a “continuity of moving masses that create a logic reached only in the heat of the dance” (37–38). In other words, the work centres on the give and take of each person's touch or a “basic exchange of energy in which each person is both extending his feelings but is also receiving not unlike a handshake” (37). Spontaneity is implicit in the work, and kinesthetic awareness is an intrinsic factor which led me to consider how introducing physical touch into a singer’s process could address the challenges of working with the invisible and ephemeral voice to develop heightened reflexes and break habitual, rote-learned vocal responses?

Much like *bel canto*, Contact Improvisation is widely taught and practised yet is not formally codified. It relies on a sharing of knowledge through experiential means, where teachers offer various approaches to sensory preparation rather than setting movements to be strictly copied (Novack 154). Strategies towards enhancing internal sensing take precedence over consciously chosen bodily expression. The type of embodied self-reflexivity rooted in Contact Improvisation became a model for what I considered to be lacking in my classical voice training.

I was introduced to Contact Improvisation at the Banff Centre for The Arts in Canada while attending an International Voice Workshop with Richard Armstrong, one of the founding members of the vocally centred experimental theatre collective The Roy Hart Theatre. His workshops are highly physical and involve improvisational-based voicework that pushes the boundaries of traditional vocal technique. These workshops attract both actors and singers with various backgrounds from all over the world. Another student in Armstrong’s class, movement artist and educator K. J. Holmes, offered to do some physical explorations with me. We entered the contact work with the intention of

freeing up the body and the senses to make sound. At this point in the process, we were not being specific about the type of sounds we were seeking to make but rather allowing ourselves to be open to all sounds: spoken, sung, and anything that may fall in between. A short while in, after experimenting with spoken and sung improvised expression, I spontaneously began singing in a very 'loose' and improvisational way, an aria I had been working on called "Dido's Lament" (from *Dido and Aeneas* by Henry Purcell). We later went on to present our explorations to our colleagues in the course. My notes from that day's session reveal that the experience I had in performing the piece allowed me some of the vocal freedom I had been seeking. I write: "the sound that emerged was surprising and invigorating as I was able to make sounds which felt effortlessly free, even as I was dragged across the floor, lifted, and quite vigorously physically manipulated by K. J." (Holmes *Personal notes*). The following video documents one of our sessions. What is important to keep in mind is the improvisational nature of the exercise: there were no rules, and singing the correct pitches and rhythms — singing with correct technique — was not important.

Video documentation may be accessed via the link to VIDEO A in the Appendix.

Reviewing the video, I am able to identify that this intensely physical experience opened up the possibility for me to use my voice in a more fully embodied and spontaneous way. Allowing for "embodied existent, or rather, a 'being-there'" (Cavarero 173), the physicality of my voice is manifested through the sound as I was able to tap into a heightened state of internal awareness, which allowed the text, rhythms, and pitches in the score to emerge without overthinking their production. The resulting overall vocal sound is far from what would be considered a 'perfect' *bel canto* aesthetic

yet brings me closer to what I would argue is more truthful expression. Upon further analysis, I was able to unpack how the process evolved and see that what was evident was how the roles my partner and I assumed emerged spontaneously without a plan or 'script', resulting in a true improvisation.

As evidenced in the video, it is possible for one participant in a 'touch event' to become more physically active, yet that does not mean that the other is less consciously active or engaged. In exploring "Dido's Lament," it made sense to me in a purely instinctual way that Dido took on a more surrendered or physically passive role than my partner, and it was in these improvisations that we discovered that K. J. was in fact playing the role of Belinda, Dido's handmaiden. Each touch, or point of contact, acted as a significant catalyst for eliciting a response physically and vocally, some more externally (and therefore more easily visible to a witness or a video camera documenting the process). Bonenfant describes a similar experience that could serve as a useful description of our process: "Sensation can generate meaning, in that experiencing a sensation can attribute direction and desire to future impulses" ("Sound, Touch"). It was through the sensations we encountered in the improvisation that we came to realise — and give meaning to — our impulses by "delineating energies for which we don't have words" (Monk quoted in Marranca 57). Thus, by going beyond just the literal meaning of the text, we deepened the expression and emotional connectivity through the accompanying sounds. Additionally, although physical surrender on my part was the energetic impulse, this certainly was not reflected in the energetic and engaged vocal response.

K. J. and I entered into the experience (documented in the video) with little preconceived ideas of how it would unfold: it was purely improvisation by all accounts. In this particular session, I take on a very passive role physically, by moving at K. J'.s will as I vocalise the lament, while she takes on a physically active, but vocally passive, one (she does not sing). Reflecting afterwards, I was reminded that, in this particular scene in the opera, Dido is physically surrendering to death yet still has, emotionally, an unyielding need and desire to express. This was one of the intentions I was able to discover and embody through this exercise. With this in mind, my exploration became an exercise in trust as I gave up my physical will, and K. J. gave up her vocal will to decide how the lament would unfold. I was imposing narrative on her, and she was imposing physicality on me. I contest that the way in which K. J. manipulated my body became analogous to an instrument being played. As she moved my limbs and dragged my body through the space, I simply opened my mouth and sang.

The freedom I experienced vocally was the most profound result in this exercise. Engaging in the movement and using Contact Improvisational techniques enabled me to open to the responsivity of the body and sing with greater freedom. This contravened the *bel canto* teachings of the proper singer's posture of planting one's feet, standing upright (yet relaxed), and avoiding too many unnecessary physical movements lest they detract from the singing. Moving and being moved by K. J. supported my full expression through singing.

Technical Needs

Disconnection or blocked access to one's instrument is arguably one of the most significant issues affecting classical singers when they attempt to switch from singing in a purely technical way to connecting to the material on an emotional level. Just as in Contact Improvisation, where Paxton explains that "specific movements are unpredictable but take place in a knowable field of gravity, centrifugal force, support and dependancy…" ("Fall After Newton Transcript" 38), singing requires that the technique is the "knowable field" on which the performer can depend. As became clear in my process, certain elements of Contact Improvisation may lead to a resolve in the split between a need for greater freedom of vocal expression and a need for emotional connection to the material, by creating the conditions for what Paxton has called "the highest aesthetic ideal," and "a totally integrated body" ("Chute Transcript" 16). For singers, these conditions include the integration of technical proficiency and a heightened somatic awareness. My experience of Contact Improvisation has been proven most useful when I can trust, through increased awareness and sensitivity to my body, that my vocal technique will support me while I embark on a series of "touch events" with a partner. While engaged in these exercises, it is important not to worry about correctly singing pitches, rhythms, and text. To fully immerse oneself in the physical and temporal aspects of Contact Improvisation, one must momentarily let go of the need to focus or keep contact with the technical basis of singing. Doing so allows one to explore both the physiological and imagined places where emotion resides to be revealed and explored at the moment, which in turn allows feelings of freedom, responsiveness, and spontaneity to register on a somatic and visceral level. By

accessing these techniques, one can then return to performing the material in a more traditional context while maintaining the body memory of freedom, responsiveness, and spontaneity, thereby exploring where and how the balance of technical awareness and emotional connectivity can occur.

A key component of Paxton's theories of Contact Improvisation is that much of the physicality, senses, and reflexes the physical responses of the body to stimuli that may have been crucial to our survival at one time in our history are forgotten, or we have trained ourselves to disregard them over time. By exploring this physicality and reflex through Contact Improvisation, the actor/singer is asked to train their body to deal with the unpredictable, which is, arguably, the very thing that classical voice training seeks to avoid. Classical voice training teaches the vocalist to avoid the unpredictable through scales, *vocalises*, and intense rehearsal in which certain coordinated actions are developed to produce certain sounds. As Miller, echoing Paxton's "knowable field" explains; "[t]echnique in singing consists of establishing certain modes of procedure on which one can depend" (200). Negotiating the challenges inherent to classical singing — including range, flexibility, and facility of breath — requires an extraordinary amount of precision and control.

Influential speech teacher and acting coach Cicely Berry's theories on integrating speech and singing methods and using one to inform the other were ground-breaking; however, her theories were developed as a means to foster a greater understanding for actors to know and use their voices, and not necessarily intended to aid singers in finding a more profound emotional connection and greater freedom in expression. She speaks about how the challenge of negotiating the musical structure for singers can limit the ability of the

performer to fully commit emotionally, as there are many elements the brain needs to put in order. When asked in *American Theatre Magazine* to discuss the connection between speaking and singing, and the disparate approach to working with each, she is absolute:

> To me there isn't. Language actually comes from the need to speak a thought, and how each actor responds to that need differently. But when you are singing, although you are finding the truth of what you are singing, you have to honour certain notes at the same time, as well as certain timing, and that process is very different. Singing comes from the side of the brain that needs to put things in order. To speak a piece of text requires a great deal of understanding and imagination from the individual actor. I'm not saying singers don't have to have imagination, but in the end they have to honour the timing and the notes of the music. (quoted in Ellis 36)

Here, Berry acknowledges the challenges in a singer's process, including how to express words that are not theirs (the text). For classical singers there is, quite often, the added barrier of having to sing in a language other than their mother tongue, as well as following pitches and rhythms prescribed by the composer. This is where, I argue, a greater balance between the technical facets of vocal expression imparted to the student through a discursive self-reflexivity and an expanded capacity to somatically experience and connect to the material gained through an attention to embodied self-reflexivity, becomes key in uncovering a freer, more emotionally expressive voice.

By focusing on the sound of the voice, Berry argues the entire sung "message" (quoted in Ellis 36) of the performer is contained in the sound and the energy of the resonance, while contending that the actor's voice is an extension of his or herself, making

for more complex possibilities. In this thesis, I challenge Berry's suggestion that expressing with the singing voice is limited to the message being conveyed through the resonance of the voice, and instead argue that because the singer has the sound *and* the text to negotiate, the resulting expression is a more authentic extension of the self and reveals deeper and more complex possibilities. Hemsley supports this assertion in his description of how "voice" or "vocal sound" becomes singing: "For the purposes of the art of interpretation, one should consider not just 'voice,' or 'vocal sound,' but 'modifications of voice,' because it is these modifications of voice, directly resulting from variations of feeling and mood and character, that turn vocal sounds into music — which distinguish 'singing' from mere vocalization" (22). Thus, while I agree with Berry that it is important to "recognize the difference between training the voice for singing and training it for acting" (16), there is an absolute need to also find where these training methodologies can (and do) overlap and how each can inform the other practice.

As I had explicitly encountered, the singer can become encumbered by the desire to be so in control technically that the spontaneous nature of a truthful and authentic connection to the material at hand becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible. What became clear to me through praxis was that introducing somatically based improvisational practices, such as Contact Improvisation, into the rehearsal process could provide the possibility of honing one's artistic reflexes and energetic responses. Such practices can offer up the opportunity to open up the new and unknown in our bodies, training us on a somatic level to work with confusion. As Nancy Stark Smith, a key collaborator of Paxton's that was credited as a major influence in the development of Contact Improvisation, says: "as improvisation becomes chaos or

disorientation, it trains the reflexes to read confusion as a challenge, not a threat" (3). In the context of singing training, I would define reflexes as the responses of the interiority of the body and the way in which the singer can mobilise such reflexes into vocal expression. This practice constantly challenges "one's orientation … [to] where in the body the consciousness is positioned" (3), allowing the singer to sense the singing body more as a living, malleable entity rather than a less flexible instrument.

Stark Smith's theories are comparable to those of Bonenfant; "Sensation, or the perception of physical phenomena in the body, may or may not lead to the generation of emotion for emotion is at least some degree physical" ("Sound, Touch"). My experience of returning to the classical voice studio emphasised the gap that lies in a somatic experiencing of making sound. Singers are often trained to experience sound outside of their bodies and experience it aurally, while a potentially more useful technique would be to recognise and use the "physical phenomena" and respond reflexively as Paxton intended in Contact Improvisation: "While in contact we attend to our reflexes, which have been stimulated by the other's movements. Our reflexes move us, and this causes our partner to move. This cycle of movement responses is continuous and forms the basis of this dialogue (Paxton, "Drafting" 61).

These core tenets of Contact Improvisation — of accepting disorientation, chaos, and the feeling of being off balance — may be useful for singers who have spent considerable time training themselves to be more fully in control of their instruments. To deeply engage in and experience Contact Improvisation, participants must commit to a continuous process of finding and losing balance, yielding and resisting, and finding ways to cope with momentum and gravity. The student/vocalist is constantly shifting

between moving and being moved in a space that can feel somewhat unpredictable, and one which is predictable yet acts as the catalyst for response is human touch. This ability to orient one's self in chaos is a skill that lends itself well to any performing artist, but particularly to those, such as singers, who rely on carefully studied technique. As evidenced in the video documentation, by giving myself over to being dragged, lifted, rocked, and otherwise physically manipulated, I could accept disorientation as part of the process and surrender control of my bodily movements which, in turn, liberated my vocal expression.

Mind and Body

Contact Improvisation seeks to allow the participant to experience a depth of detail that only an intense exploration of reflex allows. I argue that it is the awakening of sensation and spontaneous reaction that gives the performer a sense of extended possibilities, moving from the physical and the emotional to vocal expression. The inclusion of more somatically based training modalities, such as this, is crucial in expanding the singer's capacity to connect emotionally and embody the material in which spontaneity and a heightened awareness of the body's responsivity can lead to freer, more authentic, and holistic expression. It is, therefore, an important tool for both student singers and professionals to fully reveal the ways in which the authentic expressive voice may be allowed to penetrate the trained voice by liberating it of the barriers that technique can pose. B. Hannah Rockwell's claims:

> [v]ocalizing — making one's inner life objective or 'real' for others — is one fundamental source of connection to others. Oral communication is a

> compelling material site for studying how bodies matter in communication because human voices are the ultimate locale for the mutual articulation of experiences of both mind and body expressed with thought and feeling, intellect and heart. A full range of human sensibilities are expressed through sound and silence. (12)

Her theory of voice as the vehicle by which human experience may be articulated clearly confirms that an embodied voice, one that releases us from vocal restraints, can be considered free, authentic, and most easily expressive of the person's true emotions. If a path is carved out, physically and consciously (Linklater and Slob 111), while building reliable vocal technique, that path can then be trusted. Space can thus be made for our inner life to be expressed by attending to our bodies as a site of knowing and communication; a place where our experiences become manifest through sound.

It is when the body and voice are united in expression, I argue, that the fullest, and most open and uninhibited expression is readily achieved and authentic expression made possible when merged with the technical requirements of the *bel canto* aesthetic. Rockwell's position that the voice is the "locale for mutual articulation of experiences of both mind and body" (12) can be further developed by considering the possibilities of the mind to be independent of body and vice versa. She further asserts that "bodies impose themselves into speaking practices" (13) and, in this way, the human experience is transformed into language. This is reinforced with the claim that "human subjects make themselves and their experiences 'real' for others is to talk, and mind and body ultimately collaborate to actualize (or make experiences 'real' for another) through speaking voices" (21). By applying Contact Improvisation, the 'point of contact' or 'touch

event' which precipitates a physical response works likewise in making the body 'real' and allowing for authentic communication.

Improvisation

The use of improvisation, where "a space of 'allowing' a type of openness that acknowledges an unknowingness" (McMullen 24) through the unplanned and spontaneous aspect of the exercise, was vital in my discovery of vocal freedom. In defining improvisation in relation to freeing vocal expression in classical voice, I am influenced primarily by the effects of, what Wong and Eidsheim term, "corporeal archeology" (217), or a use of embodied memory found through improvisation that defines somatic archiving and sheds light on how improvisation may help the performer mine their somatic archives:

> We perform memories, our own and those of others. My body and my bodily practices are partly molded by memories personal and cultural — which means that my body, my practices, are not wholly mine. To improvise, then, is to call on the resources of our bodies and catapult ourselves beyond the confines and capacities of our singular bodies. (217)

In Eidsheim's article "Sensing Voice. Materiality and the Lived Body in Singing and Listening Philosophy," she writes of what I would describe as a yielding of will and an allowing of the voice to 'take over', much like my experiences with K. J. In the article, Eidsheim gives an account of a performance by contemporary American soprano and performance artist Juliana Snapper, who engages in underwater singing practices as a means of challenging the limits of her voice, body and imagination. Through her work

she searches to disrupt her carefully learned and studied classical vocal technique or, as Eidsheim observes, Snapper unsettles the foundation of vocal technique that she has built:

> Through rigorous experimentation Snapper located the point at which she, as a singer, lost control, allowing her voice to take over as an autonomous, driven, and determined entity. Her own voice hastened her to places where her knowledge of singing and her artistic imagination could not take her. In other words, she discovered that allowing the physicality of her instrument, rather than prewritten instructions or preconceived ideas, to dictate the sound of her performance led her to new possibilities. (136)

Integrating Contact Improvisation with *bel canto* has permitted me the opportunity to discover a similar loss of control that has led me to experience my voice as an "autonomous, driven, and determined entity," where the tether of the technique could be significantly loosened.

Authentic Voice through Deviations of Technique

Miller suggests that *bel canto* technique is gained through measured repetition, "motor actions that are consistently repeatable," and further argues that it is through these actions that the singer may gain "psychological and physical control of performance" (3). While I agree with Miller's contention that "artistry can be only as complete as coordinated function permits" (5), it was in the disruption of the "coordinated function" that I found what I perceived to be "artistry" or a truthful expression in performance.

Arthur Lessac, a pioneer in body-based speech methods for actors, wrote about the need for the actor to develop habitual awareness, which he claimed was “an organic kind of voice training [that] can help liberate, through speech experience, abilities that lie immobilized in most of us” (4). As well, he categorically underscores the challenges that certain modes of learning technique impose on a performer: “If technique of voice and speech have been imposed by rote or mechanical drill, they will become even more mechanical or routine under pressure of stage performance; the technique will show” (233). My experience returning to *bel canto* lessons highlighted the contradiction that remains in the process towards freedom in expression. This divide dwells between the repetitive nature of the practice needed to develop the complex motor actions that ensure deviations from singing with a finely coordinated instrument do not happen and the possibility that these deviations may in fact provide a space that allows for a more authentic voice to be revealed through the practice. The constant struggle to balance these two constituents in performing vocality was, at times during my experience, a source of profound frustration; however, as Richard Armstrong affirms, this balance is a common obstacle for performers, as we “tend to favour one over the other. Sometimes a performance feels really bound by limitations … and then sometimes it slides too far into spontaneity and we don’t remember anything” (Armstrong, *Interview*). What I uncovered in this process was that gaining the perfect balance of technical management and the spontaneity needed to reach a level of freedom in expression was not only unattainable but what could be more useful was allowing myself to acquiesce to recognising the space between the two.

Integrating Contact Improvisation into my singing practice — and allowing it to exist in a state of flux between technique and spontaneity (as evidenced in the video documenting the explorations I initiated in the studio in Banff) — demonstrated that I could move more fluidly between the two constituents of singing (the technical requirements and spontaneous vocal expression) when they functioned concurrently, thus allowing space for contact with the elusive 'perfect balance' (Armstrong *Interview*), albeit momentarily, to occur.

