

# To Sing Reality

## Singing as Ethical Demand and Public Political Discourse

Mathias Gillebo





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# Summary

This thesis explores the nature and extent of the ethical and political implications of the act of singing. I take as a point of departure the experience of urgency when singing: the experience that something is at stake, that something is at once established, destroyed and constituted, and demands something of me – a reality which I am immersed in, address and change through the use of voice. I explore this performative urgency by asking the overarching research question: What are the ethical and political implications of singing?

The thesis is presented in five chapters:

The first serves as an introduction to the main topics – singing, ethics and politics – presenting a selection of key existing perspectives (Plato, Aristotle, Adorno, Goehr, Street), the music performances of the study, the hypotheses and the research questions.

The second provides a theoretical contextualization of the study, first concerning the performative turn in the humanities and performance practice (Schechner, Small, Fischer-Lichte, Borgdorff, Crispin), followed by a presentation and assessment of the theoretical framework and concepts with which I explore my own singing performance: ethics (Løgstrup, Jonas), the public sphere (Habermas, Rancière, Goehr, Street) and semiotics (Kristeva, Barthes, Adorno, Rolvsjord).

The third chapter provides a methodological contextualization of the study in relation to current discussions of arts-based research and artistic research (Leavy, Borgdorff, Crispin, Daykin, Kirkkopelto), followed by an assessment of case study as an approach to my own singing performance (Flyvbjerg). Finally, the chapter presents the three concert productions that constitute the cases of the study – *Weihnachtsoratorium* by J. S. Bach, an opera recital with mainstream opera repertoire by G. F. Händel, W. A. Mozart and R. Wagner, and *Kindertotenlieder* by G. Mahler – as well as a presentation of the group interviews, discussions concerning research ethics and an overview of the process of analysis.

The fourth chapter provides the analysis of the concerts and the five interviews of two groups attending them.

The discussion in the fifth chapter assesses what ethical responsibility and the public sphere mean in relation to singing. The short answer is that singing exposes the shared humanity of singer and audience. Based on an analysis of three main categories pertaining to the presented interpretive framework, I discuss how the ongoing transition between sound and

word manifests as both ethical demand and public political discourse, constituting subject and meaning.

The main objective of the thesis is the exploration of the ethical and political implications of the act of singing. The exposure of the shared humanity of performer and audience inherent in singing can contribute to the theoretical and methodological legitimation of singing as participation in ethical-political discourse in the public sphere, widening conventional views concerning what constitutes such participation and suggesting a notion of artistic expertise in which the awareness of such a participation is integral to artistic practice.



# Sammendrag

Denne avhandlingen utforsker etiske og politiske implikasjoner ved å synge. Jeg tar utgangspunkt i erfaringen av at noe prekært skjer når jeg synger: at noe står på spill, at noe blir både etablert, destabilisert og konstituert, samtidig, og som fordrer noe av meg – en virkelighet jeg er nedsenket i, adresserer og endrer gjennom stemmebruk. Jeg utforsker dette prekære i utøvelsen i lys av det overordnede forskningsspørsmålet: Hva er de etiske og politiske implikasjonene i sang?

Avhandlingen består av fem kapitler:

Det første kapitlet introduserer hovedtemaene – sang, etikk og politikk – og presenterer et utvalg av sentrale eksisterende perspektiv (Platon, Aristoteles, Adorno, Goehr, Street), konsertene i prosjektet, hypotesene og forskningsspørsmålene.

Det andre kapitlet er en teoretisk kontekstualisering av avhandlingen. Først i lys av den performative vendingen i kvalitativ og kunstbasert forskning (Schechner, Small, Fischer-Lichte, Borgdorff, Crispin), så gjennom en presentasjon og vurdering av det teoretiske rammeverket som jeg utforsker min egen sangutøvelse gjennom: etikk (Løgstrup, Jonas), offentlighetsteori (Habermas, Rancière, Goehr, Street) og semiotikk (Kristeva, Barthes, Adorno, Rolvsjord).

Det tredje kapitlet er en metodologisk kontekstualisering av avhandlingen. Først posisjonerer jeg avhandlingen i relasjon til pågående diskusjoner om forskning basert på kunst og *artistic research* (Leavy, Borgdorff, Crispin, Daykin, Kirkkopelto). Deretter drøfter jeg *case study* som måte å nærme meg min egen sangutøvelse på (Flyvbjerg). Til slutt presenteres de tre konsertproduksjonene som utgjør studiens *cases* – *Weihnachtsoratorium* av J.S. Bach, en operakonsert med standard operarepertoar av G.F. Händel, W.A. Mozart og R. Wagner, og *Kindertotenlieder* by G. Mahler – i tillegg til en presentasjon av gruppeintervjuene, diskusjon av forskningsetikk og et sammendrag av analyseprosessen.

Det fjerde kapitlet består av analysen av konsertene og de fem intervjuene av gruppene som var til stede i publikum.

Diskusjonen i det femte kapitlet er en videreutvikling av analysen gjennom drøfting av hva etisk fordring og den offentlige sfære kan bety i forbindelse med sang. Det korte svaret er at sang eksponerer sangerens og publikums felles menneskelighet og grunnvilkår. På grunnlag av analysen av tre hovedkategorier som knyttes til det teoretiske rammeverket, diskuterer jeg hvordan den pågående overgangen mellom lyd og ord skjer som etisk fordring og deltakelse i

offentlig politisk diskurs, og konstituerer subjekt og mening gjennom sangens destabilisering og re-etablering av symbolsk virkelighet.

Hovedhensikten med avhandlingen har vært å utforske etiske og politiske implikasjoner i sanghandlingen. Tydeliggjøringen av utøvers og publikums felles menneskelighet gjennom sanghendelsens interaksjon, kan bidra til en teoretisk og metodologisk legitimering av sang som deltakelse i etisk-politisk diskurs i det offentlige rom, utvide tradisjonelle måter å forstå hva slik deltakelse kan være, og gi grunnlag for en forståelse av kunstnerisk ekspertise der bevissthet om denne deltakelsen er grunnleggende for praksisen.

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## Glossary of Terms

The following glossary outlines central terms and notions applied and explored in the thesis.

**Ethical demand.** A demand issuing towards the persons of an encounter to accept and take care of the other. The term builds on the meta-ethical notion that in any form of communication and interaction, humans are positioned towards each other in intersubjective relations in which given dynamics of power, care, freedom, interdependence, attachment and trust constantly unfold (Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 17–18, 53–54). Løgstrup connects the ethical demand to the voice in conversation as “a certain note is struck through which we, as it were, step out of ourselves in order to exist in the speech relationship. [...] The speaker is accepted as the note struck by the speaker’s address is accepted” (1997, pp. 14–15).

**Ethically charged reality.** The reality as such, conceived of as innately normative, and not exhaustively explained by the argument that we impose a normative convention on the encounter between persons. As a fundamental premise of our humanity we are always and already interdependent, which forces us to trust each other, not by deliberation and choice, but as a given condition and back-light of our goals, actions and efforts (Jonas, 1984, pp. 40, 130–131; Vetlesen, 2014, pp. 92, 97; Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 17–18).

**Imperative of responsibility.** A notion of responsibility that involves not only what we know and are able to foresee, but spans into the future towards the unknown reality and being of others. We are morally responsible for the consequences of our actions as well as lack of action, even when these consequences cannot yet be imagined (Jonas, 1984, pp. 40, 118, 122; Vetlesen, 2014, pp. 61–63). The imperative nature of responsibility stems from the experience of the innate normativity in the being of another person or phenomenon, by which an “ought” issues from the “is” (Jonas, 1984, p. 130).

**Musical meaning in song.** Not restricted to or residing in the lyrics, nor to how lyrics provide a presumably distinguishable referential meaning to the song. Provided that the symbolic and semiotic meaning engage in dynamic transitions in the voice and in the appeal towards the audience, this study explores an interpretation of singing vocal textualized music by which the dynamics of sound and words constitute subject and meaning in and as the ethical demand and participation in the public political discourse of performance.

**Public political discourse.** The nature of discourse in the public sphere concerning public and social interactions involving exercise of authority and power within society, through communicative action aimed at reaching understanding, consensus and action (Habermas,



1984, pp. 86, 101). The study explores what political discursivity might mean in relation to song (Borgdorff et al., 2020, p. 5; Kristeva 1984, p. 62–63), and seeks a widening of the notion of public political discourse, in the sense that it does not need to fit the pattern of fully fledged verbal deliberation (Habermas, 1984, 1987, 1996a, 2006; Uberg Nærland, 2015, pp. 93–94).

**Singing as performance in the public sphere.** The singing performance taking place in a public venue, as an event constituted by someone singing and people gathering to listen. The study explores the possibility of a widening of the Habermasian notion of the public sphere, characterized by verbal discourse (Habermas, 1984, pp 93, 95). The exploring of singing as participation in public political discourse aims towards a more open concept of the public sphere as a “space generated through communicative action” (Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 37), which can “amplify the pressure of problems [...] and thematize them” (Habermas, 1996a), in a manner which includes singing as public performance.

**The semiotic.** The semiotic comprises the affective, material and corporeal dimensions of language, influencing into symbolic meaning. Semiotic meaning appears within the symbolic as disruptive motion, as vocal and gestural movement, organized by social context, family structures, biological difference between the sexes and syntax (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 23, 25, 27, 62–63, 68, 117; Rolvsjord, 2002, pp. 51, 53; Keltner, 2011, pp. 22, 24, 34).

**The signifying process.** The process by which the subject is constituted and put in process of interaction with others as a speaking subject. Through enunciation, subject and meaning are constituted in a dialectic process of transition between the semiotic and symbolic modalities of meaning. This process is not linear but continues as a “necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 24) in which the semiotic “moves through the symbolic, produces it, and continues to work on it from within” (p. 117) (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 23–25, 45, 48, 68, 109, 117).

**The symbolic.** The symbolic refers to all social and historical sign systems, that is, the ordering, categorizing and logical level of language (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 23, 25, 27, 62–63, 68, 117; Rolvsjord, 2002, pp. 51, 53; Keltner, 2011, pp. 22, 24). In the thesis, the symbolic also refers to how singing might be interpreted as statement or claim in a public political discourse, when singing is conceived of as comprising the semiotic-symbolic dynamics of the signifying process, opening up the presumed purely symbolic of words.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Song, Text and The Performative Turn

### 1.1.1 The Urgency of Professional Singing – Inspired by an Example within Music Therapy

What is at stake when someone sings? What goes on in the voice as it carries from one person towards another, or towards an audience of many? What does the voice do, and what happens to us as it is raised in song?

In this thesis I explore the ethical and political implications of classical singing, in terms of what goes on as the voice sounds in performances of classical and operatic repertoire. But the voice is familiar to everyone. Almost everyone has one, knows what it feels like to use it, to whisper, to scream. Everyone has a sore throat from time to time, and we all know what it is like not to be able to speak, not to mention sing. Many have been nervous to speak in a group or at meetings, and have listened to our own voices reverberating in the room as we say something, give our names or offer our opinions. We are all sensitized to our own voices, whether we are conscious of it or not.

Nonetheless, referring to the voice presents a challenge, because as I do, I cannot achieve any sort of definite distance from what I refer to. The distance I might obtain seems to immediately obscure an adequate articulation. I cannot put myself outside the subject matter, as it were, of this referring as it happens, because what I refer to, I refer with. Even more, what I enunciate with reveals much of who I am; the tone of my voice offers much of me to you – for you to receive, trust, reject, interpret, respond to. The voice both exposes the singer and demands something of the listener. To draw one's breath and accent the voice, puts us both in process, in action, in interaction, in terms of who we are, how we are, over against each other. How I am over against you as I sing – you can hear this, sense this, in the room, during the time that my voice sounds. The sound of the voice forces the humanity of the singer onto the audience and exposes the common human condition of both.

This is because, as a necessary matter of survival, we have become experts in interpreting signals in the voice. Nuances can make all the difference – between danger or safety, something false or something true and authentic, suspicion or trust, enemy or friend.

Voices are raised in signalling interactions. The voice is charged by the relations in which it sounds. It can function as a protective façade to hide behind or as a weapon with which to occupy the social setting of a room. It can be used to calm someone in distress, to lull a child to sleep, to tune into and resonate with the mood and the situation of another person, as if we understand and feel with our voices.

As you enunciate with your voice, what emerges is not simply the end result of fully thought-through ideas or sentiments. The voice is no neutral, empty vessel into which we pour articulations of feelings, thoughts or intentions. It resonates then and there, as a sonic development of emotion, thought and intention. It reaches towards something which the speaker or singer cannot exactly know, but in and through the voice we get an intuition or a hunch which develops and becomes clearer through phrasing, sound and airflow.

The voice is like a sense: you feel with it, seek with it, touch with it the faces of those listening, make sense of things, positions, directions, times, rooms. Your voice is an extension of yourself and your body, sometimes even more raw and exposed than your body, in you and beyond you at the same time.

As the voice does this, it is not simply coloured by what is sensed, it is not simply affected by the reality in which it sounds, as something exterior to the voice. The voice is both immersed in the reality that is unfolding, and at the same time articulating this reality, constituting it, changing it.

What is this sung reality, experienced both as a chaotic boundless fluency of non-distinctions, and at the same time as an adequate, even precise denotative articulation of what really matters in life, of what is, and sometimes also of what needs to change?

Though this thesis concentrates on the voice as heard on the opera stage, the concert hall or in the church concert, the best way to exemplify what is meant by the term singing in this study is not what happens on the professional stage. It takes as point of departure how singing can occur at the hospital. There the sounding reality of the voice, the urgency of song, can be heard in the sound of parents singing to their infants in neo-natal or palliative care. Children in such care units are often in incubators, surrounded by tubes, wires and machines. Consequently, the parents often cannot hold their baby or touch it, except in a limited manner.<sup>1</sup>

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1 McLean (2018) argues that

while neonatal medicine maximizes an infant's chance of survival, it also places barriers between parents and infants, minimizing opportunities for attuned interaction and the development of a healthy parent and infant relationship. Inconclusive results have emerged from the literature regarding attachment classifications and prematurity (Udry-Jørgensen, et al., 2011). However, there are specific relational threats for the infant and

In music therapy studies parents have been encouraged to sing to their child. When interviewed, many of them speak of this singing as that which made them parents, that which made the child their child and made a relation possible. McLean (2018) writes that «I have had the privilege of witnessing the powerful role of the human voice to musically connect, communicate, create and mediate a fragile infant's way of being» (McLean, 2018, p. 172). To sing was to touch, and not in a metaphorical sense. To sing was to be there for the child. The parents sang the relation, sang the life-death reality, the urgency of care.

In this urgency, I will argue, the voice is immersed in and radically articulates what is. What sounds is not a closed realm of music or musical meaning, non-referential and beyond comprehension. It is what is: reality, relation, life and death. The voice sounds what we are, towards each other.

The reality of the voice, what the voice constitutes, is the sound of the urgent, ethical imperative of responsibility. We may respond positively or negatively to this imperative, not at all or imperceptibly, as in the case of the newborn child. However, the voice is immersed in this reality and articulates it nonetheless. As I speak or sing to you, you receive what is exposed of me, reject it, or remain indifferent to it. Whatever the reaction, you are addressed by me, by being in and sensing the reality of what sounds, of what is exposed, my humanity, which is also yours. Therefore, what goes on as the voice sounds are dynamics of ethics, also at the opera or in the concert hall, from across the stage towards the audience and back again. The singer forces his or her humanity onto the audience, as this humanity is exposed in the voice, and the audience can take part with their humanity, as their humanity is exposed by the performer.

The sound of the voice is the sound of this shared, ethically charged reality – be it the parent-child relationship or the public, socio-political event of the opera or concert performance. That is the reality that the voice is immersed in and articulates. That is the urgency that sounds when singing.

This thesis is about the ethical and political implications of singing, experienced as an urgency in the voice when performing. I do not wish to write about this urgency as having some kind of specific musical or artistic meaning, accessible only through skilled artistic practice or the philosophical reflection on its performance or reception. I am not talking about musical meaning only as distinct and present in some secluded realm of art. This thesis is about the urgency in the singing voice as something that sounds in ethical interaction and public

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parent, including the neurodevelopmental immaturity of preterm infants and related avoidance behaviors during interaction (Brisch, et al., 2003; Newnham, et al., 2009); and parental trauma affecting a parent's representation of their infant and related capacity for responsive engagement with their baby (Keren, et al., 2003; Korja et al. 2010). (McLean, 2018, p. 175)

political discourse, as something that is always there in human interaction, but perhaps made more apparent through singing.

## 1.1.2 The Performativity of Song and/as/versus Text

As I write the words of this thesis there are no high c's or difficult passages demanding that the airflow be distributed correctly and the articulation precisely timed. No one is looking. I am not nervous or relieved or visualizing a safe place or any of those performance strategies one acquires as a singer.

Still, there is one vital aspect in which this text and the singing it is about converge: they are both fundamentally *anticipatory*, directed towards something that is not yet articulated, but at the same time present from the outset.

The text is written, finished and printed on paper or screen. But throughout the entire process of writing it – since it is about how enunciation with the voice occurs, what the enunciation constitutes, as language, as music, how the voice sometimes seems to transcend the divide between sound, reference and the reality referred to, how the sound of the voice is both a chaotic, blurring experience and what might feel like a razor-sharp addressing of what is – the text has again and again seemed to collapse into an identification with its subject.

In many ways, I find this collapse to be a good thing, a necessary part of the writing process, bearing witness to the nature of the topic of the study – voice and enunciation as in certain ways constituting reality, all-encompassing, all-consuming, including its own text. As such, the collapse between text and what it discusses resembles certain strands within the performative turn in the humanities, and the coinciding reflexive turn in the arts, in which performers study their own practices in and through their own artistic processes (Orning, 2017, p. 80). Art and its practices are seen as “inherent to, and a constituent part of, the human condition (Coessens, Crispin & Douglas, 2010, p. 31), as the artist-researcher inquires into “the place of the artist and his or her practice in contemporary society” (p. 17). In research on, in or even as the art practice (Borgdorff 2007; Crispin 2021), approaches within this research paradigm sometimes seek the production of performative text and performative analysis (Crispin, 2013, p. 77), “a new practice that shadows the old”, (Crispin 2014, p. 145), and uses “some of the modes on which it speculates; how it is written is part and parcel of what it says” (Crispin, 2014, p. 139). These tendencies reflect a demand in research on music performance for “deeper connection between the ‘actual’ musical experience of ‘live performance’ and what is written about that experience as scholarship” (Crispin, 2014, p. 145). The gap between the performance and the

text referring to might even serve as a “site of fruitful thinking and artistic experimentation, given suitably flexible and adaptable modes of re-presentation” (Crispin 2014, p. 145).

As I sang and started writing about my own singing, I initially wanted to make the text a prolongation of the singing event, a performative text, unfinished and alive on paper, impacted on by song in terms of breathing and phrasing as urgent elements in the performance, bringing them to the forefront of the referring event of writing. However, although the performative turn and the paradigm of research based on art maintain a distinction between the performance and the text that represents it, I have found such an endeavor difficult to handle without ending up with a text that says very little. This collapse between singing and writing about it might be an enticing situation, perhaps necessary as part of a process, and serves, as Crispin argues, as a site of experimentation. But it has proven easy to get lost in, and often without generating any real outcome as far as producing a text about something that is not only about itself.

Therefore, throughout the process of writing it has become increasingly necessary to maintain – or at least constantly re-establish – a distance between text and subject written about. The text is about enunciation and the implications of enunciation, and it explores enunciation, also by being enunciation. But the text is not my voice (cf. Goehr, 2004, p. 47). What remains of singing in this text is therefore simply this: anticipation, belief that something will be articulated, something will occur that makes it all make sense, at the end of the phrase, at the end of the text, but always as anticipatory.

As it is based on and sustained throughout by the claim that singing has ethical and political implications, the thesis is easy to criticize. The premise of the conclusion of the thesis, that singing constitutes an ethical demand and is a form of participation in public political discourse, is claimed from the outset as what gives impulse to the thesis. I make no effort to conceal this; rather, I present it as the title. It is my opinion that this form of anticipation exposes two interrelated conditions for writing this thesis.

First, in terms of method, a preliminary conclusion is always implied in any proposal and the elaboration of that proposal (Løgstrup, 2018). Methodically, therefore, writing a draft of the conclusion at an early stage is a way to force assumptions and biases to surface, making it possible to be aware of them as I process the data I gather. It is part of an effort towards methodical accountability, as it serves to make explicit what guides the assessment of which methods will be adequate in the data gathering, analysis and discussion. This does not amount to designing the study in order to prove what I thought in the first place. Rather, it serves as part of the development of the project and to repeatedly become aware of and critique my own biases (Nilssen, 2014, pp. 56–57).

Second, to claim the conclusion in the title reflects the project's focus on the urgent, anticipatory nature of singing. I aim to show how the act of singing refers across a boundary between sound and word, over which the act of referring is an act of belief in the constitution of subject and meaning, and that this is exemplified in its own manner in song, compared to speech or writing. Subject and meaning risk destruction and seek re-articulation on that boundary of reference. It is a boundary present already in inhaling, in the accent of the voice, that must be constantly transcended if subject and meaning are to be produced.

Thus, through the analysis of my own singing, this thesis implies a critique of research criteria by which conclusions or results are deemed invalid if they are implicit from the outset. At the same time, and based on the same analysis of singing, the thesis seeks to re-establish such criteria, in a critique of arts-based and artistic research methodologies that presuppose art and performance as something completely different from conventional research practices. Therefore, even though claimed in the title, the analysis does not take for granted that there are ethical and political implications in singing, or that subject and meaning are constituted through singing. I only argue that the proposition may be plausible.

The intuition that drives me as a singer is that the voice is immersed in, articulates and changes reality. I experience this as a form of believing-cum-certainty as I sing. The voice is ethical and political, an anticipatory articulation of how reality is and how it should become. The thesis explores how singing might be heard as an ethically charged interaction in the public politically discursive sphere of the performance. This interaction demands that the singer participate in public political discourse through musical activity, addressing and seeking to change reality. Moreover, I write about this as something ordinary, as something that it is possible to write about with conventional research approaches, with words which in terms of anticipatory characteristics and scientific validity do not differ from the sound of the voice.

## **1.2 Classical Singing as Ethics and Politics**

Music is part of human life and woven into the fabric of intersubjective and social dynamics. We listen, play and sing, alone and together. At times we make music without being aware of it; at other times it feels like the only thing we can do. Music-making can be a reflex, that which makes us who and what we are, as individuals, in our different relations and as members of society.



In this study, I explore the ethical and political implications of classical singing for both singer and audience, and how these implications operate in the performative context. I use examples of my own practice as a performing tenor soloist as the subjects of case studies, basing the analysis and discussion on interviews with two groups attending three concerts. In this way, I seek to articulate how and to what extent singing is part of an ethical demand between performer and audience, and a means of participation in political discourse in the public sphere. I aim to enhance and advocate the societal mandate of musicians through a widening notion of what constitutes ethical-political discursive participation in the public sphere.

Popular music is often regarded as having the potential to create societal debate, encourage social commitment and give rise to political action. Sound, words and images in popular music are considered to lead to public discourses about power and influence (Street, 2012; Negus, 1996). Text, practices of performance and musical-rhetorical elements such as rhythm and flow are understood as influencing political discourse and actively addressing moral and social issues (Uberg Nærland, 2015).

In classical music and opera, however, overarching themes pertaining to social criticism, the problematization of ideology and the understanding of art and reality are often attributed to the director, composer or the institution facilitating the performance. Performers are given a more passive role under the direction of the stage director, conductor or the organizing context. They are rarely understood as articulating their own opinions and attitudes through the performance as such. Compared to performers within other musical genres, such as singer-songwriters, hip-hop artists and improvising jazz musicians, the performers of classical music and opera are seldom considered, and often do not consider themselves, the owners of the music in the same way. Instead, they struggle with pressures of technical and stylistic conventions, they perform roles, are dressed up in costumes, and so forth.

Still, as a matter of music performance, I will argue that classical singing does not necessarily diminish the ethical-political implications of the event that occurs between performer and audience within a public sphere. In some ways it might be seen as increasing them, exposing them more clearly, since what happens between performer and audience does not rely to the same extent on lyrics, and as far as lyrics is concerned, may prompt a different approach to the relation between lyrics, sound and meaning production.

### 1.2.1 Music, Ethics, Politics and Questions of Autonomy

The relation between ethics, politics and aesthetics is one of the oldest topics of philosophical discussions of music (Street, 2012, p. 140). The wide-ranging meaning generated in, through

and as musical expression was originally captured by the Socratic concept of *mousiké* (Goehr, 2004, p. 1; Kjerschow, 2014, p. 19). *Mousiké* may refer to singing, lyrics and dance, but always also entails an entire view of the world, of what is meaningful, and how this manifests itself and is sensed. In this manner, *mousiké* cannot be distinctly separated from philosophy and knowledge (Kjerschow, 2014, pp. 19–21; Goehr, 2004, p. 33).

Linking musical quality to morality, judgement and order, Plato argues that the governing principles behind ethical and aesthetic judgements are closely intertwined (Plato, 2000; 1934; Street, 2012, p. 142; Cobussen & Nielsens, 2012, p. 1), and does not separate linguistically between the good and the beautiful (*kolokagathia*; cf. Frost, 2007, p. 43). He finds that “changes in styles of music are always politically revolutionary” (Plato, 2000, Bk. IV, 424c). Viewing this unsettling power in music as a potential danger to foundational political and social conventions and what he considers the fortunate social order, he warns that a change in the type of music is something to be aware of. In the discussion between Socrates and Glaucon, Socrates argues that only the Doric and Phrygian modes should be permitted in their idealised republic:

‘Which of the modes, then, are appropriate to luxury and parties?’

‘There are some Ionian modes,’ he said, ‘and again Lydian, which are called relaxed.’

‘Will these be any use to men of a warlike disposition?’

‘No,’ he said. ‘So it looks as if that leaves you with the Dorian and Phrygian.’

‘I don’t know about modes,’ I said. ‘Leave me the mode which can most fittingly imitate the voice and accents of a brave man in time of war, or in any externally imposed crisis. When things go wrong, and he faces death and wounds, or encounters some other danger, in all these situations he holds out to the end in a disciplined and steadfast manner. Plus another mode for someone engaged in some peaceful, voluntary, freely chosen activity. He might be trying to persuade someone of something, making some request – praying to a god, or giving instructions or advice to a man. Or just the opposite. He might be listening patiently to someone else making a request, or explaining something to him, or trying to get him to change his mind, and on that basis acting as he thinks best – without arrogance acting prudently and calmly in all these situations, and being content with the outcome. These two modes, then. One for adversity and one for freely chosen activity, the modes which will best imitate the voices of the prudent and of the brave in failure and success. Leave me with those.’ (2000, Bk. III, 398c-399c)

In the same manner as melodies are deemed either applicable or inapplicable in the state, so also with instruments:

‘In which case we shan’t produce any makers of those triangular harps, or regular harps, or all of those many-stringed instruments which can play many modes.’  
‘Apparently not.’

‘What about the makers and players of reed instruments? Will you allow them into your city? Isn’t playing a reed instrument more “many-stringed” than anything else? And aren’t the instruments which can play many modes in fact just imitations of the reed-pipe?’

‘Yes, obviously they are.’

‘That leaves you the lyre and the cithara,’ I said. ‘They’ll be right for the city. In the countryside, by contrast, there could be some sort of panpipe for our herdsmen.’  
(2000, Bk. III, 399d)

And the same assessment goes for rhythm:

‘Let’s purge the rest of it. Our next concern after mode will be rhythm. We should not pursue complexity, nor do we want all kinds of metres. We should see what are the rhythms of a self-disciplined and courageous life, and after looking at those, make the metre and melody conform to the speech of someone like that. We won’t make speech conform to rhythm and melody. [...].

But that gracefulness and want of grace can follow on from what is rhythmical and unrhythmical [...]. But then if rhythm and mode follow language, as we said just now, and not the other way round, what is rhythmical must follow and imitate fine language, while what is not rhythmical follows the opposite. The same with harmony and discord.’