CHAPTER THREE

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS PRACTICE TOWARDS VOCAL FREEDOM

> Censor the body, and you censor breath and speech at the same time.
>
> Write yourself. Your body must be heard. (Cixous 880)

When my findings on how assimilated embodied knowledge found through Contact Improvisation proved to be useful as a method for singers to better balance technical requirements and vocal expression rooted in self-reflexivity, an examination of the self as a process towards performance came to the forefront of my practice. The explorations with Contact Improvisation prompted me to define 'self' in the context of my vocal practice as the "feeling/sensing home of our being" (Madison 191) or, likewise, "the here and now self" (Heddon 27), which I characterise as drawing on the body as a site of knowing. Adriana Cavarero writes that "the voice subjectivizes the one who emits it" (177), and further that "[t]he voice belongs to the living; it communicates the presence of an existent in flesh and bone; it signals a throat, a particular body" (Ibid.). What became most useful in the context of my research was considering the self as a 'particular' lived body, which also serves as a repository of one's lived experiences. Whereas somatic vocal methods used in actor training (such as those of Linklater and Fitzmaurice) readily aim to "[produce] forms of identity through a notion of authentic selfhood in conjunction with the ideal of the natural voice" (Schlichter,"Un/Voicing" 3), the *bel canto* singing aesthetic requires "a highly refined use of laryngeal, respiratory, and articulatory muscles" (Stark xxi). Due to the mechanical rigour required to reach such an aesthetic, *bel canto* defies what we commonly consider a 'natural' voice. My definition of 'natural' voice agrees with Rodenburg's description as "an unblocked voice

that is unhampered by debilitating habits" (19). At the forefront of my research was the identification of a need to develop methods by which the 'natural voice' and the highly trained, refined vocality of *bel canto* could be merged allowing space for authentic expression to emerge.

This chapter outlines the autoethnographic practices I employed to centre the 'self' more specifically in the process and highlights the ways in which speech and sung expression may be integrated as a practice towards a more holistic approach to vocal expression. These methods were practiced within the context of my own performance practice and were integrated, as well, into my pedagogical approach in my capacity as an adjunct professor in the Theatre Department at Concordia University in Canada.

Self/Body

Focusing on the self as body as a site of knowing, touch, and sensation becomes central in generating meaning (Bonenfant, "Sound, Touch"). My attention turned to investigations that used embodied knowledge gained through the physical explorations of the self. From this work emerged methods that summoned autobiographical narrative and incorporated autoethnographic performance practices that led, ultimately, to the development of methods that integrate autobiographical narrative into the rehearsal of both classical and contemporary text, either sung or spoken.

Autoethnographic researcher Tami Spry has worked extensively with performative autoethnography and compares it to a CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (an American television drama) episode:

> It starts with a body, in a place, and in a time. The investigators analyse the body for evidence the body as evidence. But evidence, like experience, is not itself knowledge; like evidence, experience means nothing until it is interpreted until we interpret the body as evidence. For a performative autoethnographer, the critical stance of the performing body constitutes a praxis of evidence and analysis. (19)

A question that emerges as I place myself as autoethnographer is how does autoethnography differ from simply telling one's story? As Interdisciplinary scholar Carolyn Ellis, widely acknowledged as the originator of autoethnography, describes it;

> autoethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing. (quoted in Jones 10)

I began to approach my work with voice from an autoethnographic perspective by focusing my attention on heightening self-reflexive responses to reveal 'why' I was making sounds instead of being fixated on the technical 'how' of vocal expression. By deconstructing the material at hand — be it text, music, or both — and connecting it to my personal narrative, I have found that a deeper personal connection with the performance can be developed through praxis. Following my in-studio research, focused on embodied enquiry through Contact Improvisation as discussed in Chapter Two, I continued working, as Ellis has suggested, "consciously, emotionally, reflexively" to develop methods that could be used to expand my own capacity to somatically and

emotionally connect to the material and re-imagine these established forms. Through the integration of autoethnographic practices, I discuss how I came to access my voice in a more expressive, authentic, and holistic way. Integrating these methods became key in examining, what Spry calls, the "liminal spaces between experience and language, between the known and the unknown, between the somatic and semantic" (27). I define these liminal spaces, which Spry identifies, as the heightened transitional spaces where bodily sensations become language, and where remembered experiences shift in the body to become a vocal expression that contains a reverberation of personal truth. For example, while working with text or piece of music, a tightening in the chest may spark a recollection of a specific time, place, and feeling. If the performer can then focus on being present with that sensation, an utterance may follow that corresponds emotionally. This follows Spry's assertion that the liminal space may be the moment where the somatic, or that which relates to the body, becomes semantic, where those bodily sensations become language and logic.

Practised Vulnerability/Conscious Spontaneity

When examining my own practice, I became curious about what was contained in these liminal spaces. How could they inform my practice and provide me with a deeper understanding and connection to, what Spry has called, a "practiced vulnerability" (159). And, of course, how could I possibly access these spaces? It became clear in my investigations with Contact Improvisation that approaching the work with a sense of spontaneity, as well as a vulnerability, was key in advancing towards greater vocal freedom and emotional connection. Spry speaks of such a method as;

> a methodology of moving out of one's comfort zone of familiarity, a strategic surrendering into a space of risk, of uncomfortability, or uncertainty that one experiences when critically reflecting upon and then embodying one's own experience. Practiced vulnerability is a purposeful movement into the liminality the betwixt and the betweenness — of the critical, creative process of moving from person to persona. (167)

Spry's "practiced vulnerability" parallels what Armstrong calls "conscious spontaneity" (Armstrong, *Interview*). At the core of what Spry considers a state where the performer can strategically place themselves in a position where they feel uncomfortable in order to fully draw on personal experiences is what Armstrong calls "conscious spontaneity." He described it to me as the conscious representing of both the technical facets of expression and one's mortal limits, while spontaneity represents "the boundless nature of imagination" (*Interview*). According to Armstrong, when these two elements are combined, they make something new. However, as discussed in Chapter Two — in the context of the discovery of spontaneity through Contact Improvisation — as performers, we often tend to favour one of the two elements over the other, which can make a performance feel bound by physical, technical, or emotional limitations depending on the particular day. If a performance slides too far towards spontaneity, we may have difficulty remembering lines, the staging, or other technical elements, and when it is too far into the conscious, technique may render the performance mechanical or lacking emotional connection. So how does a performer know when they have reached a state of conscious spontaneity? Armstrong asserts that it will be felt or sensed by the

performer and adds that it is not something that is necessarily sustainable over an entire performance but “if one is lucky, they will have it for a few brief seconds” (*Interview*).

Finding a process for developing a conscious spontaneity in performance, for Armstrong, extends far beyond just an artistic studio practice. When he was a member of the Roy Hart Theatre, Hart would, on the day of a performance, vigorously quiz the company members on what they had done and eaten that day, and even went so far as to go into analysing the previous night’s dreams. Every part of being human became part of the performance experience. Hart would have the members of the group enter the performance space in their street clothes and shed them there onstage, either with or without an audience, creating a ritual around bringing one’s personal experience into the performance. For Armstrong, arriving at the theatre an hour or two beforehand to prepare for a performance, as is the custom with many performers, was not an option because everything experienced previously that day became, in fact, part of the preparation. Hart’s methods could be considered autoethnographic as he encouraged the performers to consider how they lived, thought, and moved through the world and to bring that all of that into their process as performers.

This examination, of the conscious and spontaneous, drew forth an important question in my research. How may a performer integrate this ‘practiced’ and ‘conscious’ (or what may be described or labelled as ‘technique’ or ‘control’) with the vulnerable or spontaneous state to reach a state that allows authentic vocal expression, free of inhibiting physical and emotional blocks yet established within the classical voice aesthetic. Armstrong speaks further about the dichotomy of technique and freedom, consciousness and spontaneous: “You can’t have freedom without discipline. You need

structures, but you've got to work them in such a way that they are not the main focus" (*A Vocal* 7). "Control and freedom are both independent *and* contradictory" (Kjeldson 46. Emphasis in original), and what became apparent was how the two need to be in constant negotiation rather than attempting to balance them.

In my practise as a performer (and most significantly as a classical singer), an emphasis is, as I discussed in Chapter Two, traditionally placed on reliable technique, and this is seen as paramount to one's ability to fully express the music and text. However, it is only when the technique is completely integrated into the process that I have found I can trust that the technique is in place and give way to experiencing each moment of performance from a more holistic perspective. A balancing of technical requirements and emotional connectivity is key. The consciousness of technique opens up space for the spontaneity of emotion. Just as Richard Miller contends that "the craft of singing music be placed on the background" while maintaining a firm connection with the "physical and temporal factors" (58), he also advocates for recognising and utilising the tension of technique and freedom as a tool. Miller joins Spry and Armstrong in advocating that the two be in contact with one another at all times.

Saul Kotzubei, Master Teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework® and son of its founder Catherine Fitzmaurice, alludes to a type of conscious spontaneity in his description of how performers may incorporate all of their given circumstances: the text, physical blocking of the scene, emotional states, and — in the case of singers — pitch and rhythm into a performance and the creation of a character. He describes it as "a way of expanding the flexibility of your imagination and the fluidity of your sense of self enough to be able to include almost anything you experience in the moment as part of the

character's experience" (quoted in Saklad 161). Kotzubei's explanation points to what is often an issue in performance: that of the performer entering into the process with a one-dimensional idea of a story. According to him, it is allowing everything they are feeling at the moment to be a part of the performance; they are opening themself up to a place of what is often referred to as vocal presence, or a state where the body and voice are alert and available to respond. Kotzubei defines vocal presence as "being present to what is happening and, with a sufficiently available voice communicate what is important at the moment" (162). There often seems to be an assumption that having a voice that is present and responsive may somehow correspond with 'sounding good', but, as Kotzubei maintains, it can "respond to the needs of the moment in a flexible, efficient way" (163). Kotzubei, explains that his theories stem from his mother's work on "opening the self as a basis for revelatory voice work" (161). This directly corresponds with the aim of autoethnography, which, as Ellis states, is how "we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do" (10). The whole being may be expressed through vocal expression, rather than an overly stylised and carefully prepared version.

Observing the Observer

Ellis' assertion that autoethnography "requires that we observe ourselves observing" and "challenges our own assumptions" (quoted in Jones 10) is in consonance with Fitzmaurice's theory of opening the self for revelatory voicework. Fitzmaurice's theory follows that we examine the possible reasons and causes of physical tensions and emotional inhibitions that could restrict free vocal expression, seeking balance in the

technical, somatic, and emotional. It should be noted, however, that in my own performance practice and that of my students, the opening of the self and self-observation can also become problematic. Being fixated on the sound one makes is a common issue when focusing on the voice and further conflicts with the challenge of the 'invisible voice', as discussed in Chapter Two.

Grotowski speaks further of the dilemma caused by the actor listening too carefully to their own voice and goes so far as to say that doing so may cause physical vocal damage: "once the actor begins to observe the instrument, the voice becomes forced and mechanical, the organic process is destroyed, and problems can be aggravated" (quoted in Slowiak and Cuesta 149). In response to this, Grotowski developed his resonator work.[5] Through these external places, the performer would engage with the external "echo" (149) produced and focus on the voice making contact instead of it remaining internal, therefore taking the emphasis off the need to internally analyse each sound.

In my search for methods to open the self, to interrogate what we think, believe, and know about our voices, I began to see — in students and in my own work — that, when speaking our own stories from a truthful place, vocal inhibitors — or physical and emotional blocks — became less problematic, allowing for a more accessible, responsive voice. Yielding to and adopting embodied memory into the practice may precipitate the sensation of having a 'free' voice. It brings to mind Bella Merlin's

[5] Grotowski identified twenty-four different resonators in the body and devised exercises wherein the sounds produced in the different resonators could be directed towards a specific external place; e.g., the wall for the chest resonator or the floor for the stomach resonator.

description of the integration of our own history and that of our performing selves in her description of psycho-physicality in actor training as a “continuum”; “[w]hat we’re doing in psycho-physical actor training is simply harnessing all those natural responses and channeling them into the artificial circumstances of the stage, so that, when we are playing a character the inner/outer dialogue takes place truthfully and simultaneously” (27). The “natural response” and the physical act of “channeling them into the artificial circumstances of the stage” is key in starting to understand how and why we develop habits that inhibit free vocal expression. This, in turn, allows a broader understanding of the liminal spaces between experience and language (182-83), that Spry describes.

Autoethnographic Rehearsal Practices

As a means to find a deeper personal connection to text — where the performer may discover a voice free from tension and tap into a spontaneous physical and vocal response to the material — Noah Drew developed an autoethnographic exercise he calls the ‘Pastiche Monologue’ for use in his voice classes at Concordia University. I have had the opportunity to use this exercise with second-year undergraduate theatre performance students on several occasions, and, in each instance, the outcomes supported the usefulness of intertwining autobiographical narrative with established text as a means to free vocal expression. In the exercise, the student must use a memorised monologue of their choice, have a personal story in mind that is strictly unscripted, and fragments of original self-scripted text written as transitions between the scripted monologue and the unscripted personal story. The directions for the exercise are as follows: [i]n both the text and the performance, these elements should be intertwined in

a way that makes it impossible for the audience to know where one ends and another begins; the goal is to create a unified theatrical piece from these three sources (Drew, *Syllabus*). The resulting performances given by the students generally demonstrated that, when the exercise was 'successful', it was very difficult for the audience to distinguish from the scripted text and the improvised personal story. The students reflected that they felt more connected as a whole to the text and that they were less preoccupied with using their voice in a technically correct way. They also reported that it felt easier to project their voices and access a wide range of sounds and vocal textures.

What was most significant was how the level of spontaneity, which came with telling the personal story in an improvised way, was transferred to the scripted text. This spontaneity manifested itself through a more consistent connection with the breath and resulted in vocal expression that was more fluid, employed a greater use of range and pitch, had a greater variety of resonance, and a general sense of the voice more fully embodied. Physically, what transpired was that the whole body was used to produce sound, and the students were not merely relying on their everyday use of voice, which, in my observations, can be generally under-supported, under-articulated, and narrow in its use of range and dynamics. What the students had been able to do was use their own personal narratives as a way to open up a somatic memory of certain emotions and, with a considerable amount of fluidity, transfer those memories to the scripted text.

It is important to note that an essential part of the process in devising the Pastiche Monologue is not overthinking the connection between the personal story and the scripted text. A fundamental step in the exercise is working with the text before memorising it and exploring it through a series of improvisational exercises. This

becomes key in the process as a tactic for overriding the very common tendency to over-think or be too clever in connecting the personal story to the scripted text, instead of allowing the text to inspire something on a more visceral level.

One of the most effective steps in the exercise proved to be one in which the student is prompted to choose a single word from the text on impulse and without thinking through the reasons for choosing that particular word. The chosen word is used as the basis of an improvisation, one in which the student is encouraged to play with the sound of the word and the sensation of expressing that word in a variety of different ways, both vocally and physically. This word and the sensations that emerge from the improvisation then become the inspiration or starting point for the personal story that the student will work with. What became clear was that when a student tried too earnestly to match their personal story to the meaning of the scripted text, the same spontaneity and embodied responsivity became inhibited. Consequently, the reflections of the students seem to suggest that when they were trying to make meaning from the text in a purely intellectual way, their voices tended to be less free and more restricted regarding expressivity. In contrast, when they were able to transfer the spontaneity and emotional connectivity of their personal stories to the text there was a more profound sense of connectivity.

This initial exploration of using just one word can be compared to what Stanislavski addresses as the ‘lure’ or that which “arouses experiencing” (Whyman 39), it is outlined as, “when the actor applies the system the subconscious will produce material and engender experiencing” (20). Drew’s exercise somewhat echoes Stanislavski’s Active Analysis by opening up and inspiring the unmemorised scripted text

for discovery and becoming useful for uncovering the motive and intentions of the characters they are developing. Beyond that, it is, however, the focus on guiding the students towards responsivity in breath, body, and voice where effectively using one's autobiographical narrative in voicework may become a useful tool. Where Drew's exercise differs from Stanislavski's emotion memory work is, perhaps, with the emphasis placed on the sensations of expressing the word and allowing that sensation to open up a viscerally stored memory. In this case, the word taken from the scripted text may act as a lure for the performer to activate a body memory. Theatre artist and former pupil of Grotowski Stephen Wangh describes exploring text this way as an opportunity to "see what happens if you allow the sound of your voice to play directly upon your feelings and memories … sensing sound as an emotive entity" (156).

This effort to make sense of the text intellectually and then connect to it on a somatically emotional level recalls the gap that Spry identified between our bodily experience of feeling and a signifier (203). One of the useful outcomes from Drew's Pastiche Monologue exercise, for students who are attempting to connect to text on a deeper and more visceral level, lies in what I observed as their ability to relate to language on a more somatic level. Movement specialist, and innovator of Embodied Practice Judith Koltai calls this "the language of experience": [t]he voice is an inherent organic aspect of being … the language of experience is first and foremost physical, spatial and sensory/kinesthetic" (5). Koltai reaffirms our need to connect to a visceral understanding of language with her description of how language evolved: "The origin of language is a bodily experience. Everything we know is ultimately based on our body sense. Language grew out of the need to communicate what we know/experience" (7).

The Pastiche exercise demonstrated that the gap between experience and language can be made considerably smaller by attending to a spontaneous and whole-body means of vocal expression.

Wangh, drawing on Grotowski, extends the discussion on the actor's need to learn to speak with the body. He relates how when an infant first makes sounds, in that moment the voice and body become one. Both are engaged to wail and babble. Language is being acquired "with the aid of her eyes and body" (151), and it is in that way that babies first learn to comprehend words. Wangh echoes Koltai's views on the embodiment of language, and our need to experience language somatically to understand it, just as in his description of how an infant first experiences language emphasising the connection to body, voice, and meaning leads to a physical experiencing and understanding. This may lend another layer of usefulness to Drew's exercise, as the students, through the improvisation of a single word, are led to physically experience the meaning of the text in contrast to speaking the word solely from a place of intellectual understanding. Wangh emphasises this point; "the meaning of the words is identical with the physical gesture they represent" (151). He asserts that the significance of somatic connectivity becomes even more overt when we are engaging with 'emotionally charged' language. He continues to demonstrate that we are conditioned socially as children to restrain ourselves from using physical gesture (i.e., we are taught not to grab our crotch and squirm while explaining "I need to pee!" but rather to politely raise our hand and ask to go to the bathroom), and he explains that it is through this process that we have lost our embodied connection to language:

> Through this process our words become utterly detached from their original visceral connections, so that by the time we are ready to study acting, we have thoroughly divorced our bodies and our emotions from our voices and words. Therefore, before we can demand open, expressive language from our voices, we must first exhume the ancient connections we have spent so many years diligently burying within ourselves. (Wangh 152)

My experience with the students reaffirmed both Wangh and Koltai's position that reconnecting to language on a visceral level opens possibilities to reveal sound as the "emotive entity" (Wangh 156) it can be. However, what became most meaningful in the context of this research was how connecting to one's autobiographical story through an autoethnographic lens shifting into a state of practiced vulnerability — not only becomes possible when the relationship to language is challenged, but also may be very effective in freeing the voice from technical restraints.

My aim has been to uncover how the spontaneous and vulnerable aspects in ourselves can often be revealed as the liminal spaces between the conscious and spontaneous, the practiced and the vulnerable, and how this may lead to vocal expression that is received by an audience and felt by the performer as truthful. An important question that continued to appear was how a performer might integrate this 'practiced' and 'conscious' (or what may be described or labelled as 'technique' or 'control') with the vulnerable or spontaneous state to reach a place of authentic vocal expression, free of inhibiting physical and/or emotional blocks. For the purposes of my research, I focused on physical tensions that impede the flow of breath. As voice

teacher and speech language therapist Christina Shewell observes “[a]cting and singing often use high levels of refined tension” (113) yet excess tension requires a release that “implies conscious action” (113). Berry describes it as “being relaxed but ready for action, alert but not tense” (22). What is clear is that any tension going beyond alertness will inhibit an open, available, and flexible vocal apparatus. It is important to also recognise emotional blocks or psychological barriers. I would define these as mind/thoughts which may suppress emotional connectivity. This could range from performance anxiety to confidence issues which may lead a performer to be under energised or similarly to push or use excessive effort.

Accessing the Body’s Archive

Returning to Bennet’s theories of the body as archive (as discussed in Chapter Two), I assert that using the body as an archive to draw a deeper connection to the material and expand the performer’s ability to relate to it somatically allows a more emotionally connected voice to emerge and may aid in overriding tensions that inhibits it. The task for the performer becomes having to find ways to allow the body to remember. Growtowski argues that “it is not that the body remembers. The body itself is memory. That which has to be done is the unblocking of body-memory” (quoted in Schechner 178). Analogous to this theory of our body as memory is French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theory that “we know not through our intellect but through our experience” (165). Grotowski further theorises on the body as archive, maintaining that the body stores memories and that, as performers, we can access these: “Memories are always physical reactions. It is our skin which has not forgotten,

our eyes which have not forgotten. What we have heard can still resound within us" (185–86). With this in mind, he placed great emphasis in his work on the importance of training our bodies, or instruments, as he preferred to refer to them, as a means of accessing these places of memory: "in our body-memory originate various points of departure. But because this organic base of body reaction is, in a certain sense, objective, if it is blocked during exercises, it will be blocked during performance, and it will also block all body memory's other departure points" (quoted in Slowiak and Cuestra 124). Grotowski's theories may be most useful for the performer who is searching for a more direct and practical means to connecting to somatic and body memory. This may be achieved by practically employing his method of physiologically determining where this connection to memory could be most actively found in the body.

It is clear that Grotowski believed that "all true reaction begins inside the body" (quoted in Slowiak and Cuestra 124), and he termed the area known as the coccyx — or the lower part of the spinal column — as *la croix* (the cross), and included the trunk, the pelvis, and the abdomen as the centre of where an impulse began. He called this "the sacrum-pelvis complex" (124) and developed exercises that centred on engaging and unblocking *la croix*. Similarly, the work Grotowski initiated on the 'sacrum-pelvis' is congruent to what Fitzmaurice describes as the 'focus line' in her article "Breathing is Meaning": "with the help on an imagined focus line travelling from the dynamic abdominal action on the out breath around the pelvis to the spine and up into and out from the 'third eye' area" (251).

What became apparent to me is that an embodied performance must include both the internal elements of vocal expression; thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and emotions —

experienced through the body while the external elements — voice, body, and space — must coalesce in a practical felt way and work together to create an embodied persona (Spry 189). By sensing the actions of the body, imagining the interior movement, and tracing the path by “see/feeling” (Fitzmaurice and Kotzubei) where memory and inspired breath becomes utterance, the singer’s process transcends being just a physiological mechanism. By recognising that “vocality is not an innate, given quality but the specific product of body and of mind’s direction of body” (Rutherford 118), the singer can make the invisible internal actions visible through the external utterance.

Entering into the process of freeing the voice from technical restraints requires working with a conscious reflectiveness. Being cognisant of the somatic and emotional experiencing while maintaining contact with the technical requirements — whether they be words spoken, pitches sung, or rhythm adhered to — is essential. Spry’s “internal/external dichotomy” (189) becomes key to understanding the liminal spaces; the spaces between the known and the unknown. Secondly, images and imagination, accessed through improvisation, are pivotal in allowing a broader understanding of the given text by accessing memory as a physical and vocal response.

A specific example of where I integrated this internal/external dichotomy and used it in my practice is demonstrated during a moment of performance of *The Crook of Your Arm*, where I reveal that my father had made the decision to place my mother in a hospital (I will discuss the impetus for including this moment in the piece later on in the chapter). At the moment where I say the word ‘hospital’, several factors come in to play at once; I relive the moment of my father telling me he was moving my mother into a hospital, and I have a visceral remembering of visiting her at the hospital for the first

time, recalling both the physical space and my emotional state. In the next moment, Megan plays a three-note descending scale mimicking a signal played over the public address system at the hospital (I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Four) in which she bends the final note by stretching the pitch so it slides down significantly distorting the sound. Allowing my response to emerge from a remembering of the hospital through both internal and external means allowed vocal expression that technically supported the classical singing aesthetic yet allowed for a voice, I argue, that was truthful in the moment. Kristen Linklater would describe this as "a voice in direct contact with the emotional impulse" (1); I characterise it, further, as embodied vocality. Here, the distance between personal experience and voiced response is removed.

Video documentation can be access via the link to VIDEO B in the Appendix.

I contend that, through this process, that particular moment of performance takes on what Bennett described a "strong claim to authenticity" (33). It was fully informed by my personal history, my lived experience of receiving that news from my father, visiting my mother for the first time, and the remembered emotions contained therein. As Heddon writes, "[c]reative practices are always informed by who we are, as subjects embodied in time and space, with our own cultures and histories" (*Autobiography* 7). Further, Spry relates what the autoethnographer's role is in performance: "In performative autoethnography, the researcher concentrates on the body as the site from which the story is generated by turning the internally somatic into the externally semantic" (63). Spry is contending that by allowing what is contained in the archive of the body (the "internally somatic"), what emerges is the language of experience (the "externally semantic"), or a means of outwardly expressing body memories or an

embodied knowledge of one's personal experience. She goes on to explain that "[e]mbodied knowledge is the somatic (the body's interaction with culture) represented through the semantic (language), a linguistic articulation, a telling, of what does and what does not go into the body" (63). In my practice, I extended her theory of the semantic to include the musical language of pitches and rhythm — as the internally somatic of my lived experiences were transmuted dually through musical and textual signifiers.

The challenge for the performer often becomes how to unite this internal and external while honouring what is contained in the liminal space between. As previously discussed in Chapter Two, in the context of the binding effects of technique, Linklater suggests it is the blending of the inward and outward, which may be understood as the physiological connection to Grotowski's *la croix*, Spry's internal/external dichotomy, and Fitzmaurice's focus line. The inward may function as a means to excavate lived memories contained in the body. As Järviö observes "[p]ractically everything that has come from the world into the body and has left its mark is potentially present at the moment of singing … Singing is the making audile of life in the now" (30). The ability for these memories to transform, through the liminal spaces, into vocal expression that contains the truth of memories becomes the outward expression. Classical singing technique, however, can become cumbersome in such a way that inhibits fluent transmutation of the internal to external expression.

The Extant Paradigm of Singing to Speech

My experience in teaching and performing both as an actor and a singer has revealed that there are very basic common physical responses felt when using the voice to sing or speak. The use of pitch, rhythm, and dynamics can be inherent in some classical spoken text, such as Shakespearean verse, where the meter is dictated but the pitch and dynamics are left to reader/speaker's interpretation. Contemporary text, while not as obvious in its structured use of rhythm, most often has a character's rhythm written into the text, leaving it for the actor to discover. Singers, of course, have all the technical variants of the material that are prescribed very clearly for them by the composer. Pitch, rhythm, and intensity (through the indicated dynamic marking) are laid out and expected to be followed. The quick on-and-off vowel sound in speaking contrasts with singing, where there is a much higher ratio of vowel sound that requires a longer phonation to produce the 'sung' quality. If we are to compare musculature, speaking and singing remain very much the same in terms of physiology and anatomy; however, there is less lung pressure used in speaking, and in order to create the more resonant sound and elongated vowels of singing, there is more use of supraglottic space (the upper space above the larynx and above the vocal folds). Theoretically, there is strong evidence to support the suggestion that one discipline may be useful in the training of the other, but without codified methods it remains conjecture. There is a need to acknowledge the level of disparity in the technical requirements required to produce a sung sound to a spoken sound.

The challenges singers face include; expressing words that are not theirs (the text), having to sing in a language other than their mother tongue (a frequently added

barrier for classical and opera singers in particular), and an adherence to the written pitches and rhythms prescribed by the composer. This is where a greater balance between the technical facets of vocal expression and an expanded capacity to somatically experience and connect to the material becomes key in uncovering a freer, emotionally expressive voice. The discursive self-reflexivity engrained in classical singing training must give way to embodied self-reflexivity in a singer's process in the pursuit of this balance. If one is to focus on the sound of the voice, in singing, the entire "message" (Berry 16) of the performer is contained in the sound and the energy of the resonance. It follows, then, that the actor's voice is an extension of themself, allowing for more complex possibilities.

I contest that expressing with the singing voice is limited to the message conveyed through vocal resonance and that, because the singer has the sound and the text to negotiate, the resulting expression provides opportunity for an authentic extension of the self. This can be attributed to increased opportunities for using a wider range of sound qualities to mine the performer's somatic archives and reveal deep and complex possibilities. The resonance used in singing is generally much broader, the pitches more extreme, and breath must be accessed in a far more extended manner. Hemsley supports this assertion in his description of how "voice" or "vocal sound" becomes singing: "For the purposes of the art of interpretation though, we should consider not just 'voice,' or 'vocal sound,' but 'modifications of voice,' because it is these modifications of voice, directly resulting from variations of feeling and mood and character, that turn vocal sounds into music — which distinguish 'singing' from mere vocalization" (22).

I have found, particularly in my teaching practice, that labelling the vocal act as either singing or speech can often decidedly hamper a student's ability to respond in an unrestricted way as the term 'singing' can carry significant weight. This often manifests in the singer's need to organise the response in a technical manner and anticipate the production of certain sounds; whereas, in speaking, the same needs, anticipations, and attendant anxieties do not generally predominate.

Authoethnography in Praxis

My initial investigations integrating autoethnographic methods into my practice as a means of finding a deeper emotional connection with the material I was working on was not intentional at first. I had not researched or studied autoethnography and was more broadly conducting in-studio research on incorporating somatic vocal methods into a classical vocal practice. It was in a residency at Panthéâtre in Paris, while engaging in work from the Royal Hart tradition, that I came to identify the work that emerged as autoethnographic. It was these explorations, rooted in autoethnographic performance, that ultimately resulted in the creation of the piece that was to become *The Crook of Your Arm*.

I initially chose the song "Je ne t'aime pas" (one of Weill's Cabaret songs with text written by the French poet and playwright Maurice Magre) for the explorations I was to undertake principally because it contains significant emotional depth and strong dramatic themes. As such, I determined it would make a good model for a dramatically compelling piece both text-wise, melodically, and harmonically. As well, I purposefully elected to choose a song that was in a language other than my mother tongue, in

pursuance of an emotional connection that might be gained when singing in a language in which I am not fully fluent. My process emerged through a deconstruction of the song's written text as well as the musical form through improvisation. Through this process, I was able to successfully develop techniques that allowed me to dive into the liminal spaces between experience and language and refine techniques that ultimately enabled me to discover greater vocal freedom.

The explorations with the song began in a workshop on voice in performance at Panthéâtre under the direction of Linda Wise. Her work orients profoundly with image, using improvisational and imagination-based techniques to help make visible the invisible voice. Wise describes her vision of the voice as that which "addresses the widest possible perspective on each person's individuality" (Wise, *Personal Interview*). Her work is described as a "dynamic blend of technical finesse and expressive risk in extended voice ranges" (Panthéâtre website). In the workshops, she directed collaborative explorations (I worked with Paris-based pianist Pierre-François Blanchard) into the material as we worked with the music and text in a very abstract way. Blanchard and I improvised repeatedly through the song and responded to the sounds the other was making to create a dialogue which did not rely solely on the written text. It was through this practice that I discovered how and why this improvisational relationship may be useful.

At the start, I committed to exploring the work very broadly. Very early in the process, however, my focus turned to how a specific image could open up possibilities for a theme or story to emerge, and, as it transpired, one of the initial images that emerged from our work precipitated what would become my final piece. We entered into

the work without a preconceived idea or direction in which to take it. The aim of these sessions was not to discover or uncover something in the text per se, but rather to take the thinking about the text and the literal meaning of the text out of the equation. Teacher of voice and movement Michael Lugering speaks of the need for performers to train in a way that releases one from thinking too fixedly about what one is doing: "[t]he fact of the matter is that our body can yield to the experience of the expressive action without the intellectual assistance. When this occurs a much simpler and primal type of actor training occurs that is rooted in the movement, sound and sensation, rather than predetermined analysis and deliberation" (21). Freeing myself of "predetermined analysis" allowed me to begin to feel how the pitches, sounds, and words felt in the body rather than trying to make meaning from them.

The improvisational work became challenging for me in two regards. Firstly, as a classically trained singer, I needed to let go of my deeply ingrained need to sing it correctly. Secondly, as a trained actor, it was difficult for me to not try to make literal meaning of the text. Working with a collaborator (Blanchard) became most useful in this regard, as I was forced to listen and respond, making it difficult to predetermine my next sound or movement if I wished to stay in the moment of the improvisation as well as in the relationship with my scene partner, the pianist. Slowly images and visceral emotional memories began to emerge. I experienced mirrored aspects of Stanislavski's sense memory work and, as my attention to how the sound of Blanchard's piano was 'touching me' deepened in turn, a space for emotion memory — emotions that were stored within myself — emerged. Mental images began to form, and felt emotions emanated through my physical and vocal gestures. However, this exploration contrasted to that of

Stanislavski's in a very significant way. I came to focus most on the physical sensations of my body rather than on emotional ones. I sensed the sound I was receiving from the piano and the sound I was responding with somatically, leading to the subsequent spontaneous expression of roused lived memories. Ultimately, tuning my attention to the visceral sensation of the sound I was producing became primary in the process of connecting to the song's text.

Attending to the somatic experience of a moment as it turns to utterance, is essential in freeing oneself from the tendency to 'over-think' in conjuring images that may be useful in accessing emotion through somatic experiencing,

Linklater uses imagery widely in her work with speech for actors and claims that, when approaching a text (particularly Shakespeare), it is imperative that the actor should observe the imagery, and then allow it to "play on your voice" (quoted in Saklad 195). Shewell, likewise suggests the importance and usefulness of the imagination in voicework and argues it is analogous to the evidence of the mind-body connection as seen through neuroscience (23). Fitzmaurice maintains that the use of imagery in her practice must include a corporeal sensing: "only thinking of the voice imagistically is insufficient; you've also got to be able to honour the anatomy and physiology" (quoted in Sakland 98). My practice emerged as an amalgam of these theories. My position remains that the performer must stay firmly connected with the actions of the body while activating the imaginative mind for the imagery to be useful. The place of imagery within the pedagogy, while prominent and necessary, must be presented as a component that remains specific to the student-singer and therefore needs to be allowed broad exploration. Strict considerations must be given to each individual's imagistic history and

frame of reference and what is. It is about the “live movement of the singers body” (Järviö 27) and what emerges from within it.

At the beginning of my explorations working in collaboration with Blanchard — under the direction of Wise — one image, in particular, stood out for me: a closing elevator door. I connected this image, very readily, to a specific personal experience (referenced earlier in the chapter), in which my ailing mother was admitted to a long-term care hospital. I live on the other side of the country and had flown in to help her settle into her new place. When I visited her, she was very confused and became upset when it was time for me to leave, as she did not understand why I was leaving her there. My bodily experience was one of sadness, guilt, and loss, and improvising through the song which repeats the phrase “Je ne t’aime pas” (which translates as “I don't love you”) opened up a raw, deeply felt place of experience. This became an extremely useful place from which to vocalise the text. The closing elevator door was persistent. The image returned through many improvisations. This particular image elicited a physical feeling of profundity, a darkness, a depth, a need to cry out, a loneliness, and a starkness that I was able to mobilise and divert into sounds that I perceived to emerge from deep within my body. My notes from the session indicate that I felt a resonating sensation in my pelvis, an opening that began in my pelvic floor region through to my solar plexus, chest, and throat; the body memory I experienced was that of wailing. It was not a specific incident of wailing that my body remembered, but a body memory of what it feels like to wail.

In subsequent rehearsals, I began to home in on more specific images and let them spin into more of a through-narrative. Although I did not, at this time, begin to

generate a specific text, a narrative was unravelling in my imagination. I did not try to direct the story in any sort of way and, instead, tried to let it unfold in a kind of organic manner.

Tying my personal story to the Weill song enabled me to take the mystery of vocalising out of the equation, as the generation of images allowed me to tap into my somatic history and my own experiences where my body and voice could 'remember' how I would respond in such an emotional state. It was this critical reflective movement through a given moment in my life that helped my piece take shape and which gave me a voice both literally and figuratively to tell this particular story. The French text became embodied in a way that felt closer to my personal experience, and I was able to navigate the technical challenges of singing Weill's music from an internal/external perspective, integrating the external technique with the internal emotion.

This work also served to address the invisibility of the voice. A broad range of practitioners of body-based speech methods use (to various degrees) imagery and metaphors in their pedagogy. Imagery can play a crucial role in allowing students to fully understand and assimilate information offered as well as function as a means to document a practice. Voice and speech coach Louis Colaianni advocates encouraging his students to find the images in parts of the body. He does this primarily by locating where the breath is felt (whether imagined or not) in the body, and suggests that this is where a performer may "register emotion" (quoted in Sakland 71), and the sensations, in turn, may be turned into language.

Grotowski used imagery in his work with the voice in a practical manner declaring "[o]ne must determine which images and associations produce, in a certain actor, the

‘opening’ of the vocal apparatus (resonators, larynx, etc.)” (*Towards* 165). As I began to identify how these methods, used in my acting training, could be integrated into my singing practice, locating where the breath may sit in the body as a means of inhabiting a particular experience became key. In turn, this allows the breath to direct the voice to respond, accordingly, to the emotion contained in the particular moment. Colaianni describes it as a process that “involves breath, deep relaxation, [and] being able to think imagistically. Letting words evoke strong images, which the actor can internalize. To be able to turn the whole body into an inner landscape and to be able to see images internally, and let them mingle with and be nurtured by the breath, and in turn let images emerge as words” (quoted in Sakland 71–72).

Collaborative Improvisation

While the collaborative improvisation work in the Panthéâtre studios with Blanchard was useful in urging a visceral responsiveness, it became particularly useful in taking the ‘thinking about’ out of the equation. It also promoted the emergence of the one image from which the entire personal narrative of *The Crook of Your Arm* ultimately emerged. In one of our sessions, Wise offered a strategy of letting the accompaniment be a partner — much like in Contact Improvisation, where each partner works to illicit a response from the other. Entering into the work Wise suggested that “[y]ou may experience where the piano really disturbs you and pushes you to areas of expression where you may not think you can go. That feeling, where someone is pushing all the buttons inside you — you have these moments of so much emotion that it just shuts you up or leads you to scream and cry” (*Interview*).