‘Yes, rhythm and mode certainly should follow language,’ he said. [...]

‘In that case, all these things – the right way of speaking, the right attunement, grace and rhythm – follow from a good nature. I don’t mean the good nature which is the polite name we give to stupidity, but the true intelligence which consists in a character which is rightly and properly constituted.’ (2000, Bk. III, 399e-400e)

Plato criticises ways of living that are undisciplined and varied. He compares such lifestyles to “the music and song that uses every mode and all the rhythms. [...] Variety and luxury bred indiscipline. [...] As simplicity in music and poetry gave souls self-discipline, so simplicity in physical training gives bodies health [...]” (2000, Bk. III, 404e). The gods have given the citizens “the power to perceive and enjoy rhythm and melody. Through this sense they stir us to movements and become our choir-leaders. They string us together on a thread of song and dance” (Plato, 1934, Bk. II, 654). More than any other expression, rhythm, melody and lyrics

shape, and can therefore also remodel, moral disposition (Plato, 1934, Bk. II, 669). Melody, rhythms and harmony are meaningful and potent as such.

For Aristotle, *mousiké* encompasses different phenomena, fields of praxis and ways of thinking, even though he applies *mousiké* in ways that come closer to a more modern notion of specialized music praxis (Kjerschow, 2014, p. 37). He also criticizes the professional, competitive praxis of music performance (Aristotle, 1916, Bk. VIII, Ch. 6, 15).

Compared to Plato, Aristotle finds the power of expression and potential for building character in *mousiké* to be less the result of mathematical proportions, and he is more explicitly concerned with its value within the perspectives of societal philosophy and education (Kjerschow, 2014, p. 37). Recognizing that “music is pursued, not only as an alleviation of past toil, but also as providing recreation,” he asks whether “in addition to this common pleasure [...], may it not have also some influence over the character and the soul? It must have such an influence if characters are affected by it” (Aristotle, 1916, Bk. VIII, Ch 5, 14-15). Different harmonies serve different character-building purposes, and are also relative to age, so that “[i]n education ethical melodies are to be preferred, but we may listen to the melodies of action and passion when they are performed by others” (Bk. 8, Ch. 7, 3). Thus, Aristotle welcomes more melodies than Plato, and also agrees with musicians who blame Socrates for rejecting the more relaxing melodies, as these should be valued as suited for the senior citizens in the state (Bk. 8, Ch. 7, 13), whereas the more character-building melodies serve educational purposes (Bk. VIII, Ch. 7, 3, 15).

However, music does not only have effects on the character. Aristotle even finds that “rhythm and melody supply imitations of anger and gentleness, and also courage and temperance and of virtues and vices in general, which hardly fall short of the actual affections” (Bk. VIII, Ch. 5, 18). Compared to the visual arts, which are only “signs of moral habits” (Bk. VIII, Ch. 5, 21), he finds that

even in mere melodies there is an imitation of character, for the musical modes differ essentially from one another, and those who hear them are differently affected by each. [...] The same principles apply to rhythms: some have a character of rest, others of motion, and of these latter again, some have a more vulgar, others a nobler movement. (1916, Bk. VIII, Ch. 5, 22-23)

Thus, for Aristotle, melodies and rhythms are closely tied to morality as they form manners and social conduct (Street, 2012, p. 142).

Writing about the relation between modern-day music and politics, Street (2012) argues that Plato and Aristotle present “not just the claim that music is an important feature of the good life, but that discrimination between forms of music is not simply an expression of taste; it is a matter of morality and political order” (p. 142). Even though this “moralizing of music [...] is a recurring, if by no means consistent, feature of the ways in which music is valued in political thought” (p. 142), Street argues that the tradition from Plato and Aristotle “that places music at the heart of politics [...] is also a tradition that has been largely neglected”, stating that

from almost the first recorded writing on politics, music has been present as a key component of the good society or as a topic upon which it was necessary to comment. This is no longer true. Indeed, it is remarkably rare to find mention of music, or sound more generally, in any work of contemporary political theory. (2012, p. 140)

Ever since the notion of art's autonomy developed from the aesthetic philosophy of Kant (1995) (cf. Bernstein, 1992, pp. 2–4; Varkøy, 2017, p. 103; Røyseng, 2021, p. 27), both the philosophy of music and different strands of research and public debate reflect tensions between the freedom of art from social, religious, verbal and political restraints, the moral conditions of artists as human beings and art as life practice (Goehr, 2004; Varkøy, 2017; Wiersholm, 2009, 2013). Varkøy (2017) argues that after Kant, “the idea of the liberation and freedom of art, and therefore also music, from other areas of life becomes fundamental in modern western thinking about art” (Varkøy, 2017, p. 103. My translation). Røyseng (2021) argues that the notion of the autonomy of art after Kant is founded on a Cartesian dualistic body-mind concept of the human self. This has engendered a notion of art's autonomy that connects it closely to a cognitive realm presumably unaffected by bodily and sensory dimensions (Røyseng, 2021, p. 27). Consequently, discussions over art and music's social mandate are often polarized into narrow definitions of relevance, usage and relational characteristics on one hand versus notions of art as an independent realm of expression, meaning and value on the other.

Bourdieu (1984/2010) might be read as articulating a middle ground in the argument that the potential of art as political and social critique is dependent precisely on its relative autonomy, a potential which as such is even greater than the critique generated by the social sciences (Bourdieu, 1984/2010). A similar argument is developed by Adorno and Horkheimer (2011), arguing that due to its relative freedom, art can assume a critical function in relation to society and oppose daily routines and conventions (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2011).

Adorno (2004) argues that it is in its opposition to society that art becomes social:

Art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as “socially useful,” it criticizes society by merely existing. [...] Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness. [...] They embody negatively a position in which what is would find its rightful place, its own. (Adorno, 2004, pp. 296–297)

This resistance against society is art’s contribution to society, “in which, by virtue of inner-aesthetic development, social development is reproduced without being imitated. [...] Nothing in art is immediately social, not even when this is its aim” (Adorno, 2004, p. 296). Thus, according to Adorno, “what is social in art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions” (p. 297).

Further, Adorno argues that the extent to which works of art have any critical function in society is limited to the time of their appearance: “Works are usually critical in the era in which they appear; later they are neutralized, not least because of changed social relations. Neutralization is the social price of aesthetic autonomy” (p. 299).

Adorno traces the development of the autonomy of art first through art’s freeing itself from cultic function, “a secularization without which art would never have developed” (p. 2). Autonomy is developed further by art’s nourishing itself with the idea of humanity. And when society becomes less humane, art remains autonomous: “Art’s autonomy remains irrevocable. All efforts to restore art by giving it a social function [...] are doomed” (p. 1). Still, this development is ambiguous:

As a result of its inevitable withdrawal from theology [...], art is condemned to provide the world as it exists with a consolation that – shorn of any hope of a world beyond – strengthens the spell of that which the autonomy of art wants to free itself. (2004, p. 2)

Likewise, the social represents a border without which art would not be art. The social is art’s other, towards which art is related as a magnet. Consequently “art is autonomous and it is not; without what is heterogenous to it, its autonomy eludes it” (pp. 7–8). Along the same lines, Adorno finds that by “its difference from empirical reality the artwork necessarily constitutes itself in relation to what it is not, and to what makes it an artwork in the first place (p. 9).

Thus, Adorno can warn against simplifying notions of art for art's sake, and considers concepts of a pure, exclusively self-sufficient artwork as fetishistic (p. 297). At the same time, his notion of autonomy in art leads him to argue that

the study of social effect neither comes close to understanding what is social in art nor is it in any position to dictate norms for art, as it is inclined to do so by positivist spirit. [...] Art and society converge in the artwork's content, not in anything external to it. (2004, p. 299)

Thus, for Adorno, art's development towards autonomy is an ambiguous and complex process. Hammer (2006) argues that on the one hand, Adorno finds autonomy to be an important progress whereby art is realised as itself. At the same time, art runs the risk of detachment from tradition, society, politics and religion, that is, from human life (Hammer, 2006, p. 109). He reads Adorno's view of the relation between art and society as one in which art does not mirror reality, but can disclose and decode it (Hammer, 2002, p. 101), through an antithetical relation or a negation of the status quo (Hammer, 2002, p. 112). His aesthetical theory is an aesthetics of negativity (Hammer, 2006, p. 112). Art's ethical-political imperative is constituted by how art transcends the borders of what a given culture considers possible and opens new possibilities for human praxis and life (Hammer, 2002, p. 115). In the distance between art and society, as autonomous, art opens itself up towards the possibility that everything could be different. Art is a privileged bearer of truth, anticipating a better and truer existence (Hammer, 2002, pp. 122, 124, 149). Its manner, however, is always confrontational: music is, like critical theory

under the same obligation as theory to reach out beyond the current consciousness of the masses. [...] This is to be achieved not through the self-subordination of music to "use" which it could do here and now only through definition of itself as a commodity and which would grant it only an illusion of immediacy, but rather by developing within music itself [...] all those elements whose objective is the overcoming of class domination. (Adorno, 2002, p. 394)

Goehr (2004) draws on critical and liberal political thinking, advocating what she labels as an "enhanced formalism" (Goehr, 2004, p. 19) in music, which combines a form of musical autonomy with connectedness to society:

Music's freedom from external constraint gives music a freedom to express itself in, with, and on its own terms, which in turn gives it a freedom to express or reflect upon society at a critical distance. By combining music's freedom from with its

freedom to, music achieves its desired position in society – its freedom within.  
(Goehr, 2004, p. 13)

For Goehr, music's autonomy is not constituted by music being secluded from the world, but by music's quest for freedom within society, generating a critical distance from which to express itself or reflect upon that society. By being autonomous in this sense, music becomes political (Goehr, 2004, p. 1, 89).

Rancière (2004, 2009) opts for an even more directly affirmative notion of the political role of art, be it either as 'autonomous' or what he refers to as "relational" forms of aesthetics and art, which do not heed any pretension of art's self-sufficiency (Rancière, 2009, pp. 22–23). He argues that politics is a form of aesthetics, not in the sense of reflecting on the essence of art or as an alliance between radical artistic practice and radical politics, but rather aesthetics understood through the forms by which politics is sensed and through which it is spoken and done (Rancière, 2004, pp. 12–13; 2009, pp. 21–23). Politics, therefore, is about fragmenting and reordering what we sense and the way we sense things in a shared world, and is fundamentally an aesthetic undertaking. Aesthetics in/as politics is

the system of the a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. (Rancière, 2004, p. 13)

Although focusing more on art in general than music specifically, Rancière's notion of the social function of art, in terms of what and how things are sensed, have implications on music and song as well, and the way music is conceived as autonomous and/or societal. For Rancière, art has the egalitarian function of making the anonymous sensed in a public sphere, that is, seen and heard by the community:

For all time, the refusal to consider certain categories of people as political beings has proceeded by means of refusal to hear the words exiting their mouths as discourse [or] in the simple observation of their material incapacity to occupy the space-time of political things. (Rancière, 2009, p. 24)

Politics develop when those who are seen as only making sounds

front up as inhabitants of a common space and demonstrate that their mouths really do emit speech capable of making pronouncements on the common which cannot



be reduced to voices signaling pain. This distribution and redistribution of places and identities, this apportioning and reapportioning of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of noise and speech, constitutes what I call the distribution of the sensible. (2009, pp. 24–25)

Thus, for Rancière “theater and assembly [...] are two interdependent forms of the same distribution” (2009, p. 26). The conflict between the notion of art as autonomous and art as heterogeneous does not really exist:

We must take care to understand what ‘politicization’ means. [...] There is no conflict between the purity of art and its politicization. But there is a conflict within purity itself, in the conception of this materiality of art which prefigures another configuration of the common. (2009, pp. 33–34)

### 1.2.2 Research Status: What makes Music Ethical-Political?

These different approaches to the ethical-political implications of music and notions of musical autonomy depend radically on the point of view of the researchers, with their various backgrounds and priorities in terms of both theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches and musical fields of expertise. In the following I present a thematic review of literature related to the topic of this study, outlining significant themes, approaches and findings, and identifying research gaps that this study addresses.

*Overarching perspectives concerning* connections between music and politics are explored by Street (2007, 2012), Frith (1996) and Garofalo (1992a), maintaining that music is always ethically and ideologically charged, and that aesthetic and ethical-political conceptions connect when performances raise a form of public awareness that integrates music into political discourse and action. Holman Jones (2002) argues that music is a text in which ideology is embedded, and that the performance of certain types of songs (torch songs) constitutes a form of implicitly political engagement. Hesmondhalgh (2013) advocates the significance of music through a critical defense of the value of music as both intimate and social, private and public at the same time, which can translate into political values and action.

Another approach is to investigate the *relations between music and discourse*. Perris (1985) explores music as propaganda, persuasion and control, arguing that the musical stage is a “hidden rostrum” and may be the most persuasive and most advantageous for repeated hearings” (Perris, 1985, p. 164, 178). Leppert (1993) argues that the rituals of Western music culture are closely linked with ideological forces in such a way that nothing purely musical

can be separated from the discourses that surround it. Uberg Nærland (2015) explores the political implications in popular music in terms of “explicitly political lyrical content” and “politically explicit characteristics” of hip hop (Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 56).

A more detailed exploration of the relation between music and discourse can be sought in considering the nature of *discourse in terms of sign and sound* as such. Nattiez (1990) seeks to establish a semiology of music, exploring music and discourse in light of aspects of Peircian notion of the sign (Nattiez, 1990, p. 9). He argues that music as a symbolic construction has an infinite potential for embodying meaning: “Musical symbolism is *polysemic*, [...] the meanings it takes on, the emotions that it evokes, are multiple, varied, and confused. [...] We can no longer say with certainty what constitutes the expressive, the natural, the conventional, the analogical, the arbitrary association” (p. 37). Leeuwen (1999) explores the “common ground between speech, music and other sounds”, arguing that a “semiotic purism” has caused categorical terminologies and disciplines (Leeuwen, 1999, p. 1). He investigates “semiotic resources” of sound, time, rhythm, interaction of voices taking turns, characteristics of the human voice, and how things are done and said with these sounds (p. 9), and finds that the voice is always a mixture of different features constituting what it presents or represents (pp. 129, 140).

Yet another perspective on the dynamics between music, ethics and politics comes from viewing *music as a representation of something real*. Discussing the extent to which music contains emotion and knowledge, Nussbaum (2008) considers music to be a symbolic representation of connections between emotion, ethics and politics, and suggests an account of the music-language relation that “preserves the cognitive and symbolic complexity of musical experience, while refusing to treat the music as a mere means to a cognition that is extramusical in nature” (Nussbaum, 2008, p. 265). She argues that emotions can in fact be contained in the musical structure itself, and the listener, accepting the form, is inhabited by these emotions (p. 288), causing in some cases a reality as such in song, so that what is performed in song is “not illusory but real and the tragedies it presents [...] final and insoluble” (p. 291).

Similarly, though not directed specifically towards ethics or politics, Holm (2017) discusses interpretations of Beethoven and Brahms by Furtwängler and suggests a widened debate on “*dimensions of reality* in musical interpretation” (Holm, 2017, p. v. My italics and translation). Dimensions of reality constituted in and as music are also considered by Cook (2012), arguing that music performance is also a *performance social meaning*, conceiving music as reflecting and generating such meaning (2012a, p. 193). This social meaning in music is assessed more specifically in Cobussen and Nielsen (2012) as “an *aural ethics*, emerging in the encounter between music and listener” (p. 10). Through different examples of music events they explore

how listening to music and music as interaction might contribute to discussions about ethics as well as concrete moral behaviour.

Gritten (2017) explores notions of *empathy and trust* in the performance of Western Classical ensemble music. Empathy is understood as involving a “decentering of the Cartesian subject, perhaps even a destabilising of it, a distracting passage in the direction of a more flexible and socially aware subject position” (Gritten, 2017, p. 250). The notion of trust is discussed as a confident expectation regarding the way other(s) will behave, and that this behaviour will be conducive to the subject’s own projects (p. 250). Therefore, “the relationship between trust and empathy can be understood in terms of the musical activities of which they can be configured as the theories. [...] [t]rust is a theory of what performance ‘is’, while empathy is a theory of what the performing ‘does’” (p. 250). Gritten suggests that such notions might contribute to make more explicit “the social value that musicking, the performing arts and the creative industries more widely contribute to society” and the “long-term health of the polis” (p. 263).

Warren (2014; 2017) theorizes how music is *intertwined with ethical responsibility and politics*. He builds on the ethical theories of Levinas, arguing that “ethical responsibility emerges in encounters with other people [as] encountering another person places an obligation on me to respond,” (Warren, 2014, p. 3), and explores the embedded role of music in the experience of such encounters. Building on Taylor (1992) and Cook (1998), he describes the relation between artistic creation and self-definition, authenticity and selfhood (Warren, 2017, pp. 38–39).

More direct approaches to *voice, intersubjective action and forming of identity* can be found in literature concerning music therapy. Trondalen (2016), also applying the ethical theories of Levinas, connects music therapy to the encounter with the client’s face, as “the therapist meets with a vulnerability not available for negotiation, and therefore it is not possible to be indifferent or unresponsive.” (Trondalen 2016, p. 138). She maintains that a possible practical implication from such encounters could be the “feeling of being recognized as I am through the creation of a song [and] increased self-esteem that leads to new possibilities of participation” (p. 139). Focusing more directly on voice and vocalizing as an individuation process, Jordet and Gullestad (2020) explores the implications of singing for Bangladeshi village girls learning folk songs. Based on in-depth interviews, they connect vocalizing, singing, sense of community, and one’s own discovery and integration of affect, arguing that singing generates *courage and individuation processes towards increased autonomy*.

Interviewing parents singing lullabies to their children, Bonnár (2014) develops notions of singing as an interaction by which “the parent and the child *become sense makers together*, and the boundaries between active and passive listening and participation are blurred” (Bonnár

2014, p. 349. My italics). Lullaby singing can be a way to “explore together the paradoxes and contrasts of life – of being close but in two separate bodies, of equality and otherness and autonomy and interdependence” (p. 349).

Studying how ensemble singers talk about their own practice, Havrøy (2015) describes the complexity of talking not only about a voice, but one’s own voice. Though not focusing on the ethical-political implications of voice in ensemble praxis, Havrøy finds that the singers “draw their language from a number of discourses [...], place themselves within a practice field and create an authority inside it” (Havrøy, 2015, p. 22). Schei (2007) explores processes towards vocal identity interviewing three professional singers identifying themselves either as a classical, jazz and pop singer. Applying a Foucaultian frame of reference, Schei analyses the singers as cases in terms of how they apply technologies of the self, that is, disciplining techniques to become, have and continually seek identities as professional singers, coping with *cultural norms, institutionalized ideals and self-imposed demands that effect the way they present themselves on stage* (Schei 2007, pp. I, 14, 15). Kjølberg (2010) stages song recitals in which she performs herself, exploring the concert dramaturgy through *practice-based research*. Drawing on Small’s (1998) notion of *musicking* and Gadamer’s (2010) notion of *play*, Kjølberg aims to “develop theory of the different aspects of singers’ performance in the song recital” (Kjølberg, 2010, p. 369. My translation). In her methodical approach, she also interviews a focus group of classical singers, but they were not part of the audience (p. 354).

Finally, an approach to the dynamics between music, ethics and politics can be sought in considering the *relation between music and or as social participation*. Garofalo (1992b) attributes to popular music an important role in the civil rights movement in the US, as does Wicke (1992) with regard to the dissolution of the GDR. Knudsen, Skånland, Trondalen et al. (2014) explores the role of music and singing in the wake of the July 22 terror attack in Norway, presenting different perspectives on how music has both a destructive potential when applied “in preparations and implementations of the most horrific actions” (Knudsen, Skånland, Trondalen et al., 2014, p. 4), and a “specific potential or force – to vitalize, heal or generate experiences of being united” (p. 5. My translations). Teitelbaum (2014) examines correlations between the use of music and neo-Nazism and how music can illuminate a terrorist’s engagement with neo-Nazism (Teitelbaum 2014, p. 122). Varkøy (2014) describes the uniting effect of certain songs in the public sphere after July 22, as well as problematizing some of the underlying dynamics causing an us-vs-them mentality (Varkøy, 2014, p. 230).

Exploring music practice in a Palestinian refugee camp as a form of social action through music, Boeskov (2019) analyses “the ambivalent processes that occur when music is employed as a means of social intervention” (Boeskov, 2019, p. v). Although these music practices might

be seen as a site of social justice, participation and transformation (p. 6), Boeskov argues that participatory music simultaneously “enables individuals and groups to transcend certain boundaries within their social worlds; but at the same time, reinforces and conceals other limitations that equally constrain them” (Boeskov, 2019, p. v).

Hautsalo (2021) explores the politics of equality in Finnish opera. Studying flourishing local opera practices, she argues that these also constitute practices of social responsibility: “In and through *local opera*” (Hautsalo, 2021, p. 2) people involved could mobilize and change the local community and also alter attitudes towards opera for the better, through “the art form’s power as a service for the benefit of others” (p. 13). That way opera can be a “relevant art form in contemporary societies, and one that challenges [...] prestigious opera houses through requiring local thinking and professional boundary crossing beyond the established traditional state institutions” (p. 2). Similar social dynamics of involvement are explored by Eiksund (2019) concerning participation in amateur choirs in Norway. Interviewed choir members express experiences of being included in a local community, getting involved and take active part in the changing conditions of interaction in society (Eiksund, 2019, pp. 251–252).

These contributions all articulate different aspects of possible relations between music and the ethical-political, and in different ways they are relevant to the present study in terms of identifying what makes music ethical-political.

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In this dissertation I attempt to contextualize my own performances as ethical-political. The relationship between singing, ethics and politics has, to my knowledge, not been explored and tested based on a qualitative analysis, done by the performing artist, of the singing event as a potential performance of ethics in a public, political, discursive reality, experienced, discussed and criticized in interviews with members of the audience.

In terms of analysis, it does not amount to very much simply to argue that music is ethical-political based on the fact that music is part of reality. Street (2012) argues that nothing comes out of an analysis that simply lumps music and politics together through the argument that ‘everything is political’, from which it follows that ‘all music is political’ (Street, 2012, pp. 6–7). As long as music is real and part of reality, then of course it is part of a reality that is always ethically and politically charged. We cannot escape ethical-political reality, as ethics and politics are woven into the fabric of everyday life, including when we perform or listen to music. In other words, to claim that music is ethical and political does not really say much.

On the other hand, a common notion of music inherited from and building on the Romantic discourse of European music, is that – due to its presumed non-referential and non-representational characteristics (Goehr, 2004, p. 7; Crispin 2014, p. 142) – it is or ought to be a form of expression free from any ethical or political constraints: free in the sense that it is not about something else, only itself; that music is a realm of sound, devoid of referential meaning, or referring only to itself. The sound of music does not point to particular objects, meanings or people. The sound of the trumpet is not addressing climate change. The sound of the singer is not addressing social injustice. Notions of the purely musical, in one way or another adhering to romantic notions of music, expressed perhaps most explicitly by Hanslick’s dictum that “tonally moving forms are the sole content and object of music” (Hanslick, 1965, p. 32, in Dahlhaus 1991, p. 109),<sup>2</sup> remains for many artists, music critics and music researchers the premise of musical autonomy and artistic freedom: only when it has no referential meaning can music be a free form of expression.

But how music is this form of free expression is not exhaustively explained through notions of autonomous and absolute music. The one playing the trumpet or singing an aria may very well feel strongly that they are in fact affected by, responding to and addressing, in one way or another, climate change and social injustice through their way of performing. This thesis is motivated by the performative intuition verging on a form of knowledge, that what is performed, how it is performed, and that it is performed, is urgent, that what is done right now says something about something, something specific, is directed towards something and someone, and makes a difference and constitutes a specific reality that is addressed and changed by the act of performing. Just as it amounts to very little to state that all music is ethical and political, neither does the opinion that music determines its own content as tonally moving forms present itself as particularly self-explanatory or comprehensible (cf. Dahlhaus, 1991, p. 109). That musical expression is free by being about itself, autonomous in the sense that it is an immanent realm of meaning and reality, distinctly apart from ethics and politics, does not amount to much more than its counterclaim that all music is relational, ethical or political. And the increasing presence of musical censorship indicates that music is indeed perceived as having political significance, autonomous or not (Kirkegaard et al., 2017; Street, 2012; Goehr, 2004). Reports even show that among artists subjected to censorship, musicians constitute the largest group.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, I find that one research gap that justifies the present study is the attempt, by the singer, to approach and describe what constitutes the ethical-political potential in singing,

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2 Dahlhaus (1991) and Kjerschow (2014, p. 199) both discuss to what extent Hanslick is dependent on romantic musical philosophy.

3 Cf. Freemuse State of Artistic Freedom, 2021, 2022 and 2023 reports.

by engaging in extensive dialogue with members of the audience through performances and post-performance interviews, and by further qualitative analysis and discussion.

### 1.2.3 What makes Singing Ethical-Political?

One way to go about determining the ethical-political implications of singing would be to analyse lyrics. Uberg Nærland (2015) takes as a point of departure the political implications in popular music and narrows it down to the “explicitly political lyrical content” and “politically explicit characteristics” of hip hop (p. 56). Street (2012) asks in what manner sound, melody and rhythm may be labelled ethical-political in a substantial way, not reducing the scope of interest to lyrical content or what is ‘inscribed in lyrics’. Demonstrating how “the battle for the soul of Bruce Springsteen’s ‘Born in the USA’” reveals how political adversaries can claim the same song for their side, Street claims that it is “not sufficient or appropriate to simply ‘translate’ musical evaluation into judgement”, nor that art is “merely politics represented in symbolic form” (Street, 2012, pp. 153–154).

The approaches suggested by Uberg Nærland and Street might also have been applicable to this study if the cases I have chosen were performances of songs with more up-to-date lyrics in terms of societal themes, relating in obvious ways to current ethical-political issues and well-known social developments. I could then go on to analyse how these lyrics, presumably distinctly verbal, were backed up or enhanced by a just-as-distinctly musical element in the songs, and finally made a comparison of different recordings of the ‘same’ piece, comparing the melody and lyrics as two distinct parameters across the different recordings.

However, the cases in this thesis do not suit such a treatment. The lyrics of Bach’s Christmas Oratorio, Mozart arias, Händel arias, Wagner arias, Schumann lieder or Mahler’s *Kindertotenlieder*, can hardly be seen as directly referring to current issues such as climate change or perils in refugee camps. Nevertheless, I will argue that they can be understood as addressing them, though less in terms of lyrics as a presumably distinct realm of meaning, and more in terms of how the voice constitutes subject and meaning in an ethical-political manner.

This initial barrier concerning the lyrics to the music considered in this study, the methodological challenge of exploring the ethical-political implications of classical song, prompts a thorough investigation concerning the ethical-political implications of music, that does not settle for an analysis that juxtaposed lyrics and music simply as two separate domains, more or less accidentally coinciding in the songs I sing. The cases in this study highlight the issue of ethical-political implications beyond what may be implied by up-to-date lyrics, with their seemingly distinct realm of meaning.

It seems to me that the question of what makes music political, be it instrumental music or song, concerns in a radical manner the issue of reference: if, and if so, how, and finally what music refers to, during a particular performance. I write here of reference in a wide but still distinctly musical way that does not collapse sound into the (presumably) distinctly verbal characteristics of language: how music refers to the reality it is also part of, immersed in and creates, what it might be performed as and experienced as participating in, independently of whether this music is ‘pure’ music or song.

Given the outcomes of the analysis in Chapter 4, I find that a constructive way to approach the ethical-political implications of singing is to explore the semiotic-symbolic dynamics between sound and word, as the analysis indicates that these come together in singing both as integrated realms of meaning and as a form of enhanced dualism, in the voice as it is carried from the singer towards the audience. Ethics and politics, as domains adhering to an intersubjective and public sphere, are often conceived of as predominantly realms of words, logic and arguments, presumably qualitatively distinct from that of sound, music, breathing and development of phrase. But the singer negotiates these realms through the use of voice, as it carries towards the audience.