Similar to Wise's contention that having "all the buttons inside you" pushed can lead to an authentic response, Grotowski argues that in order to find "connection" in improvisation "one should begin with disconnection" ("Tu Es" 296). By using everything contained in the moment, and not trying to maintain connection solely with the person we are engaged with in the improvisation, but, taking into the experience all that is contained in that moment, we can open ourselves to a more truthful response. For example: a "jet plane passing over the work building … The sound of the engine is there. If you sing as if it is not, that means that you are not in harmony. You must find a sonic equilibrium with the jet plane, and against everything, anyway keep well your melody."(296) Grotowski claims that it is our overzealous desire to have a "positive connection" (296) by blocking out the parts of our experience deemed to be distracting or unimportant, that leads us to imposing ourselves on the work and on our collaborators, by searching too fixedly for contact. By 'disconnecting', we are able to incorporate all the circumstances of the moment (including those that 'disturb' us) towards expressing in a freer and more truthful way.

Employing the theories which I had been exploring in my research, through the integration of Contact Improvisation methods in a sonic context into a classical singer's process, I steered my practice towards deepening reflexive energetic responses through an internal corporeal sensing. Further, I included an investigation into how I could simultaneously remain receptive to the external sonic sensing required by receiving and responding to the sonic energy of the piano (and, ultimately, the cello as the piece moved into further iterations).The intent in this move, towards a more fully unified internal/external awareness of being, was the creation of dialogue.

"Such dialogues exist between sensations of activity and receptivity" (Novack 153), and I endeavoured to similarly create a sonic space that would permit the same sort of arena through which to build my perceptual skills and sensory awareness. Dance scholar Ann Cooper Albright defines this area between activity and receptivity as "a corporal space in which feeling allows for an interconnectedness with another person" (244), and I aimed to build the same capacity of interconnectedness through sound with the instrumental collaborators as I developed the piece.

Maintaining a special proximal relation to your collaborator is one of the primary principles of Contact Improvisation that intentionally leads to "spatial disorientation" (Albright 233). It can serve as a means to shift and rearrange how we, specifically as classical musicians, routinely approach performance (through a more rigid interpretation by always fully honouring the rhythm, pitches, and dynamics as prescribed in the material at hand) by accepting disorientation as a fundamental part of the improvisatory process. Instead of bracing against it (as I had found was my primary habitual tendency), we can view the process as a means of "training the reflexes to read confusion as a challenge not a threat" (Stark Smith 3).

A study published in Musical Performance Research in 2013 and conducted by Dolan et al. studied the impact on classical musicians in using an improvisatory approach to classical chamber music. It found a significant change in the way musicians related and responded to one another during performance if they were engaging in improvisation; "the musicians appeared to exhibit a kind of 'inner listening', both in terms of their awareness of compositional structure as well as their attunement to the other players and their musical input" (31). I concede that this "inner listening" and awareness

experienced by the musicians in this study correlates closely to the experience I constructed in rehearsal, first with Blanchard, and then subsequently with each of the cellists I worked with. It aligns closely with Paxton's definition of Contact Improvisation as "physical dialogues" ("About Contact") requiring the participants to listen and respond to each other in the moment. In my process, I was able to find moments where I could attune my voice to the piano or the cello, and my collaborator could likewise attune and respond to me. This manifested tonally as we experimented in finding moments of contact by inhabiting spaces along the harmonic continuum ranging from consonance to dissonance and all that lies in between. In doing this, we were able (at times) to get to a place of flow in our dialogue, precipitating a dynamic relationship and a mutual freedom in expression.

Passaggio

Pivotal in my findings working with Wise was confronting how my *bel canto* voice training had led to my habitual practice of singing in a 'lyrical' way with purely classical technique.[6] This was essentially blocking my ability to fully reveal what I considered my authentic self, as my early training was so ingrained physiologically that I would always respond when singing using refined classical technique. To respond using any other kind of method would require me consciously trying to use my vocal instrument to create a different sound. This was most evident in how I negotiated the *passaggio* or, as it is more commonly referred to, the break. The *passaggio* is the area of the voice where

[6] A lyric voice is defined by its warm, full yet bright sound. Lyric sopranos most often play the ingenue roles in Opera.

there is a transition from one register to another. The voice resonates more intensely in different areas of the body, for instance lower notes resonate more significantly in the chest and higher notes in the head. In *bel canto* training much time is spent in effectively smoothing over these transitional areas so that the timbre or quality of the vocal tone is as uniform as possible.

Jane Streeton and Philip Raymond cover the contentious issue of working through the break in their book *Singing on Stage: An Actor's Guide*: "It is akin to a switching of gears and sounds uneven. It is a notorious thorn in the side for many singers. This area can be the most vulnerable space and a great deal of emphasis is placed on mastering an even sound throughout to gain proficiency" (50). However difficult this area of the voice can be to negotiate, Wise indicates there is, perhaps, much that the performer can gain from this vulnerable place and that the "notorious thorn in the side", in terms of emotional connectivity, by exploring what is contained there, much like Spry's "liminal spaces" (27);

> There is often emotion where registers change. It is in these areas that the voice may begin to unbalance, to lose its centre, and a sense of vulnerability may often follow because the singer is no longer able to sense the space or feel the affirmation that comes when the voice is clear and strong. When we sing in a more classical mode, we don't go into this vulnerable place, for we are seeking a stable homogeneity in the voice. But literally, and metaphorically, there are bridge areas, vulnerable passages, changes of mode. When there is confidence, we can move right into them and explore their imaginative landscapes. (Wise, "Essay Voice" 77)

My realisation was that I was using my “classical mode” of singing as an emotional barrier. Stanislavski had previously theorised on the *passaggio*: “[w]hen you are vocalising and trying to get some transitional notes, always try to associate some psychological problems with your singing, so as not to sing bare notes, but note-thoughts” (*Stanislavsky on the Art* 268). His tactic was not to bridge the break, but to use it to add dramatic integrity, which contravenes the mechanical strategies I had been accustomed to employing.

This was an important step in my explorations into how loosening my grip on my technical skills may open myself to a broader emotional landscape. Miller states that “artistry cannot be realized without the technical means for its presentation” (xvi), and it is through this aesthetic lens that my practice as a vocalist was framed; however, my technical foundation was challenged during my sessions with Wise. I was struggling to break through to a deeper understanding and embodied connection to the song “Je ne t’aime pas,” but I was having great difficulty breaking free from my very carefully placed and technically sound singing voice. While Miller asserts that “systematic vocal technique an artistic expression are inseparable,” (xvi) my sense was that my “artistic expression” was not as fully truthful as I wanted it to be. I still had a strong preoccupation with the technical facets of vocal production. As an experienced singer, I was not fully obsessed with the production of each note, nor was I free of a running critique on the vocal expression I was engaged with. During a session, Wise told me: “don’t hide behind beautiful sound, be transparent” (*Interview*), which led me to experiment by singing the piece with a purely chest-led sound, focusing my resonance in my chest cavity and omitting any lyrical quality in my sound. As a singer I am

categorised as a ‘Lyric Colouratura Soprano’, singing with my chest voice forced me to forgo moving through my *passaggio* and, therefore, through the more vulnerable area in my voice, risking the wobble inherent in moving through this space with an aesthetic quality that matches that of a cry or wail.

Streeton and Raymond also recognise what may be useful for the singer working through the break: “[p]erhaps because of inherent tension, the areas of the voice around the bridges, especially the upper bridge, often carry a great deal of emotional expression in music” (249). By singing from a physical place that I experienced as being very alien, and abandoning my proficiently trained lyrical voice, both in sensations and sounds, for one that borders much closer to speech, I found a harder, grittier place from where to sing the song. Wise’s instruction to “not hide behind the beautiful sound” opened up a much more raw place emotionally, one that made me open up the possibility of revealing what is ‘ugly’. When speaking of emotions, we often use phrases like ‘holding it together’ and not ‘breaking down’. Singing in a more lyrical way, in fact can be extremely ‘held together’ and letting my voice wobble and ‘break’ was liberating and foreign at the same time. In the Hart tradition, these sounds would be called ‘broken’ sounds, and it was through these broken sounds that I found I was able to express in a way that felt more whole. It was not just my practiced and rehearsed self that was expressing but the sum of all my experience and history-self.

A specific moment in *The Crook of Your Arm* that serves as an example of how I exploited the act of revealing broken or ugly sounds happens midway through the piece. Just after I speak about my mother’s move into a long-term care facility, I reveal that the nurses have informed me I should never say goodbye to my mother as this is too

upsetting to her. While I intellectually understood, at this time, that the nurses communicated this to me as practical information deemed to help make my mother feel more secure in her new environment, I still responded emotionally with a deep sense of regret, guilt, and sadness. Due to the nature of my mother's disease, which progressed somewhat slowly over 10 years, she was beginning to lose her ability to recognise me at the time she was admitted into her new residence. At that moment, when the nurse told me that I should not say goodbye, I truly felt as if I had missed the chance to say goodbye to my mother as she was before she was ill and to the mother-daughter relationship we once shared. In that moment of performance, I allow myself to experience what Stanislavski would call "emotion memory" as I "live through" (Whyman 34) this specific moment of my own experience, and I allow the strong internal emotions rising viscerally to become momentum or "the lure" to fully inspire the transition from simply speaking my story to the more heightened action of singing, which requires a much broader and fuller use of vocal expression. My translation of the song's text is below.

Video documentation may be accessed via the link to Video C in the Appendix.

> Je n'ai pas pleuré, je n'ai pas souffert (I don't cry, I don't suffer)
> Ce n'était qu'un rêve et qu'une folie (This is not a dream of a bit of nothingness)
> Il me suffira que tes yeux soient clairs (It will be enough for me that your eyes are clear)
> Sans regret du soir, ni mélancolie (Without regrets in the evening or melancholy). (Weill lyrics as translated by Holmes)

As demonstrated in the video on the word ‘soir’, instead of singing the note as written (C5), I sing it, instead, an octave higher (C6). I aim at the onset of the note to sing it as I have been trained to do, with a strong sense of *appoggio* supporting the sound to produce a clear spinning tonal aesthetic. However, remaining connected to the true experiencing of the lived memories of that particular moment, I give way to an impulse that is firmly attached to the emotion and increase the intensity of the *appoggio*, adding what feels like sharper and more efforted expiration of the breath. The note, in an instant, goes from carefully placed to a harsh screech/scream more fully expressing through authentic voice, the totality of my emotional state including guilt, trauma, sadness, and regret.

Soprano and Performance Artist Diamanda Galás uses radically extended vocal expression as a means of challenging the restrictions language places on communicating meaning (Vosters 93). Her work explores the extremes of human experience and, despite being a classically trained singer and very capable of singing in the *bel canto* aesthetic, she is forthright in describing her practice as one in which she uses “voice in very ‘unattractive’ ways” (quoted in Chase and Ferrett 65). Some of the sounds Galás uses in performance include shreiks, growls, moans, and sighs, in addition to more conventional tonal expression as a means of fully exploring the edges of what a voice can do. Citing the voice as the instrument which is the most “malleable tonally” (66), she favours using extended vocal techniques to convey meaning through sonic manipulation believing the text can be better served through sound rather than semantics. In transcending traditional vocal expression Galás exposes “the underside of words through a technique of misshaping them, opening them out, extending them until

they are emptied of sense, eviscerated. Un-shaping is the ultimate aim. Galás guts meaning, turning words back into noise, making them guttural, giving the voice back its materiality" (60). My experience transmuting my carefully executed and aesthetically/stylistically conforming high C into the screech/scream likewise allowed me to "un-shape" the tonal quality of the note and in each performance, after moving through the experience of shifting from sung tone to screech, I was left feeling emptied emotionally, just as I had in the lived experience with my mother. Grotowski contends that "[t]he actor must exploit his voice in order to produce sounds and intonations that the spectator is incapable of reproducing or imitating" (*Towards* 147). I would challenge his assertions by suggesting that by experiencing the 'unnatural' sounds made by Galás or the perplexing transformation of the beautiful sung sound to the 'ugly' scream I employed, the audience may be able to recognise the possibility of these sounds living within themselves.

Everydayness to Free Vocal Expression

Spry describes performative autoethnography as "a continual critically reflective movement through one's everydayness" (201). I interpret her description of "everydayness" not so much as a quotidian or banal reflective movement, but as more of a personal reflection of any given moment in my own life in this context. These moments contain what could potentially be a multitude of sonic expressions including natural, unnatural, 'ugly', and the more refined sounds of the *bel canto* aesthetic. Berberian embraces the folding of the quotidian into vocal expression recognizing the inherent everydayness contained in voice: "Unlike the instrument, which can be locked up and

put away after use, the voice is something more than an instrument, precisely because it is inseparable from its interpreter. It lends itself to the numerous tasks of our daily lives continuously…" (Berberian 62). Singing from a place of "everydayness". I aimed to channel a living response, containing both the more cultivated aesthetic of my classical singing training and an authentic response rooted in a truthful emotional response.

This "reflective movement through my own everydayness" became key in my ability to free myself from the technical restraints that I routinely experienced when singing or speaking in performance. These restraints would hold me back from connecting to the material fully. Embodying the emotions freed me from the technical aspects of vocal production, making for a greater ease of expression that was still firmly connected emotionally. I did not forgo good vocal technique so much as surrender completely to vocal expression. I simply was not fixated on the technique. Tying my personal story to the Weill song enabled me to take the mystery of vocalising out of the equation by tapping into my somatic history and my own experiences where my body and voice could 'remember' how I would respond in such an emotional state. It was this critical reflective movement through a given moment in my life that helped my piece take shape and which gave me a voice both literally and figuratively to tell this particular story. The French text became embodied in a way that felt closer to my personal experience, and I was able to navigate the technical challenges of singing Weill's music from an internal/external perspective, integrating the external technique with the internal emotion.

Examining the liminal spaces — between singing and speech, technique and freedom, as well as the *passaggio* — elicited a fear and uncomfortableness. It was,

however, in those spaces that I was forced to stray from the comfortable confines of mechanical technique, on which I could depend, to a rich territory where excavating truth was possible. An examination of the whole self — including what Stanislavski calls "psychological problems"(268 *On The Art*) made singing in a mere technical fashion give way to expression through "note-thoughts" (268), resulting in truthful expression of my particular body and experiences. Employing autoethnographic practices became a process towards creating performance, as images emerged initiating the spark of a narrative (which I will discuss in Chapter Four); yet, concurrently, these practices developed as pedagogical strategies towards freeing the voice from the habitual tensions the mechanical rigour of classical voice training can trigger.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEVISING THAT WHAT LONGS FOR EXPRESSION

The previous chapter discussed how firmly positioning the 'self' in my vocal process as a classical singer, by integrating autoethnographic performance practices, led to the creation of more immediacy in the exploration and expression of the material at hand. This ultimately proved to be vital in the creative process of my devised piece. Inserting the experiences of the 'self' into my devising practice became explicit in the sense that I was weaving my experiences by way of inserting spoken narrative through the Weill song "Je ne t'aime pas", which functioned as a scaffolding for the story *The Crook of Your Arm*.

In this chapter, I will analyse how, in communicating my personal story, I fulfilled the development of a new kind of process in reaching an emotional connection which could be applied not only to the French text of the song but, more generally, to how the performer can be freed from inhibiting technical aspects of classical vocal technique. This chapter examines the process of devising *The Crook of Your Arm*, through an analysis of the critical threads of research explored throughout this process.

Four strands of research were identified as providing fuel for this process: the significance of responding to the need to communicate (Fitzmaurice and Kotzubei) by straddling spoken and sung expression, the adaptation of Kotzubei's "opening of the self 'as a basis for' revelatory voice work" (quoted in Saklad 161), the vital role the performer-audience relationship plays in freeing the voice from technical restraints (Armstrong, *Interview*; Govan et al.), and the significance of integrating spontaneity into the classical singer's process (Armstrong and Gould; Spry).The imperative that

sustained these specific threads emerged from an examination of how such processes, typically used in speech training for actors, could be adapted for singers and activated within performance creation. Through this, I established new performance methodologies alongside the creation of a specific performance.

As a classical singer pursuing a traditional career, I have not often been afforded many opportunities to take an active role in performance creation. Stepping into this new position of writer/creator has served as an essential step towards assuming a certain autonomy over my vocal expression. An overarching objective that extended over the entirety of my research, of particular consequence in this section, was the significance that working from a place of autonomy plays in the singer's ability to integrate technique and freedom in performance. As singer and academic Jessica Walker states;

> A singer's involvement in the creative process can lead to a more thoroughly embedded performance because of its emergence from autobiography and individual skills. This more embedded — or embodied — performance can give access to a greater freedom of expression in the act of singing. The new freedom is the result of a rigorous process; it is the combination of personal agency (which in itself has evolved through involvement in the creative-collaborative process) with surety of 'technique', acquired through repetition and refinement in rehearsal of the material. (173)

Walker's position that the personal agency of the singer in the creation of new performance creates the space for embodied performance to take place aligns with my findings of the vital need for the self to be rooted in the process of emotionally

connected vocal performance. However, my primary intention in creating evolved more specifically as praxis, using the act of making as a method towards free vocal expression rather than solely a mechanism of creating theatre. This follows the heuristic investigative model of self-discovery I had established in my process and supports Freeman's position on reflective practice as a means of understanding in which "[t]he processes undertaken in rehearsal makes space for the random to occur, and this in itself comprises a deliberate form. Work proceeds, thus, through a series of intentions rather than calculations" (101). I remained committed to allowing the process of making to be the container from which the ever-evolving praxis could be disseminated rather than have it function solely as a demonstration of a skill set.

Devising

The development and subsequent performances of *The Crook of Your Arm* had four iterations between August 2014 and June 2016. The first stage of development emerged during a Fitzmaurice teacher training 'Performance Module'. My aim in the course was to immerse myself in Fitzmaurice Voicework (FV) and develop further approaches to using speech-centred work in singing. FV was initially developed for actors as a holistic approach to the voice and emerged as a "synthesis of Catherine Fitzmaurice's classical (speech) technical voice training, her adaptations of other modalities and her own experiential insights" (Morrison et al. 339). Fitzmaurice has claimed that her method is an "open system … and demands that its community of practitioners … continue[s] to explore the gaps in knowledge about how the voice works" (quoted in Morgan 159). The work remains based on training the actor's voice, though a few practitioners have

adapted the work for the singing voice.[7] My unique experience with it proved that much of my classical voice training was readily adaptable within it and allowed me to address the particular gaps that I perceived in classical singing training (as outlined in Chapter Two) when fused into the Fitzmaurice system.