Of course, links between music and any kind of verbal discourse entail theoretical and methodical challenges, especially concerning views on verbal and non-verbal meaning, the presumed non-referential characteristics of music and its temporality as opposed to the presumed static and spatial characteristics of the written symbol. Even though the ideal of an absolutely autonomous music has to a large degree been abandoned (Hammer, 2006, p. 149), it seems to me that in the continuum of positions on music and meaning – from notions of the purely musical, in which musical meaning is conceived of only as the internal play of sounding forms, to positions that argue a degree of referential characteristics in music – some form or the other of formalism prevails (Goehr, 2004, p. 17). It is a notion that meaning in music is and must be of another nature than verbal, symbolic language; that music addresses other truths and realities, and does so in ways that verbal discourse cannot; and consequently, that verbal language does the same in ways that music cannot.

Thus, philosophy, adhering either by approving or rejecting notions of the purely musical, has “stuck [music] in a place where it is unexplainable, and then said: Why can’t we explain it?” (Goehr, 2015; 2004, p. 29).<sup>4</sup> Connections exist between sound and meaning, sound and reality, sound and life, but it is difficult to articulate what they are in a methodically legitimate

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<sup>4</sup> Goehr (2015) argues that music is marvelous, but not mysterious: <https://aeon.co/videos/music-is-marvellous-but-not-mysterious-an-interview-with-lydia-goehr>.



manner (Guldbrandsen & Varkøy, 2004, p. 8; Guldbrandsen, 2004, p. 13; Goehr, 2004, pp. 18, 29, 46–47).

Consequently, attempts to verbally articulate meaning in music are often halted by the assumed limits of verbal language. As a result, efforts to explore how singing addresses human conditions and influences ethical and political discourse often end up as mere descriptions of presumably distinct musical qualities that in some way or another amplify an equally presumed distinct textual meaning by furnishing it with sound (cf. Uberg Nerland, 2015, pp. 50–51). The word-sound dichotomy is rarely genuinely disturbed in the theoretical approach. However, for me as a singer, this dichotomy does not exhaustively represent the dynamics urgently activated in song, in the voice, between me and the audience, and between what is sung and the meaning produced in the public sphere of the performance, nor in the writing about that performance.

Therefore, another research gap that justifies this study is the exploration of the possible coextensiveness between the dynamics of word and sound and the dynamics within the voice that can be interpreted as constituting subject and meaning in the performance.

#### 1.2.4 Classical Singing as a Critical Case for Exploring the Ethical-Political Mandate of Music

Dualistic concepts of music are often applied to the performance of classical music and classical singing, such as the standard works serving as cases in this study. Notions of the purely musical seem more readily at hand in considerations of endless da capo arias in Händel operas than with a punch-line activist song.

Goehr (2004) argues that the philosophical silence on musical meaning and the tendency among musicians to try to avoid being censored by retreating to notions of the purely musical are basically two sides of the same coin (2004, p. 18). Rigid dualistic views on the relationship between music and the world, in which music has no content other than itself and refers to nothing but itself, tend to dismiss and “disempower” (p. 8) the musician as a genuine participant in interpersonal and public spheres, let alone discourse in a deliberative democracy defined strictly in terms of verbal deliberation amongst (presumed) equals. Thus, the artist’s musical expression is conceived of as an immanent expression of itself, and mute in every other sense, even though the performance is an “expression of spontaneity, immediacy, and freedom, of feeling and breathing, of conviction and commitment” (p. 148).

Examining the concept of the purely musical versus the extramusical, Goehr argues against simplified dualistic notions of the relation between music and world in which music does not express and mean anything outside of or other than itself, but is only content-free and purely formal. In such views of music “any extramusical references to feelings or emotions, to programmatic content, to visual or verbal association, or to social, political, or moral values are false, because they do not emanate directly from their referentially or conceptually meaningless notes” (p. 8). Such notions of the relationship between music and the world render the musician “merely a musician” (p. 8), and the meaning that might be produced and experienced is considered without any applicable significance outside the presumed distinct musical realm or event. Opposing such notions of music and performance, Goehr finds that in musical expression there “endures an ancient activity that once signified a philosophical quest for the cultivation of the soul and a political quest for freedom” (2004, p. 1), and argues further that

reconnecting music to the original aspirations of *mousiké* [...] allows us to recognize music’s broad philosophical and political significance and its autonomy. For, as paradoxical as it sounds, connecting music to *mousiké* demonstrates that music is philosophical and political already by virtue of music’s being autonomously musical. (2004, p. 1)

Such a reconnection might move us away from “narrowly formalist concerns” (p. 17), and lead us to see

that music’s aesthetic dimension of resistance less concerns an assertion of music’s freedom per se than it does an assertion of a person’s free and individual agency through the medium of music. [...] We might also then want to move our emphasis away from determining the borders of the musical domain to understanding the political power of communication through the expressive voice and performed act. Were we to do this, we could then also think about musical activity as a quest for the autonomous (musical) voice. (2004, p. 17)

It might be argued that inclinations towards dichotomies of music and lyrics in song contribute to the tendency in research into the relation between music, ethics and politics to focus mainly on popular music, or more specifically, its lyrics and what they are “about”. Opera arias, oratorio arias or a collection of Schumann lieder are another matter, with lyrics that perhaps even to the singer make no sense or even feel silly or wrong. Still, as a performative experience, the “performed act” and “power of communication power through the expressive voice” that Goehr addresses, an aria can function as a precise and up-to-date expression

within what is a current ethical-political reality, addressing what goes on in the performative event that unfolds.

I argue that this paradox is exactly what makes classical or operatic singing a critical case for exploring vocal meaning-production and the societal mandate of music. If the performances that are explored and tested in the cases of this study do not indicate a falsification of the existence of ethical-political implications in song, then the probability for falsification is even less in the obvious cases, that is, songs with lyrics and contexts that are explicitly political (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Classical singing and opera force the researcher to view singing based on a more nuanced and dynamized dualism of sound and text. What the aria is 'about' must be analysed in ways that, at least during analysis, disturb all clarifying distinctions by which things can be compared and written about.

### **1.3 Writing About My Own Singing**

In writing about music, ethics and performance as societal-political events, the necessarily external view of the writer, at least when writing, will influence how the relation between music and language is perceived and how this relation is activated and operates in the description of the musical performance and its implications. It might be easier to write 'about' music and performance from the methodically stable, safe and fixed point of view of a defined discipline, in terms of what one hears, sees, is affected by and analyses, that is, as something exterior to the writer and language, voice and sound, instead of something that is already present in or as this language, in or as the writer, or as something that the language and the writer are already in, participating in, before writing about it. Being a professional singer, writing about my own performances and my own voice, puts this 'aboutness' and the dynamics of interior and exterior of language concerning music into play.

There has been a significant amount of research on art, ethics and the public sphere, from a musicological point of view as well as through more arts-based and artistic research approaches. Adhering to the performative turn in research, arts-based research and artistic research often take as a theoretical and methodological point of departure the presumed uniqueness of art in its expression, addressing and constitution of human life. This has generated many interesting investigations into music and performance. However, a tendency to base the perspectives of the investigation on the uniqueness of art as something opposed to language, doubled down with a notion of the uniqueness of music within art in terms of its presumed non-verbal

characteristics, may sometimes obstructs further explorations into music performance as a legitimate form of participation in ethics and politics, apart from at the level of song lyrics.

This study is an attempt to contextualize my own performances as ethics and public political discourse, exploring and testing a notion of singing as something that negotiates what discourse is, dynamizes the relation of word and sound, and constituting the enunciating subject and meaning. I explore the relationship between music, ethics and politics on the basis of an analysis done by me as both performing artist and interviewer, as the singing event is experienced, discussed and criticized in interview conversations with members of the audience. Thus, I consider the study as an attempt to bridge some of the distance between conventional qualitative research, and research based on art and artistic research. But as I discuss in Chapter 3 concerning method, I find that the study also highlights methodical differences, and to some degree I criticize certain strands within research based on art and artistic research. Although it can be read as a form of research based on art, the study is situated within the tenets of conventional qualitative research.

By exploring my own performance practice, I seek to evaluate a position that singing, ethics and politics might be understood as deployed within each other, as music in language and language in music, and where both to a certain degree are coextensive with the event of the singing voice as constituting the enunciating subject and meaning. Based on my own performances, I aim to describe the event of singing as immersed in, addressing and changing reality; that is, singing as ethical and political discourse and action. In my own practice as a soloist, I have on several occasions experienced the performance event as less a performance of a musical work, and also less a performance as such, than an addressing of, participation in and changing of a shared reality, made more explicit through singing in terms of what our lives are like and our basic conditions as human beings, all occurring as interaction in a public sphere. This might be achieved through the conveying of a plot or some form of meaning residing, at least partially, in the musical work, that is, the score and the staging. But what has given rise to this thesis, as an abductive hypothesis, is a recurrent sense of urgency: that something is at stake; that something important and shareable is created, sustained by and dependent on what is done with the voice to the audience; that this something is there in a manner that does not separate the lyrics from sound; and that this something is not limited to music as something presumably distinct from 'the rest' of reality in which it sounds, but rather this, articulated as the overarching hypothesis of the study:

Singing has ethical and political implications.

Writing with this sense of urgency, yet from the distance necessary to write about it and refer to it, has been the methodical challenge of this study. On the combined basis of theoretical discussion and the analysis of post-performance audience interviews, I argue that sound and word can occur as both a unified event of signification and as a re-established dichotomy, when the act of signification has direction from someone to someone, constituting performer and members of the audience as interdependent subjects in the public sphere; and that singing can occur with the characteristics of a claim or a statement, and to some extent as a referring expression.

## **1.4 Theoretical Framework, Auxiliary Hypotheses, Research Questions and Categories**

This “sung reality” is contextualized theoretically in two different ways. First, the study is situated within the tenets of the performative turn as a current research paradigm connecting research and art in different ways. I present perspectives from Schechner (1992, 2003), Small (1998), Austin (1976), Fischer-Lichte (2008), Borgdorff (2007, 2020), Coessens, Crispin and Douglas (2009), Crispin (2014; 2021), Leavy (2009) and Bernstein (1992).

Second, I present the theoretical framework from which the study draws its main theoretical perspectives. These are strands within ethical theory, theory of public political discourse and public sphere theory, and theory of semiotics. I discuss pertinent writings of Løgstrup (1976, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1997, 2010, 2018) and Jonas (1984) concerning ethics; of Habermas (1962, 1984, 1987, 1990, 1992, 1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2006), Rancière (2004, 2009), Goehr (2004), Street (2012) and Uberg Nærland (2015) concerning public political discourse and the public sphere; and of Saussure (1974), Peirce (1994), Barthes (1973, 1977), Kristeva (1984, 1989, 1996a, 1996b), Adorno (2002a, 2002b) and Rolvsjord (2002) concerning semiotic perspectives on voice, subject and meaning.

The theoretical framework is thus structured into three interrelated levels of intersubjective/social, objective/societal and subjective world (Habermas, 1984, pp. 85–94; cf. Eriksen & Weigård, 2016, pp. 16–20, 45–51), in order to provide a framework for exploring three auxiliary hypotheses of singing:

1. Intersubjective/social: Singing constitutes an ethical demand between singer and audience (singing as constituting the relation between singer and audience)

2. Objective/societal: Singing is a form of participating in public political discourse (singing as addressing and participating in the ethical-political sphere in which the performance occurs)
3. Subjective: Subject and meaning are constituted within the dynamics of a singing voice (singing as a transition between the semiotic and symbolic, constituting subject and meaning)

Each theoretical level/auxiliary hypothesis relates to a category in the analysis, and the analysis and discussion are guided by the designated auxiliary research questions:

1. Ethical Demand: To what extent and how does singing constitute an ethical demand between singer and audience?
2. Public Political Discourse: To what extent and how is singing a form of participation in public political discourse?
3. Word and Sound: To what extent and how are subject and meaning constituted by the singing voice?

Questions 1 and 2 gave rise to prepared categories in the analysis. This was different concerning question 3. The implications of the question were difficult to address directly in the interviews. The analysis therefore focuses on the emergent theme of *Word and Sound*, with respect to the dynamics of semiotic and symbolic meaning in song, providing a basis for discussing the third auxiliary question more directly in Chapter 5.

All three questions start with 'to what extent', which might suggest a quantitative methodology and is answerable only in relatively vague terms – to a greater or lesser extent, or not at all. This might seem insubstantial compared to what can be generated from the questions of 'how', as well as foreign to the general approach adopted, since the study both begins with and is guided through out by the assumption that there are implications in singing concerning ethics, politics, and subject and meaning. However, I found the question of 'to what extent' to be warranted as it generates a more vital dialogue in the interviews and a more thorough exploration in the analytical process, since it does not take for granted that there is any such material to be found or explored (cf. Gritten 2013, p. 376).

The overall purpose of the analysis and discussion is to answer the following overarching research question:

What are the ethical and political implications of singing?

## 1.5 Research Design: Case Study with Group Interviews

Following the theoretical contextualization, the dissertation is contextualized methodologically, building on perspectives from among others Leavy (2009), Borgdorff (2020) and Flyvbjerg (2004) concerning arts-based research, artistic research and the use of case studies. The study is designed as an exploratory case study modifying its hypotheses through analysis of three performances:

1. J. S. Bach: Weihnachtsoratorium. 07/08.12.2019
2. Opera Recital: Händel, Mozart, Wagner, Schumann, Grieg. 21.06.2020
3. G. Mahler: Kindertotenlieder. 26/27.09.2020

Even though the study builds on three performances in which I sing myself, the study takes a conventional qualitative approach in which the theoretical framework is applied as frames of reference to the qualitative analysis and discussion of the empirical material, gathered through video and audio recordings of the performances followed by group interviews of members of the audience.

## 1.6 Discussion

The findings of the analysis are discussed in light of the research questions and within the theoretical framework of ethical theory, public sphere theory and semiotics presented in Chapter II.

In the discussion, I argue that from inhalation, through the accent of the voice and development of sound, in articulation, phrasing and direction towards closure and silence, singing constitutes subject and meaning within an ethical-political reality, by addressing this reality. The discussion assesses the meaning of ethical responsibility and participation in the public sphere in relation to singing. Based on the analysis of the three main categories pertaining to the presented interpretational framework, I discuss how the ongoing dynamics between sound and word occur as ethical demand and public political discourse, constituting subject and meaning. Of the three auxiliary research questions, I find that I cannot answer research question 3 concerning subject and meaning in a satisfying manner. However, the question has guided the exploration, analysis and discussion, and I have attempted to let that show in an accountable way.

## 1.7 Objective and Significance

The main objective of the thesis is the attempt to explore the ethical and political implications of singing, resulting in a proposition of the potential of singing as a practice that, through its exposure of the humanity of the performer and audience, can constitute participation in ethical and political discourse and action. My aim is to enhance the awareness of the societal mandate of musicians by widening the notions of what constitutes ethical interaction and the public sphere.

I hope that the significance of this exploring and proposition might contribute to the interdisciplinary fields of performance practice, ethics and politics, particularly on two interrelated levels of practice and research:

First, in terms of *enhancing artistic expertise*, by contributing in the facilitating of a further empowering of the singer's active and conscious participation in an ethically-politically charged reality, even when singing repertoire which is not contemporary (in the sense that it was created recently).

Secondly, in terms of *proposing and justifying – theoretically, methodologically, and as part of the expertise of the artistic practice – singing as ethical and political discourse and action*, by the project's exploring of the dynamic relation between sound and word as ethically and politically significant, thus seeking to widen the notions of what constitutes participation in ethical-political discourse in the public sphere, by articulating a theoretical and methodological conception that assesses singing as such a participation.



## 2 Theoretical Context

In this chapter, the study is contextualized theoretically in two different ways. Section 2.1 situates the study within the tenets of the performative turn as a current research paradigm connecting research and art in different ways. In Sections 2.2–2.4, I present the theoretical framework from which the study draws its main perspectives concerning ethics, public political discourse, and semiotics. These strands do not stem predominantly from the performative turn and art practice as such, nor are they closely related in terms of terminology, fields of research, or aims.<sup>5</sup> However, structured together as an interpretative framework, I have found the combination suitable as a frame of reference for analysis and discussion of what goes on in the voice as I sing to an audience.

### 2.1 The Performative Turn

Given the characteristics of singing on stage or in concert as combining sound, words and theater, generating the experience that the voice is at the same time immersed in, addressing and changing social reality, the following sections present and discuss relevant aspects of the performative turn concerning music, theatre and research on, in and through performance practice.

#### 2.1.1 Performance as Truthful, Real and Relational

Modern performance studies constitute a complex field of research, with varying, constantly negotiated and contested concepts of performativity. They draw on insights and theories within a wide spectrum of fields across the humanities and social sciences, and different traditions in the United States and Europe. Carlson (2008) argues that one way to view and apply performativity in research on art is as concepts through which one explores social and cultural processes by drawing on different insights and theories concerning art, theatre, drama, dance, music, folklore and anthropology, heightening our awareness and sensitivity about our being in the world (Carlson, 2008, pp. 1, 8).

Pioneering performance studies in America, Schechner (2003) challenges traditional notions of theatre, rituals and everyday life, stating that “sometimes – especially in theater – it is

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<sup>5</sup> The combination might therefore be criticized as amounting to a selection of theories put together based on opaque eclecticism. However, I find that it is the usage of the framework that must justify its composition, not the other way around.

necessary to live as if ‘as if’ = ‘is’” (Schechner, 2003, p. xviii). Arguing that this is because “performance is an illusion of an illusion and, as such, might be considered more ‘truthful,’ more ‘real’ than ordinary experience” (p. xix), Schechner bases his argument on his interpretation of Aristotle’s concept in *Poetics* “where theater did not so much reflect living as essentialize it, present paradigms of it” (p. xix). This renders the concept or the meaning of performance as a constantly ongoing experimental process, as our lives are always unstable and experimental:

Performances not only play out our modes, they play with modes, leaving actions hanging and unfinished, so theatrical events are fundamentally experimental: provisional. Any semiotics of performance must start from, and always stand unsteadily on, these unstable slippery bases, made even more uncertain by the continually shifting receptions of various audiences. Because performances are usually subjunctive, liminal, dangerous, and duplicitous, they are often hedged in with conventions and frames: ways of making the places, the participants, and the events somewhat safe. In these relatively safe make-believe precincts, actions can be carried to extremes, even for fun. (Schechner, 2003, p. xix)

In this manner, Schechner claims that “performances in the broad sense of that word [are] coexistent with the human condition” (p. ix). He places the performing arts “in active relation to social life, ritual, play, games, sports, and other popular entertainments” (p. xi), and characterizes theatre as “a very small slice of the performance pie” (Schechner, 1992, p. 10), that is, of the rest of the reality of social life as always performed.

Seeking to widen the notion of music performance, Small (1998) develops the concept of musicking, proposing the following definition: “To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (Small, 1998, p. 9). He argues that music must be conceived of primarily as action rather than as thing, and that this action must be conceived of as concerned with relationships: “Then we see that whatever meaning a musical work has lies in the relationships that are brought into existence when the piece is performed (p. 138).

Thus, Small is more concerned with the socio-dynamics of the performative setting than with conventional intra-musical concepts such as notions of music as an ordering of sound. The relational dynamics of music constitute the meaning of musical practice:

The act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies. They are to be

found not only between those organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as being the stuff of musical meaning but also between the people who are taking part, in whatever capacity, in the performance; and they model, or stand as metaphor for, ideal relationships as the participants in the performance imagine them to be: relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world. (1998, p. 13)

In a sense, Small accentuates this relational dimension in music performance to the extent that relations activated and present in music are not simply the then-and-there-relations of the physical room and time of the performance:

During musical performance, any musical performance anywhere and at any time, desired relationships are brought into virtual existence, so that those taking part are enabled to experience them as if they really did exist. By bringing into existence relationships that are thought of as desirable, a musical performance not only reflects those relationships but also shapes them. [...] It is thus an instrument of exploration. (1998, p. 183)

Small's notion of musicking can serve as a constructive take on how the performative turn opens perspectives on music performance in which it is a production of and participation in a relational reality, through different processes of musical signification.

### 2.1.2 Performance as Events Where the Aesthetic and the Socio-Political Coincide

Discussing performance as event within the context of theatre, Fischer-Lichte (2008) argues that the production of meaning in theatre performance has the transformative power of changing the world. She builds on notions of speech acts as coined by Austin (1976), who argues that linguistic utterances may not only serve to make statements, but may also perform actions: "To utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing [...] or to state I am doing it: It is to do it" (Austin, 1976, p. 6). In the appropriate circumstances, speech is "the performance of an act in saying something as opposed to the performance of an act of saying something" (Austin, 1976, pp. 99–100). Fischer-Lichte argues that this concept of speech acts, where promises, curses etc., do not represent actions or preexisting circumstances, but are actions when uttered, that is, when performed, that are "self-referential and constitutive in so far as they bring forth the social reality they are referring

to” (Fischer-Lichte 2008, p. 24). Linking the term of speech act with the performative turn in the arts, Fisher-Lichte defines the performative turn in theatre as a

redefined relationship between actors and spectators [that] went hand-in-hand with a shift in the semiotic status of the actions and their respective potential meanings. Favored instead was the experience of physicality by all participants and their responses to it, from physiological, affective, energetic, and motor reactions to the ensuing intense sensual experience. The dissolution of boundaries in the arts [...] can be defined as a performative turn. Be it in art, music, literature, or theatre, the creative process tends to be realized in and as performance. Instead of creating works of art, artists increasingly produce events which involve not just themselves but also the observers, listeners, and spectators. (2008, p. 22)

As Carlson (2008) points out, the shift from notions of theatre as a work of art to theatre as an event does not represent a new paradigm of performance for Fisher-Lichte and the German theatre tradition in the same manner as it does in the United States. Rather, performance as event is a continuation of a concept of ‘performance as experience’. Carlsson argues that the ongoing discourse of modern American performance theory has on the whole been oriented

toward pragmatic concerns and the use of performance to achieve certain specific social, cultural, personal, and rhetorical goals. In the formation of modern American performance theory, aesthetics in general and theatre in particular, have often been sidelined or outright rejected as areas of particular interest. (2008, p. 10)

In Europe, on the other hand, the commonplace concept of ‘performance as experience’ has caused the performance aspect of theatre to be seen as directly related to our perception of life as an eventful process. Therefore, Carlson argues, Fischer-Lichte draws her examples mostly “from what might be called the artistic tradition of theatre and performance art, instead of ranging broadly through other examples of social and cultural performance” (Carlson, 2008, p. 4).

Fischer-Lichte explores how a theatre performance can create an event that is “neither envisioned nor legitimized by the traditions and standards of the visual or performing arts” (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 11). She argues that after the performative turn in theatre in the 1960s

theatre was no longer conceived as a representation of a fictive world, which the audience, in turn, was expected to observe, interpret, and understand. [...] Something

was to occur between the actors and the spectators and that constituted theatre.  
(2008, p. 21)

This event between the participants in a performance occurs, for instance, in the performances of the artist Marina Abramović, when she is “actually harming herself, abusing her body with a determined disregard for its limits” (p. 12), and thus putting the audience “in a deeply disturbing and agonizing position that invalidate[s] both the established conventions of theatrical performance and generally of human responsiveness to a given situation” (p. 12).

Such events, Fischer-Lichte argues, challenge the traditional pretence of theatre as well as the rules and norms the audience should apply towards what goes on in terms of interference and sympathy. Members of the audience ended Abramović’s performance by interfering and putting an end to the artist’s ordeal. Fischer-Lichte therefore argues that the performance transformed the “performer and certain spectators” (p. 15), and “transformed the involved spectators into actors” (p. 13):

Such performance eludes the scope of traditional aesthetic theories. It vehemently resists the demands of hermeneutic aesthetics, which aims at understanding the work of art. In this case, understanding the artist’s actions was less important than the experiences that she had while carrying them out and that were generated in the audience. In short, the transformation of the performance’s participants was pivotal. (2008, p. 16)

What is challenged by this concept of performance-as-event is the notion of binaries, most obviously in the way the distinctness of subject and object collapses in and through the transformational process of performance:

The pivotal point of these processes is no longer the work of art, detached from and independent of its creator and recipient, which arises as an object from the activities of the creator-subject. Instead, we are dealing with an event, set in motion and determined by the actions of all the subjects involved – artists and spectators.  
(2008, p. 22)

Inherent in this collapse of the subject-object binary is a change in the relationship between the material and semiotic status of objects in performance:

The material status does not merge with the signifier status; rather, the former severs itself from the latter to claim a life of its own. In effect, objects and actions are no longer dependent on the meanings attributed to them. (2008, p. 22)

Different elements emerge during performance and “appear de-semanticized because they are perceived in their materiality and not as carriers of meaning” and therefore “trigger a wealth of associations, ideas, thoughts, memories, and emotions in the perceiving subjects” (p. 140). The various elements emerging are “perceived as signifiers which refer to diverse ideas and contexts and can be related to a range of signifieds. The isolated materiality [...] thus effects an immense pluralization of potential meaning” (p. 140). The consequence of this is that “dichotomous pairs such as subject/object and signifier/signified lose their polarity and clear definition in performance; once set in motion they begin to oscillate (2008, p. 25).

This effect of the performance event is based on the self-referential and constitutive characteristics of the speech act. That the speech act has the potential to bring forth the social reality that it is referring to is “intuitively known to and practiced by speakers of all languages. Speech entails a transformative power” (p. 24). In fact, Fischer-Lichte finds that Austin drew attention to the performative act as something that destabilizes dichotomous terminological schemes as a whole (p. 25).

In this sense, expressivity and performativity constitute mutually exclusive opposites. Fischer-Lichte finds that performance implies a move away from the body as a carrier of signs to embrace the “real” body. Bodily co-presence of actors and spectators and their physical actions is a “dynamic and ultimately wholly unpredictable process [that] precludes the expression and transmission of predetermined meanings; the performance itself generates its meanings” (p. 35).

This notion of performance as self-generating its meanings is based on what Fischer-Lichte sees as a self-referencing and ever-changing feedback loop provided by the ongoing interactions of performers and audiences. Following the line of thought challenging the dualism of Western binaries of subject-object, mind-body etc., Fischer-Lichte expands on how theatre is constituted not just through sight but always through sound as well, and argues that “the transience of performance is epitomized in its tonality” (p. 120). She argues against notions of tonality in theatre that equate it to spoken language, rendering tonality as a “medium in and through which language appears” (p. 121), and emphasizes how vocality brings forth corporeality:

To hear somebody scream, sigh, moan, sob, or laugh is to perceive these sounds as a specific process of embodiment. The listener perceives the concerned person

in their bodily being-in-the-world, which immediately affects the listener's own being-in-the-world as the scream penetrates, resonates in, and is absorbed by the listener's body. When a performer lets out a scream, they create a moment in which the voice brings itself forth in its own sensual materiality. (2008, p. 125)

As the performative turn centred the notion of contingency in performance, “the feedback loop as a self-referential, autopoietic system enabling a fundamentally open, unpredictable process emerged as the defining principle of theatrical work” (p. 39). Carlson (2008) finds that Fischer-Lichte demonstrates how the autopoietic feedback loop

ties the living process of the theatrical event back to the fundamental processes of life itself, and as the creation of embodied minds on both sides of the loop (actors on the one side, spectators on the other) demonstrates not only how performance operates within human society, but why it is important, indeed essential. (Carlson, 2008, p. 8)

Thus, the autopoietic feedback loop turns performances into events where the aesthetic and the socio-political coincide (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 51), and into experiments in which to explore the specific function, condition and course of the interaction between actors and spectators. Still, Fischer-Lichte finds that “evaluating the outcome of these theatrical experiments proves difficult” (2008, p. 40).

### 2.1.3 Research on, in/through and as Performance

The performative turn has spurred research efforts in the entangled areas of musicology, philosophy of music, performance practice, practice-based research and artistic research (cf. Orning, 2017). Discussing practice-based research and the possibilities of an intrinsic nature of research in the arts, Borgdorff (2007) distinguishes between three types of research: *on*, *for* and *in* the arts.

*Research on the arts* refers to investigations based on the regulative idea of a theoretical distance between researcher and research object, from which the investigation is aimed at drawing valid conclusions about art practice. Although such a distance between researcher and object will always be an idealization, Borgdorff finds that common characteristics in this form of research approaches are ‘reflection’ and ‘interpretation’ “under the inquiring gaze of the researcher” (p. 5).

*Research for the arts* refers to approaches in which “art is not so much the object of investigation, but its objective, [...] *in the service of art practice*” (p. 5). Thus, the research is aimed at delivering tools and knowledge with which the artistic practice can be undertaken and developed as creative process.

For Borgdorff, *research in the arts* represents the crux of the matter, in terms of

whether a phenomenon like research in the arts exists – an endeavour in which the production of art is itself a fundamental part of the research process, and whereby art is partly the result of research. (Borgdorff, 2007 p. 1)

He argues that the underlying premise in research in the arts is that no fundamental separation exists between theory and practice. Research in the arts “does not assume the separation of subject and object, and does not observe a distance between the researcher and the practice of art. Instead, the artistic practice itself is an essential component of both the research process and the research result” (p. 5). Through experimentation and interpretation, Borgdorff argues, research in the arts can reveal and articulate situated, tacit knowledge embodied in art practice, that is, both the art object and the creative process (pp. 13, 15):

There are no art practices that are not saturated with experiences, histories and beliefs; and conversely there is no theoretical access to, or interpretation of, art practice that does not partially shape that practice into what it is. Concepts and theories, experiences and understandings are interwoven with art practices and, partly for this reason, art is always reflexive. Research in the arts hence seeks to articulate some of this embodied knowledge throughout the creative process and in the art object. (p. 5)

Borgdorff distinguishes art practice-as-research from art practice-in-itself by qualifying art practice as research when “its purpose is to expand our knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects and creative processes”, revealing and articulating a presumed “tacit knowledge that is situated and embodied” in the artworks and artistic processes (p. 15). This embodied and tacit knowledge in art is characterized as forms of practical knowledge, a ‘knowing-how’ and as a sensory knowledge (p. 11), and even though it must somehow be documented and disseminated as research processes and outcomes if the practice is to qualify as research (p. 15), Borgdorff finds this knowledge to be “cognitive, though nonconceptual, rational, but nondiscursive” (p. 11). Consequently, Borgdorff in a later article (2010) defines research in the arts slightly narrower, when the “artistic



practice is not only the result of the research, but also its methodological vehicle, when the research unfolds *in and through* the acts of creating and performing (Borgdorff, 2010, p. 46).

Building on similar strands of thinking within the performative turn, Coessens, Crispin and Douglas (2010) seek to articulate the implications of performance more directly on artistic practice, advocating an artistic turn in the form of a manifesto. Attempting to define artistic research and what makes it different to other research, they find that it is characterized by its “ecological situatedness” within its related context, which “can open of new possibilities for subject/object relations in research” (Coessens, Crispin & Douglas, 2010, p. 65). The fundamental premise of this situatedness is therefore the interlocked nature between artistic practice and research, as well as the merging of the subject with the object of research (p. 73). They argue that the artistic turn is not a displacement of science by art, but rather

an acknowledgement of an essential interrelationship between these two different ways of positioning ourselves in the world – the one goal oriented, focused by identifying and solving problems, based in deductive method, and the other concerned with forming questions, images and experiences through inductive means that take into account the individual in society. (p. 72)

Asking what knowledge is developed through art, they argue further that «artistic research comes about when there is something to be found out that is addressed neither by science nor by expert practice alone» (p. 96). Thus, artistic research “resides in the recording, expression and transmission of the artist’s research trajectory: his or her knowledge, wanderings, and doubts concerning exploration and experimentation” (p. 91). By claiming a role in understanding knowledge, the artistic turn can serve to “rebalance ways in which knowledge is produced in culture” (p. 17). Tracing a similar line of thought as Borgdorff, they argue that through artistic research “new insights into otherwise tacit and implicit knowledge can be gleaned” (p. 91), and that it is “only through the artist-researcher remaining an artist while pursuing these insights that he or she will be able to enrich the existing inquiries carried out by scientific researchers” (p. 91). This knowledge is

embodied in the skill and know how that are intrinsically performative and not merely applied to the performing or creative situation. It is a form of knowledge that enables us to see the world as continuously in the process of formation, and to act accordingly (p. 85).

In this manner, they argue, research through art can “engage in a critical analysis and semiotic interpretation of art as a human-induced process embedded in a broader artistic community and culture” (p. 72).

Following ways pointed out in this manifesto, Crispin (2014) argues that artistic research enters a “no-go area” in terms of actively and openly applying one’s own subject in research (Crispin, 2014, pp. 139, 142). Different kinds of expositions can function as vehicles for ideas and emotions, in which research and art performance

simultaneously honor both the complex nature of art and its conception and the necessary rigour of scholarship [...] The developing field of artistic research has been noteworthy for the willingness of many of its practitioners to embrace interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary approaches to their research questions as a means of generating a widely relevant discourse. (Crispin, 2014, pp. 140–142)

Crispin makes a distinction between the interpretation of art and the artistic practice itself. The interpretation is made from memory, as a new practice that shadows the practice that is explained. Instead of obstructing an adequate language about the music experience, however, the time gap between artistic realization and the articulation of research is identified by Crispin as a constructive place for artistic experimentation where perceptions of language, method and design are challenged. She refers to Rheinberger (1997), who considers scientific experimentation to be “impure, hybrid settings ... [which] must be capable of differential reproduction ... in order to behave as devices for producing scientific novelties that are beyond our present knowledge, that is, to behave as ‘generator[s] of surprises’” (Rheinberger, 1997, p. xx, in Crispin, 2013, p. 69).

Building on Rheinberger’s argument, Crispin finds that both art practice and research must be confusing, complex and uncertain in order to generate surprising articulations. She advocates an artistic practice that challenges the language of its own practice (Crispin, 2014, p. 145) and argues that “music, because of its non-representational character and existence as performance in ‘real-time’, poses many challenges to those who would present artistic research through standard dissemination mechanisms” (p. 142). Artistic research represents a ‘twist’ in terms of language and representation, not only of the art practice, but the research on it, because “we look at ways in which personal reflection, auto-ethnography and self-reflexivity can continue to be developed as viable approaches to conducting artistic research (Crispin, 2021, pp. 73–74).

In a similar manner as Borgdorff, Crispin understands the knowledge articulated in art and research on art as a kind of tacit knowledge that generates artistic practice (Crispin, 2014, p. 141). And because this knowledge is intrinsically performative, it denotes not only knowledge about something, but perhaps first and foremost a presumed act of knowing *through* performing, or even *as* performing (Crispin, 2021, 63). Crispin argues that the artists-cum-researchers strive to hear things not ‘on their own terms’ but ‘in their own selves’ (Crispin, 2021, p. 74). Thus, understanding the deep engagement and attention that characterizes e.g. an act of phrasing a certain place in a Schönberg piano piece,<sup>6</sup> “is an important part of grappling with what musical practice is actually about – and that, in turn, becomes another part of the puzzle of comprehending musical practice *as research*” (Crispin, 2014, 148). Consequently, “the terms on which we hear things must be more inclusive and communicable or the reflection becomes too myopic to function as research” (Crispin, 2021, p. 74). The artist-cum-researcher works under a double pressure by having to communicate, both in a research environment and otherwise, what music can be and express, and at the same time avoid reductionist approach to the experienced nature or basic function in music.

#### 2.1.4 Applicability to Analysis and Discussion: Participation in the Subject Matter when Writing/Singing

By not taking for granted absolute dividing lines between subject and object, researcher and phenomenon, artist and researcher, and by looking at the distance between the artistic and the articulating practice as a desired and constructive challenge for language and design, artistic research has raised a valid criticism of methodological understandings adopted in conventional research approaches. The performative turn in research based on art or through art challenges the distinctions we apply to make sense of things. These are distinctions which we perhaps must apply to be able to articulate something about something, but which are often taken for granted, e.g., that between subject and object, expression and impression, form and content (Leavy, 2009, pp. 263–264). When that happens, distinctions taken for granted can make it too easy to orient oneself within a given field, resulting in less-than-satisfying descriptions of musical praxis and experience.

Since the present study contains the analysis of three of my own performances, I have found strands of thinking within AR and different forms of arts-based research highly relevant. They foreground the boundary-blurring characteristics of music, both in the audience’s experience and in my own when performing and writing about it. This has served as a productive guideline both for the categories analysed and the methodical approach.

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6 Crispin analyses A. Schönberg’s *Drei Klavierstücke*, Op. II/I.

However, as I address more thoroughly in the methodological discussion in Chapter 3, I find neither research based on art nor AR to be necessarily essentially different from conventional forms of research based on conceptual, argumentative and concluding language. Distancing AR from “standard dissemination mechanisms” (Crispin, 2014, p. 142), the tendency within AR is sometimes to regard its research practices and artistic practices to merge into a new methodology applicable for articulating knowledge, often referred to as tacit or even silenced knowledge, beyond the reach of presumably rigid, conventional qualitative research (Leavy, 2009, pp. 9, 107, 259). For the purposes of this chapter, it suffices to point out that knowledge is never completely tacit nor explicit (Wenger, 1998, p. 69), and that no matter how necessary it might be always to destabilize distinctions and dichotomies between subject and object, theory and praxis, method and art, such distinctions remain preconditional for language and perception. I find that a trustworthy study of performance practice situated within the performative turn must acknowledge that conventional dualisms and dichotomies cannot stand as given if one is to take seriously the implications of performance on subject and language. But at the same time, a trustworthy study must also acknowledge that without dualisms and dichotomies, nothing can be gained or even articulated in terms of analysis.

Bernstein (1992) criticizes notions of art and aesthetics that regard art as something that can be secluded from other domains of reality, a presumed distinct aesthetic realm, whereby the performer and the language about the performance run the risk of being detached and alienated from human life. This aesthetic realm remains unaffected by the instability and responsibility this life represents to the performer and the researcher, to the performance and the language interpreting it:

What can we make of a domain in which questions of truth, goodness, efficacy, even pleasure (since our interest in art is ‘disinterested’) are eliminated at the outset? What sort of beast might beauty be if in considering it we are not considering how the world is (truth), how we do or should comport ourselves in the world (morality), or what might be useful or pleasurable to us? A silent beast, then, given voice only through the gestures of approximation and analogy to what it is not. [...] Autonomous art is art that is autonomous from (rationalized) truth and morality [...], and it provides us with the first hint as to how the discordance of art and truth comes to stand as a sign of modernity. The experience of art as aesthetical is the experience of art as having lost or been deprived of its power to speak the truth – whatever truth will mean when no longer defined in exclusive ways. This loss, no matter how theorized or explained, I shall call ‘aesthetic alienation’; it denominates art’s alienation from truth which is caused by art’s becoming aesthetical, a becoming that has been fully consummated only in modern societies. (1992, pp. 3–4)

Bernstein argues further that this aesthetic alienation is also continued in the discourse of art praxis:

The move to 'practice' talk, to providing an account of what it is and what it is not to be a full citizen of the art world, does not of itself directly entail the kind of sublation of distinctions central to overcoming aesthetics; such talk merely replaces mental talk (aesthetic attitudes and the like) by practice (institution or language game) talk, but leaves the categorical separation of art and truth firmly in place. (1992, p. 6)

Building on the argument Bernstein makes that the move to practice does not overcome the aesthetic alienation separating art from truth and morality, it seems rather that the performative turn sometimes camouflages this alienation, as long as it operates with a notion of art as something distinct from other forms of expression and sees artistic research as a new form of research and methodology distinct from other research methods.

If this is what characterizes the performative turn, in performance practice and the research on it, then the performative turn amounts to little more than another round of romantic aesthetics in the sense that it presupposes a detached, distinct and moral-free realm of human thought and practice, in which an object can be performed and analysed as something exterior to subject and language by a similarly detached, distinct and unaffected-by-others subject. As a singing performer, and as a researcher writing about it, I do not recognise such a performativity nor such a notion of aesthetics as.<sup>7</sup>

What I do know as a performer is that both in performance and in writing about it, there is more at stake than music for music's sake, more than isolated musical meanings and the task of articulating what they might be. Indeed, if they are simply something in and for themselves, I believe, building on Bernstein, that they cannot be sung or written about. They are silent. And the task of trying to articulate the meaning of this silence is, in my opinion, doomed to regression, often eloquent in its attempt, but never really saying anything about something. To uphold the unspeakable in music and music performance seems to me a safe undertaking, because you risk nothing with what you say or write. This lack of risk could not be further away from what goes on in performance. What goes on when performing and enunciating is the risk of loss of meaning, language, self and relation to what is addressed.

At the heart of this thesis lies the hunch or intuition that when singing, the voice is touch, care, trust, protest, revolution, violence, protection. At least sometimes, the voice is all the singing subject has, all it can activate, the only thing that makes it what it is, and therefore a

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<sup>7</sup> However, *aesthetics* and *distance* develop as important topics in the analysis and discussion in Chapters 4 and 5.

necessary constitution of life, reality and self (Knudsen, Skånland, Trondalen et al., 2014, p. 3). No performance occurs in an a-relational, a-political, a-ethical vacuum. Audiences do not distinguish strictly between instrument and performer, but rather experience them as one (Stubbley, 1995, p. 59), or the sound as extensions of the performer (Bresler, 2005, pp. 176–177), when perceptual boundaries and sensations are blurred (Leavy, 2009, p. 113). In the same way that performance occurs as relational reality, so does writing about it. Both performed sound and written symbol are charged by current reality and the subjects inhabiting it.

These are urgent implications of the performative turn that challenge distinctions between subject and object; between language referring from a presumed methodical distance and language as survival and necessary action against silence; between writing and performing, between regulating syntax and the flow of signification in the voice. These urgent implications impose methodical chaos upon perception and language, as singing forces the humanity of the singer upon the audience. Clear distinctions, operating as ordering dichotomies, are blurred by the voice.

Yet that is the position, chaotic as it might be, that to me seems to be methodologically the most accountable starting point for writing ‘about’ singing, in line with what Schechner (2003) sees as the necessary “unstable slippery bases” on which the semiotics of performativity must unsteadily stand (p. xix). This position verges on the loss of both method and language, and therefore risks silence after all. It can easily be criticized by well-defined disciplines for being prone to bias and methodological opaqueness. Still, that is the cost of taking the performative turn.

As a performer-researcher, I find it better not to presume that I am able to treat performativity as something I can write about as external to me and my writing – even less so when writing about my own performances. I have found it important not to discard this ambiguity between subject and object too soon in the research process. It is an ambiguity that has caused me to lose a sense of self, what I know and my language about it. Yet through that process, I believe I have been able to write forth a distance, a re-established distinction between me and the performative reality constituted by my singing. The articulation building on that distance, that is, this thesis as referring to the performances, need not overcome or hide that ambiguity. Rather, the ambiguity has played out within the language used about the practice.

I am not arguing that subject and language are constantly destabilized in performance. If that were the case, it would not be possible for the subject to signify at all, nor would a text appear on paper. Rigorous language and a somewhat static method are necessary when describing something, so that language is not immersed in its referent to the point of collapsing

identification. This also applies when describing music and performance. Nevertheless, the implications of performance for language and its ability to refer must be written about.

This has been challenging throughout the entire writing process. But in that manner performativity and language about performativity have imposed a continued critique of the theoretical and methodological choices I have made concerning the practice of music and its written description. In Chapters 3 (Methodological Context) and 5 (Discussion), I will therefore argue that the urgency that unfolds in singing simultaneously makes distinctions blur and become more apparent: as the singer performs with the radical instability of the voice, singing sweeps away subject and language as meaningful realms of the symbolic, including theoretical and methodical language, and simultaneously re-establish subject and language in a necessary action of signification, in singing and in research, and in ethics and political discourse.

### 2.1.5 Conclusion

In section 2.1, I have outlined aspects of the performative turn concerning music and theatre that inform my interpretation and analysis of my own performances: performance as something real; performance as constituting social relations; performance as events in which the political and the aesthetical coincide. Each of these aspects highlight several questions and challenges in the analysis and discussion of my own singing in the cases of this study.

Further, I have discussed how these aspects of the performative turn implicate on method and representation in research on music performance: notions of research on, in and as the performance of the art practice; the distance between the original performance and the text referring to it; and the risks of ending up with a text that is “silent”. These are approaches and problems concerning methods and writing about one’s own practice which are highlighted in the analysis and discussion, and will therefore also be treated more thoroughly in Chapter 3 Methodical Context.

In the following sections 2.2–2.4 I present and discuss more directly the theoretical framework from which the study draws its main theoretical perspectives concerning ethics, public political discourse, and semiotics.

## 2.2 Ethical Demand

In this section, broad meta-ethical theory concerning normativity, power, responsibility and interdependence is presented, drawing on the thinking of Løgstrup (1976, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 1997, 2010, 2018) and Jonas (1984). First, I present general aspects of both, then I discuss how these might apply to analysis of the interview conversations about my own singing. Taken together, these strands of ethical theory provide a frame of reference for the category of *Ethical Demand* in the analysis and discussion in Chapter 4 and 5, for exploring how my singing may be considered a form of participation in the encountered normativity constituted by the relation between me and the audience.

### 2.2.1 Trust and Demand

Løgstrup develops his notion of the ethical demand, arguing the meta-ethical position that in any given encounter, in any form of communication and interaction, humans are positioned in intersubjective relations, in which given dynamics of power, care, freedom, interdependence, attachment and trust constantly unfold. He argues that humans are given into each other's care and show of trust, and that this puts us under an ethical demand:

That life together with and over against one another consists in one person being delivered over to another person means that our mutual relationships are always relationships of power, the one person being more or less in the power of another person. [...] This self-surrender is a part of his or her life, irrespective of any decision on his or her part. [...] This implies the demand that we take care of the life which has been placed in our hands. [...] In other words, it is impossible to avoid having power over the person with whom we associate. We may very much dislike the idea of having another person's life in our hands, even in the least degree. We possibly find it to be unworthy of both of us. We might wish instead that every contact between persons were a free meeting of free spirits. [...] The fact remains, however, that this is not the case, and therefore the fundamental phenomenon of ethical life is something else. Because power is involved in every human relationship, we are always in advance compelled to decide whether to use our power over the other person for serving him or her or for serving ourselves. [...] That a person is more or less in the power of another person is a fact we cannot alter; it is a fact of life. We do not deliberately choose to trust, and thereby deliver ourselves over to another. We constantly live in a state of being already delivered – either through a passing mood or in terms of something which in a fundamental way affects our entire destiny. (Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 53–54)



Løgstrup describes how reality is ethically charged through the fact that over against one another, we are always already interdependent. Trust is an existential phenomenon of life and generates in us an ethical demand to meet this trust by taking care of one another. As a fundamental premise of our humanity, our interdependence in a way forces us to trust each other, not by deliberation and choice, but as given condition. Trust is an ethical demand constituting every relation, meeting and interaction, every lie and every truth spoken or performed. Whether or not this trust and exposure of dependency is met by care is a subordinate matter. The ethical demand is always there, charging intersubjective relations, expressions and actions. As interdependent, we are always practitioners of power and hold the life of our fellow human being in our hands.

Løgstrup sees the practice of power as poignantly present in the relationship between adult and child. The child can only trust without reservation, unlike adults who have adjusted to social conventions of appearing neutral in the interaction towards each other:

The important thing is that if a person's trust is met by any other response than acceptance, it turns into distrust. [Therefore] one neutralizes his or her own trust in advance. [...] The child, however, will not go along with this. He or she is able to trust only without reservation. When he or she shows trust he or she gives him or herself completely. The child, being yet outside of convention, stands in the power of the given alternative. If he or she fails to encounter love, his or her future possibilities are destroyed. (1997, p. 20)

Therefore, this relation between the adult and the child also exposes how the ethical demand is present and functions in every relation:

Although it is in the child's relation to the adult that the one is surrendered to the other in the most far-reaching and fateful sense – which is why science has been able to establish it – it is nonetheless in one degree or another true also of all the relationships in which we deal with one another. A person never has something to do with another person without also having some degree of control over him or her. It may be a very small matter, involving only a passing mood, a dampening or quickening of spirit, a deepening or removal of some dislike. But it may also be a matter of tremendous scope, such as can determine if the life of the other flourishes or not. [...] We do indeed constitute one another's world and destiny. (1997, pp. 15–16)

Specifically, Løgstrup argues that the ethical demand occurs and can be heard as trust in spoken conversation:

In its basic sense, trust is essential to every conversation. In conversation as such we deliver ourselves over into the hand of another. This is evident in the fact that in the very act of addressing a person we make a certain demand of him. This demand is not merely for a response to what we say. And the self-surrender is not essentially a matter of what is said. [...] What happens is that simply in addressing the other, irrespective of the importance of the content of what we say, a certain note is struck through which we, as it were, step out of ourselves in order to exist in the speech relationship. For this reason the point of the demand – though unarticulated – is that the speaker is accepted as the note struck by the speaker's address is accepted. For a person inadvertently or even intentionally not to hear the note in what we say, therefore, means that it is we ourselves who are being ignored, provided it is we ourselves who dared to make the overture<sup>8</sup>. (1997, pp. 14–15)

Here, it seems to me, Løgstrup all but identifies the tone of one's voice – which is taken up or rejected by the one towards whom it sounds – with the subject enunciating it. It is the enunciator who has dared to step out of him or herself and exist in the sounding of the voice. The ethical implication of this is that it is one's self that is exposed in the sound of one's voice, and one's self that is taken care of or rejected. I will pick up on this below, concerning this tone as song, and how this connects the ethical demand to the theoretical framework concerning sign and reference.

## 2.2.2 Beyond Reasons for and Results of Ethics

Vetlesen (2014) argues that the meta-ethical position of the ethical demand developed by Løgstrup transcends the traditional differences between a cognitivist and non-cognitivist notion of ethics. Despite their differences, cognitivist and non-cognitivist notions share the same point of view in terms of the origins of ethical phenomena: the human subject and its intentional abilities (Vetlesen, 2014, p. 98).

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8 A better translation from the Danish “Ikke at høre eller ville høre ens anslæde tone betyder derfor, at ens selv overses, for såvidt det er een selv, der har vovet seg frem i den” might be: “Not to hear or intentionally ignore the struck note of a person, therefore means that this person is ignored, since it is he or she who as dared to venture forward in it [the sound/note].”

Concerning “note” versus “tone”: The Danish and Norwegian term is “tone” and refers both to the inaudible vibe or mood of a social setting, and to material qualities such as timbre, phrasing, pitch, and volume, as well as the emotional quality experienced in these, or simply musicality as such. “Note” refers to the tone as written in a score. This English translation of Løgstrup (1997) applies the term “note”. In my discussion of Løgstrup's thinking, I apply “tone”, as I find that it is more in line with his general argument.

This is not the case with Løgstrup. Demand, power and responsibility are encountered in the world as innately positive or negative, that is, as charged, spontaneous expressions of life (Vetlesen, 2014, p. 92). Thus, an ethical point of view is not something that is generated within the subject; it is not an opinion the subject acquires regarding actions and goals. Rather, it is a back-light which is always thrown on to our goals, actions and efforts in the form of an appeal issuing from the relationships in which we already stand with other people, and from the conditions we already live under, whether we want to or not (2014, p. 97).

Therefore, Vetlesen shows, Løgstrup sees questions concerning reasons for the display of trust as fundamentally misguided:

It is not in our power to reject the phenomenological reality of the demand, which for Løgstrup is tantamount to the actual (given, encountered) normativity of the demand. In his analysis of it, the demand to safeguard the one who has exposed himself through trust in me represents a reality that I have neither created nor have the opportunity to recreate in the sense of modifying or removing it. The demand comes to me without my having wanted it to do so. I get involved simply by virtue of being faced with another human being. The basic phenomenon in human existence is namely that of interdependence. (2014, p. 91. My translation)

Modern ethical theories often aim for concrete and directly applicable results, generated through discussion of dilemmas, often hypothetical “puzzles” and “hard case” situations, influenced by modern scientific methodology and procedures. However, Vetlesen argues that ethics need not be concerned only with finding solutions to dilemmas and concrete cases. He criticizes such notions of ethics as opting too much for gaining control of situations or conflicts which are always more complicated than what can be met by clean and simple answers. Building on Løgstrup’s notion of the ethical demand, Vetlesen advocates an ethical theory which does not consist of mechanisms by which solutions can be produced, but is rather something which must be ‘lived’ (Vetlesen, 2014, p. 140). According to Løgstrup, the ethical demand is normatively given, always and in advance, as a fundamental phenomenon of life:

Regardless of how varied the communication between persons may be, it always involves the risk of one person daring to lay himself or herself open to the other in the hope of a response. This is the essence of communication and it is the fundamental phenomenon of ethical life [...] Trust is not of our own making; it is given. Our life is so constituted that it cannot be lived except as one person lays him or herself open to another person and puts her or himself into that person’s hands either by showing or claiming trust. (Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 17–18)

### 2.2.3 Responsibility spans into the Future, and Issues as an “Ought” from the “Is”

Questions concerning reasons for ethics are met in a similar way by Jonas (2014), who also argues for an encountered normativity in the world. His notion of the imperative of responsibility has similarities with the meta-ethical position contained in the ethical demand as defined by Løgstrup, and the example Jonas provides as evidence for the imperative of responsibility is the same as the one Løgstrup gives for the ethical demand: the total responsibility towards a child, the being of the newborn as a charged phenomenon, issuing not simply a “mere is”, but an “ought” (Jonas 2014, pp. 68–79, 130–135; cf. Vetlesen, 2014, pp. 68–69).

Firstly, Jonas argues that ethical discourse has been too preoccupied with what we can know, the here and now, and our responsibility has been confined to what we are able to foresee. Jonas articulates instead an imperative of responsibility that involves the expansion of the horizon of responsibility in time towards the unknown reality of the future (Jonas, 1984, p. 118), and for an ethics in which an “ought” issues from the “is”, that is, from the being of the phenomenon (p. 130). In search of an ethics for the technological age, Jonas finds that

the time spans of responsibility as well as of informed planning have widened unprecedentedly. [...] Human action has changed and with it the focus of ethical theory. For, reflecting on everything – on the magnitude of our novel powers and the novelty of their products, their impact on the human condition everywhere, and the dynamism they let loose into an indefinite future – we must see that responsibility with a never known burden and range has moved into the center of political morality. (1984, p. 122)

Vetlesen argues that Jonas’ ethics precisely articulates what has changed since the ethics of Aristotle, and therefore what a discourse of ethics must address which the tradition after Aristotle could not (Vetlesen, 2014, pp. 58, 70). With his ‘heuristics of fear’, Jonas develops an ethics of distance and future. We are morally responsible for the consequences of our actions as well as lack of action, even when these consequences cannot yet be imagined (pp. 61–62). The unpredictable future is what constitutes the horizon of our responsibility, not simply what we know here and now (pp. 62–63). Jonas articulates this as a categorical imperative: “Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life” (Jonas, 1984, p. 11). We have a duty to ensure a future (p. 38), a duty toward the existence and the condition of future generations:

It is this sort of duty that is involved in a responsibility for future mankind. It charges us, in the first place, with ensuring that there be a future mankind [...], and second, with a duty toward their condition, the quality of their life. (1984, p. 40)

Secondly, Jonas' argument opposes what has been a general consensus after Hume, that any statement of morality that is derived from descriptive premises must be considered invalid (Vetlesen, 2014, p. 66). According to the tradition following Hume, no "ought" can be derived from "being"; no path leads from "is" to "ought", no facts, actions or other circumstances in the world are ethically charged – we only interpret and evaluate them as good or bad, as sources of pleasure or pain. Thus, this normativity derives from the human subject, not the outer world. Normativity and value are projected on the world by the human subject, they are not innately in the phenomena of the world (p. 67).