In the same manner that *bel canto* exists as a non-codified method (see Chapter Two), FV has yet to be codified, and it is this aspect of the methodology that aids in maintaining its effectiveness. Because of "the porosity of the Voicework [that] allows it to thrive in a constant state of discourse with itself and with other systems" (Morgan 159), the work readily accommodated my research objective of integrating various dance and actor somatic methods into my singing practice while remaining true to the *bel canto* aesthetic. A key tenet of FV is the commitment to provide a framework for each student to reveal their own unique personal path towards expression. While Catherine Fitzmaurice was a classically trained actor and her technical training plays a prominent role in her teaching, her inclusion of a wide range of other modalities played a pivotal role in her development of a fundamental practice central to her method called 'destructuring'. This practice includes specific physical exercises (some of which resemble adapted yoga positions) that help the student open "their involuntary impulses, release excess tension and increase a felt sense of flow" (Morrison et al. 341). My FV practice provided me with a motif in constructing the theoretical underpinning of the solo

[7] Joan Melton is a Master Teacher of Fitzmaurice Voicework and specialises in the integration of singing and voice for the actor, working predominantly in Musical Theatre. Her work is geared predominantly for the actor who has not had significant singing training rather than integrating speech-based exercises to balance the significant demands of classical voice technique in free vocal expression.

performance assignment in the course. The malleable aspects of FV, in which a multidisciplinary approach to voice is encouraged, are consistent with my desire to break the binding effects classical training has had on my voice practice.

The instructions in preparing the solo performance assignment were first and foremost to embody FV methods that give participants significant leeway in their creations. The piece was to be neither scripted nor completely improvised but was to have a definite framework. Some elements were specified as needing attention, these included: the performers need to "communicate what matters," demonstrate "healthy voicework," be present with her/himself, and allow the "fluidity of experience to be seen", be present to the physical space and the people in it, and allow the audience to "witness a range of your humanity" (Fitzmaurice and Kotzubei). In approaching the assignment, I decided to include "Je ne t'aime pas," as I had just previously explored it at Panthéâtre (as discussed in Chapter Three). My intention became to devise a piece with spoken text woven through it.

Considering my research objectives of investigating how body-based vocal methods used in speech training for actors can effectively be integrated into a singer's process, and function alongside the *bel canto* method to allow a singer full emotional expressivity in performance, I approached this assignment as an opportunity to create a platform to play in the spaces between speech and song. Although I had previously made emotional connections to the song at Panthéâtre, most significantly through work with imagery and linking the song with my mother's descent into Alzheimer's disease, I had not taken steps to create a piece of theatre from it, nor had I connected any words, narrative, or written text with it up to that point. My core aim entering into the process

was to remain responsive to an impulse by awakening a body-memory to become an impetus to respond vocally. Adhering to the assignment instructions with close attention to Fitzmaurice's theory of spontaneity as a pathway to "expression at its source prior to the shaping of consciousness" (Morgan 41), I roughly mapped out guideposts via biographical incidents (listed below). I intended to tell the story in such a way that I was communicating by allowing my "humanity to show moment-to-moment…" (Kotzubei quoted in Saklad 162). The outline below provided a scaffolding built on mine and my mother's story through which I intertwined the Weill song and my improvised narrative;

- begin to play piano and sing
- stumble repeatedly
- abandon the song
- "I want to talk about it" to the audience.
- "I never had the chance to say goodbye to my mother."
- tell the story of how when Mum got sick, Dad sold the house, got rid of their bed, moved into an apartment, got separate beds, moved into senior's home, got separate bedrooms, moved Mum into an extended care facility.
- use yoga mats and towels to represent my parent's bed, start with mats side by side as one bed, pull part to make two beds, drag one mat offstage when Mum gets put in the hospital,
- final line — "You're going the wrong way you ding-a-ling!"
- weave all of this through the singing of the song, allowing the impulse to dictate when I sing and when I speak text.

The outline functioned as a timeline of lived moments through which I could build the narrative of the piece in a way that allowed for the events to be expressed with enough structure to remain committed to telling that specific story, yet permit enough space for the spontaneous 'in-the-moment' expression of my humanity to be revealed. Intertwining the song through the narrative (supported by the outline) accommodated space for the heightened emotional medium of sung expression and further granted access to the fluidity of my lived experience to be communicated.

Determined to reject the commonly held belief of singing as "stylised communication … justified once speech is no longer sufficient" (Bean 167), my objective became to engage in a full investigation into how I may override the learned preoccupation I had with attending too rigidly to the technical requirements in singing. By attending to the space between speech and singing, I concluded that the most truthful response in the moment must be contained within the impulse to communicate. The impulse results in a vocal action that is comprised of "complicated physical components as a result of the human effort to communicate a fragment of one's life in all its complexity" (Fret quoted in MacPherson and Thomaidis 214). In acknowledging singing and speech each as justifiable modes of dramatic expression that can communicate the totality of one's life, my intention was for each to explore "different aspects of human behaviour … [which] may, therefore, require different modes of acting" (Williams 445). It follows that singing may be recognised as a form of expression which "moves towards the extremes of experience" (Ibid.). In my process, while I anticipated the need to express more extreme emotion through singing, I also remained dedicated to the

possibility of my impulses remaining in a state of flux between the two modes of expression.

As I entered the process of devising, by centralising the divide between spoken and sung expression, a memory of my mother's distinct sing-song way of speaking arose and became a decisive constituent in the creation of the piece. Before my mother became ill, she had unmistakable sung qualities in her speech patterns. She would use a wide range of pitches, elongate vowels (similar to sung expression), and her speech possessed distinct rhythmical qualities, much like a musical line. In addition, along with the musical characteristics her everyday speech contained, she frequently spoke with a multitude of idioms which furthered the heightened quality of her vocal expression. After I had established a basic improvised framework of the piece (as listed above), I endeavoured to augment the scaffolding around which I would weave the song and the improvised narrative by including some of the specific idioms. I aimed to use this as a tactic to more fully inhabit her vocalic expressivity by triggering a felt remembering of my physical response to these phrases.

This process began simply by making a list of all the idioms I could recall her using. These included "For crying out loud!", "What in the Sam Hill?", "Heavens to Betsy!" These expressions were very much a part of my everyday life growing up and speaking them brought up a strong bodily memory of my childhood. Once compiled, I experimented by speaking them out loud, doing what I would describe as a very broad 'impersonation' of my mother — exaggerating melodic and rhythmic characteristics until I created a very broad caricature-like version of her. My next step was to sing through the text of "Je ne t'aime pas" focusing on making emotional connections (as discussed in

my work with the song at Panthéâtre in Chapter Three). Once I felt sufficiently connected, I would then try to allow my mother's idioms to 'slip' into the sung phrases while attempting to maintain the established emotional contact. By trying these expressions on vocally, playing with pitch, rhythm, and tempo, I experienced, from a phenomenological position, how I may, through greater attention to an embodied self-reflexivity, inhabit the sounds my mother made, which in turn yielded a somatically-based emotional connection.

Experimenting in this way corresponds to composer and performance artist Laurie Anderson's use of voice. Anderson is deeply curious about the many voices and range of characters that we inhabit in our everyday life; "[e]veryone has at least twenty, bottom line at least twenty. They have their hail-a-cab voice, they have their interview voice, and their most intimate voice talking to their dearest loved ones on the phone, to name a few" (quoted in Zurbrugg 21). Anderson tries on different voices in her performances not only to facilitate her narrative but to infuse the text with a more embodied sense. Coining them "audio masks", these various voices provide "rhythmic undertow and variety" (Goldberg 155) to define characters — just as melody or text can — that become integral parts of her storytelling.

The exercises I developed became the base from which I could embody my mother's vocality by trying on an "audio mask" that resembled her and led to an opening of possibilities in inhabiting the counterpoint of emotions she may have felt at that particular point in her life when she was moving from her healthy, vibrant self to her ill self.

Video documentation may be accessed via the link to Video D in the Appendix.

The process of moving between the two modes of expression and the divergent spoken texts (the French text of the song and the remembered idioms of my mother) remained, from the first explorations through subsequent rehearsals and performances, fully open to improvisation (I never predetermined where I would switch from spoken to sung or song text to idiom), thus demanding a full commitment to sensing where the impulse to each action would lead me. It also provided me with a kind of tension as I attended to the liminal spaces between singing and speech, and the lucid and confused. Avant-garde vocalist, composer, and theatre artist Meredith Monk describes using a similar tension when working with various elements. She argues that form is initiated in how disciplines oppose each other in a kind of counterpoint or simultaneous contrast, rather than working in conjunction with another: “I try to create counterpoint with the different elements to make one larger whole” (42). Framing my piece using the contrapuntal convention of sung and spoken expression made way for investigations in how the divide between the two modes of vocality may be better bridged to promote a fuller range of expression.

Anderson is a pioneer in combining spoken word, sung text, and instrumental lines to create performances that “stir her audiences viscerally”; her melodies are inspired by ordinary everyday conversations and “the to and fro of argument” (Goldberg 11). Anderson’s attention to conversation and dialogue as well as her dedication to looking for regular rhythms in the ordinary everyday has allowed speech, singing, and instrumental lines to effectively merge and support the communication of the story. In describing her process, she stresses that she does not focus on producing precise notes and melody but rather on thoughts and emotion to move through the narrative: “[m]y

idea was, there would just be two or three thoughts in each piece. For example, it would move from observation, to doubt, to some other emotion. I was trying to make it almost like talking" (quoted in Kernohan). Anderson prioritises the need to communicate as a means of laying an emotional groundwork in her compositions. She pinpoints music and, particularly, sung expression out of all the disciplines she utilises to be the one that moves her emotionally and most profoundly: "[y]ou rarely see people crying in front of a painting" (quoted in Goldberg 22). As such, Anderson recognises the influence sung expression carries. I suggest that due to the full-bodied gesture that producing a sung sound requires (in contrast to the lesser physical effort required to produce an everyday spoken sound) a more profound visceral imprint is made. The breath is engaged in a much more encompassing way, pitch and range are extended, and a heightened energy is employed. While all these elements can and may come into play when speaking as well, applying the elements inherent in singing requires a much more concerted effort by the person making sound while speaking.

Utilising my mother's 'everyday' speech, which once leaned towards the heightened energy of classical singing, became useful in navigating the gap between 'everyday' conversational vocality and the heightened energy required in classical singing thus determining how the space between the two can be narrowed. Anderson's use of the conversational components of sung expression and the sung qualities in spoken text was influential in my own exploration in examining the liminal space between the two modes of expression. For Anderson, blurring the lines between singing and speech was significant in her motivation to reveal emotional connection in her expression. She contended that when the voice moved to singing from speaking, it

became “a very emotional experience to find where your spoken words become sung” (quoted in DeCurtis 163). Likewise, my findings suggest that moving between the sung phrases of the Weill song to the spoken idioms of my mother provided fertile emotional ground from which to vocalise.

The focus of my explorations into how to embody my mother’s vocality through an examination of the divide between singing and speech was analogous to Anderson’s intension of working from a “phenomenological view of the voice” (Kimbrough 253) to reveal emotional connection. While experimenting with the idioms, I explored the musical constituents of voice — including pitch, range, and tonalities — in two ways. With some, I placed a more cerebral remembering on the idioms, doing what would commonly be referred to as an impression of my mum. With others, I allowed an embodied phenomenological approach, allowing the words to rouse the experiences associated with them. I found that entering into the exercises through a more cerebral approach, utilising a form of mimesis, gave way, quite quickly, to a more phenomenological experiencing of the words. It acted as a form of ‘short-cut’ to a means of embodying a voice other than my own.

Defining impulse in the context of these explorations — using a combination of the internal somatic sensations generated from the pitch, dynamics, and placement of the sung vowels as impetus or stimulus to prompt my voice “to take over as an autonomous, driven, and determined entity” (Eidsheim, “Sensing Voice” 136) — brought in to focus my desire to pinpoint the elusive moment where sung expression could and would transmute to spoken. My rehearsal notes indicate I remained fixated on having a reliable definition of impulse from a corporeal position;

> How did I know when I ‘should’ flip to singing or vice versa — to speaking? Impulse. I would wait for the impulse. Moreover, what was this impulse? It is a surging of emotional energy — when I was speaking I would allow my vocal palette to gradually become much larger in terms of pitch, range, dynamics etc. — letting it grow — feeling wild and free until it kind of burst into singing. Going the other way — to singing — transitioning into speech was more difficult. I had the sensation of trying to contain this entity (the sung voice) It was bigger than the container I was trying to put it in (the spoken voice) — it was quite exhilarating in a way to have his unruly ‘thing’ (my voice) and trying to negotiate all the wildness contained in it so that it spoke rather than sang. (Holmes, *Personal*)

It was through the negotiating of the ‘wild’ sung voice — or that which is “at the limit of human capacity, bordering on the unnatural” (Grover-Friedlander 318) — with the more contained spoken voice, that I was most able to feel a connection to my mother’s essence. Her pre-illness everyday spoken voice stretched the boundaries of what is expected in conventional speech, and her use of the comical idioms only served to amplify the magnitude of her operatically inclined vocality.

The resulting vocal technique I came to use grew into something similar to *sprechgesang*, a technique most closely associated with composer Arnold Schoenberg’s (1879–1951) melodrama for solo voice and chamber orchestra, Pierrot Lunaire (1912). It was, however, also employed by composers Richard Wagner and Alan Berg (Griffiths). In the Preface to the Pierrot Lunaire score, Schoenberg specifies the characteristics between sung and spoken modes of expression; “the difference between a sung pitch

and a spoken pitch should be clear: a sung pitch is held and does not change, whereas a spoken pitch is intoned, then left by rising or falling in pitch" (Schoenberg quoted in Merrill and Larrouy-Maestri). In the vocal line, he "expanded and stretched the intonation patterns in speech, sometimes with deliberate exaggerations and distortions to form a unique and new type of melody" (Rapoport 77). While the realisation of employing *sprechgesang* remains problematic, partly because the pitch range of speaking voices is narrow, partly because there is no clear middle point between speech and song but rather a haze of alternatives" (Griffiths), I found the exercise of searching for the elusive "middle point between speech and song" instrumental in my practice. Fluctuating between the two modes of expression supported a deep attention to the somatic stimulus provoked by the act of vocalising. Where full singing could be experienced as "exaggerated or intensified; the voice seems to have a less mediated relationship to the body, perhaps because there is literally more body in the voice — more breath, more diaphragm muscles, a more open mouth" (Dunn 52). Spoken expression, while almost capable of taking on matching characteristics, falls short of being as equally intensified. Hemsley affirms the feeling I experienced of a "surging of emotional energy" that led the transition from speech to singing; "[t]he impulse to sing … not simply the wish to make sound … it is the overwhelming urge to express feelings … to realise emotion through vocal sound" (22).

By playing in this liminal space, between the two forms of expression, I found an ability to gain a closer hold on the emotional nuances of vocal expression. I would relate the sensation of moving between the sung and spoken voice to that of working through the *passaggio* (as discussed in Chapter Three). The precariousness of not knowing how

the voice (sung or spoken) will be realised (Will it crack? Will it wobble?) adds to the level of vulnerability felt in the moment. What became apparent was that, if I may allow, in the moment, that vulnerability to be present (instead of resisting it), a deeper emotional connection is not only possible but is palpable in the sound. If "[t]he operatic voice is an exercise in concentrated intensity, all the while imparting an impression of ease in its technically flawless, emotionally charged execution" (Grover-Friedlander 319), then my aim became to achieve greater tolerance in allowing the "concentrated intensity" to lead my voice as an autonomous entity, rather than concerning myself with being 'technically flawless'.

By employing a process of moving between sung and spoken expression, I sought to avoid over-analysing each response to circumvent the desire to predetermine the resultant sound. This allowed room for the sum of my experiences to filter through my body and be present in the moment of utterance, whether it be sung or spoken expression. By averting any tendency to consider the degree of weight each expressed emotion merited, or to reserve sung responses for extreme expression, I was able to be more fully invested in working with what Kotzubei describes as 'vocal presence'. By "being present to what is happening and, with a sufficiently available voice communicating what is important in the moment" (quoted in Saklad 162), I discovered a release from the habitual response to fixate on the technical requirements in making sound and subverted my tendency to hold too tightly to an exact idea of how it should sound.

Crucial in my process was having the form of the music and text firmly established in my consciousness relieving me of the need to 'think' about the pitches,

rhythm, or words and clearing space to engage with the material in a wider context through physical and emotional connections. As Odin Teatret actress Julia Varley describes; “the restriction of the fixed details has been transformed into an open source of unknown visions” (170). This allowed not only full experiencing of the material but a firm foundation that permitted me the freedom to slip between spoken and sung, divergent texts, opposing emotions, and the two languages.

Barba contests that it is in the experiencing that the “invisible ‘something’” (or that which he terms ‘subscore’) “breathes life into what the spectator sees” (“An Amulet” 127). According to Barba, the dialogue between the visible score (the music and text) and this invisible subscore is where the actor can experience an inner life (130). Varley provides hints as to what this invisible entity of the subscore may contain; “a set of images, a memory, personal associations, a certain quality of breath, a particular use of the body, a certain rhythm” (169). In developing *The Crook of Your Arm*, all these constituents (and more) not only contributed to ultimately breathing life into the performance but making contact with the subscore functioned as a means of generating material. In Chapter Three, I discussed how my work with images precipitated the specific memory of the elevator door, and I would contend that this correlates closely to how dwelling within the subscore facilities the devising process by opening space for images and associations to emerge. As Varley notes in her own creation process, the subscore can contain “references which during creation help find and fix the score” (171). Similarly, the spoken narrative which I was weaving through the song began to surface by way of my attention to it.

The hesitant, stuttered vocalisation leading to the words “I want to talk about it” at the beginning of the piece, is an example of narrative generated by attending to the associations emanating from the improvisational exercise with which I was engaging. As I improvised moving between the sung text of the Weill song and the idioms used by my mother, a sense of anxiety entered into the process as I began to feel fear at the prospect of publicly sharing this intimate story. However, I concurrently became aware of my desire to tell it. It was a story I longed to communicate, and the words “I want to talk about it” emerged. I made these words central to the piece by “transforming the response into a fixed, repeatable score” (Ledger 401). The focal point in my process transitioned to the exploration of this phrase, and I began by merely centering on negotiating the breath in various ways while speaking the words. Playing with the breath, by concentrating on the inspiration for and the expressing of, produced diverse ways of interrupting the process where “impulse and thought together as action” (Fitzmaurice 248) occurred. Specifically, by holding my breath in various moments of the process, I arrived at the resulting laboured, stuttered vocal expression.

Video documentation may be accessed via the link to VIDEO E in the Appendix.

Attending to the moment where I was suspended in the liminal space between breath and thought elicited a physical and emotional feeling of discomfort. My rehearsal notes reveal that this corresponded closely to what I was experiencing in my life at that specific time; namely, my response to my mother’s descent into her disease. Through this, I tapped into the struggle I was feeling in the literal need to “talk about it”. Mining my somatic archives, through a remembering of specific recent experiences in which I was trying to communicate with my parents about their situation, elicited painful emotion.

Acknowledging the trigger of emotion, I focused on the physical sensations that accompanied them and pinpointed the interruption of the breath as being vital in my ability to summon an embodied remembering of the lived experience.

Spry argues that “performative autoethnography is a narrative articulating how and why and what we think of a particular experience” (54), and Fitzmaurice indicates that breath is “the vital active ingredient for physical sound-making as well as for the expression of ideas” (248). Accordingly, I assert that centring breath in these investigations proved conducive to devising methods of vocally expressing experience.