Jonas argues against such premises of ethics as "the most firmly entrenched dogmas of our time: that there is no metaphysical truth, and that no 'ought' can be derived from 'being'" (Jonas, 1984, p. 44). He finds that "with the very assumption of such a concept of being, the rigid separation of 'is' and 'ought' reflects in itself already a definite metaphysics" (p. 44). His critique of ethical theory that holds that no "ought" can issue from an "is" is the underlying premise of such a theory, namely

the concept of a naked "is", present, past, or future. Needed, therefore, is an ontic paradigm in which the plain factual "is" evidently coincides with an "ought" – which does not, therefore, admit for itself the concept of a "mere is". (1984, p. 130)

Jonas acknowledges that "only an immanent claim can objectively ground for someone else an obligation to transitive causality" (p. 130). Searching for such an immanent claim as evidence of a path from "is" to "ought" that can sustain the argument of ethical responsibility, he argues that a single instance is enough to break the ontological dogma (p. 131) and turns "to the timeless archetype of all responsibility, the parental for the child. Archetype it is in the genetic and typological respect, but also in the epistemological, because of its immediate evidence" (p. 130). He describes the being of the child as

the most familiar sight: the newborn, whose mere breathing uncontradictably addresses an ought to the world around, namely, to take care of him. Look and you know. I say "uncontradictably" not "irresistibly": for of course the force of this, as of any, "ought" can be resisted, its call can meet with deafness [...], or can be drowned by other calls and pressures [...]. This fact takes nothing away from the claim being incontestable as such and immediately evident. (1984, p. 131)

The newborn generates “the always acute, unequivocal, and choiceless responsibility which the newborn claims for himself” (p. 134). This claim of an “ought” in the “is” of the newborn, this innate normativity encountered as the being of the infant, is not a request. The claim is silent, as the ethical demand in Løgstrup is silent. The normative claim is not uttered as such, and nor is it as such an appeal:

Nor do I say “an entreaty” to the world (“please take care of me”), for the infant cannot entreat as yet; and anyway, an entreaty, be it ever so moving, does not oblige. Thus no mention also is made of sympathy, pity, or whichever of the emotions may come into play on our part, and not even of love. I mean strictly just this: that here the plain being of a *de facto* existent immanently and evidently contains an ought for others. (1984, p. 131)

Constituting the radical claim to be taken care of, Jonas argues that the newborn child, with every breath “unites in himself the self-accrediting force of being already there and the demanding impotence of being-not-yet; the unconditional end-in-itself of everything alive and the still-have-to-come of the faculties for securing this end (p. 134). The demand to avert death prevents any fetishism of a here-and-now. Rather, it presents an imperative of responsibility that stretches forward into the future:

The radical insufficiency of the begotten as such carries with it the mandate to the begetters to avert its sinking back into nothing and to tend its further becoming. [...] Its observance (even by others) becomes an ineluctable duty toward a being now existing in its own authentic right and in total dependence on such observance. (1984, p. 134)

Jonas locates the proclamation of the ought, and the attendant ethical duty to take action in order to preserve and take care of, in the breathing of the child:

The immanent ought-to-be of the suckling, which his every breath proclaims, turns thus into the transitive ought-to-do of others who alone can help the claim continually to its right and make possible the gradual coming true of the teleological promise which it carries in itself from the first. They must do this continually, so that the breathing might continue and with it also the claim renew itself continually [...] Their power over the object of responsibility is here not only that of commission but also that of omission, which alone would be lethal. [...] Thus the “ought” manifest in the infant enjoys indubitable evidence, concreteness, and urgency. Utmost facticity of “thisness”, utmost right thereto,

and utmost fragility of being meet here together. In him it is paradigmatically evident that the locus of responsibility is the being that is immersed in becoming, surrendered to mortality, threatened by corruptibility. [...] In the case of continually critical vulnerability of being, responsibility becomes a continuum of such instants. (1984, pp. 134–135)

Thus, Jonas argues that the infant is the archetype of all responsibility, both in terms of self-evidence and content, as well as its initial germ in the generic human condition (p. 135).

#### 2.2.4 Beyond the Child-Relation in Everyday Action and Art

As with Løgstrup, Jonas identifies the responsibility for the child as the preeminent example of how reality is ethically charged. However, this responsibility is not limited to an ethics of close relations. Vetlesen (2014) finds that Jonas' argument is based on that

in today's complex, high-tech and globalized world, the responsibility for unknown, not-yet-experienced and distant others is no less important than the responsibility for the close few – simply because the group of people affected by my – or our – actions in the here-and-now is constantly expanding, in time and in space. In short, how do I relate to all those who will never be able to become a face – The Other – for me? (Vetlesen, 2014, pp. 118–119. My translation)

This encountered charged quality of total responsibility, prominent with the child, but extending beyond the child-relation and towards the future, Løgstrup finds also to be present in the experience of art. In his treatment of art and knowledge Løgstrup (1995a/2018)<sup>9</sup> develops his notion of interdependence as constitutive of our existence, claiming that it is through the ethical demand, which issues from our interdependence, that we can understand our historical existence as such (Løgstrup, 2018, pp. 54–56). This interdependence goes hand in hand with a total responsibility towards each other, and this responsibility is poignantly present in artistic expression. An ethical demand to take care of others makes itself known in the experience of art. Løgstrup finds that when appealed to by the ethical demand, we cannot escape the feeling that we are responsible in a radical way, towards everyone. Løgstrup finds this feeling of radical responsibility to be operating in the experience of art as well:

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9 With this work, *Art and Knowledge*, only excerpts have been translated into English, published in Løgstrup 1995a, *Metaphysics* Vol. II, pp. 291–336). Citations from outside the published translated excerpts are my translations from Danish (Løgstrup 2018).

Man cannot avoid understanding himself in advance as all-responsible [...] This perception is confirmed, it seems to me, by the aesthetic experience. The individual's overall responsibility manifests itself aesthetically. [...] what I experience aesthetically corresponds to a fictional involvement in it. (2018, p. 57. My translation)

Thus, for Løgstrup, aesthetics is not separated from the rest of the world in a detached realm of art. In the experience of art, the subject is drawn into art through reality's imperative of responsibility, made known to our senses also through art. According to Løgstrup, this is most explicitly true of music:

Sensation gives us access in an immediate way to the world and in such an immediate way that we do not give thought to how it occurs. This access is, so to speak, always already over and done with. It is always behind us. We are always out among things and events. However, the artist considers the sensible element in itself. This is made independent in music more than any another art form. [...] Sensation and understanding are so interwoven that they cannot be separated. (1995a, p. 291)

Løgstrup thus seems to find a deep identification between the experience of radical responsibility and the act of sensing music. In the following, I develop this identification in terms of applying theory on the ethical demand to the analysis and discussion of singing.

## 2.2.5 Applicability to Analysis and Discussion: The Musical Demand as Trust and Demand in the Sound of the Voice

The connection between the ethical demand and art, which Løgstrup finds most explicitly in music, is also linked directly to the sound of the voice:

The tone is sound's attuning of the sense of hearing. This is also true of sound in its linguistic shape. Speech has its tone, and its attuning of the mind is indispensable if we are to understand what is being said in an effortless and self-evident way. Without this adjustment to the total meaning and intent in speech which the tone gives, the understanding would go through a process of guesswork and misunderstanding, would be frequently led astray and trail falteringly far behind speech. The tone seeks the synchronization of the speech by one person and the understanding of the other. (Løgstrup, 1995a, p. 292)

As shown above, Løgstrup all but collapses the enunciating subject with the voice and the tone of the voice, as it is one's self that ventures forward in the sound of the voice: "For this reason



the point of the demand – though unarticulated – is that the speaker is accepted as the note struck by the speaker’s address is accepted. For a person inadvertently or even intentionally not to hear the note in what we say, therefore, means that it is we ourselves who are being ignored, provided it is we ourselves who dared to make the overture” (Løgstrup, 1997, p. 15). Sørensen (2005) writes about what he considers as the musical demand in Løgstrup’s work:

For Løgstrup, there is also a connection between the tone and the ethical requirement by virtue of the fact that a specific tone is set in the appeal, whereby the speaker transcends himself in relation to the other. There is thus an ethical demand in the tone itself. (Sørensen, 2005, p. 150, endnote 1. My translation)

Sørensen regards this musicality of the ethical demand to be what Løgstrup sets up as the very condition for language to be intelligible. The way sound tunes the sense of hearing is the tone in Løgstrup’s analysis of the demand, which makes our words possible to understand:

The sound tuning the sense of hearing is exactly the tone, and this also applies to sound in the linguistic form. Speech has its tone, a tone which endows the words with meaning and which constitutes the condition of possibility for understanding what is being said. (Sørensen, 2005, p. 147. My translation)

In addition to sound, Løgstrup connects the intelligibility of the tone with its temporality. In his discussion of creation, annihilation and time, Løgstrup (1995b) writes that

in order to be able to hear a melody, each tone in it must be preserved in its own time. Otherwise, the tones would not be able to arrive in the fixed relation to one another which must exist in order to create a melody. When something happens, it must receive from time its own fixed time. Otherwise, it would not be able to be apprehended as a sequence. (1995b, p. 26)

Addressing the temporal course of the tone of the voice, Løgstrup (1976/ 1995c)<sup>10</sup> finds that “because it is the alternating and continuing tone to which the speech owes its speed, it is the tone that comes to convey the meaning of the speech, “before” it becomes the meaning of the individual words” (Løgstrup, 1976, p. 11). He argues further that “the meaning corresponds with a rhythmic division of the sentence as a sound form, and this is the prerequisite for speech and understanding” (Løgstrup, 1976, p. 12, citing Stenzel (1934)). According

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<sup>10</sup> Also with this work, *Breadth and Concision*, only excerpts have been translated into English, published in Løgstrup 1995c, *Metaphysics* Vol. II, pp 147–290). Citations from outside the published translated excerpts are my translations from Danish (Løgstrup 1976).

to Løgstrup, it is the speed of speech while we talk that is the condition for speech to have meaning (Løgstrup, 1976, p. 23).

Thus, the Løgstrupian ethical demand can be described with the metaphors and terminology of music: it is present in the “note that is struck” through which we address each other and expose ourselves in a trusting manner (Løgstrup, 1997, p. 15); it is the “sound in thought” (Sørensen, 2005, p. 141). Articulated through metaphors of music, the ethical demand is not simply a theoretical analogy to the tone of the voice and the temporal, emerging sound, but operates in real time. The sound and temporal flow of our exposed trust, the revelation of ourselves in our voices, is what gives words meaning and intelligibility in social interaction. The ethical demand in the tone and flow of the voice is what gives meaning to words.

Along the same line of thought, I find that Jonas’ reference to the breathing of the child as constituting the continuum of instants of responsibility opens up the possibility to look at breathing during singing as a locus of ethical demand. Building upon this, Jonas’ notion of the future and the impossibility of foreseeing the consequences of our actions, is equivalent to the future one anticipates but never can fully know as one breathes and phrases while singing.

However, the fact remains that Løgstrup (and to some extent Jonas) insists that the ethical demand is silent and mute (Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 22, 108). It is not expressed by social norms, nor does it correspond to what is expected or demanded by the interactors (Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 44, 108; Jonas, 1984, pp. 131, 134). Thus, in my reading of Løgstrup and Jonas, but especially Løgstrup, I find that there remains an ambiguity as to whether or not, and if so how, the ethical demand is heard in art and in the voice.

## 2.2.6 Applicability to Analysis and Discussion: Connections between Ethical Demand and Discourse

Løgstrup maintains that sound does not refer or address in and of itself (Løgstrup, 1976, pp. 12, 14). He acknowledges that the materiality of sound makes us identify the articulated sound with meaning, but only to immediately separate the two again:

As the sound is articulated, it acquires significance and meaning. As soon as we ascertain this, we indiscriminately separate the significance and the meaning from the sound and the writing and put them in a hierarchical and ranking relationship with each other. (Løgstrup, 1976, p. 17)

Utaker (2018) argues that the result of this hierarchizing is the traditional distinction within language philosophy between meaning and expression, where the latter is the medium or means of the former, transporting meaning from sender to receiver. The expression is reduced to a tool and a means of conveying (Utaker, 2018, p. 67).

However, Løgstrup searches for other solutions than the conventional separation within language philosophy between meaning and language expression. Though he argues that sound does not refer, he also argues that language is not merely a referring instrument (Løgstrup, 1995, pp. 11–12). Løgstrup focuses neither on what language refers to nor on its formal structure separated from its reference and the appeal that it makes. Rather, Løgstrup seeks to assess language as an *appeal as such*, in its transcendence: “There is yet a third possibility and that is to consider language in its transcendence, in its reference and communication as such” (Løgstrup, 1995c, p. 288).

Utaker (2018) argues that for Løgstrup, language is not to be understood as a closed system, as an object in itself or with respect to its transcendent aim. Such understandings of language reduce its orality to the “noise in the air” and its written characteristics to the “ink on paper” (Utaker, 2018, pp. 66–70. My translation). Instead, Utaker emphasizes Løgstrup’s effort to understand language in terms of its characteristics as an appeal: “Not a relation between two different kinds of quantities (word and thing, word and meaning, etc.). Not the reference or correspondence of language, but ‘transcendence of language’” (Utaker, 2018, p. 74, citing Løgstrup, 1995c, p. 174. My translation).

I find that this third option resembles what can be characterized as the ethical demand in public political discourse, including when this discourse is participated in by singing. The ethical demand is here connected with the oscillation of verbal and non-verbal meaning-production, and the transcendent character of the enunciated sign in its constitution of reality.<sup>11</sup> However, as I will argue both as a methodological and artistic concern, a notion of the transcendence of language as such does not fully suffice. There must be a form of referring quality beyond that transcendence by which it is an act of stating something about something other than the medium of expression by which the statement is made, which in the end is not transcendence but immanence.

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11 Making this argument, I deviate from Løgstrup’s own notion of the tone as non-referential, as he seems to regard music as referring only to itself (Løgstrup, 1995c, pp. 12, 14). However, I find that the arguments put forward by Løgstrup can be applied regardless of whether one posits that sound has referring qualities or not.

### 2.2.7 Conclusion

In Section 2.2 I have outlined two theoretical perspectives on ethics and interdependence that inform my interpretation, analysis and discussion of my own performances and the interviews with the audience: the ethical demand and the imperative of responsibility, occurring in every interaction as an innate normativity. These perspectives raise questions and highlight dynamics and challenges in terms of interpreting the ethically charged relation of performance, and how this relation affects song, method, analysis and discussion.

According to Løgstrup and Jonas, all human actions, expressions and relations are ethically charged with a demand. We cannot choose to withdraw somehow from this, because to do so would still be a decision with ethical implications. Based on such a meta-ethical position, I have offered a preliminary discussion of how singing is always immersed in ethically charged settings while also addressing them. To sing is to interact, to enunciate is an event within which ethically charged relations are constituted and addressed, as I make the overture (Løgstrup, 1997, p. 15) using the voice and exist in the appeal to the audience. The audience and I encounter each other not simply as existing, but with an “ought” issuing from this existence, as we hold each other’s lives in our hands. Its nature as sound and temporal flow makes it possible for the sung appeal to be understood. Human existence and interaction become intelligible by being ethically charged, by our mutual interdependence, without which we would not be able to communicate.

However, this meta-ethical position cannot simply function as a theoretical backdrop that I can apply or discard for the analysis and the discussion in this thesis. It also forms a basis of understanding for the whole project of this thesis as such: the ethically charged relation of the performance affects the singing, method, dialogical dynamics in the interviews, analysis and discussion.

I find that Løgstrup’s third option described in Section 2.2.6, emphasizing language in its transcendence, to a large degree resembles what constitutes the ethical demand in the singing voice, including a connection between ethics and an act of referring. In the following sections 2.3 and 2.4 I expand this argument, as it also underpins an understanding of singing as participation in public political discourse and connects the ethical-political discourse of singing with the oscillation of the symbolic and the semiotic, i.e. the verbal and non-verbal meaning production.

## 2.3 Public Political Discourse

In Section 2.3 the ethical demand present in the singer-audience relation is contextualized further as a form of participation in political discourse occurring within the public sphere. Three main theoretical strands pertaining to the public sphere and theory of politics are presented and interpreted: notions of the public sphere and the notion of rational discourse in communicative action as developed by Habermas (1962, 1984, 1987, 1990, 1992, 1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2006), notions of dissensus and the politics of the senses as developed by Rancière (2004, 2009), and notions of the autonomous and political voice in opera as developed by Goehr (2004). In the interpretation and discussion of these strands I draw on the writings of Street (2012) and Uberg Nærland (2015). The section provides a frame of reference for the analysis and discussion of the category of *Public Political Discourse* in Chapters 4 and 5.

### 2.3.1 Communicative Action in the Public Sphere

Habermas defines democracy as a sphere where people negotiate, opinions are formed, criticism of government is articulated and a responsiveness between citizens and political-administrative decision-makers might be established. At the heart of his public sphere theory lies the concept of a discourse ethics, in which norms and moral perceptions emerge and are discussed in a dialogical, participatory manner. He finds free reflection on validity rather than consensus about truths to be the most fundamental aspect of communication and conversation, allowing a diversity of points of view (Habermas, 1990; Eriksen & Weigård, 2016; Hammer, 2006). Applying insights from the language philosophy of Austin (1976) and Searle (1969), he considers the fundamental premise of all communication, both verbal and non-verbal, to be that of action, developing his theory of communicative action. Within this action, rationality operates as the orientation towards consensus in a manner that is not simply instrumentalist or strategic (Habermas, 1999). Although he emphasizes verbal discourse, music is given a natural place in a deliberative understanding of how a democracy works (Habermas, 2006; Uberg-Nærland, 2015).

In his theory of communicative action, Habermas (1984, 1987) draws on central insights from sociological and philosophical schools<sup>12</sup> in order to clarify

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12 To study the universal conditions for communicative action in particular contexts and in specific societies, Habermas establishes a connection between philosophy and sociology, applying philosophy to uncover the universal condition for communicative action, whereas sociology is applied in the analysis of how the universal premises express themselves under certain conditions (Smith & Smith, 1999, p. 18).

the normative foundations of a critical theory of society. [...] With the concept of communicative reason ingrained in the use of language oriented to reaching understanding, it again expects from philosophy that it take on systematic tasks. The social sciences can enter into a cooperative relation with a philosophy that has taken up the task of working on a theory of rationality. (Habermas, 1987, p. 397)

Habermas builds his theory on an explicit hermeneutic notion of science, opposing positivism. To understand the meaning of a statement or an action, we must be integrated into a communicative relationship with the sender/actor:

Finally the concept of communicative action refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (whether by verbal or extra-verbal means). The actors seek to reach an understanding about the action situation and their plans of action in order to coordinate their actions by way of agreement. The central concept of interpretation refers in the first instance to negotiating definitions of the situation which admit of consensus. As we shall see, language is given a prominent place in this model. (Habermas, 1984, p. 86)

He argues that it is the institutionalization of argumentative procedures that ensures the legitimacy of democracy. This requires public forums that facilitate discussion and decision-making, and which can be put under scrutiny and criticized (Habermas, 1962). Habermas agrees with his predecessors in the tradition of critical theory, Horkheimer and Adorno (2011), that much of the critical potential and function of the public sphere is lost, as the ideals of the Enlightenment backfire into its own antithesis in a total, manipulative reign of instrumental rationality (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2011; Horkheimer, 1974). However, he seeks to rescue what is left. In contrast to the power-driven decision-making processes within the system-integrative spheres of bureaucracy, government, political parties and organizations, he argues that the logic of communicative action is in fact operating in the public sphere, constituting both cultural identity and political opinion through processes of consensus (Habermas, 1984).

In the public sphere, questions are addressed directly and often more informally. As long as decision-making processes are not immune to such impulses occurring in the public sphere, the institutionalized forums (the objective world) of political spheres of power have not lost their deliberative and democratic core and can be influenced by the social world. Communicative action in the informal public sphere can contribute to the creation of communicative power, which can then become administrative power through institutionalized legal and political procedures (Habermas, 1996a).

Discussing Habermas' notion of deliberative democracy, Eriksen and Weigård (2016) find that by introducing communicative action in addition to instrumental and strategic action, Habermas highlights differences in action orientation. Instrumental and strategic action is coordinated through an orientation towards results, whereas communicative action is coordinated towards understanding and perception, in which one's own goals are secondary to reaching a consensus with other actors concerning what action is appropriate in a current situation (Eriksen & Weigård, 2016, p. 39).<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3.2 Communicative Rationality in Communicative Action – As Speech Acts

What Habermas opposes with his theory of communicative action is the notion of a solely strategic, instrumental form of rationality and action. This form of rationality lies at the heart of what he sees as the traditional understanding of rationality in science, which mainly emphasizes the cognitive aspects of reason. Eriksen and Weigård (2016) argue that Habermas thereby also opposes the Cartesian paradigm in which “the solitary subject [...] uses his reason to interpret events and facts in an attempt to relate optimally to an unstable external world” (p. 12. My translation). According to Habermas, this ends in a form of philosophy of consciousness in which rationality is conceptualized as an essential quality of an active, thinking subject who receives and processes information about a world of objects (Habermas, 1996b).

Eriksen and Weigård (2016) find that Habermas does not completely denounce this instrumental rationality, but that it is insufficient as a model for interpreting societal dynamics:

In Habermas' opinion, the principal disadvantage of understanding the coordination of social action in this way is that one perceives rationality and subjective meaning as something that springs from the consciousness of the individual, instead of from the communicative relationship that is always there and is constantly reconstituted among several individuals. If one is to understand the social fabric that holds society together, it is insufficient to assume that the various actors only see each other as conditions and means for the realization of their own goals (as Weber expressed it). Action coordination [occurs] within social frameworks that cannot themselves be explained as products of strategic planning, but on the contrary must be seen as symbolic constructions, formed through linguistically mediated communicative interaction. (2016, p. 39. My translation)

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13 Eriksen & Weigård (2016) therefore argue that Habermas' distinction between instrumental and communicative attitude corresponds with Kant's distinction in his formulation of the categorical imperative between treating humans as means for an objective or as means in themselves (Eriksen & Weigård, 2016, p. 39).

Therefore, alongside instrumental rationality, Habermas advocates another form of modern rationality, namely the communicative. He aims to show the possibilities of a less pessimistic development, in which communicative rationality is not completely colonized by instrumental rationality but can serve to emancipate societies and those who live within them (Habermas, 1999, pp. 74–75). Habermas finds this rationality inherent to communication as an orientation towards consensus, through interpretation and assessment by actors of, ideally, equal status and competence of communication and ability to act (Habermas, 1984, pp. 39–40).

A crucial point in Habermas' theory of communicative rationality and action is therefore that communication, through statements and actions, consists of speech acts which assume implicit claims of validity. Habermas argues that all competent users of language will intuitively assess three claims of validity concerning the speech act:

1. That the statement made is true (or that the existential presuppositions of the propositional content mentioned are in fact satisfied);
2. That the speech act is right with respect to the existing normative context (or that the normative context that it is supposed to satisfy is itself legitimate); and
3. That the manifest intention of the speaker is meant as it is expressed.

(1984, p. 99)

These criteria adhere to three levels of relation between actor and world, respectively the objective, the social and the subjective worlds (p. 100). Crucially for Habermas, however, in terms of communicative action in contrast to other forms of action, these relations are ascribed to the speakers and hearers themselves, their own perspectives, not that of the social scientist:

It is the actors themselves who seek consensus and measure it against truth, rightness, and sincerity, that is, against the “fit” and “misfit” between the speech act, on the one hand, and the three worlds to which the actor takes up relations with his utterance, on the other. (1984, p. 100)

Habermas claims that “we understand a speech act when we know what makes it acceptable” (p. 297), that is, when the terms of validity are met, by what is said as such, or by the implicit guarantee given by the speaker to meet the terms. Thus, human communication is characterized by rational commitment, by which it assumes an action-coordinating function: the actions of the interactors will depend on their assessment of the validity of the statements of the other interactors or the guarantee implicit in their actions (Habermas, 1984, pp. 297–302; Eriksen & Weigård, 2016, pp. 14–15, 58, 67):



A speaker can rationally motivate a hearer to accept his speech act offer because – on the basis of an internal connection among validity, validity claim, and redemption of a validity claim – he can assume the warranty [Gewähr] for providing, if necessary, convincing reasons that would stand up to a hearer’s criticism of the validity claim. (Habermas 1984, p. 302)

According to Eriksen and Weigård (2016), this is what Habermas advocates as the “real” human rationality: the ability to let one’s actions be governed by a joint conception of reality, that is, consensus established through linguistic dialogue. By the term communicative action, Habermas means action that is linked with linguistic validity claims, that is, action oriented towards interaction on the basis of consensus around these claims (p. 15).

Habermas does not dismiss strategic or instrumental rationality, acknowledging the implicit teleological structure also within communicative action. As a communicative medium language serves understanding, and the actors pursue towards particular aims while communicating and coming to an understanding so as to coordinate their actions (Habermas 1984, p. 101):

Communicative actions always require an interpretation, that is rational in approach. The relations of strategic, normatively regulated, and dramaturgical actors to the objective, social, and subjective worlds are in principle open to objective appraisal, both for the individual actor and for an observer. In communicative action, the very outcome of interaction is even made to depend on whether the participants can come to an agreement among themselves on an *intersubjectively valid* appraisal of their relations to the world. On this model of action, an interaction can succeed only if those involved arrive at a consensus among themselves, a consensus that depends on yes/no responses to claims potentially based on grounds. (1984, p. 108)

The rationality of the expression is therefore based on its being susceptible to criticism, and exists in the expression

if and insofar as it [the expression] embodies fallible knowledge and therewith has a relation to the objective world (that is, a relation to the facts) and is open to objective judgement. A judgement can be objective if it is undertaken on the basis of a transsubjective validity claim that has the same meaning for observers and nonparticipants as it has for the acting subject himself. (1984, p. 9)

These criteria must be fulfilled if the statements and actions are to be deemed valid, which again is the premise for consensus. The moment this process does not end in consensus,

because the validity of the statements or actions is problematized, then communicative action is continued by other means. It becomes *discourse*, in which the validity of statements or actions is questioned (Habermas, 1990; cf. Smith & Smith, 1999; Eriksen & Weigård, 2016).

### 2.3.3 Applicability to Analysis and Discussion: Music as Discourse and the Role of Music as Discursive

However, this notion of discourse oriented towards consensus might seem less than fitting in any direct manner to analysing what goes on in a singing performance. Though Habermas argues that “the only protection against an empiricist abridgement of the rationality problematic is a steadfast pursuit of the tortuous routes along which science, morality, and art communicate with one another” (Habermas, 1987, p. 398), and although he occasionally gives music a natural place in a deliberative understanding of how a democracy works (Habermas, 2006), the question remains as to what extent the Habermasian framework, emphasizing verbal discourse oriented towards consensus to such a degree, is applicable to the analysis of the role of music and singing in the public sphere.

In his treatment of encounter and performance in dramaturgical action, such as acting in front of an audience, Habermas does not assess the communication as genuine discourse, but rather an action that “presupposes language as a medium of self-presentation” (Habermas, 1984, p. 95): “The scale of self-presentations ranges from sincere communication of one’s own intentions, desires, moods, etc. to cynical management of the impressions the actor arouses in others” (p. 93). He finds that such actions can to some extent be assessed in terms of criteria of validity in that they are “open to objective appraisal” (p. 93). However, genuine communicative action differs from the dramaturgical in that it “presupposes language as a medium for uncurtailed communication whereby speakers and hearers [...] refer simultaneously to things in the objective, social, and intersubjective worlds in order to negotiate common situational definitions” (p. 95).

Further, Habermas defines body movements, such as getting up, lifting one’s arm, moving one’s larynx, tongue or lips, not as actions susceptible to assessments of truth, right and authenticity. These are elements of actions or operations, not communicative actions in the full sense, which must be open to criticism from the standpoint of truth, efficacy, rightness, or sincerity: “They [operations of movement] acquire a relation to the world only as infrastructures of other actions. Operations do not concern the world” (1984, p. 98). The communication between performer and audience, Habermas seems to imply, is not guided by or towards a discursive negotiation of common situational definitions in terms of verbally articulated consensus.