Physicality

Searching for methods of further provoking images and associations on which to fortify the biographical events which made up the framework of the story, I chose to introduce mattresses, blankets, and pillows into the process, as beds figured prominently (from my perspective) in telling my parent’s story.[8] I used these objects in my explorations as catalysts to instigate physical engagement. By pushing and pulling the mattresses through the space while singing, I allowed the physical movements to manifest in the sung expression. The physical effort that I used significantly shifted my use of the active breath, and I focused on how I could maintain freedom in producing the sound while yet still allowing the struggle, frustration, and full-bodied effort to be evidenced in the sound. By coordinating the use of the objects and the physicality, Barba's work influenced me in that I did not intend the inclusion of the beds to be “illustrative, like mime, but [is] ‘real’ in

[8] In the in-class performance at the teacher training course, I used yoga mats and towels to represent the beds and blankets and, in later iterations of the show, added mattresses, blankets, and pillows.

that it must provoke a reaction in the musculature of the actor" (Ledger 40). The 'reaction caused' provided a way into inhabiting the chaos (physically, mentally, and vocally) that I imagined my mother to be experiencing as her disease took over, and it expanded my ability to both construct and communicate the story.

Video documentation may be accessed via the link to VIDEO F in the Appendix.

Recalling Lamperti's description of the optimal posture for singers (outlined in Chapter Two), the physicality I engage in at that moment of the show contravenes his suggestion that the body be "easy and unconstrained" (7). While I am not singing, I am using my voice in a heightened way, accessing my range, resonance, and a wide variety of tonal qualities that not only require immense physical energy, but the ability to vocalise freely without excess vocally inhibiting tension so as to avoid 'pushing' (a common vocal habit where the performer fails to utilise the breath in a way that supports the sound and 'pushes' too much breath, too quickly through the vocal folds). The physicality I was able to employ, I argue, worked in a way that could support the heightened quality of the sound. I found, through the actions of tension-release I engaged in, that the 'tension' became intentional as I purposely initiated it through the pushing of the beds, and the release of that tension likewise was intentional, as I fell onto the beds. This mode of physicality activated my whole body through the engaging of and releasing of muscles and allowed my voice to extend in range through my energetically activated body in a playful way. The vigour of this opening sequence functioned as a warm-up of sorts for the singing that came later in the piece waking my body/voice up to a more profound state of alertness.

The Audience-Performer Paradigm as Mode Towards Vocal Freedom

A crucial step in the process arrived when I first presented the piece for an audience. I argue that the need to express can be facilitated through the performer audience relationship as the performer homes in on communicating a full range of what they believe is vital at the moment (rather than merely presenting a skill set). According to Williams, this becomes difficult for opera singers in particular as "the immense physical effort demanded by such singing does not provide an ideal foundation for subtle characterisation, as it tends to encourage gestures that are sweeping and generalised rather than highly nuanced" (2). Interpreting Williams' theories of "gesture" to include vocal gesture, on a spectrum of vocality (from subtle to heightened expression), my findings indicate that, because I had the ability to trust the physical effort demanded by the technique to support my singing was intact, I could direct my energies towards engaging with the energetic tension between audience and my (performed) self. Therefore, a space for expression that embraces nuanced paralinguistic vocality could be granted.

The first performance of the piece was in front of an audience comprised of my peers and several master teachers in the FV teacher training programme. This experience revealed the significance of what having the work witnessed meant in the context of searching for a voice more fully embodied and freed from physical and psychological blocks. Master Fitzmaurice Voice Teacher Andrew Besler was one of the teachers on the course and his comments to me following my presentation — "I feel you were speaking privately to me. I feel you know something about me" (Belser quoted in my personal class notes, 2014) — reinforced what autobiographical performance

generally provokes in an audience, which can include placing “an emphasis on sharing intimacies with witnesses” (Govan, Nicholson, and Normington 61). Besler’s comments became particularly pertinent in the context of how this “sharing of intimacies”, speaking privately in a public arena, related most profoundly within the framework of connecting emotionally to the expressed thought and is significant considering its relation to singing in another language.

Armstrong emphasises the role the audience plays in a performer’s process: “students have an idea that performance is a battle to be overcome, you have to win your audience” (Armstrong, *Interview*). He adds that the performer and audience actually “play for each other”. Increasing the stakes by elevating the sense of vulnerability I was experiencing, telling this private story in a public forum became essential to the process. Govan, Nicholson, and Normington contend that in sharing with others what is usually considered private, a sort of tension is created that is “explored and even exploited for their theatrical effect” (62). This remained true in my process as I incorporated methods to negotiate being witnessed sharing that which is personal in such a way that could be useful in my practice.

The convention that I established in the presentation of the assignment — directly addressing the audience — is seen to be fundamental to autobiographical performance and had a profound effect on the level of vulnerability and depth of emotion that I was able to access. I was sharing something intensely private and personal with the audience and for myself, as the performer, this tension was not only palpable but became another layer with which to work. However, to speak directly to the audience is an opera convention that Stanislavski considered “one of the worst and most hampering

in the work of opera singers" *(Stanislavski on Opera* 59). To break this commonly used convention, he advocated for an "approach in art [that] is directed at an object. Every actor, like every human being, has some object towards which his thoughts, his attention, is drawn when he embarks on any creative work" (58) .While I would acknowledge the hampering effects this type of physicality has on the singer's ability to express freely, I argue for the effectiveness of another variation of playing directly to the audience. What Stanislavski describes as "hampering" corresponds to my experiences (as outlined in Chapter Two) on rigid physically and consequently stifled vocal expression, yet my new investigations diverged quite markedly from that. However, as Stanislavski suggests, by choosing to use the audience as an object to direct my attention towards, I was able to draw my attention towards creating the very useable line of attention from myself to the witnesses, opening up space in which the voice could function freely with a that which corresponded to Spry's "practiced vulnerability" (167) and Armstrong's "conscious spontaneity" (*Interview)*.

True to my intention of maintaining a clear sense of praxis in the trajectory of *The Crook of Your Arm*, the audience-performer relationship remained as a radically changeable entity as I presented the show in three different countries in four widely divergent contexts. These included an audience of peers in London, colleagues and family in Montréal, late-night performances in a relaxed setting for audiences in a festival in New York, as well as an audience made up of fellow students, the general public, and PhD examiners in Stratford-upon-Avon. Engaging in the audience-performer dynamic in each context became essential in maintaining spontaneity, physically and vocally. Varley describes tactics to keep the "score alive … creating new tasks within the performance

or to start[ing] up new processes which are independent of it" (174). I argue that such tasks correspond to each time I would have to shift my energy to communicate with each new audience with whom I shared my story. Entering into the run of six shows in New York, for example, I resolved to keep clear the motive of keeping the praxis of my research at the forefront. What this meant in the context of heuristic inquiry in my practice was that the PaR needed to continue to "move and transmute" (Freeman 101) through the performances. This creative fluidity would allow me to arrive at the end of each performance with a new understanding and further knowledge that could not be gained in any other way besides experiential. Most significantly, a longer run allowed me to more thoroughly investigate how the tension inherent between audience and performer may yield results in excavating a conscious spontaneity that engenders vocal freedom. In particular, it served to demonstrate how elusive the audience-performer tension can be. In sharing my personal story repeatedly over a series of performances, the sensation that I had been sharing a secret or an intimacy had diminished since my first performance in London, and I could not rely solely on just telling the story as a tactic towards maintaining an emotional connection.

Over the run in New York, I was able to unpack the struggle I experienced in maintaining contact with the vulnerability inherent in communicating personal aspects of oneself to an audience. I suggest that the over-attachment to the 'performed me' was an attempt on my part to assert a sense of agency over my story when, in fact, I found greater agency in acknowledging the performed me. As the creator and performer of an autobiographical piece, where vocality was the most prominent mode of expression, by exploring the space between the performed self and the performing self, as well as

acknowledging the tension between the two, became a method towards establishing a channel to authentic voicing.

Heddon recognises the duality of the performed self and argues that the liminal space between the two may hold useful energy that could potentially inform my performance: “[i]n performances of the ‘self’, there are always, necessarily, (at least) two selves on stage at any one time — the self that is performing, and the self that is performed. (Arguably, the space between one and other is both the place and result of the creative process)” (“Performing the Self”). I determined that I needed to shift from holding both the performed and the performer in my awareness and enter into a state, analogous to what Spry terms, in autoethnographic performance, the “embodiment of the performative I persona” (167). The resulting discovery led me to embody my own experience and the ‘in the moment’ lived experience of the performance simultaneously. I entered into the uncertain and uncomfortable space of vulnerability, yet I also maintained a flexible firmness in my awareness of the act of performing.

An example of the influence being firmly in the moment while being witnessed by an audience brought to my process is demonstrated in the video documentation from one of the New York performances.

Video documentation may be accessed via the link to VIDEO G in the Appendix.

The video reveals a moment that I document in my post-performance notes describing what I experienced as “heightened attention to the quiver in my voice and the trembling of my limbs that did not distract but provided me with a vibrant energy” (Holmes, personal notes). This specific instant of performance stood out for me because — as I

documented in my notes after the performance—I was acutely aware, at the exact moment just after I reveal that “I never had a chance to say goodbye to my mother”, the audience member sitting just in front of me shifted in his seat and took a sip of his beer. This did not distract me, I felt in the moment, rather, that I was fully receiving the energy from this one audience member. I felt his shifts as an uncomfortable reaction to the story I was revealing. It was palpable and vulnerable and led to the quivering and trembling that I experienced.

By attending to how this “quiver in my voice” and “trembling in my limbs” arose, an impulse was accessed to incite an emotional connection to the thoughts I was expressing in the moment, manifesting as authentic expression revealed through the *bel canto* technique. This is in contrast to what would have happened if I had been adhering to the more control-based awareness my classical singing training had instilled in me. I would have not allowed myself to notice the audience member, and if I did, I would have most likely tried my best to block out or ignore the energy for fear that it would distract me. This “vibrant energy” would have been denied and not be available to me, and would, instead, be something that I would possibly brace against, thereby inviting tension into my body as a means of stopping the quivers and trembling. The state I refer to in my notes, whether recognised by the audience or not, was an especially vulnerable space to sing from as it disrupted the space of physical control I had been trained to inhabit. As Miller describes, technique in singing is gained through measured repetition to become “motor actions that are consistently repeatable. This constitutes the psychological and physical control of performance” (3). While I agree with Miller’s contention that “artistry can be only as complete as coordinated function permits” (5), it

was in the disruption of the “coordinated function” that I found what I perceived to be “artistry” (5) allowing for authentic expression in performance. Lessac categorically underscores the challenges that specific modes of learning technique impose on a performer: “if technique of voice and speech have been imposed by rote or mechanical drill, they will become even more mechanical or routine under pressure of stage performance; the technique will show” (233). My experiences highlight this depth of struggle as, despite my very conscious application of specific techniques designed to combat this tendency, contending with ‘mechanical’ interpretation was an ongoing dilemma.

Holding space to be both ‘in the moment’ by remaining consciously aware of the here and now, while allowing the remembrance of lived experience to provoke an embodied response in performance, established a malleable process. This ensured that I was continuously working with a conscious spontaneity. I contend that without the tension caused by the audience-performer relationship, the vulnerability — so useful in this regard — would be challenging to attain.

Activating Somatic Methods in Performance Creation

The purpose in creating *The Crook of your Arm* was to activate the specific methods rooted in the somatic which had been part of my earlier foundational praxis. This, in turn, developed in the creation of a music theatre piece. Creating in the context of PaR meant that a plurality of intentions was in play concurrently; these were my specific research objectives combined with the task of making a performance piece. Following the position that performance work creates knowledge, my piece evolved in such a way that my

research questions functioned not only as a way to generate knowledge, but as an opening towards, or way of making space for, my findings to emerge as building blocks in the devising process.

My findings in this phase of my research uncovered further evidence to suggest that the adaptation of methods associated with disciplines other than singing, namely autoethnographic performance practices, can be useful in expression across the vocalic spectrum. Additionally, an examination of the spaces between the selves, the performed and the performer, informed an authentic expression allowed to move through the *bel canto* technique and capable of touching the edges of the self-perceived limits of what a voice is capable of expressing. Devising a music theatre piece, by means of deconstruction of an established form by weaving autobiographical narrative through it, was the synergetic product of these key investigations.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DISEMBODIED/EMBODIED VOICE

While I traced the trajectory of the devising process of *The Crook of Your Arm* in Chapter Four, one component of the piece that I have not yet discussed is the use of my mother's recorded voice during its development and the subsequent creation of the soundscape included in the final performances. This chapter documents how I utilised an intermedial approach towards the application of an outside-in method of inhabiting an emotionally connected voice. The techniques I discovered highlight how using the disembodied mediated voice can function as a catalyst to inhabiting a more fully embodied one. By directly confronting the voice as extra-corporeal and linking the notion that the sung voice "challenges human possibilities" (Cavarero 125), I introduced mediated voice to investigate how technology may encourage the voice to be released from its bodily constraints (Darroch 112) before re-inscribing it into the body as an expression of self. Key in negotiating these methods was examining the challenges in embodying my mother's post-illness voice, my search for approaches to "channel mediatised forms into an embodied form" (Parker-Starbuck 31), and the tertiary improvisations between myself, the cellist, and the soundscape.

Whose voice?

By weaving my autobiographical story through the Weill song, I layered my story and experiences — my self — into the text as a vehicle to apply the improvisational and autoethnograhic devising techniques I had been developing. In the book *Voices Made Flesh: Performing Women's Autobiography*, we are offered an explanation of the

challenges in embodying the self: “[i]n a sense, we could say that the writer-performer looks for surrogate selves in order to play out aspects of her personality and then gain insight into them” (Miller, Taylor, and Carver 154). While, in some sections of the piece, I sought to embody my mother’s voice, it was my story that I was seeking to tell. Immersing myself in the memories of my mother and the specific events surrounding her descent into her illness, through physical and sonic explorations, I found that the dividing line between her voice and mine became significantly blurred. Furthermore, my investigations revealed inherently complex issues in inhabiting her voice. The difficulty arose primarily in discerning which of my mother’s voices I needed to inhabit, her pre-illness voice (as discussed in Chapter Three) or her post-illness voice, and how I might negotiate using each. Her pre-illness voice seemed the most readily accessible to me, and I would describe it as somehow a part of my own vocal make up. “I’m beginning to sound like my mother”, a clichéd sentiment shared by many women, became especially meaningful in this regard: “The Mother’s voice contains a vocal patterning that, over time, the baby shall adopt. Her voice becomes the template — timbre, frequency, sense of time and metre, punctuation, and dialect. This becomes the model, the benchmark, and the norm” (Young 4). It follows that finding ways in which to inhabit my mother’s post-illness voice became more difficult. I could not rely on the ‘vocal patterning’ that I had absorbed as early as in-utero; her voice, as I had known it, had changed so significantly in such a relatively short time. Her new voice was limited in paralinguistic properties, lacking in variances of pitch, and possessing minimal resonance. This voice that I had once considered to be operatic on the spectrum of spoken vocal expressivity was lacking much in expressive qualities and the tactics I used in embodying her pre-

illness voice did not have the same effectiveness. The defining characteristics that were so obvious and easy to establish were now far less evident.

My initial aim in making an audio recording of my mother's voice was to analyse it in an attempt to make meaning of the seemingly nonsensical language she was using in the midst of her illness. My intention being to have the recording serve as a point of reference in my devising process. However, as I began listening to the recording through speakers in the studio, I determined it should become an integral element in the devising process. This experience opened up a heightened aural sensitivity to the subtle variances contained in my mother's vocalic expression and inspired a curiosity as to how I may receive this external and disembodied voice coming through the speakers, inscribe it into my body, and re-inscribe it as an embodied vocalic response.

Outside-In

Introducing the use of the mediated voice into my practice was a radical departure from the more inside-out approach of attending to the internal somatic sensations, transforming physical sensations into vocal expression as I had previously used in embodying my mother's pre-illness voice (as described in Chapter Four). The process of integrating a technological approach with the somatic I had been working with required that I find a way to reconcile my reluctance to accept that a voice filtered through a machine could approach the same level of authenticity that the live voice can. The dance scholar and contemporary phenomenologist Susan Kozel advocates for a more flexible means of working with these two elements that I perceived as opposing;

"if technology is regarded as abstract, logical and mechanical, and bodies are seen as organic matter only, then the two will be mutually hostile. But if bodies and technology are seen additionally as flows of energy or intensity or as fluid dynamics then there is ground for collaboration" (17). Determining how to access this flow of energy from the mediated voice to the live voice became key in the investigations of using the recording of my mother's voice to embody the disembodied.

Composer and vocalist Caroline Wilkins argues that the mediated voice may be useful in a process of embodiment: "[i]t is exactly this point of intersection with technology that enables further developments of the voice's phenomenal potential to take place" (121), and exploring the effectiveness of this intersection became a useful starting point in my line of inquiry.

Aesthetic inspiration also played into my decision to work with my mother's mediated voice after I attended a performance of French-Canadian theatre artist Marie Brassard's solo work *Peepshow*. Using "memory as both a dramaturgical device and reccurring theme in her work" (Halferty, "Me Talking" 29), Brassard's pieces often start from a personal and biographical place to which she adds mediated layers of sound and light to twist and distort the recalling of these memories. Technology is used (in *Peepshow*, the actress speaks into a microphone, and the amplified voice is then run through multi-effect processors) to manipulate and transform the solo performer's voice into a myriad of characters. Brassard has said that she seeks to achieve "mismatched body and spirit" (quoted in Halferty, "The Actor" 26) in her use of mediated voice; however, I felt my use of my mother's mediated voice served to challenge Brassard's intention of creating a divide between body and voice, as I sought to bridge that same

divide. In entering into the work with the recording and employing a form of mimesis, my aim was to explore how I could repurpose one of the fundamental elements in classical voice technique, that of using “motor actions that are consistently repeatable” (Miller 3). I attempted to replicate the melodic and rhythmic patterns I heard in my mother’s pre-illness voice in order to embody it, much as I had done in my explorations with the myriad of spoken idioms she used previously. This tactic, however, had minimal impact due to the lack of melodic and rhythmic components in her post-illness voice. I concluded that I needed to use her mediated voice in a way that would allow my body to become a conduit for the sounds of my mother coming through the speakers to allow her voice to filter through my body/voice instead of merely attempting to imitate them.

I was, however, intrigued by Brassard’s work with sound technologies, as they serve to “refocus our attention on the history of the relationship between the human voice and its live performance” (Darroch 113). My experience at the performance of *Peepshow* highlighted what I interpreted as a tension between a live body communicating intimate, personal narrative, and the mediated sound my body (as audience member) was receiving, which I perceived to be something other than that expected from a live body. The resulting sensation provoked by that tension was one which I would describe as disembodied-embodiment. It was somewhat unsettling to expect an embodied human sound to emerge from the person in front of me only to receive a digitally altered sound instead, and I saw this as significantly extending the actor’s vocalic capacity. As Darroch observes of Brassard, “[h]er theatre places the human voice at the centre of a synaesthetic experience, where digitally enhanced voices operate on a sonorous plane that mingles the meanings of human speech with other

sounds, images and tactile sensations" (114). Brassard sees the intervention of technology on the live voice as a natural extension of the human body and the normal capabilities of the human voice. My use of mediated interventions in the rehearsal process and ultimately in performance supported Brassard's intention of adapting technology as a means for extending the natural capabilities of the voice and using the resulting technique to encourage a more fully comprehensive use of vocalisation.

My first impression of Brassard's work indicated that her views on voice contrasted markedly from my own as she aimed towards separating body and voice, by disembodying the voice, filtering it electronically, and re-mediating it. The effect was that of a "mismatched spirit and body. As if spirits have chosen the 'wrong' body, or at least a very strange body, in order to express themselves in a very strange way" (quoted by Halferty, "The Actor" 27). Conversely, my experience with voice was based primarily in *bel canto* where the focus is on creating a pure and even tone; my aim was to find methods towards a more emotionally connected vocal expression through embodiment. What I discovered to be useful however was that Brassard's separation of body and voice allowed an examination of what lay between the two, opening up the possibility of discovering further layers of acoustical intimacy (Samur and Windeyer), textural nuances, and stimulating opportunities to creatively decant a voice deemed to be authentically engaged.

Playwright Alecky Blythe who is a pioneer of verbatim theatre, where people connected to a specific topic are interviewed and their words are used to construct a play, sees authenticity as the foundation for her work. For her, authenticity derives from the exact reproduction of recorded sound (and not just language) that is channelled and

embodied from documentary source material — through the actors — to the audience. In her work, she incorporates recordings of the voices of 'real' people in the rehearsal process as an essential means to shape performance to bring to the stage through the performer's body and voice "the aural material ingested through the ear" (quoted by Taylor 369). This attention to authenticity motivated an attempt to reach a similar state and understand what my mother may be experiencing through dementia and provided a space to fully embody her by means of imitation of the recording:

> At first, I said to my m-mother ah, is …
>
> I can't go over there anymore is ah,
>
> Is that black stuff around there?
>
> We've got to sit down!
>
> And she says all right you go ahead, and I'll bring you another
>
> one of those bingos, and they said, awwwww, no not them …

As I began to verbally explore her voice and words on the recording, ingesting sounds aurally, and responding to them orally through a form of mimesis, I came to more fully understand Brassard's theory of how working with technology created this conflict of body and spirit, and inspired a broader spectrum of sounds with which to work. This was manifested both in how I felt I was trying to imitate my mother's voice and by contemplating the visceral inscription made when my mother spoke to me in the moment of recording. Physically, she remained just as I remember her, her body intact but her mind and spirit (as I remembered them) gone.

This outside-in mode of investigation, mouthing the words while my mother's recorded voice was playing through speakers, provided a compelling tension much like

Brassard's "mismatched body and spirit" (quoted in Halferty, "The Actor" 26), which invoked an intense emotional response, precipitated, as Bonenfant has suggested, by a sonic encounter which became a physical experience ("Sound, Touch"). This became key in the exercise of allowing her mediated voice to penetrate and ultimately go beyond being merely an aural experience. Adding to this tension was my own imagining that a similar tension could possibly exist within my mother, as her mind, through the disease, began to betray her and disconnect her body and spirit. The exercise established that, by confronting the 'extra-corporeal' nature of voice by exploiting it through mediated practices, it is possible to find a means of accessing more embodied vocality or "utterance[s] not only of the mouth, throat and lungs but [on] the internal being" (Young 5). My mother's voice became a "more mysterious sound object when electronically manipulated…" (Young 5). I would describe the qualities of my mother's post-illness voice as mysterious; somewhat monotone, breathy with whispery tendencies, low pitches, limited range, creating a sound that makes it challenging to detect emotional cues typically expressed vocally. I received it as being somewhat nonhuman or ghostly and lacking in recognisable emotion. Finding ways to feel (as a performer) emotionally connected to it was challenging.

In developing the exercises, I mouthed the words with the recording to experience how the words felt in my body without fixating on the sounds. As such, I was able to focus on the corporeal sensations and let the sound of her voice penetrate to generate memory and emotion. It became, however, a very different sensation when I began to speak the words in mimesis, attempting to match my voice in pitch, timbre, rhythm, and tempo with the recording. The act of sounding allowed me to sense, conversely, an

inside-out embodiment of my mother. I focused on what my body-instrument needed to do to produce sounds that resembled the ones of my mother.

Bonenfant contends that “our bodies are vibrated by this sound, and the matter within us, at least to some extent must react” (“Sound, Touch”).The dual reaction of hearing my mother’s voice through speakers and simultaneously reproducing the sounds allowed an internal emotional memory to ‘react’ in a different way than it would have by experiencing the sounds through aural means only. I experienced these sounds in and through my body. Reviewing the video from the dress rehearsal, I can see how the act of producing sound invited my body to be engaged in a very tangible way. As an observer, I could see the voice in the body through distinct gestural ways, but what was most evident was the way the respiratory system was activated through a full engagement of the breath. I perceived movement in the torso and down into the pelvis to be specific to how I felt the vibration of resonance in those spaces. Linklater suggests that “together, breath and emotion create identity” (43), and I acknowledge that what I felt, albeit briefly, was a shift into assuming the identity of my mother. I was able to be more emotionally connected to the text by inhabiting her breath.

Video documentation may be accessed via the link to VIDEO H in the Appendix.

Soundscape

I was initially inspired to work towards the development of a soundscape by a BBC documentary by Victoria Derbyshire in which she provided a report about a simulator developed to recreate what dementia patients experience sensory-wise. Danny

Warboys[9] layered static and chaotic sound clips, as well as visual effects in the form of flickering lights over my mother's recorded voice, and I used the liveness and ephemeral qualities of my voice to further create a form of resistance between the live and mediated voice.

The entire section is documented in VIDEO H — indicated above on mediated voice.

I devised the soundscape to add the cello in the second repetition of the text of my mother speaking. When we began rehearsing this, before the addition of Warboy's soundscape, the intention was to add a cacophony of sound, representing the chaos and discord that I imagined my mother to be experiencing in her mind. In following Stanislavki's theory that singers are more fortunate than actors because "the music in effect becomes the emotional memory" (Carnicke and Rosen 123), I found that the cello, in consolidation with the soundscape, provided me with aural prompts and allowed for the mining of emotional memory. In turn, I was able to achieve a deeper connection to the text. Further, I allowed the mechanical sounds to inspire extended vocal sounds.

Motifs to Memory

Among these prompts were varying melodic motifs inspired by the recording and soundscape that were played acoustically on the cello which corresponded to specific points in the story. An example of one of the motifs Megan made contact with was a descending triad heard in the background of the recording of my mother. The sound — a three-note descending triad — is a code used in the hospital (as I discussed in Chapter

[9] Danny Warboys is the Stage Technologies Tutor and Production Manager in the Department of Drama and Theatre Arts at the University of Birmingham.

Three) my mother lives in to signal staff. Megan replicates this on her cello and then distorts it precisely at the moment in the piece where I reveal that my father has decided to put my mother into a hospital. These motifs and Megan's engagement with them became tactics to introduce the soundscape into the process of working in mimesis with my mother's voice. By mimicking (and at times attempting an exact reproduction and the subsequent distortion of it) some of the sounds she heard in Warboy's soundscape, we were using a process of filtering what we were experiencing aurally through body, voice, and cello. This became a dialogue much like touch events in Contact Improvisation used in a dual context but now expanded to include my mother's voice as well as the cacophony of sounds filtered through the theatre speakers. Through this process, not only were we able to read the subtleties of each other's embodied dynamic responses but also receive and react to the disembodied, mediated sounds.

The progression I ultimately used in performance, using the recording of my mother's voice and the soundscape, proceeded as follows:

- start simply with my mother's recorded voice sounding through the speakers,
- begin to mouth her words, then vocalise a mimesis of her voice,
- the cello enters,
- focus on allowing the sounds of my mother's voice, the soundscape, and the cello to concurrently stir an emotional response which in turn spurs an impulse to propel physical movement and engage with the mattress,

- allow the movement to instigate extended vocalisation (broadly playing with pitch, tone, texture) over my mother's voice, - layer Warboys' soundscape over all of it and build in dynamic intensity to
  a cacophony of sound and movement as I wrestle with the beds until a climax of sound and physical struggle is reached at which point the soundscape and cello stop,
- collapse into silence and stillness on the mattresses.

My intention in devising this section was to show how the friction contained in the space between the liveness of the voice, the cello, and the mediated voice of my mother could contribute to finding a more embodied place to inhabit her in performance.

Disembodied/Embodied Findings

Filtering my mother's voice through a machine and making it both disembodied and embodied demonstrated the effectiveness of using the body to simultaneously receive a mediated voice and filter the seemingly disembodied experiences through my performing body. In doing so, I could transcend the experience of what I perceived as a lack of emotional connection in my mother's voice as she spoke those words to me and uncover traces of meaning. Upon first listening to the recording, her words were nonsensical, almost gibberish, but hearing them back through the machine, and especially with the understanding I had gained on the sensory differences of dementia patients, I was struck by how much meaning they contained: "I can't go over there anymore…" "Is that black stuff around there?" Listening to the mumbled and almost whispered vocalisation of my mother's voice amplified through the speakers allowed me

to receive her voice in a way that I was not fully able to in person, and the nuances of her utterances gave insight to linguistic meaning.

My mother's altered voice, through the soundscape, opened new possibilities in the physical responses I was experiencing and the interpretation of these vocal responses: "[t]hrough digital speech manipulation, the human body is revealed as a site of inscription, coupling vocality with variable identities" (Darroch 113). As the words became somatically inscribed, I could access these "sites of inscription" and respond with a broader and deeper sonic palette. The range of sounds with which I improvised through each run of the performance varied widely, but I was consistently able to access my voice to include what I experienced as a heightened and expansive field of vocal expression in flux between spoken and sung, firmly established in the technical, while free from its restraints, and inhabiting a space between myself as performer and my performed self.

Working with the mediated voice and the soundscape provided an essential opportunity in my process of finding methods to realise methods that may allow a yielding of technique to authenticity in the performed voice. As well, the recording of my mother's voice and the soundscape both provided vital insight into diverse ways of negotiating the representation of my mother's experience in performance for both myself and the cellist. Critical in my findings was how, by moving away from myself to encounter another self (my mother), a more profound vocalic experiencing was made possible. This approach not only served to open up my body-voice to a broader mode of expression but moved beyond being just an exercise to crucial in the devising process of *The Crook of Your Arm*.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Through my PaR, I established methods that addressed the challenges classical singers face in negotiating the potential intersection between *bel canto* technique and what I have deemed a freer vocal expression. By insisting upon a disruption of the dividing line between singing and speech, I developed methods to reveal the 'unique being' of the performer and prioritised an examination of the self as a means of excavating phenomenological experience. What proved fundamental to these investigations was how a performer can remain both 'in the moment' and responsive to a living impulse, and true to the *bel canto* performance aesthetic.

By inciting embodied self-reflexivity in the singer's process, my investigation challenged the prevailing notion in *bel canto* training that the voice exists as extra-corporeal. My methods thus destabilised the prevailing idea that "vocal interpretation [is] replaced by vocal mechanisation" (Helfgot and Beeman 11) by examining how performers might more effectively negotiate the coordinated mechanics necessary to gain technical mastery while also allowing for spontaneous expression. By developing a heightened awareness of the emotional impulse, I established practices that facilitate expressive interpretation within technical proficiency. Encouraging a more sensate approach to sung expression through an embodied self-reflexivity allows the student-singer to move beyond the practice of discursive self-reflexivity embedded in the pedagogical approaches of the *bel canto* method. Placing myself as both the observer and the observed in the investigations was fundamental in employing autoethnography as reflective PaR. Maintaining what Spry identifies as a "continual critically reflective

movement through one's everydayness" (201) allows the performer to surrender to an embodied expression where somatic history containing personal experiences are revealed through vocal expression and supports the ability to override fixedness of technical vocal production. The praxis informed the heuristic process through which the research was conducted as I examined my performer/teacher/scholar self and my personal experience training and performing across the disciplines of music, theatre, and dance. So, while the above problematics initiated my inquiry, they also remained at its centre.

In my development of methods that integrated the more sensory-based actor training methods, such as those of Linklater, Fitzmaurice, and Roy Hart, with the more mechanically based *bel canto* technique, I aimed to create a singing practice where the 'living person' manifests through sung expression, fully revealing the singer's persona or 'person who sounds'. The process, implemented through PaR, commenced as an investigation into the gaps in singer training that I recognised as limiting the possibilities of the singer-actor's ability to engage as a performer in a thoroughly artistic capacity and grew exponentially to include crucial insights into the significance of interdisciplinary approaches in classical singing pedagogy while accentuating the relevance of the self in the singers process. By underscoring the ability of the voice to carry humanness, as Cavaero has suggested, the resulting split between a voice capable of freely expressing a broad range of emotion and one bound by technique can be more readily bridged. Stanislavski is forthright in his assessment of the repercussions created when singers lack kinaesthetic awareness in their acting skills: "[v]ocal, sound-producing, machines are of no use to either the public or to culture; what we want is living people, singing

artists" (*Stanislavsky on the Art* 268). The making of *The Crook of Your Arm* demonstrated that the infusion of my personal narrative into established musical and textual forms could initiate new modes of practice, in which my living self could become manifest through sung expression.

Research Progress

In order to examine the status quo, Chapter Two examined my history as a classical singer through a first-person narrative of my recent experience of returning to *bel canto* singing lessons after years of practising as an interdisciplinary artist. I examined the influence my training in body-based, somatic, vocal methods (encountered in my actor training) had in establishing a more holistic approach in my practice as a classical singer based on a mode of discursive self-reflexivity. This precipitated the investigations into bridging the divide between the measured coordination required to master the highly refined technique of classical singing and the spontaneity and heightened awareness of the body's responsivity needed to access a more profound depth of emotional connectivity to express musical and textual nuances effectively. At this stage, the most vital discovery was the usefulness of Contact Improvisation as a method to connect more deeply with the material at hand. Using an adaptation of the improvisatory dance method, I experimented by locating a signifier (a piece of text or musical note) as an impulse in the body through 'touch events'. Inspired by Bonenfant's theories of bodily sensation as a generator for emotion ("Sound, Touch"), I further extended that impulse into embodied sung expression in order to deepen emotional connectivity. By manifesting felt sensations into sound, relying on a practice, based in embodied self-

reflexivity, I explored how the classical singer may communicate energies that cannot be expressed through the literal interpretation of the text and designated pitches in a score alone.

Intertwining both physical and musical improvisation into the highly structured confines of classical singing technique allowed me to loosen my learned dependence on the technical requirements of singing. By disrupting the mechanical facets of singing technique through the spontaneity of improvisation, I could allow my voice to be an autonomous entity, capable of expressing beyond my preconceived limits. The video documentation from the initial explorations undertaken at The Banff Centre demonstrate a turning point in my practice, where I uncovered an ability to access what I have called my 'somatic archives' using a self-reflexive vocal process towards embodied expression.

The most significant teaching principle arising from this phase of my research offers exercises derived from modified Contact Improvisation (as demonstrated in Video A , and described pp. 33-36). The student-singer, after establishing the givens of the form of the material at hand (pitch, rhythm and text) may then explore the material with an experienced physical improviser which will allow for a somatic examination of the liminal space between technical requirements and spontaneous vocal expression. Ultimately, the core aim is to experience a yielding of will or an acquiescing to the learned response of control inherent in the *bel canto* tradition.

The research progressed to examine how embodied knowledge gained through lived experience became central in my investigations of freeing the voice from technical restraints (Chapter Three). Extending the work with bodily sensation, and further motivated by Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological insights into the body as a site of

knowledge, I adapted autoethnographic performance practices for use from a vocal perspective. Spry's suggestion that a researcher may move from the experience she carries in her body — the somatic — to the "linguistic representation of that knowledge" (183) — the semantic — became pivotal in this regard. By inhabiting the liminal space between the somatic and the semantic, I thus developed modes of practice that aided a breaking free from learned habit; namely, that of entering into singing with a predetermined analysis of a particular desired sound. By substituting the 'touch event' of Contact Improvisation with the 'haptic voice', I could allow the body both to be penetrated by sound and respond to it spontaneously. Crucially, the resulting expression yielded to sensation rather than relying on careful intellectual analysis.

As the practical research developed as a holistic process, aspects of Hart's work, experienced with Linda Wise at Panthéâtre, evoked visceral memories. Echoing Stanislavski's sense memory work, the collaborative improvisations with the pianist became useful in working within the internal/external dichotomy of vocal expression. By attending to the ways in which the external sound of the piano affected me — viscerally penetrating my body — I examined how the internal spontaneous expression initiated by those felt sensations grew into voiced expression. Grotowski's theories of body as memory served to reinforce the significance of enabling access to one's somatic archive of remembered experiences as a source for sound. Working across the mind/body divide in the context of *bel canto* training opened possibilities to move beyond using the voice merely as an instrument to facilitating vocal expression that more fully revealed the uniqueness of the singer.

Inhabiting liminal spaces continued as a theme as I uncovered further spaces (beyond those between the somatic and semantic), that became essential threads in my PaR. Examining the space between the conscious and spontaneous was vital in establishing more fully authentic, or that free from self-judgement, connection to the 'in-the-moment' emotional response. Cultivating what Spry defined as "practiced vulnerability" (167) and similarly what Armstrong termed "conscious spontaneity" (*Interview*) opened up the opportunity to shed the rigidity of the carefully constructed technique I had come to rely upon. I achieved this by examining ways in which a performer may more effectively negotiate the security of singing with technical mastery while remaining emotionally available in a way that is vulnerable and spontaneous in performance.

Confronting my deeply ingrained desire to habitually cover up and control the *passaggio*, identified as the liminal space between my upper and lower registers, and typically an area of the voice that can feel unstable, was vital in accessing a more complete self. Improvising the song "Je ne t'aime pas", with Wise guiding me to let go of my need to stabilise pitches and control the sound, gave way to a means of allowing authentic expression to infiltrate classical technique to include sounds that, despite potentially being considered 'ugly' or 'broken', were more truthful in expressing emotion in the moment. Stanislavski identified the *passaggio* as a place where the sensation of singing notes that may feel unsteady can invoke psychological discomfort that may be useful in bringing a more profound dramatic depth to expression. My investigations proved that challenging my reluctance to be more transparent in revealing this weakness in my voice ultimately allowed me to be more fully present and free from self-

judgement in my vocal expression. Thoroughly examining the totality of the self in the context of autoethnographic performance practices and inhabiting the various liminal spaces contained within can be an integral constituent in the singer's process.

The exercises emerging from this phase of the research that may be readily applied as foundational teaching principles are those that specifically explore weaving personal lived experience through established forms. Integrating performative autoethnographic techniques such as the adopted version of Drew's Pastiche exercise (pp. 56-61) and adapting key concepts of Contact Improvisation in a sonic context to exploit expressive sounds beyond the *bel canto* aesthetic (pp. 75-84) provide practical methods that may be used to instigate a living response rooted in truthful vocal expression.