The Habermasian concept of communicative action remains central to social science at large and continues to have an enormous impact on notions of discourse and the public sphere. As the present study explores the extent to which, if at all, singing can be understood as a participation in public political discourse, I find that it must also assess singing within such a framework, even if only to dismiss the appropriateness of such an understanding. In the remaining sub-sections of 2.3, I present and discuss different approaches to the relation between art, voice, discourse and politics, supplementing and widening the Habermasian concept of communicative action and public discourse. The aim is to show the extent to which these concepts might be applied for analysing and discussing singing.

### 2.3.4 Politics of Aesthetics

Rancière (2004) criticizes Habermasian notions of deliberative democracy and the premise that democracy can be based on consensus. He finds that this form of democracy only cements the order of things as they are, as consensus by nature excludes those who cannot participate in the deliberative process leading to that consensus, due to socio-economic differences or other forms of inequality. Against this notion of consensus as what constitutes democracy, Rancière argues that *dissensus* is a premise for a political development towards real democracy and equality (Maurseth, 2012, p. 86), a dissensus that turns politics into a form of aesthetics:

Politics consists in reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community, to introduce into it new subjects and objects, to render visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those who had been perceived as mere noisy animals. This work involved in creating dissensus informs an aesthetics of politics that operates at a complete remove from [...] forms of staging power and mass mobilization. (Rancière, 2009, p. 25)

Contrary to the notion of politics as a power struggle, Rancière promotes a notion of politics as the splitting and reorganizing of what and how things are sensed in the world:

The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed. Having a particular 'occupation' thereby determines the ability or inability to take charge of what is common to the community; it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc. (Rancière, 2004, p. 12–13)

Rancière thus sees politics as a process that fragments and reorganizes what can be sensed in the world and the way the sensed is juxtaposed in relation to each other. These new juxtapositions form the basis for new social communities (cf. Bale & By-Rygg, 2008, p. 533). Crucially, however, communities are not based solely on deliberative, verbal consensus, since thinking is not solely based on language (cf. Maurseth, 2012, p. 69). As Rancière argues:

For all time, the refusal to consider certain categories of people as political beings has proceeded by means of refusal to hear the words exiting their mouths as discourse [or] in the simple observation of their material incapacity to occupy the space-time of political things. (Rancière, 2009, p. 24)

He argues that politics is a form of aesthetics, not in the sense of reflecting on the essence of art or as an alliance between radical artistic practice and radical politics, but rather as the ‘politicization’ of art, aesthetics understood through the forms by which politics is sensed and through which it is spoken and done (Rancière, 2004, pp. 12–13; 2009, pp. 21–23, 33):

There is thus an ‘aesthetics’ at the core of politics that has nothing to do with [...] the ‘aestheticization of politics’ [referencing Benjamin (1991)] specific to the ‘age of the masses’. This aesthetics should not be understood as the perverse commandeering of politics by a will to art, by a consideration of the people qua work of art. If the reader is fond of analogy, aesthetics can be understood in Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is the delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. (Rancière, 2004, p. 13)

Thus, politics for Rancière is “the configuration of a specific space, the framing of a particular sphere of experience, of objects posited as common and as pertaining to a common decision, of subjects recognized as capable of designating these objects and putting forward arguments about them” (Rancière, 2009, p. 24). But crucially, Rancière argues, politics develops when those who are conceived of as only making sounds, or only working with tools and not with words, place themselves in a public space and prove that

their mouths really do emit speech capable of making pronouncements on the common which cannot be reduced to voices signalling pain. This distribution and redistribution of places and identities, this apportioning and reapportioning of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of noise and speech, constitutes what I call the distribution of the sensible. (2009, pp. 24–25)

Rancière therefore finds that “theatre and assembly [...] are two interdependent forms of the same distribution” (2009, p. 26). Art is oriented towards equality in the sense that all things can be art, and therefore visible, including the anonymous person in a film: “It is because the anonymous became the subject matter of art that the act of recording such a subject matter can be an art” (p. 32). This way, the anonymous has the opportunity not only to become art but can also take on a specific beauty: “The fact that what is anonymous is not only susceptible to becoming the subject matter of art but also conveys a specific beauty is an exclusive characteristic of the aesthetic regime of art” (p. 32). In a revolutionary fashion this regime breaks down conventional forms of representation in which “the dignity of the subject matter dictated the dignity of genres of representation (tragedy for the nobles, comedy for the people of meagre means; historical painting versus genre painting; etc.” (p. 32). Thus, Rancière finds that the egalitarian function of art is fulfilled when it “dismantle[s] this correlation between subject matter and mode of representation” (p. 32).

Maurseth (2012) argues that for Rancière, this form of dissensus fragments the existing order of things and societies, for instance groups that have reached an internal consensus, and opens the possibility for new kinds of communities with a new kind of equality (Maurseth, 2012, p. 77). The consequence of this shift is what Rancière sees as a revolution (Rancière, 2009, pp. 32, 37) that disrupts any absolute distinction between the “empirical”, as traces and imprints of what has happened, and the “poetical”, as what could have happened. For instance, concerning film,

testimony and fiction come under the same regime of meaning. On the one hand, the ‘empirical’ bears the marks of the true in the form of traces and imprints. ‘What happened’ thus comes directly under a regime of truth that demonstrates the necessity behind what happened. On the other hand, ‘what could have happened’ no longer has the autonomous and linear form of the arrangement of actions. The poetic ‘story’ or ‘history’ henceforth links to the realism that shows us the poetic traces inscribed directly in reality with the artificialism that assembles complex machines of understanding. [...] Documentary film, film devoted to the ‘real’, is in this sense capable of greater fictional invention than ‘fictional’ film, readily devoted to a certain stereotype of actions and characters. (2009, p. 38)

Maurseth (2012) argues that Rancière thus blurs the relation between art and reality:

There are no longer clear differences between the production of art and fiction on the one hand and history and documentation of reality on the other. [...] Art provides new ways of seeing, hearing, sensing and perceiving. That implies a new relationship between the various senses and between senses and reason, and thus it opens up for a new apportioning and distribution of the sensible. As such, it is at once egalitarian, political and democratic. (Maurseth, 2012, p. 83. My translation)

Since art can disrupt the correspondence between subject matter and mode of representation (Rancière, 2004, p. 32), it becomes crucial what art presents and how the mode of presentation differs from conventional forms (Maurseth, 2012, p. 85). Maurseth argues that “art’s persistent endeavour to challenge our accustomed modes of sensing implies the possibility of a better world with more democracy and more equality” (Maurseth, 2012, p. 86. My translation). Contrary to the Habermasian theory of consensus in politics, and to the distance-/negation theory of Adorno concerning the political significance of art, Rancière’s perspective on the relation between art and politics is in essence affirmative. Art is not a societal critique in its opposition to society but is political by bringing forth something new. Art is political by the way it creates and represents:

Rancière’s thoughts on art and aesthetics and relations with politics [...] consider the power of art in terms of how it intervenes and disrupts our way of perceiving the world. In this sense, he is far from those who claim that art for art’s sake, art’s autonomy, is sufficient to legitimize art. Art operates in a perceptible and sensuous world, it enters into relationships and acquires meaning based on the relationships it enters into. Art gives meaning to a way of sensing that disrupts how meanings are usually established and communicated. Rancière shows how art accommodates a paradoxical form of politics through its unusual way of creating meaning. (Maurseth, 2012, p. 87. My translation)

Thus, for Rancière, the politics of aesthetics accommodates both an advocacy of egalitarian aims, through and with and as art, and at the same time a sense of art’s autonomy:

There is no conflict between the purity of art and its politicization. But there is a conflict is within purity itself, in the conception of this materiality of art which prefigures another configuration of the common. (Rancière, 2009, pp. 33–34)

In this manner Rancière articulates a more direct and affirmative political role for art in society than Habermas, as the relation is acknowledged as already integrated in politics. The way I understand Rancière's argument, this acknowledgement applies not only to the effect of art in politics, but the performance of and participation in art as such, as a form of meaning production, i.e., political action. Art can be one of many "ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making" (Rancière, 2004, p. 13).

### 2.3.5 Song and Politics – An Intertwined and Ambiguous Connection Within Society as an Underdetermined Expression

However, affirming the political role of art as integrated in social reality, and that such an integration by necessity has a sensuous nature, does not really solve the problem of how the connection between art and politics works, much less to what political ends. Acknowledging the historically integrated nature of music and politics, Street (2012) and Goehr (2004) address and negotiate the ambiguous connection of today in a more direct and critical way than what follows from Rancière's argument.

Street (2012) argues that the general lack of affirmation of the integrated relation between music and politics

stems from the thought that music and politics are two discrete realms of human experience and endeavor. One is concerned with the organization of public life; the other with the creative use of sound and the appreciation of its beauties and meanings. And insofar as the two worlds are linked, in, say, the protest song or in the censorship of music, one sees music intervening in politics, the other politics in music. (2012, p. 1)

Goehr (2004) also questions the purported discrete realms of human experience, and traces them back to the development of formalism of the nineteenth century that severed the musical from the political (Goehr, 2004, p. 3). Or more precisely, formalism sustained a connection between music and politics based on the dualistic notion that music expressed what cannot be expressed, what belongs to "silent discourse", in an effort "to reach for something that presently is not so or does not exist" (p. 27).

Goehr therefore finds that the reconnecting of music to the "original aspirations of *mousiké* has an advantage for us today insofar as it allows us to recognize music's broad philosophical and political significance and its autonomy" (Goehr, 2004, p. 1). Music is political and critically

intervenes in the world by being “purely aesthetic”, that is, an autonomous expression within society (pp. 13–15, 89).

Making a similar argument, Street recognizes that the intertwined connection between music and politics is nothing new, but commonplace in Ancient Athens and easily detectible in Rousseau (1997, 1998), Adorno (2002) and Attali (1985). However, today it is a neglected concept (p. 140), “largely overlooked or dismissed by those who study politics, and some who study music. And even if the connections are recognized [...], their implications have not been fully realized” (p. 2).

The (re-)realization of the connections between music and politics, Street argues, should not amount to notions of total unity or collapse between music and political statement. Even though “there is a connection between aesthetic value and moral values, [...] this does not map neatly or systematically onto a political spectrum” (Street, 2012, p. 154). While one might argue that all art is political, Street stresses that “it does not follow that art is ‘merely politics represented in symbolic form’” (p. 154, citing Wolff, 1983, p. 66). He argues that “it is easy enough to cherry-pick examples and [...] to make grand claims about the inseparability of politics and music. It is quite another thing to provide a sustained argument” (Street, 2012, p. 5).

One approach be to treat music “as an expression of political causes and movements. The music is seen to embody particular sentiments, typically, but not exclusively, contained by the lyrics” (p. 67). Another approach is to see music “as the cause of political participation” (p. 67). However, Street finds that the underlying assumption of both these approaches are “rarely stated explicitly, theorized in detail or tested empirically” (p. 67). This results in notions of connections between music and politics that amount to little more than “that the two just ‘happened’ upon each other, or that they were drawn together by the ‘spirit of times’” (p. 72).

Seeking to make a more substantial and concrete account of music’s capacity to engage us politically, that is, how music is political, Street et al. (2008) identify three main elements that must be in place in addition to the music ‘itself’: legitimacy, organization and performing participation. Developing these notions further, Street (2012) finds that

for musicians to persuade others that the cause they represent is worth following, they have to be regarded as credible or authoritative voices. They have to be deemed legitimate representatives. Secondly, there have to be processes – forms of organization – that enable musicians and political actors to work together. The discrete



worlds of music and political activism have, in some way, to be linked. And finally, there has to be some means by which the music not only conveys the message or sentiment of the movement or cause, but also motivates it. (2012, p. 72)

Building on these elements, he aims to demonstrate that “how music works on us, and how we act upon music, are intimately connected to the way we think and act politically” (p. 8). When the circumstances concerning organization, legitimacy and performance participation are in place, music and politics might be understood as extensions of each other, and in some ways even as identical:

They are not to be seen as separate entities whose worlds collide only occasionally, but rather are extensions of each other [...] Music embodies political values and experiences, and organizes our response to society as political thought and action. Music does not just provide a vehicle of political expression, it is that expression. (2012, p. 1)

Thus, Street argues that music might be heard as “more than a mere soundtrack to politics, but as the substance of politics” (p. 6). Music might be explored as embodying, conveying and performing politics (p. 175). This connection concerns not just individuals but the collectivities and institutions they form, that is governments, parties and social movements, and the power they wield or seek to wield (p. 8).

The necessity of these connections for music to have a political function seem appropriate and justified. Still, perhaps due to a focus primarily on popular music, the argument seems to bypass a thorough investigation into the methodical problem concerning verbal/non-verbal meaning and how that implicates on these connections (Street, 2012, pp. 151, 159). As discussed in the Chapter 1, this problem becomes all the more apparent when dealing with opera and classical singing. If opera is political, that is hardly due first and foremost to the lyrics, even in contemporary opera, as the lyrics cannot be taken for granted as being neither heard nor understood, and if so, motivating political action. This has proved a challenge in this study both in terms of methodology and for the interview participants when articulating their responses. Classical singing seems to constitute a critical case for exploring the political implications of singing, when the analysis cannot be based neither on a notion of singing as words with sounds, nor on a notion that separates the two as discrete realms of meaning production.

Goehr addresses the dynamics of word and sound as the most significant factor in terms of music’s political role, exploring connections between expressivity, voice and the political

in opera. She discusses the Rousseauian view that identifies “singing or vocal expression as the shared source of human community, on the one hand, and music’s significance, on the other” (Goehr, 2004, p. 89), as well as a correspondence between “the inexpressible moral or passionate basis of expression that inspires acts of singing” and that which motivates “public speaking within which lies the potential for human freedom” (p. 89).

These dynamics, Goehr finds, are exemplified in Wagner-operas. Drawing further on the Rousseauian conception of words as “uttered with melodic inflection, accent, rhythm [as] part of the word’s meaning” (p. 100), she finds that *Die Meistersinger* established an

intertwined aesthetic and political lesson by making the subject of the opera be about the medium in which it was written. Singing in song about song gave the opera an aesthetic condition of immediacy as well as a reflective political significance. The opera asked its audience to listen to the singing of songs sung and to what the songs were saying about singing. However, [...] the opera’s intertwined thesis was established not simply because song contains the double language of words and melody, but also because when singers sing, they use their voice to a fundamental human purpose. Singing, to put Wagner’s attitude into a single claim, is a fundamental act of human expression of shared aesthetic and political significance. (Goehr 2004, pp. 88–89)

Wagner’s aim was “not so much to give music back its speech by reuniting the now separated arts but, more fundamentally, to give music back its expressive voice – whatever music’s content” (p. 106). The overcoming, as it were, of what separates art by reference to its content or medium “recalls a pre-modern, indeed ancient, conception of an expressive act and the conditions under which that act is regarded as free” (p. 90).

For Goehr the expressive act when words are sung in opera can be the same as it was when “the ancient orators sung out their laws, laws that were as much political as musical” (p. 111). Musical content depends “for its fullness of meaning on its connection to the expressive voice” (p. 111), raised in performance as “a social act of engagement” (p. 124). Music’s content and product is “is properly autonomous when it draws on the autonomy of the voice that performs it” (p. 91). Therefore, Goehr argues, the concept of the musical “must accommodate the idea that people who voice their freedom often sing in and through song. That singing is both a musical and a political act” (p. 127).

What the human vocal expression might convey or what that expression under the right circumstances might be in and of itself in terms of political opinion, is another matter. The expression that Goehr writes about is left “deliberately empty of specific or ‘prejudicial’ content so that it can be filled out, mediated, or met in different ways in different practices” (p. 130). Goehr argues that music is autonomous and expresses something to someone, that is, has a political role “when it is open, and it is open when it is regulated by suitable regulative or formal ideals that have neither been overdetermined nor closed by ideological content” (p. 37). Both performer and audience, when “faced with ideological saturation, [...] lose their expressive potential or autonomy” (p. 38). This underdetermination of ideals “suits a view of open practices in which participants are required constantly and independently to reflect upon, and to judge, whether the actions undertaken and the products produced meet these ideals” (p. 131).

To some extent, this reflection upon and judgement about the singing actions resemble what Habermas argues must take place as discourse when participants assess the validity of a communicative action. The underdetermination of ideals present in the expression of song might generate interpretative processes in which the performer and the audience question the validity of statements or actions, making the communicative action of the performance into discourse about ideals that the musical performance is about or activates, be it in an underdetermined manner.

Street (2012) on the other hand, openly attempts to “connect music to one particular political outcome, namely social democracy” (Street, 2012, p. 70; cf. Goehr, 2004, p. 3). He criticizes the futile effort in strands of research that either sees the political potential of music as dictated by the social context or acknowledges the political power in music to such a degree that the social context is eliminated. Both alternatives render music to provide the same resources boosting unity and self-confidence to both Nazism and the civil rights movement (p. 69). Neither alternative, Street finds, treats music with regard to any impact stemming from the music itself. Instead, one must emphasize music’s specific political contribution, in terms of what it constitutes that cannot serve both fascism and civil rights.

He refers to Bennett (2001), who addresses the power of art to energize our sentiments through an “embodied sensibility” (Bennett, 2001, p. 131, in Street, 2012, p. 150). Art has the power of “enchantment”, so that we are “struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday” (Bennett, 2001, p. 4, in Street, 2012, p. 150). Street finds that Bennett argues for the motivational ability of music, in that it can motivate our moral and political commitments:

Through singing, through the rhythms of repetition, Bennet argues, we are connected to others and enchanted by our world. She claims that this effect provides the motivation we need to act on behalf of others. Music, in this sense, mobilizes politics. (Street, 2012, p. 150)

Still, “to act on behalf of others” is not an act claimed solely by actors who uphold social democracy as the most desirable political outcome. Neither is the ability to do so explained as an act in and through musical performance, but rather as an effect motivated by music. Neither Bennett nor Street seem to articulate this distinction, and therefore in the end does not provide clarity as to how the music performance might be such an act “on behalf of others”.

The existence and impact of the intertwined and ambiguous connection between music and politics may be obvious and felt strongly, perhaps even more so in an expressive voice raised in song. Both Street and Goehr, as well as Rancière, provide descriptions of the conception *that* music is or might be political. But as their approaches show, they do not articulate *how* this might be the case, and do not provide clarifying arguments concerning any specific content or political opinion constituted by the music performance. Content or opinion remain either implied a priori (Rancière), deliberately underdetermined (Goehr) or explained as generated by less than as music (Street).

I find that to articulate how music is political, one must somehow analyse how a song might be understood as discursive in terms of referring to something, that is, as a participation in a discourse that argues something about something that cannot be reduced to the lyrics of the song. Of course, that might be impossible, both in general terms or in an analysis of specific performances. But if so, even the claim that music is political ought to be contextualized within an overarching argument concerning deliberative society, in a manner that at least tries to articulate the relation between music and a form of defined discourse. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I aim to do so within the Habermasian argument that discourse sustains society, this notion of discourse supplemented and widened by the approaches above, as well as Uberg Nærland’s (2015) more recent research on the relation between music and Habermasian discourse.

### 2.3.6 Music as Participation in Rational Discourse: Expressive Communication Undergoing Deliberative Processes

As discussed in section 2.3.3, the Habermasian framework might seem less than fitting for analysing the political role of music due to how it privileges verbal language. Also, Habermas has been widely criticized for paying little attention to the practical realities which characterize the less-than-ideal forms of democratic deliberation in the real world, with unequal abilities and possibilities to participate for the affected actors. This would further weaken the appropriateness of applying the Habermasian notions of discourse for assessing singing as a form of participation in public discourse, at least in a discourse towards egalitarian and democratic aims.

The critique centres on the perception of Habermas' notion of rationality. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2017) traces how this is criticized due to its concept of emancipation and liberation, which is presented as dependent on intellectual ability and insight. Habermas is understood as underestimating emotional expression and processing, empathic attention and other non-cognitive aspects of discourse. This is not only a critique of Habermas but of critical theory as such, and the notion of liberation as an intellectual and rational project. Critical theory can also seem blind to political-economic conditions when theoretical ideas are to be translated into liberating practice (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017, p. 230). Alvesson and Sköldbberg also discuss the postmodern critique of Habermas, as articulated by Lyotard (1984) arguing that Habermas represents grand but unsustainable narratives, overestimates the importance of interference- and contradiction-free communication, and sets the wrong goal for the dialogue between actors, namely its harmonization – that is, consensus. Rather, the goal must be paralogy, a fruitful disagreement that undermines and disrupts prevailing discourse (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017, pp. 231, 287–288).

Against positions that criticize a presumed one-sided rationality in Habermas, a lack of emotional, non-verbal, expressive forms of discourse, or a sense of aloofness and idealization of discourse blind to power structures, Uberg Nærland (2015) argues that Habermas does not close his eyes to social inequality and hegemonic power structures. Rather, he suggests that

it is possible, through institutionalized, communicative procedures and discourse ethics, to minimize the power dimension of political discourse. [...] Public sphere theory offers a framework through which to detect and criticize these dimensions of power, and in which to create institutional designs that, as far as possible, minimize the democratic deficit produced by unequal power relations. (2015, pp. 49–50)

Uberg Nærland (2015) finds that Habermas provides a “differentiated concept of rationality which, as well as instrumental-practical reason, also includes moral and aesthetic reason” (p. 39).<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Street (2012) finds that Habermas “gives more prominence to the place of music in the public sphere than is often acknowledged” (p. 65). These perspectives shed light on the verbal versus the non-verbal characteristics of the conventional Habermasian concept of discourse, which, as Street and Uberg Nærland show, might not be one-sidedly verbally based to the extent one might think. In the following, I discuss these perspectives with the aim of contextualizing the notion that music is political within such a conventional concept of discourse.

Drawing on Habermas’ observation that music “served to enhance the sanctity and dignity of worship, the glamor of the festivities at court, and the overall splendor of ceremony” (Habermas, 1992, p. 39), Street (2012) argues that “this changed with the emergence of public concert societies. Accompanying this change was the enhancement of the status of musicians, and hence their place in public discourse” (p. 66). Building on (among others) the Habermasian theory of the public sphere, Street argues that “it is where music inspires forms of collective thought and action that it becomes part of politics. It is where music forms a site of public deliberation, rather than private reflection, that we talk of music as political” (p. 8). Focusing on popular music and mass public events such as Live 8, a string of benefit concerts that took place simultaneously in the G8 countries and South Africa in 2005, Street finds that Habermas’ perspectives are applicable, at least in the sense that “Habermas makes music part of a system of political participation in which talk is key, and which allows us to see the possibility at least that Live 8 might constitute a version of that participation” (p. 66).

Investigating this further, Uberg Nærland (2014; 2015) applies Habermas’ theory of the public sphere as a lens through which to analyse rap music in Norway:

Habermas’ conceptualization of the public sphere is a promising, albeit underexplored, framework in which to understand the democratic role of music. By introducing the notion of “the literary public sphere” in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1971) Habermas gave aesthetics a central function, as both a means to articulate critique and as an organizing force of critical publics. The key role Habermas ascribes to the public sphere in the makeup of deliberative democracy is that it functions as the actual or symbolic space where citizens collectively negotiate important matters, public opinion is formed, and critique against the state can

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14 In his latest book, *Ein neuer Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit und die deliberative Politik* (2022, Suhrkamp) Habermas puts forward a bleaker analysis of the role of rational communication in the public sphere. As this book came out just recently, I have not been able to integrate it in my treatment of Habermas in this study.

be articulated. Furthermore, the public sphere is vital to democratic legitimacy as it facilitates a mutual responsiveness between citizens and political-administrative decision-makers. (Uberg-Nærland, 2014, p. 127)

While acknowledging the methodological difficulty of ascribing political significance to music within a framework that privileges verbal and rule-bound communication, Uberg Nærland maintains that

the public sphere and the framework of deliberative democracy provide an overarching architecture of democracy in which music and the processes it is part of can be located. [...] It is a theoretical framework that, given the critical and eclectic use of supplementary theory and method, accommodates for a clarification of the role of expressive and aesthetical communication in deliberative democracy – therein music. (Uberg-Nærland, 2015, p. 95)

Uberg Nærland therefore finds that even though certain “critiques elucidate problematic issues in Habermas’ theory [...] none of these fundamentally debilitate his theory’s grasp on the democratic role of music” (Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 48). Instead, the endeavour to explore the political significance of music within the Habermasian framework hinges on the interpretation of Habermas’ characterization of the nature and quality of public discourse (p. 38). A criticism that presumes Habermas’ notions of rationality and discourse to exclude aesthetic-affective communication, emotion, power and rhetoric, is misguided (pp. 48–49). Habermas rather attempts to

“rescue” reason and the Enlightenment project from what his predecessors held to be the inescapable conditions of modernity, [and] establishes a differentiated concept of rationality which, as well as instrumental-practical reason, also includes moral and aesthetic reason. (p. 39)

Uberg Nærland offers a critical defence of the Habermasian framework, arguing that it can provide a basis for developing “a ‘public discursive’ conception of the politics of music” (p. 93). This conception might even open the possibility to explore the political significance of music in a way that to some extent overcomes an

untenable dichotomy between rational verbal discourse and ‘non-rational’ expressive communication [that] has been constructed that, in effect, has inhibited an understanding of the role of music in the public sphere. (Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 49, referencing Gripsrud, 2009)

Undoubtedly, Habermas' conception of rationality "gives primacy to verbal communication, argumentative speech and writing", whereas "aesthetic dimensions of discourse, or aesthetic expressivity in itself, is ascribed significance as an indicator of the level of authenticity and sincerity of the speaker" (Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 40). This often causes aesthetics and art to seem "of lesser concern in his account of communicative rationality" (p. 40). Still, Uberg Nærland finds that expressive culture and aesthetics are not excluded from the equation of what constitutes public discourse, arguing that Habermas, at least "in passing, imply a more open conception of the expressive features of art" (Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 40). Habermas' framework entails an openness towards expressivity which simply implies that passions eventually must be articulated as contestable arguments:

Political mobilizations and enchantment through emotional and expressive communication [...] must eventually enter deliberative processes if they are to be part of a legitimate formation of public opinion. (2015, p. 48)

This necessity of entering into deliberative processes is highlighted in Habermas' argument concerning the nature of reasons:

Reasons have the peculiar function of bringing us to see a work or performance in such a way that it can be perceived as an authentic expression of an exemplary experience, in general as the embodiment of a claim to authenticity. A work validated through aesthetic experience can then in turn take the place of an argument and promote the acceptance of precisely those standards according to which it counts as an authentic work. (Habermas, 1984, p. 20)

The artistic expression stands as an action or statement that is assessed as a claim of validity, open to objective appraisal, (Habermas 1984, pp. 93, 99), though it "happens in an indirect way" (Habermas 1984, p. 20). Uberg Nærland interprets this as an acknowledgement by Habermas that art may "by its own expressive means, contribute to rational discourse, but also emphasizing the role of the critic in both guiding our perception of the artwork and making its authenticity apparent" (Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 40). Such an interpretation finds support in how Habermas argues that the actor can be deemed rational, even if the action itself is not verbal or argumentative:

In contexts of communicative action, we call someone rational not only if he is able to put forward an assertion and, when criticized, to provide grounds for it by pointing to appropriate evidence, but also if he is following an established norm and is able, when criticized, to justify his action by explicating the given situation in the light



of legitimate expectations. We will even call someone rational if he makes known a desire or an intention, expresses a feeling or a mood, shares a secret, confesses a deed, etc., and is then able to reassure critics in regard to the revealed experience by drawing practical consequences from it and behaving consistently thereafter. (Habermas, 1984, p. 15)

Uberg Nærland traces a widening of a strictly verbal notion of the public sphere, as Habermas (1996a) argues that it is best described as a network for communicating information and points of view (i.e., opinions expressing affirmative or negative attitudes); the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified public opinions (Habermas, 1996a, p. 360). This widening of the public sphere can be interpreted as a more open concept of a “space generated through communicative action” (Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 37), especially when it comes to how Habermas ascribes to the public sphere the function of “amplifying pressure”:

The public sphere is a warning system with sensors [...]. From the perspective of democratic theory, the public sphere must, in addition, amplify the pressure of problems, that is, not only detect and identify problems but also convincingly and influentially thematize them, furnish them with possible solutions, and dramatize them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by parliamentary complexes. Besides the “signal” function there must be an effective problematization. The capacity of the public sphere to solve problems on its own is limited. But this capacity must be utilized to oversee the further treatment of problems that takes place inside the political system (Habermas, 1996a, p. 359)

Uberg Nærland finds that the notion of “‘amplifying of pressure’ implies a role for expressive culture and music” (2015, p. 51), and that Habermas in his later revisions offer

a framework more sensitized to communicative forms and modes other than just verbal and argumentative. [...] The role of music in social movements is here a classic example of how music, in the most literal sense, amplifies pressure, by furnishing political programs and causes with sound. (2015, pp. 50–51)

Referencing Habermas’ argument that public discourse may take on different forms, and that mediated political communication “need not fit the pattern of fully fledged deliberation” (Habermas, 2006, in Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 52), Uberg Nærland finds that Habermas’ revised model of the public sphere is increasingly and explicitly open to a role for expressive culture

and music (p. 52): “It is a model that softens the conception of public discourse and offers an anatomy of deliberative democracy in which the role of music can be situated” (2015, p. 52).

Applying Habermas’ framework in this manner, Uberg Nærland aims to explore rap music in Norway. He finds that music might be experienced as “politically charged” consistent with what he describes as “a ‘public discursive’ conception of the politics of music” (p. 93):

It is a conception that bases itself upon the fundamental premise that the public sphere and the discursive interaction that occurs herein constitutes the *modus operandi* of democratic politics. Thus, music, by integrating into these discursive interactions, either as aesthetic public discourse in its own right, or by stimulating verbally based public discourse, becomes politically significant. (2015, p. 94)

Thus, Uberg Nærland argues that the concept of the public sphere “contributes to a clarification of the political significance of music, as it suggests an anatomy of democracy in which music also has its place” (pp. 37–38). Following this argument, the Habermasian concept of deliberative discourse in democracy might be understood, participated in and heard as an artistic expression in its own right in the public sphere, an expression that consists of contestable arguments and which can be assessed in terms of its validity, but which is built on and remains affected by expressive culture and passion. According to Uberg Nærland (2015), the politics of music rests upon three conditions:

The degree to which the music is public, i.e., also has a life beyond the private sphere of individual audiences; the degree to which music is discursively engaged with, i.e., collectively interpreted and debated in public forums; and, lastly, the nature of this discursive engagement, i.e., the degree to which music addresses matters of collective interest and is interpreted and debated in relation to political questions. The two first conditions accommodate for a politics of music in a wide sense; by means of public nature and discursive engagement music is part of the processes of the negotiation of ethical standards as well as the formation of identity and solidarity. The third and last condition assumes a politics of music in a strict sense – where music stimulates or feeds into public political discourse proper. Crucially, this conceptualization is not necessarily confined to music. It may also be productive in the understanding of the politics of other forms of expressive culture, be it film, poetry or photography. (Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 94)

Uberg Nærland's interpretation of the Habermasian concept of discourse is more in line with the concept of communicative rationality that Habermas articulates than what he is often criticized for doing. It is a discourse in which instrumental and strategic rationality are opposed and criticised, but not completely dismissed. Habermas' identification of different ways in which a communicative action can be defined as rational opens up the possibility of analysing music performance as constituting a form of rational speech act. Building on such notions of discourse, communication and rationality enables the assessment of singing as a form of communicative action, no less rational than other forms of expression in a public, political discourse, as long as the performer is afterwards "able to reassure critics in regard to the revealed experience by drawing practical consequences from it and behaving consistently thereafter" (Habermas, 1984, p. 15). This follows the same line of thinking that Goehr applies when considering what must take place when assessing the "open" expression of the human voice.

Still, Habermas' and Uberg Nærland's characteristics of rational discourse, which could be applied to the performance of music, seem to be at the margins of what the Habermasian framework incorporates. There are obvious limitations in terms of applying it in the assessment of singing as a rational, public, political action and statement. These limitations become clear not so much in terms of acknowledging a role for musicianship and singing within the public sphere, but in terms of describing *how* the performance as such constitutes participation in the public discourse. Given Habermas' criteria of validity assessment that must be in place for the discourse to be rational, it remains difficult to explain how music as such "feeds into" public political discourse, at least in terms of classical and operatic singing. Building on Habermas I find that it makes more sense to argue that music has an effect on discourse, but from outside, not as a form of discourse.

### 2.3.7 Conclusion

In Section 2.3 I have outlined, compared and discussed theoretical perspectives on communicative action and music and politics in the public sphere, in order to shed light on relations between the political role of song and public political discourse. In varying ways, the perspectives discussed raise questions about the extent to which music and song might be assessed within a framework concerning discourse as a verbal domain of meaning and action, and further the extent to which music and song might be assessed in terms of constituting a discourse of political opinion.

As Uberg Nærland (2015) shows, Habermasian notions of communicative action and discourse may be interpreted as containing aesthetic, emotional and musical elements. Communicative action in this sense include music as part of a system of political participation where verbal language is dominant. Still, in such a system it remains a fact that “talk is key” (Street, 2012, p. 66). Therefore, building on Habermas, the communicative action of musical performance might be criticized, assessed and made judgements about, that is, become part of discourse – but first and foremost in terms of what the performance generates in retrospect, not as something the performance is part of in and through its own medium or in and through the event it constitutes.

Rancière’s assessment of art’s unfamiliar way of generating meaning, through disturbance of the established order of things, represents a more direct and even an a priori political role for music. To some extent it resembles what I find is going on in the voice during singing. If singing can be understood as a form of ethical-political intervention “in the general distribution of ways of doing and making” (Rancière, 2004, p. 13), then Rancière’s notion of art might be applied in the analysis of singing as participation in public political discourse.

Similarly, Goehr’s development of the connection between music’s political role and the autonomous, expressive voice in song, affirms singing as both a musical and political act. The autonomous voice raises an expression that is deliberately underdetermined and open in terms of content, as an act that requires reflection and assessment, resembling the Habermasian process of discourse. As musical content depends “for its fullness of meaning on its connection to the expressive voice” (Goehr, 2004, p. 111), and on conditions under which the act of expression is free (pp. 90–91), the musical-political act of singing is based on the overcoming of what separates song by reference to its content or medium, thus challenging static distinctions of word and sound, and hence a distinction between discourse and song.

Although mainly applicable in articulating *that* music is political, the perspectives presented and discussed in this section will also inform the analysis and discussion in terms of *how* the music performances of the study can be interpreted as political.

## 2.4 Voice, Subject and Meaning

This section presents a framework of theory of semiotics aimed to facilitate the analysis and discussion of the constitution of subject and meaning in singing. However, the auxiliary question that guides this choice of theory is not reflected in the wording of the main research question. The following introduction to this section seeks to unpack the rationale for this design.

Underpinning the approach to singing in this study is the experience during performance that the dynamics within my voice negotiate the relationship between word and sound. This negotiation is not only a technical issue, rather it is experienced as an event that is best interpreted phenomenologically. It unfolds as a development of two coextensive processes: first, that the voice makes sound into a meaningful and to some extent an addressing and referring language. Second, that these dynamics of word and sound – through breathing, accent of the voice, phrasing towards something and the running out of breath – constitute me as a subject and the meaning I produce through singing.

Consequently, the underpinning experience in the approach to what goes on in singing, is that 1) the constitution of the subject in the use of voice is what takes place in and as the ethical demand, that is, as the overture towards the audience, and that 2) the constitution of meaning in the use of voice is what takes place in and as the public political discourse, that is, as the sound of the voice becomes an addressing and referring language. Therefore, the constitution of subject and meaning is not reflected in the wording of the main research question, but is rather the premise of its wording, as what might make it possible to conceive of singing as ethical demand and public political discourse.

Arguably, this is a two-way street, in the sense that the ethical demand and the public political discourse in and as singing, also are premises for the constitution of subject and meaning in singing. But as far as the motivation of this thesis is concerned, the point of interest is not the constitution of subject and meaning as such, but on what that constitution implies and how it can be of use ethically-politically.

The negotiation within different strands of the philosophy of music concerning the relation between music and language, sound and meaning, music's presumed non-referentiality and meaning, or lack meaning (Goehr, 2004, pp. 8, 18, 46, 47), is in my opinion exposed more clearly in the performative event of singing, perhaps even more so in the case of classical singing. Often the classical singer must assume that the audience does not know or understand the words, and that the ethical-political impact of the performance, if any, is caused not primarily by the lyrics.

Therefore – if the performance of classical song has such an impact, if an urgency occurs in which something is at stake and matters, in which something is addressed as a current reality in a personal, ethical and political sense – one has to take into consideration a notion of singing by which the sound refers, that is, by which it cannot be dismissed simply as non-referential towards reality, and by which it cannot be discounted from genuine participation in public discourse. It is necessary to attempt to explore the extent to which and how sound relates to the referring function of language, so that from the point of view of singing, one can ask what discursivity means (Borgdorff, Peters & Pinch et al., 2020, p. 5), and how this discursivity occurs in the social setting of performance, even if one cannot identify exactly what is referred to, nor how this referring action, constituting subject and meaning, occurs.

In the attempt to do so, this Section 2.4 situates singing within a broader context concerning sign, signification, referent/reference, enunciation, subject, meaning and language, that is, semiotics defined broadly. The section provides theoretical frame of reference for the analysis, particularly of the emerged category of *Word and Sound*, as this category provided material for the discussion of voice, subject and meaning.

The field of semiotics encompasses multiple and partially overlapping terminologies and strands of theory (Rolvsjord, 2002, p. 32). I will not present a full overview but go through some aspects of semiotics pertinent to singing. I briefly present structural notions of sign, referent and symbol, as developed by Saussure (1974) and Pierce (1994). Then I trace the post-structural reaction to and development of those notions, as Barthes (1970; 1973; 1975; 1977) and Kristeva (1984; 1989; 1996a, 1996b) widen the perspectives of semiotics by emphasizing voice and subject. In the interpretation of these developments, I draw on the writings of Stene-Johansen (1994) and Glomnes (2005).

Finally, I discuss how such notions within semiotic theory might be relevant in the analysis and discussion of singing. I refer to the intersubjective dynamics of music therapy (McLean, 2018; Rolvsjord, 2002), which I find show music' function as a symbolic and referring language, and simultaneously expose the limited adequacy of notions of formalism and absolute music in the performance of music, exemplified in the writings of Adorno (2002a; 2002b).

#### 2.4.1 Sign, Symbol, Referent/Reference and the Sound of the Subject: Structural and Post-Structural Semiotics

In a narrow sense, semiotics refers simply to the formal aspects of a sign system and how these are characterized by the semiotic function, i.e., a relation and mutual conditioning between the level of content and expression within the sign (Stene-Johansen, 1994, p. 155). Saussure

(1974) developed a conceptual apparatus for the study of language as a synchronous system, that is, as it appears at a given time in history. He separates language from communication by distinguishing the language system from the utterances. Language (*langue*) is the system which can be derived from the sum of existing utterances (*parole*). Saussure finds that expressions and texts are language in use rather than language itself, arguing that “language is a form and not a substance” (Saussure, 1974, p. 122; cf. Glomnes, 2005, pp. 31, 55). He splits the sign between signifier and signified, where the signifier concerns the level of expression, that is, the acoustic, expressive or material aspect of the sign, whereas the signified pertains to the level of content, idea or concept. According to Saussure, the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary. Nothing about the expression, acoustics or the material aspects of the sign, refers as such to the content (Saussure, 1974; Glomnes, 2005, pp. 31–32; Rolvsjord, 2002, pp. 32, 37; Stene-Johansen, 1994, pp. 139, 155).

Investigating the relations between language, reality and the voice of the subject, Glomnes (2005) describes this model as a language system in which

the signified and the signifier [lie] neatly together, [...] and they form part of a whole that it is possible to get an overview of. [...] The model is static and ahistorical. This is not an unintended side effect, but the very purpose of the model. In Saussure’s opinion, language should be separated from history and change. (Glomnes, 2005, pp. 43–44. My translation)

Stene-Johansen (1994) argues that within the Saussurean model of the sign, the signified is often misconceived as the significance, meaning or even the referent (the “real” word) (p. 155). However, as the division between signifier and signified reflects a radically arbitrary relation between expression/sound and content, this arbitrary relation extends further to encompass both the sign as a whole and what it refers to, i.e. the entities in the world that the sign stands for (p. 139). Thus, language in this sense is conceived of as a sign system that can be described independently of history and social conditions, its users and the things it refers to. It is a system of differences, with each sign having value in that it is different from other signs. By isolating language from its use, language as an autonomous system comes into focus, not the speaking subject (Glomnes, 2005, pp. 34–35).

For Peirce (1994), the sign and the referent are divided. However, as Glomnes argues, Peirce differs from Saussure in that he aims to explain the sign less in terms of a synchronous system, and more in terms of “how all human knowledge is based on how we draw conclusions from signs and how all interpretation is generated as new signs” (Glomnes, 2005, p. 38). Every

thought and every process are characterized by the constitution of a chain of signs, as an eternal semiosis (Dinesen & Stjernfeldt 1994, pp. 8, 16).

Peirce distinguishes between three types of signs based on the relation between the sign and its object (1994). The icon is a sign that has real similarity of form to its object and refers by virtue of this similarity. The quality the sign has qua thing, makes it suitable for representing something as icon (Peirce, 1994, pp. 117–118; cf. Glomnes, 2005, p. 37; cf. Stene-Johansen, 1994, pp. 147, 158). An index has a causal connection with its object. Different from the icon is that the representative characteristic of the index is individual in its relation to what it represents. It is an expression created in contact with its content, such as imprints, appearances and sounds, upon which we react, draw conclusions and develop anticipations (Peirce, 1994, p. 122–123; cf. Glomnes, 2005, pp. 37, 74; cf. Stene-Johansen, 1994, pp. 147, 158). The third kind of sign is symbol, which is the kind of sign Saussure deals with (cf. Kristeva, 1996b, p. 64). Peirce argues that a symbol has a conventionally adopted connection with its object, which it represents by virtue of unmotivated, arbitrary signs (Peirce, 1994, p. 129, 132–133; cf. Glomnes, 2005, p. 38; Stene-Johansen, 1994, pp. 147, 158).

These three categories of signs do not necessarily occur in a distinct manner. Rather, the categories stand for different relations between a sign and the referent – three forms of meaning-making, which can also combine with and even contradict each other (Glomnes, 2005, p. 38). Thus, Peirce is less concerned with the internal structure of the sign (signified-signifier), and more with the relation between sign as a whole and its referent (object). Glomnes (2005) points out that Peirce emphasizes the meaning-creating process, the semiosis, instead of the sign system (Glomnes, 2005, pp. 36, 37, cf. Dinesen & Stjernfeldt 1994, p. 8). He is concerned with the relationship between sign, reference and interpretation and argues that that a sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity (Peirce, 1994, p. 94).

According to Stene-Johansen (1994), the critique of the structuralist model is that the division between the signifier and signified results in a notion of content (signified) that is either a metaphysical, idealistic postulate, or simply a new signified, and therefore in both cases a meaningless term (1994, p. 155). At any rate, the division between signifier, signified and referent has been fundamental for structural linguistics, and has been applied even more in philosophy, literature and psychoanalysis (Glomnes, 2005, pp. 18, 36, 151).

The structuralist view within semiotics is challenged by the writings of e.g. Barthes and Kristeva, criticizing how such a linguistic system subordinates the speaking subject. Structuralist notions of language as arbitrary render it an oppressive phenomenon, as it forces the subject



to be something that language, as a rigid system, speaks through (Glomnes, 2005, p. 46). Focusing more on the enunciating process of signification and the speaking subject, Kristeva and Barthes represent a poststructuralist approach to subject and language. Glomnes 2005 finds that their approach

dissolves the structures' firm grip on the world and the text and our consciousness, and problematizes the subject's place and the possibility of a voice of its own. Discourses without beginning and without end, language as an infinite web of signs that constantly relate to each other in new ways, is what replaces the fixed structures. (2005, p. 48. My translation)

Opposing strict structural concepts of language Barthes (1973) claims that the classical sign is an entity which halts the meaning, thereby preventing the meaning from vibrating, splitting into different parts and going astray (Barthes, 1973, p. 71) Thus, the classical notion of the sign prevents language from functioning as a genuine interpreting praxis. Barthes finds that this defect of language becomes even more obvious when the language is to refer to music: "How, then, does language manage when it has to interpret music? Alas, it seems, very badly" (1977, p. 179). Therefore, instead of trying to change the language referring to music, Barthes suggests that

it would be better to change the musical object itself, as it presents itself to discourse, better to alter its level of perception or intellection, to displace the fringe of contact between music and language. (Barthes, 1977, pp. 180, 181)

Rather than asking for similarities and differences between music and language in the pursuit of a precise articulation of musical experience, Barthes asks where meaning arises in a way that means music and language do not have to be understood in dualistic and dialectic opposition. He finds the answer in the 'grain' of the voice, the grainy materiality of the voice: "The 'grain' is that: the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue; perhaps the letter, almost certainly significance" (1977, p. 182).

The 'grain' of the voice is not only its timbre, but also the signification that opens up in the friction between music and language. According to Barthes, this signification implies an imperative for the singing voice to constitute a writing event: "The song must speak, must write" (1977, p. 185). Meaning formation takes place in and when "the 'grain' is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs" (Barthes, 1977, p. 188).

Stene-Johansen (1994) describes Barthes' position as "a response to assumptions about the 'unspeakable' as the hallmark of literature and art" (Stene-Johansen, 1994, p. 16). Stene-Johansen finds that Barthes addresses

a field of meaning that exceeds the informative (or communicative) and symbolic meaning level of interpretation. This third level of meaning is the level of meaning formation, an "open" meaning [...] where the signifier is grasped in the process of seeking its signified, in other words, a notion of the irreducible materiality of the signifier that criticizes the dual and "solidaric" relationship between the side of expression and the side of content in Saussure's concept of sign. (Stene-Johansen, 1994, p. 140. My translation)

Meaning formation takes place in a process where the materiality of the sign is constituted through its search for its content. In this way, expression and content can be understood less as a dual relationship, and more as a unified, integrated event, experienced in the sound of the voice, audibly and tangibly present in the articulation itself. In his music analysis, Barthes aims to counter visual tendencies in musicology, which analyse themes, cells and sentences, neglecting the body and the performative action (Barthes, 1975, p. 112). He articulates a notion of music performance as a manual, muscular, sensual activity, in which the body is at once writing (Barthes, 1970, p. 55) and itself constituting the referent (Barthes 1975, p. 114, cf. also pp. 106–113; cf. Stene-Johansen, 1994, p. 17), independent of whether one composes, performs or listens (Barthes, 1975, p. 109).

More than Barthes, Kristeva maintains the Saussurean/Peircean divide between signifier and signified. However, she "conceives of meaning not as a sign-system but a signifying process," (Kristeva, 1996a, p. 28), and traces what she considers to be a passage in Western culture, architecture and literature from the "symbol" to "sign" (Kristeva, 1996b, p. 68). She argues that a transition takes place from a hierarchical model of the symbol as referencing universals and metaphysical ideas to a more horizontal mode of referring, in which referring is directed to the singularity of each thing, "made independent of its transcendental background" (1996b, p. 68). Symbols turned into sign "signify in their own right" (1996b, p. 70), independent "of any idea extrinsic to the order of their existence or their sequence" (1996b, p. 69). A fundamental feature of the sign is therefore that it can "suggest what is not, but *will be*, or rather *can be*. And this future tense is accepted by the sign not as something caused by extrinsic factors, but as a transformation produced by the possible combinations within its own structure" (1996b, pp. 71–72).

She finds this development to pertain more adequately to modern thought and processes of signification in the social space of enunciation than what structuralist notions could (Kristeva, 1996b, p. 72; cf. Moi, 1996, p. 62). Still, a structuralist notion of the symbol is continued:

The sign that appears through these mutations retains the fundamental characteristic of the symbol: irreducibility of terms, that is, in the case of the sign, of the referent to the signified, of the signified to the signifier, and based on this, irreducibility of all the “units” of the signifying structure itself. (1996b, pp. 70)

In addition to its horizontal characteristics in terms of what it refers to, the sign assimilates the hierarchical, metaphysical structure and strategy of the symbol, and, as a semiotic practice, “projects it on to the ‘immediately perceptible.’ The latter, thus valorised, is then transformed into an objectivity, which becomes the reigning law of discourse in the civilization of the sign” (Kristeva, 1996b, p. 70). Therefore, according to Kristeva, one must explore the symbol and its dynamics in light of its expressiveness, through which the symbol is akin to the sign (1996b, p. 71).

Holding on to Saussurean/Peircean division of the symbol, albeit as expressive sign, makes it possible for Kristeva to investigate how the act of reference in terms of the relation between enunciation, what is spoken about, and the speaker as acting subject. Even though the Saussurean/Peircean divide was intended to pertain to a language system, and not to the act of speaking and the speaking subject, Kristeva argues that the arbitrary relation between signifier and signified can indeed be experienced by the subject in the use of language:

Every social practice [...] is also determined by a set of signifying rules, by virtue of the fact that there is present an order of language; that this language has a double articulation (signifier/signified); that this duality stands in an arbitrary relation to the referent; and that all social functioning is marked by the split between referent and symbolic and by the shift from signified to signifier coextensive with it. (Kristeva, 1996a, p. 25)

Different from her predecessors Kristeva writes of language from a psychoanalytic and therapeutic angle. The speaker in question is the depressed and melancholic subject, who, according to Kristeva, does not believe in his/her language. Therefore, when trying to speak with a language arbitrary in its relation to what is spoken about, what occurs in enunciation highlights what is at stake in the process of signification. The depressed speaker, unable to believe that the words signify, experiences Saussure’s systemic theory in physical manner, as an “alien skin,” a “mask,” and a “dead and foreign language” in the act of speaking, or

trying to speak (Kristeva, 1989, pp. 53–55): “The arbitrary sequence [...] is coextensive with a loss of reference. The depressed speaks of nothing” (p. 51). The speech of the depressed is “repetitive and monotonous,” a “frugal musicality” of “repeated, obsessive litanies” which is finally exhausted, as the speaker is “sinking into the blankness of asymbolia or the excess of an unorderable cognitive chaos” (p. 33).

However, meaning is not necessarily completely erased from the discourse of the subject, even though the speech does not produce symbolic meaning in terms of sentential signification. Kristeva argues that meaning might “hide in the tone of the voice, which one must learn to understand in order to decipher them *meaning* of affect” (p. 55). The speech of the subject, unable to refer, is “at the edge of words, but at the heart of the voice” (p. 56), as the object/representation is “as if buried – and dominated – by jealously kept affects finally concealed in vocalizations” (p. 57). It therefore becomes the task of the analyst to interpret the modulations of the voice and identify affect as rhythm, tone and sound, by which the semiotic brakes through the dead language of the depressed (p. 55). Then the vocal expression might again be invested in by the subject, as it must draw into its language the semiotic meaning of the sound of its voice, as “the tone that calls song” (p. 55). Writing from the angle of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic literary studies, Kristeva claims that it is in the signifying process as such, on “the threshold of language” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 45), that subject and language are put in process, established, posited and constituted (p. 63, 67).

Fundamental in Kristeva’s approach to voice and meaning is a theoretical distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic as two modalities of the signifying process that establishes subject and language (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 23–24, 48). The symbolic refers to all social and historical sign systems, that is, the ordering, categorizing and logical level of language, whereas the semiotic comprises the affective, material and corporeal dimensions of language (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 23, 25; Rolvsjord, 2002, pp. 51, 53; Keltner, 2011, pp. 22, 24).

This distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic is only theoretical, as Kristeva claims that neither the semiotic nor the symbolic is experienced as ontologically distinct or primary in terms of constituting language (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 24, 68). The distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic, in which the semiotic somehow precedes symbolization, is only a theoretical supposition intended to make description possible (p. 68). The signification process is dialectical, driven by negativity (p. 109), that is, the “semiotic movement, which moves through the symbolic, produces it, and continues to work on it from within” (p. 117):

Although originally a precondition of the symbolic, the semiotic functions within signifying practices as the result of a transgression of the symbolic. [...] It exists

in practice only within the symbolic and requires the symbolic break to obtain the complex articulation we associate with it in musical and poetic practices. (1984, p. 68)

This also works in reverse: the symbolic does not function without the semiotic forces working on it from within. “Whether in the realm of metalanguage (mathematics, for example) or literature, what remodels the symbolic order is always the influx of the semiotic” (p. 62). It is this influx that the voice of the speaking subject inflicts on symbolic, presumably solid words. In the act of enunciation, a transition takes place between the semiotic and the symbolic, and language is

drawn out of its symbolic function (sign-syntax) and is opened out within a semiotic articulation: With a material support such as the voice, this semiotic network gives “music” to literature. But the irruption of the semiotic within the symbolic is only relative. Though permeable, the thetic continues to ensure the position of the subject put in process/on trial. (1984, p. 63)

The thetic, or the thetic phase, marks the “rupture and/or boundary” (p. 43) and the “threshold between [...] the semiotic and the symbolic” (p. 48), and denotes where enunciation and establishment of the subject meet (p. 43): “that crucial place on the basis of which the human being constitutes himself as signifying and/or social” (p. 67). The thetic subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, and any signification system depends on both modalities (p. 31). Therefore, “the sign can be conceived as the voice that is projected from the agitated body [...] on to the facing imago or onto the object” (p. 46).

Investigating the implications of the threshold between the semiotic and the symbolic in Kristeva’s writings, Keltner (2011) even argues that for Kristeva, “subjectivity and language are coextensive [...]. The subject, she insists, is a speaking being; a being who means; a being who always intends something and speaks to another in a social and historical context” (Keltner, 2011, p. 21). Bodily processes can be found in verbal language, transformed into language as semiotic elements of meaning and subjectivity (Keltner, 2011, p. 34; cf. Rolvsjord, 2002, p. 53). Semiotic meaning appears within the symbolic as disruptive motion, as vocal and gestural movement, organized by social context, family structures, biological difference between the sexes and syntax (Kristeva, 1984, p. 27, 63; cf. Rolvsjord, 2002, p. 53).

As “unarticulated”, as sound with no obvious referential orientation, the semiotic is integrated as part of the articulated sign, “which may or may not obey the norms of grammatical locution” (Kristeva 1984, p. 57). Therefore, Kristeva argues that even music cannot be identified as simply semiotic:

This exclusivity [of the semiotic in music] is relative, precisely because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process. Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either “exclusively” semiotic or “exclusively” symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both. (1984, p. 24)

Thus, based on her conception of what goes on in speech as a constitution of subject and meaning, Kristeva finds that neither language nor music are exclusively semiotic or symbolic. Consequently, as language signifies, so does music: “Musicality is not without signification; indeed, it is deployed within it (1984, p. 63).

This “deployment within” is present in language as such, and exemplified in the speech of the melancholic subject’s effort to address with words. However, it becomes particularly apparent in artistic expressions: “The semiotic’s breach of the symbolic in so-called poetic practice can probably be ascribed to the very unstable yet forceful positing of the thetic” (p. 62) Even though the semiotic is a precondition for the symbolic, that is, for referential language and the constitution of the subject in and through its enunciation, at the same time it is exactly this influx and instability in language that always threatens to destroy both the enunciating subject and its language. Subject and language are created, destroyed and reformulated under the pressure of the semiotic, especially in art: “In ‘artistic’ practices the semiotic – the precondition of the symbolic – is revealed as that which also destroys the symbolic” (p. 50). In Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic and the symbolic in the voice, the act of enunciation always runs the risk of being halted, of being voided or voiding itself of meaning, since the influx of the semiotic is always also a destabilization of the symbolic.