The foundational praxis of my PaR enabled a strong and original foundation towards the creation of *The Crook of Your Arm* (Chapter Four). The intention of the praxis remained for it to function as a vehicle of creating knowledge yet also serve as a process of building a performance piece by activating somatic methodologies into my singing practice. While the initial impetus in the devising process grew out of the significance of responding to the need to communicate, it was further fuelled by the sense of autonomy creating performance facilitates for a classical singer. By studying various performer-creators working from a vocal perspective, but centred in disparate genres (Anderson, Brassard, Galás, and Monk among them), I examined how exerting personal agency in creative processes may aid in establishing the capacity for somatically rooted expression. As artists who are mostly accustomed to working within a highly ordered discipline that includes scripted text, pitches, and rhythm, establishing

modes of practice that engender a sense of self-determination in their creative process can aid singers gain a better sense of balance between technique and freedom. Infusing personal narrative into the established form functioned to buoy the singer's connection to self by fortifying the voice as inseparable from the interpreter rather than considering it as instrument. Creating performance that integrated autobiographical narrative into the established form of the Weill song became a vehicle in which I could embody my own experience while simultaneously infusing the vulnerability telling my own story aroused into the song "Je ne t'aime pas" 'in the moment'. While the entire process functioned as a means towards performance creation, my intentions in the study persisted dually as a development of pedagogical strategies for the classical singer.

Critical in my findings in the devising process of a vocally led piece in the context of PaR was the vital role of identifying where the impulse to vocalise, before it becomes externalised as sound, plays in constructing performance that can generate knowledge. This became especially meaningful as I facilitated investigations into how a response may remain fluid between spoken and sung expression by analysing my mother's operatically inclined pre-illness spoken vocal qualities and those of her post-illness voice which had become stripped of its expressive qualities. These investigations not only functioned to advance my research imperative of determining methods of integrating speech methods into a singer's process but also supported the dramatic structure of *The Crook of Your Arm*. By integrating some of the idioms my mother favoured before she became ill into the piece, I inhabited my mother's exaggerated vocalic qualities and experienced a felt remembering of my response to her voice. The resulting explorations served to hone a more embodied vocalic response to stimulus where the voice can take

over as an autonomous entity, free from a predetermined analysis of the expected sound. As discussed in Chapter Four, examining the place where sung and spoken expression converge promoted fuller and more nuanced vocal expression across both disciplines.

The performer-audience relationship became vital in fully realising how the act of being witnessed by an audience could open space for a line of attention running between the performer and audience to create a tension that engenders an embodied sense of vulnerability useful in evoking spontaneous vocal expression. The convention I employed of speaking directly to the audience provided a platform in which the act of being witnessed inspired an intimacy. By having agency over the sharing of my private story publicly, my voice could function freely with what Spry identifies as “practiced vulnerability” (167).

The key teaching principle developed during the practical, devising phase of my research, centred on developing methods for the singer-creator enabling them to exert agency over their vocal practice by creating autobiographical theatre. The development of exercises in which lived experiences are explored through memesis, then interjected on impulse into sung text and musical form (pp. 94-95) serve as a model for incorporating embodied self-reflexivity into the more discursive self-reflexive process established in classical singing training.

Investigating the disembodied voice — specifically, my mother’s recorded voice — for use as a dramaturgical device became significant in the context of my traditional voice training, where technological interventions are scarce. In Chapter Five, I challenged the notion of embodiment that my research had relied upon up to that point;

namely, that where attention relied upon the negotiation of internal somatic sensations, I examined, rather, the intersection between technology and the ephemerality of the live voice. By identifying the tension between the sensation of receiving the external stimulus of the 'disembodied' mediated voice of my mother, I allowed it to incite an internal sensation leading to the impulse to respond vocally.

Exploring where the intersection of technology and the lived body may converge through the integration of a soundscape, made up of sound clips representing the kind of chaotic sensory experience a dementia patient may experience, functioned to inspire a more embodied vocal response. Inserting the soundscape into the creation process served to provoke emotional memory through aural prompts to realise a broader mode of vocalic expression and incite an understanding of an authentic performed self. Using this outside-in mode of practice revealed how my mother's recorded voice, when played through speakers, could become inscribed in my body, filtered through it, and then be re-inscribed through my voice as a means of challenging my own preconceived notions of my vocalic potential. This was particularly meaningful in the context of my carefully practiced *bel canto* mode of singing, as the key outcome of these investigations were how my vocal palette, or the sounds I presupposed to be available to me, broadened as I extended the sonic possibilities (inspired by the recording) to include utterances beyond what I may have considered 'natural'. This approach not only served to open up my body-voice to a broader mode of expression but moved beyond being just an exercise, to a crucial constituent in the devising process of *The Crook of Your Arm.*

The most significant teaching principle to develop from this stage of the research emerged via the introduction of mediated sounds through speakers into the rehearsal

space (pp.121-122). In my process I used my mother's voice, as well as sounds adapted from the BBC report of the dementia simulator. The student-singer approaching these explorations could choose to access a myriad of sounds specific to their own experiences. Once researched, recorded and introduced into their practice (through speakers or other mediated means) the student is encouraged to explore the physical responses (rather than the intellectual response) that may allow memory and emotion to support the use of a broader vocal palette.

Mobilising a number of techniques became critical in the symbiotic reckoning leading to both the performed outcome and the theoretic underpinning of the project. The notion of self was central in the process of revealing free vocal expression, and the creation/performance of a devised piece grounded in autobiographical narrative. The techniques having the most profound impact on my research findings manifested through a focus on opening the self, and were, in the context of devising the piece, the "textualising" (Spry 29) of the singing body, where impulse, thought, and action meet to generate narrative, a deepening of embodied self-reflexivity to mine the sung body in search of emotional connectivity, as well as the development of a dialogue established in an interconnected relationship between the voice (both live and mediated), the cello, and the soundscape.

Possibilities

Personal experience is implicit in heuristic inquiry, and as such, researcher subjectivity has persisted as a deliberate delimitation in my PaR. However, it was also essential in accomplishing the research aims. In the context of my praxis, the "performative-I

persona" (Spry 173) allowed me to become both subject and object and consequently acquire and employ "the specific phenomena of increased self-knowledge and awareness" (Freeman 99) through my practice. As Freeman further argues, "if we don't understand our own practice we have no option but to follow someone else's" (105), and I have proceeded with a similar aim of maintaining contact with a self-reflexivity and of consciously being an observing subject and observing object (Pagis 266), while sustaining contact with both my research aims and procedures.

Despite what I have identified as potential limitations to the possible pedagogical implications in this study above, my findings provide ample methodologies that can be readily practised. This may be through self-directed in-studio explorations, one-on-one coaching contexts towards the preparation of repertoire or a specific role, voice classes for the singing-actor in a music or opera conservatoire setting, or for the actor-singer in a theatre training programme. Although I did not include evidence of it in this study, I have, over the course of my postgraduate studies, developed the findings of my investigations and integrated them into exercises within my teaching practice. Examples of exercises that I have established as part of my pedagogy include the weaving of autobiographical narrative through established text and music, engaging in contact improvisation exercises while vocalising, and encouraging a state of practiced vulnerability in performance practice. This has been primarily with actor-singers through my position as a voice teacher within a university actor training programme. The information I have gathered, informally, from direct student feedback, and in the more formal context of evaluations administered by the university, have revealed the methods to be beneficial

for allowing the students to open their vocal capacity, and to access a broader and more profound emotional palette, while still maintaining a facility over reliable vocal technique.

Synergy

The interdisciplinary methodologies that proved decisive in my investigations were those rooted in a synergetic body/mind process and aimed towards performance-making that prioritised embodied understanding of the circularity of the 'self as performer' as well as 'performed self'. Contact improvisation, autoethnographic performance practices, the body-based vocal methods of Fitzmaurice, Linklater, and Roy Hart, as well as the theories of voice of such influential theatre practitioners as Stanislavski and Grotowski support working with an embodied self-reflexivity. Conversely, voice training for classical singers persists in approaching the pedagogy from a position of 'discursive self-reflexivity'. This research has served to highlight the need to infuse strategies that encourage methods of embodied self-reflexivity with traditional training modalities.

In order to facilitate what has here been argued as a more profound connection between the self and the act of performance, somatically centered methods widely used in actor training can clearly best address the divide in a singer's experience. This bridges or negotiates the divide in a voice sufficiently established in the technical requirements of the material at hand, and one rooted in the corporeal sensations of the sung body. The dominant element that I advocate as pivotal in allowing singers to realise full, unencumbered vocal expression is the centralisation of the self in their process; as I have suggested, autoethnographic performance practices can serve to open the whole self as instrument.

Further, employing these methods that allow authentic voice, that is, a voice sufficiently entrenched in the *bel canto* aesthetic, yet flexibly in contact with all the nuanced sensations of the body, support the singer's process towards revealing the singularity of the self through vocal expression.

My research reveals that what exists in the liminal spaces between the spoken and the sung, the performed self and the performer self, the mediated and live, conscious and spontaneous, technique and freedom, may in fact be the most useful in the singer's process. By inhabiting these formerly unknown, elusive spaces, classical singers — whose training has focused on smoothing over these spaces through the cultivation of a 'well-coordinated' instrument and carefully studied technique — can confront what I have experienced to be a somatic reluctance in conceding their practised performer self to their spontaneous performed self.

Centering the autobiographical devised performance, *The Crook of your Arm* within my PaR provided the ultimate opportunity to confront the self in a way that promoted the incorporation of methods to negotiate the divide between the fulfillment of technical requirements and emotional expression. Using the whole body as a medium for experiencing the memory of how a lived experience feels and transforming that into vocal expression, coupled with a process of cultivating fluid corporeal reflexivity to free the voice from technical restraints, is at the forefront of the outcomes of my investigations and can play a crucial role in the development of the holistic singer-actor.

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AUDIO AND VIDEO DOCUMENTATION

All audio and video documentation referenced in the thesis are accessible via the online links as indicated in the table below.

TRACK	TITLE	LINK
Audio 1	Revisiting the *Bel Canto* studio Part One	https://soundcloud.com/user-989370259/s-holmes-audio-1
Audio 2	Revisiting the *Bel Canto* Studio Part Two	https://soundcloud.com/user-989370259/s-holmes-audio-2/s-Q5VMK
Video A	Contact Improvisation	https://vimeo.com/374250664/b059bdc6dc
Video B	Internal/External	https://vimeo.com/374255696/e803211804
Video C	Ugly Sound/Scream	https://vimeo.com/374255811/d86e3242a6
Video D	Idioms	https://vimeo.com/374255935/f8682ea5a3
Video E	"I want to talk about it…"	https://vimeo.com/374256056/0ae912de83
Video F	Physicality	https://vimeo.com/374256446/3beb10f4cc
Video G	Audience-Performer Relationship	https://vimeo.com/374256607/0cfaa5c507
Video H	Mediated Voice/Soundscape	https://vimeo.com/374256737/6a9a7d58b7
Video I	*Le creux de tes bras* (full performance) Montréal Canada 2014.	https://vimeo.com/374256914/fbad291c4
Video J	*The Crook of Your Arm* (full performance) NYC Frigid Festival 2015.	https://vimeo.com/374257503
Video K	*The Crook of Your Arm* Dress Rehearsal (full performance) The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon, UK 2016.	https://vimeo.com/374258945/f7512089cf

The Crook of Your Arm

by

Shannon Holmes
Music by Kurt Weill

LX Audience Lights out

LX Blackout

LX Lights slow fade up to 75% warm wash

Shannon centre stage

2 mattresses centre stage-rear

Cellist sits stage R-

SX Mothers voice and static

LX lights flicker through static

"At first I said to my m-mother ah, is, I can't go over there anymore is ah, that black stuff around there? We've got to sit down! And she says alright you go ahead and I'll bring you an-other one of those bingos and they said, awwwww, no not them"

First time Shannon mouths the words

Second time Shannon speaks the words and cello starts improv.

Third time improv extended voice and cello

Shannon struggles to push/pull mattresses to front/centre stage

Fourth and fifth times to climax and silence.

Cellist wait 15 counts- silence

LX light to 100%

Cellist starts to "vamp" SEC A *beckons Shannon over indicating she should start singing.*

Start singing "Ritre ta main… forget words

Cellist starts from beginning. This happens 5 times.

Cellist demonstrates frustration- stops trying.

Shannon steps forward attempts to speak but cannot- continue to make sounds that finally turns into;

I want to talk about “it.”

I want to talk about “IT”.

Cellist starts playing again (Vamp SEC A)

I never had the chance to say good-bye to my Mother.

Notice apron on bed- put it on

My Mum taught me; that the secret to a good apple pie is all in the crust, that you should never wear navy blue and black together, that carrots taste best fresh out of the garden, that family dinners are very important, that it’s best not to argue, ever, that you should never miss church… ever and that no one really wants to see you cry… ever.

I get from my Mother, my sunny disposition and unwavering optimism, and an appreciation for outdated expressions; okee dokee, what in the sam hill is going on here?! Oh for crying in the beer! Honest to Pete! Heavens to Betsey!

My Mum was one of the cheeriest, optimistic and friendliest people you would ever meet. She truly never had a bad word to say about anyone. She was a terrific baker, a fabulous cook a master gardener…She was a Sunday School teacher!

And I am talking about my Mum in the the past tense but my Mum is not dead.

I never had the chance to say good bye to my Mother but My Mother’s not dead.

Sing through SEC A with cellist with added spoken expressions

My Mum is not dead. She has Alzheimers disease.

Alzheimers is a cruel disease because it takes the person away from you one piece at a time- they start slipping slowly until they might look somewhat the same on the outside but they are hardly recognizable at all.

My Mum has been slipping from us for over 10 years- she still looks like my mum but she is hardly recognizable.

And I know she she knows, but we never have talked about.

My Mother has been married to my Father for 60 years. 60 years.

60 years! and I don't think they have ever talked about it.

We all know but we don't talk about it because that was one of the most stringent rules in my house growing up DO NOT TALK ABOUT IT- what ever the :it: happens to be at that particular moment- do not talk about it and hope to God that it goes away-

Sing- with cello SEC A with added spoken expressions make beds.

My Mum's illness became very apparent when she stopped being able to look after my Dad. My Dad is not sick- it's just the way they had always done things. She did the cooking and cleaning and gardening because he just didn't do those sorts if things and so when her weekly freshly baked pie at Sunday dinner became an apple crumble and roast beef became ham, and her gorgeous garden became a few hanging baskets and… is that black stuff over there

Stories were repeated. Were Repeated.

When it was clear she couldn't keep up with the washing, or the garden, or the cleaning or the family dinners. My Dad thought it best to sell the house. The same house they had lived in for 30 of their years together. He sold the house and moved them into an apartment in hopes that she could continue on a usual just on a smaller scale-

And when they moved, my dad also decided to get rid of their marital bed, and bought two separate beds….

Cello Sec C *Start to sing and separate beds…*

Cello plays SEC D

Take off apron

They lasted there at the apartment for only a couple of years, until my Mother became unable to even open a can of soup for dinner, or make toast, the washing wasn't getting done and Of course my Dad didn't do that sort of thing so he decided to sell the apartment and move into a seniors community. Here they would have their own apartment but take meals in a communal dining room, and have someone clean for them.

Moving in, my Dad decided that they needed a 2 bedroom unit so that they could have their own separate bedrooms.

Cello plays SEC C *Sing and move beds to separate spaces denoting separate bedrooms.*

Cello plays SEC D

Take off blue dress

Soon after this move my Mother lost the ability to look after her own basic hygiene. She wasn't bathing, or changing her clothes and my Dad couldn't help her because he "didn't do that sort of thing". I was living 3000 kilometers away and unable to help, so I insisted that he hire a nurse to come in for a few hours each day to help her with these things, which he did.

On the first day the nurse arrived, my Dad called me. He was angry. "the nurse asked me where your Mother keeps her underwear!" Did you tell her Dad?" "No! I did not tell her! How the hell am I supposed to know where she keeps her underwear?"

Cello becomes more dissonant

And it did it. I broke the family rule, I talked about "it"

"Dad!" I said, "How could you be married to someone for 59 years and not know where she keeps her underwear?! She is sick Dad, she needs your help, she is not going to get better!"
CELLO STOP

There was silence.

5 beat silence

So I got on a plane and flew 3000 miles to find my Mothers underwear.

When I arrived it was apparent that my Mum needed much more care then my Dad, the seniors complex or the part time nurse could give her. But I found my mother's underwear, there were a few pairs on the top dresser drawer, where one usually finds their underwear, but there was also pairs stuffed into coat pockets, shoes, under the bed and between books on the bookshelves. My Mum could not be left alone ever, she followed my Dad around all day and he was overwhelmed. He needed more help, more support and I told him that, so he decided to move her into a full time care facility, a hospital.

Cello hospital bells- down to "d"

Sing SEC C drag one bed off stage.

Move remaining bed on stage to centre. ***Cello play SEC E***

Cello to vamp

She settled in as well as could be expected, except when it was time for whoever was visiting to leave. She would get angry and extremely upset that you were not taking her with you.

The nurses told us the best thing to do would be to not say good-bye, but rather to say "I'll see you soon, I have to run a few errands", or "I'll be back in a half-hour"

Maybe I'll never have the chance to say good-bye to my Mother.

Cello SEC A- sing 2nd verse- up octave to primal scream

Cello play SEC B -chromatic

Another effect of my Mothers illness was the dramatic change in her personality. The sweetest, kindest woman who never raised her voice, and taught Sunday School, who became famous among my high school friends for answering the phone in her ultra-cheery "Hell-oooooo!", became a wise -cracking highly sarcastic comedienne.

For example, when I told her I would "be back soon", or that I was "just stepping out to run some errands" she would answer with "Oh sure!" or "What-ever!" or a sarcastic "okee-dokee!"

But with my Dad she always answers the same thing.

He will get halfway down the hall and she will call after him,

"You're going the wrong way you ding-a-ling!!" **CELLO STOP**

You're going the wrong way you ding-a-ling.

Start to undress sing through entire song, lie down in bed

SX static begins after singing ends (cello continues) SX continue u until blackout

static only when singing stops- cello continue to play SEC E

Cellist finish playing- wait 5 beats, get up walk across to stage L-

Shannon; You’re going the wrong way ding-a-ling.

Cellist turn and walk off

Shannon lie down to sleep

LX Blackout

Je ne t'aime pas-

Maurice Magre, Lyrics. Kurt Weill, Music

Retire ta main, je ne t'aime pas
Car tu l'as voulu, tu n'es qu'un ami
Pour d'autres sont faits le creux de tes bras
Et ton cher baiser, ta tête endormie

Ne me parle pas, lorsque c'est le soir
Trop intimement, à voix basse même
Ne me donne pas surtout ton mouchoir :
Il renferme trop le parfum que j'aime

Dis-moi tes amours, je ne t'aime pas
Quelle heure te fut la plus enivrante? Je ne t'aime pas
Et si elle t'aimait bien, et si elle fut ingrate
En me le disant, ne sois pas charmant

Je n'ai pas pleuré, je n'ai pas souffert
Ce n'était qu'un rêve et qu'une folie
Il me suffira que tes yeux soient clairs
Sans regret du soir, ni mélancolie

Il me suffira de voir ton bonheur
Il me suffira de voir ton sourire
Conte-moi comment elle a pris ton cœur
Et même dis-moi ce qu'on ne peut dire

Non, tais-toi plutôt. Je suis à genoux
Le feu s'est éteint, la porte est fermée, je ne t'aime pas
Ne demande rien, je pleure, c'est tout
Je ne t'aime pas, je ne t'aime pas, ô ma bien-aimée