## 2.4.2 Applicability to Analysis and Discussion: The Sound of Voice in the Interaction of Music Therapy as Critique of Formalism

In this study the ethical and political implications of singing are explored in terms of what happens when someone and something is constituted in and through the voice of the singer. Based on the theory presented above, singing as a signification process constituting subject and meaning is coextensive with music’s referential capabilities: subject and meaning are constituted by the use of voice in and towards reality and those inhabiting it, expressing something about them, and remodeling both reality, symbolic meaning and the subjects in question.

In this section I present and discuss how theory concerning sign, reference, subject and voice might be applicable in analysing singing as a signification process, in terms of how singing, as constituting subject and meaning, is coextensive with singing as a symbolic, referring language.

I draw on how the use of semiotic theory can unpack intersubjective dynamics in music therapy as they show music's function as a symbolic and referring language (Rolvsjord, 2002). At the same time, these intersubjective dynamics expose the limited adequacy of notions of formalism and absolute music in which music only refers to itself (cf. Adorno 2002a, p. 114).

As pointed out in Section 1.1.1 concerning infant musicking in neo-natal care units (McLean, 2018), I find that the constituting capacities of song become apparent in contexts of urgent relational interaction, facilitated by music therapy. Singing as part of the neo-natal care, constitutes subjects and meanings through the ability of the voice to “connect, communicate, create and mediate a fragile infant's way of being» (McLean, 2018, p. 172). By singing, the parents take care of their child, and develop an identity as parents. This singing occurs in situations in which the baby's life might hang in the balance. But as Jonas (1984) emphasizes, this is in effect how it always is, as the imperative “ought” of responsibility issues from the “is” of the infant: “The immanent ought-to-be of the suckling, which his every breath proclaims, turns [...] into the transitive ought-to-do of others” (Jonas, 1984, p. 34, see Section 2.2.3). Therefore, the symbolic quality of parents singing can be understood as acting on this responsibility to care for the continued existence of the newborn, that is, constituting them as parents and the life of the baby through singing. The act of singing as taking responsibility, constitutes subject and meaning, the sound of the voice becomes a symbolic expression that refers in its address towards what it constitutes. Therefore, in terms of sign, reference and voice, I find that this responsibility, acted upon as song, resembles the referential capacities of the voice in what Kristeva describes as a feature of the expressive sign, namely that it can “suggest what is not, but *will be*, or rather *can be*. And this future tense is [...] a transformation produced by the possible combinations within its [the sign's] own structure” (1996b, pp. 71–72).

Rolvsjord (2002) applies semiotic theory of language in an exploration of how musical meaning is generated in music therapy. She takes as point of departure the immediate forms of communicative exchange between infant and caregiver, building on Trevarthen (1988; 1997), Trevarthen & Malloch (2000) and Stern (1995; 2000), who find that a newborn has innate capacities for participation in face-to-face exchange of emotion. This exchange is not only facilitated by the caregiver in terms of taking turns, affect-intonation of voice and framing in the activities of the child. Rather, the exchange is fundamentally mutual, in the sense that it also influenced and led by the infant who motivates the caregiver (Rolvsjord, 2002, pp. 11–14).

This notion of primal intersubjectivity in early attachment Rolvsjord builds on in her interpretation of a shift in theory and practice of music therapy, from a therapeutic conception of “fixing” the client towards a notion of enhancing a development of innate musical capacities during the musical interaction (p. 13). Further, this therapeutic shift has also adjusted the

conception of music in the therapeutic situation, challenging sharp distinctions between symbolic meaning and pure music (pp. 3, 13–14). For instance, the romantic and formalistic concepts of absolute music resemble notions of a presumably ‘pure’, content-free communication between mother and child in the infant phase. However, the musical intersubjective interaction between caregiver and infant exposes the inadequacy of concepts such as ‘preverbal’ and ‘non-verbal’ to understandings of musical meaning (pp. 9–10, 22), since these forms of meaning do not cease to exist as the child develops a verbal language. Rather, the kind of immediate and semiotic meaning production in infant caregiving situations continues in parallel with and in verbal language, just as it does with music (p. 10). Therefore, the practice of music in music therapy facilitates an understanding of music as a language of content, not opposed to, but as verbal language (pp. 3, 22).

Building this argument Rolvsjord discusses to what extent Saussure’s model of signifier and signified can be used in order to distinguish the expression and the content of the sign (p. 32), and to what extent Peirce’s distinction between icon, index and symbol is applicable to music (p. 33). She argues that an identification of the signified is not evident in music (p. 37), and that the signs of music are always ambiguous and involving multiple different connections of meaning (p. 33). Still, she finds that in the praxis of music therapy as well as in communicative relations between infant and caregiver, music can be experienced as having referential functions (p. 48). Building on Kristeva’s notion of the dialectics between the semiotic and the symbolic, Rolvsjord argues that “semiotics creates ‘life’ in language; it creates differences of oppositions and nuances in language that are absolutely necessary for its referring function” (p. 56). Finding that these dynamics in language can also be identified in music, Rolvsjord advocates a referential function in music as “a type of symbolic referring within the semiotic” (Rolvsjord, 2002, p. 58).

Rolvsjord references Langer (1953), who describes music as symbol: “An unconsummated symbol, a significant form without conventional significance” (Langer, 1953, p. 241, in Rolvsjord, 2002, p. 35). Building on Langer, Rolvsjord acknowledges that music is a predominantly semiotic language in the Kristevian sense, not pointing directly towards objects (Rolvsjord, 2002, p. 35). Nevertheless, it remains integral to the symbolic realm of meaning, in that it is a human form of expression (p. 61), and as such show referential features:

As symbol, music is special in its lack of denotations or fixed meaning; that is, it does not point to a specific object. However, this “open” symbol is a meaning-bearing form, a form that can have connotations. [...] Implicit is [...] an assumption that not all meaning fits the form. (2002, p. 35)



Rolvjord further argues that this lack of fixed meaning in musical signs does not apply only to music, but to verbal language as well. Building on Kristeva's claim that neither semiotic nor symbolic meaning exist independently (Kristeva, 1984, p. 24), Rolvjord posits that the argument goes both ways, as the semiotic modality is not only present in music, but also in verbal language. It can be experienced as a current or a pressure which breaks into the symbolic, causing language to become ambiguous and more dominated by rhythmic and sonic elements (Rolvjord, p. 55). This might occur in metaphors and in the fusion of different symbols within a text, creating new meanings pertaining to each symbol (p. 38).

In the communicative interaction of music therapy, these different layers of meaning – in texts, verbalizing, movement, dance or poetry – can merge into the music, so that music also must encompass another mode of symbolic meaning:

The materiality of music must include the materiality of another symbolic mode. For example, the use of songs in music therapy will mean that the materiality of music will include the materiality of verbal language and poetry (2002, p. 39).

In music therapy, therefore, music can become a form of language with referential functions, with musical interaction playing out as symbolic communication (p. 48). Often, music and verbal language occur simultaneously as a merged expression. Referencing Kristeva, Rolvjord argues that “such a fusion or transposition is both about the music appearing in the verbal language and the verbal language appearing in the music” (Rolvjord, 2002, p. 61). Both verbal language and music are semiotic-symbolic languages in which the distinction between signifier and signified is no longer absolute (p. 37). Music acts and moves in language and vice versa (p. 61).

Rolvjord thus finds that Kristeva's thinking concerning sign, reference and the subject challenges romantic and formalist concepts of pure music, understood as non-referential, non-verbal, self-contained phenomenon, which has been prevalent in historic and analytic music science, to avoid attributing music with extra-musical content (p. 64, cf. Daykin 2009, pp. 124–125; Goehr, 2004, pp. 3, 7–8, 17)

Exemplifying such a notion of formalism, I apply in the following Adorno's (2002a; 2002b) discussion of the relation between music and language. Recognizing the similarity, Adorno argues that it points to what music is, but simultaneously misguide further investigation:

Music is similar to language. Expressions like musical idiom or musical accent are not metaphors. But music is not language. Its similarity to language points to its

innermost nature, but also toward something vague. The person who takes music literally as a language will be led astray by it. (2002a, p. 113)

Adorno finds that the difference between music and language is often sought in the presumed self-evident opinion that music does not know terms. However, he argues that music in many cases shows characteristics akin to terms. The material difference between terms of language and the characteristics in music akin to terms can be found in the fact that “the identity of these musical concepts lies in their own existence and not in something to which they refer” (2002a, p. 114).

Given the notions of symbol and referring discussed in the previous section, in which no symbol or sound is purely symbolic or purely semiotic, Adorno’s notion of “term” and “referring” could easily be read as a static conception of expression in music and language, and as a statement made from a theoretical position of music philosophy discussing system rather than praxis and usage. It resembles a purebred formalism in line with Hanslick’s notion of music as tonally moving forms (Hanslick, 1965). However, Adorno argues against such a formalist conception, as it

comes down to empty stimulus or the mere existence of something that reverberates, where this stimulus lacks the relationship of the aesthetic Gestalt to something that is not itself, through which it first constitutes itself as aesthetic Gestalt. (2002a, p. 117)

Neither does Adorno’s conception of musical terms amount to what he criticizes as an aesthetics of expression: “The aesthetics of expression [that music has sense or structure [2002a, p. 116] [...], ends with the temptingly arbitrary act of substituting what has been understood ephemerally and by accident for the objectivity of the thing itself (2002a, p. 117). Such a substitution leads to the confusion of one’s own interpretation of the music with what it presumably expresses in and of its own.

Adorno does advocate the conception that music expresses something, but not in the same intentional manner as language. Rather it expresses the form of what language intends to express, but is never able to, namely the name of God:

In comparison to signifying language, music is a language of a completely different type. Therein lies music’s theological aspect. What music says is a proposition at once distinct and concealed. Its idea is the form [Gestalt] of the name of God. It is demythologized prayer, freed from the magic of making anything happen, the

human attempt, futile, as always, to name the name itself, not to communicate meanings. Music aims at an intentionless language. (2002a, p. 114)

Still, Adorno acknowledges that this is not how music is experienced by the senses. To the contrary, music is often experienced as a language of strong intentions: “Among its intentions, one of the most urgent seems to be “That is the way it is” – the judicious, even judging, affirmation of something that is, however, not expressly stated” (2002a, p. 115).

This ambivalence concerning the relation between music and language extends all the way in music, “from the whole, the organized coherence of meaningful sounds, down to the single sound, the tone as the threshold of mere existence, the pure medium of expression” (2002a, p. 113). Consequently, Adorno finds that

as language, music tends towards pure naming, the absolute unity of object and sign, which in its immediacy is lost to all human knowledge. In the utopian and at the same time hopeless attempts at naming is located music’s relation to philosophy, to which, for this very reason, it is incomparably closer, in its idea, than any other art. But the name appears in the music only as pure sound, divorced from its bearer, and hence the opposite of every act of meaning, every intention toward meaning. (2002b, p. 140)

Thus, Adorno maintains a difference between sound and a referring sign, where sound is pure expression while the sign is not, since the sign refers to something and has a transcendent character. This cannot apply to music without music ceasing to be what Adorno finds it to be, that is, something completely in and of itself. Although music tends towards the name understood as absolute unity of object and sign, Adorno always understands music as something other than language:

Music may be said to make sense the more perfectly it determines its destiny in this way – not only when its individual elements express something symbolically. Its similarity to language is fulfilled as it distances itself from language. (2002a, p. 117)

Adorno brings both formalism and aesthetics of expression to their extremes in that the transcendence of music cannot happen in any other way than by the musical content becoming completely itself, as perfect immanence (2002a, p. 117). At the same time, it seems to me that the dialectics which Adorno describes and bases his description of music on tend to close in on themselves, causing his language concerning musical expression not to refer to music and music experience, let alone performative praxis. In his effort to articulate how music

expresses something without referring to something, Adorno's dialectics becomes a closed dynamic in his texts, not unlike the tonal forms of music formalism he argues against. When the language about music denies music the characteristic of referring to something, then that language becomes not about music, but about itself.

Rolvjord finds that Kristeva's notion of the signifying process foregrounds a framework within which it makes sense to assess music as symbolic language (Rolvjord, 2002, p. 52), and that this becomes apparent in the intersubjective dynamics of music therapy. Formalist conceptions of pure music does not hold true in a caregiving, expressive relation. Rather, in such a relation music becomes language:

When the music becomes a language, the music becomes meaningful through a dialectical relationship between the symbolic and the semiotic. This implies a referential function. This referential function must be related to several different types of relationships between the musical structures and the extra-musical, to the relationship between the subject and music, and to the relationship between the participants in a musical interaction. [...] A referential function in music will, however, always be exceeded by the semiotic, so that the meaning of music on a referential level is always ambiguous. And it is possibly precisely its possibility of denotation combined with an almost infinite ambiguity that makes music so applicable in therapy. (2002, p. 65)

I find that applying notions of sign, reference and the symbolic quality of the sound of the voice in music therapy and infant musicking, shows how singing as symbolic and referring language becomes more apparent as care and responsibility towards another person challenges notions of absolute music, as well as absolute language.

As the design of this thesis shows, dynamics concerning the constitution of subject and meaning might not be appropriately sought as a prepared category and direct findings in an analysis (see Section 3.3.6 and 4.3). However, what the notion of the signifying process and the transition between semiotic and symbolic can be exemplified by, is the relation between word and sound, and how this is experienced and stated something about in the interviews.

### 2.4.3 Conclusion

In Section 2.4 I have outlined theoretical perspectives from different strands of semiotics, music theory and music therapy on voice, subject and meaning. I have traced the development of the notions of sign, symbol, and reference, as well as of voice and subject through

structuralist and post-structuralist approaches, exemplifying with intersubjective perspectives developed within infant musicking and music therapy how theory of semiotics might apply to analysing singing.

The discussed notions and perspectives inform the interpretation, analysis and discussion of my own performances and the interviews with the audience: the constitution of subject and meaning in singing as coextensive with the dynamic negotiation of word and sound in the voice, that is, the transcending of symbolic and semiotic meaning, making song into a referring language, forms the premise in the thesis on which to discuss how singing can be interpreted as an ethical demand and a participation in public political discourse.

### **3 Methodological Context**

This thesis is situated within the qualitative research paradigm as a case study analysing events of singing through interviews of two selected groups from the audience attending my own concerts. Designed as an exploration of my own act of singing in three live performances, the study can be read as a form of arts-based research. Research on or as art sometimes seeks to expand and even transcend the conventional methodological tenets and standards of qualitative research. This is not my primary objective, as this effort seems to me to isolate art from science more than bridging (presumed) gaps. Rather, I will argue that the subject of this thesis and my own involvement in it as an artist-researcher serve to highlight the very ordinary (but very close) connections between the researcher and the subject matter, foregrounding common methodological challenges. The argument is not that the singer needs a methodological awareness to participate in ethical-political discourse as a singer, but that the process of exploring how and to what extent singing can be termed such a participation (how singing states something), and to explore this based on one's own singing serves directly to highlight the various logics underlying qualitative research.

Section 3.1 presents current strands of discussion on the relation between art and research and discusses the methodological implications of this relation in the study. Section 3.2 presents the specific methodological implications of case study research into my own singing. Section 3.3 presents the cases of the singing performances, the group interviews, the groups, reflections concerning research ethics and an overview of the process of analysis.

#### **3.1 Art and/as Research: Methodological Implications**

The methodological implications of the relations between art and research lie at the heart of this study, in terms of its subject matter, choice of method, the potential significance of the outcomes of the analysis and discussions, and the notion of singing practice as communicative action.

In this section I present current discussions on the relations between art and research in order to show how they operate within this study and why I have decided on a conventional qualitative interview as the most adequate instrument for data collection and analysis.

Within the field of qualitative research, there are emerging methodological concepts that, at least at first glance, may seem more suited to the present study than conventional methods.

The shift towards the use of art in and as research and the methodological implications thereof are part of the development constituted by the “practice turn and the material turn in the sciences and humanities” (Schatzki et al., 2001, p. 4), and has gained currency the last two decades (Borgdorff et al., 2020, pp. 1–4). Arts-based research (ABR) and artistic research (AR) operate on the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary border between art and science in ways that raise questions about epistemological, theoretical and methodological aspects of both art and science (Kapula et al., 2018; Borgdorff et al., 2020, pp. 19, 31). The terminology applied about or in these research practices concerning their relation to art seems to fall into two main categories, often without sharp distinctions: on one hand, the art-science relation is seen as generating a heightened awareness of and sensitivity towards what is done in qualitative research, and hence advancing what is already being done (Leavy, 2009, pp. 10, 106, 259, 261; Borgdorff, et al., 2020, p. 7); on the other, the art-science relation might be seen as opening up new, “hybrid knowing spaces” (Borgdorff et al., 2020, pp. 7–8), or even “opening up a whole new language for interpreting and writing up or presenting qualitative data” (Leavy, 2009, p. 261). In both cases, the use of music-based methods is seen as helping researchers “access, illuminate, describe and explain that which is often rendered invisible by traditional research practices” (p. 101).

As implied in the discussion of the performative turn in Section 2.1, even though this study explores my own performance practice, I do not identify the methodological approach of this study with its performative object. The following methodological discussion of art and/as research aims at defining how this study can be read as an arts-based research project, informed by artistic research, but situated as an arts-based research in performance practice within the tenets of traditional qualitative research – as a case study of my own performance, dealing with words and meaning and interpretation (Leavy, 2009, p. 256), and not collapsing research into art.

### 3.1.1 Arts-Based Research

In terms of both its subject matter and its method, the present thesis most closely resembles arts-based research, ABR. Leavy (2009) applies this label to research both within and outside the bounds of qualitative research, in which art provides not only the object of inquiry, but is also the basis for and/or forms the entire design and different phases of the research practice, facilitating research questions that would otherwise not have been unmasked (Leavy, 2009, p. 117), having implications for the data, data collection, analysis, coding and representation (pp. 4, 258), and more generally serving as a basis, model and/or resource for both method and (re) presentation (pp. 2–4, 104–111).

Leavy argues for a bridging of the science-art divide which she considers to be artificially constructed on the polarizing and one-dimensional notion that “[a]rt is mysterious. Science is straightforward. Art promotes thought through its reliance on metaphor, symbolism, and imagination. Science offers “facts” and “truth” through its reliance on numbers, words, and objectivity” (p. 263). Exploring how method meets art Leavy argues that “This new breed of qualitative methods [based on art] offers researchers alternatives to traditional research methods that may fail to “get at” the particular issues they are interested in, or may fail to represent them effectively” (pp. 3–4). The general belief is that “various art forms can be refashioned as research practices” (p. 259), in which art is “used during all phases of the research endeavor” (p. 4), in a manner that either enhances qualitative research methodologies, or even provides models of approach, analysis and (re)presentation that would otherwise not have been ascertainable (p. 107). Thus, the interrogation of qualitative research practice, propelled by ABR, has resulted in

the dismantling of the dichotomies that guide positivist research, including the rational-emotional, subject-object, and concrete-abstract, [...] science-art and fact-fiction. Arts-based research practices call our attention to the polarizing notions that distinguish art and science from each other in ways that have prevented the kinds of cross-breeding that might advance conversations about the human condition and our study of it. [...] The fusion of tools from the arts with scientific methods has created the methodological innovation necessary to more fully address the complexities of social life. (2009, pp. 263–264)

Hence, even though arts-based practices can be seen as extensions of the qualitative paradigm, they also challenge conventional qualitative methods, disturbing assumptions about what constitutes research and knowledge (p. 9). New methods of this kind are seen as “strategies for accessing silenced perspectives, evoking emotional responses, provoking dialogue, promoting awareness, and cultivating an increased social consciousness” (p. 259).

This wide range of methodological implications from ABR stems, according to Leavy, from the fact that method and art are joined within complex social and political dynamics of emancipation and empowerment:

Method meets art at the intersection of social and political progress, the emergence of alternative theoretical and epistemological groundings, overarching social justice-oriented research initiatives, and the academic shift toward interdisciplinarity and now transdisciplinarity. The merging of the world of science with the world of art has caused a renegotiation of the scientific standards that traditionally guided



social scientific research practice while also highlighting the points of convergence between the two formerly disparate worlds. The methodological hybridization that has occurred as a result of these larger shifts [...] facilitates the objectives many qualitative researchers have long held while simultaneously creating a space where new research questions can be formulated. (2009, pp. 253–254)

### 3.1.2 Transdisciplinary Research

Developing a similar argument from the perspective of transdisciplinary research (TDR), Kapula and colleagues (2018) argue that exploring transdisciplinarity in art and science challenges Cartesian paradigms in research. They find that transdisciplinary methodology

raises questions on epistemological aspects inherent to crossing sciences with the arts. In experimental sciences, scientists carry out research in laboratory conditions, following Cartesian paradigms relying on conceptual, theoretical and operational standards. While they are designing experiments, collecting and analyzing data, and facing critical reviewers to have their articles published, researchers continuously experience the delicate balance between meeting and exceeding these established standards and paradigms. The highly challenging research questions on the arts and their making are particularly prone to such an epistemological dilemma. How can we articulate the reductive but rigorous experimental procedure with a necessary evolution towards new paradigms that are simultaneously complex and open? Are artists also facing new paradigms of their time? Or does engaging in the arts imply breaking free from constraining paradigms? (Kapula et al., 2018, p. v)

According to Kapula et al., such discussions must involve transdisciplinary inquiries in which traditional boundaries of disciplines are questioned, both within art, and between art and the sciences. Thus, they advocate practices that question “the singularity of the musical practice with respect to other artistic disciplines, such as literature, [...]” (2018, p. vi), as well as practices that apply music to research on cognitive neuroscience and creativity:

Recording and sonifying the brain activity not only shows the hidden rhythms of human neurons, but suggests that different families of neurons may be studied and characterized through their inner musicality, which opens new interesting perspectives in computational creativity. (Kapula et al., 2018, p. vi)<sup>15</sup>

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15 For instance, Destexhe and Foubert (2018) investigate the musicality implied when neurons emit electrical impulses called “spikes”: “These electrophysiological events show very precise timing (less than 1 ms) and are used by neural cells to transfer local activities through wide communication networks” (Destexhe & Foubert 2018, p. 243).

Applying cognitive neuroscience, Pinho (2018) finds that musical improvisation, as a behavioural model for studying creativity, reveals “neural correlates of mental processes” (Pinho, 2018, p. 77) that have hitherto been considered to be either deliberative-cognitive or spontaneous-emotional (pp. 77, 98). Comparing experiments involving the use of an MR-compatible piano keyboard, Pinho concludes that

musical improvisation is not restricted to a fixed set of regions [in the brain] but rather a network of interchangeably functional regions dependent on task- and context-specific domain. As a behavioral model to study creativity, it thus shares many specialized functional networks previously identified in e.g., free selection or divergent-thinking tasks. Either extrospective or introspective networks have been, respectively, linked to creative behavior featuring deliberate-cognitive mechanisms or spontaneous-emotional ones [...] These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive and can pertain to the same high-cognitive process, involving creativity. (2018, p. 98)

Thus, TDR points towards fusions of “hard science” and musical practice, deliberative-cognitive and spontaneous-emotional functioning, arguing that neither operates independently and distinctively.

### 3.1.3 Artistic Research

Following the same line of thinking, but from the perspective of artistic research, in which research is presumed to be conducted in and through art and design (Borgdorff et al., 2020, p. 1), Borgdorff et al. argue that

for some in the art world, artistic research undermines the modernist dichotomy of autonomy and instrumentalism, breaking away from the alleged “otherness” of art as a societal domain that has clear boundaries and that can be separated from science (Nowotny, 2010, p. xx). In academia, taking art to be a form of doing research and presenting the works of art that result from that research as a form of knowledge is criticized as conflicting with standards of intersubjectivity, detachment, and justification. (2020, p. 2)

As touched upon briefly in Chapter 1 and 2, AR is an umbrella term which includes multiple approaches and methodologies in research involving artistic research (Borgdorff, 2007, p 13, 15; Orning, 2017, p. 81). A common trait is that AR raises debates concerning how art as research might address fundamental philosophical questions of epistemology and methodology, as well as issues concerning artistic agency and autonomy, all of which is structured on what Borgdorff et al. see as “powerful dualisms”:

When does art practice count as research? What is the object of artistic research and in what ways is it different from the object of scientific research? How can scientific knowledge be distinguished from knowledge generated within artistic practice? Are scientific research methods radically different from artistic methods of research? In the debates on these questions, one encounters powerful dualisms: art and science, worlds and words, art practice and writing, embodied and discursive knowledge, original artworks and their representations. As a practice, art is often taken to be a paragon of unmethodological, autonomous, and intuitive work, while science appears as methodological, intersubjective, and articulate. (2020, p. 2)

While acknowledging that artistic research might use methods and techniques from the humanities or the social sciences or technology, or in a combination or triangulation of various methods and tools, Borgdorff et al. identify three main features that often characterize artistic research projects: experimentation, involvement/engagement and “a form of analysis or interpretation” of findings (p. 4).

“Experimentation” denotes that “the research takes place through and unfolds in artistic practice, in and through making and performing. That is why it is sometimes referred to as studio-based research” (p. 4). They argue that “the objective of the artistic experiment is not so much to test something – as in a science or engineering laboratory – but to tell something, to convey content” (p. 4). This is because “testing is all about commensuration and standardization [...], but in telling no appeal needs to be made to commensuration” (p. 4).

The aspect of “involvement and engagement” of the person or persons who perform the research characterizes artistic research as participatory. In a sense, this might be said about all qualitative research, and “as such, it [artistic research] shows kinship with ethnography, where the subject-object divide or the fact-value dichotomy are relativized” (Borgdorff et al., 2020, p. 4). But, as Leavy (2009) argues, research based on art, or artistic research for that matter, applies its research tools in a manner that exposes what goes on in research, including the participatory aspect, and puts it out in the open instead of excluding it as simply a preparatory phase before the presentation of results (Leavy, 2009, p. 1).

The “form of analysis or interpretation” that artistic research needs with respect to making sense of its findings is the locus in which “‘theory’ might help to contextualize the research and to show how it relates to other research and how it is embedded in academic, cultural, social, or political spheres and discourses” (Borgdorff et al., 2020, p. 4).

Thus, although artistic research “appropriates a variety of research methods and techniques from other research fields”, Borgdorff et al. argue that “it is distinctive in the combination

of experimentation, participation, and interpretation” (2020, p. 4). In fact, Borgdorff (2020) sees its distinctiveness to be of a nature that might even “alter or amend our understanding of what academic research is,” when a process of translation takes place “from the realm of the aesthetic to the realm of the epistemic,” and the artwork or artistic practice “travels” towards “epistemic articulation and impact in scholarly discourse” (p. 19).

Borgdorff et al. argue further that

the central controversy around artistic research involves its legitimacy as a proper academic field of investigation: that is, whether it conforms to the prevailing standards of scientific research with regard to methodology, replicability, reliability, reporting, and so on. In that controversy, some people tend to take sides in such a way that a caricature is made of the opponent. Science is curtailed and reduced to a “scientific” picture, where everything that falls outside the scope of the controlled experiment is dismissed as pseudo-science or fraud. Others see art as the realm where autonomy and resistance towards standards and restrictions prevail. It is our assumption that such an opposition is not helpful when one wants to understand the rationale and internal dynamics of the artistic research program. (2020, pp. 12–13)

Specifically, they criticize how educational and doctoral programs hold on to sharp distinctions between the artwork and the reflection on it. Such distinctions, they find, do not recognise the intertwining of theory and practice in artistic research, and do not ask the fundamental questions concerning what discursivity means, and what it is to make a claim in and through art:<sup>16</sup>

If we acknowledge the agency of material practices and things, and if we stress the importance of studio-based, practice-based methods, and if we furthermore acknowledge that cognition is embodied, embedded, and enacted in material practices, then we should not hesitate to conclude that the reasoning is also located in those material practices. [...] How to articulate this style of reasoning? How to articulate the epistemic and methodological force of art? [...] One of the tasks now is to rethink what “discursivity” means, what it is to make a claim in and through art, what reasoning is, once we have accepted that material practices and things in this field of inquiry are not only constitutive in a methodological sense but that they also count as valid expressions of research processes and outcomes. (Borgdorff et al., 2020, pp. 4–5)

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<sup>16</sup> More specifically, they criticize the way regulations for the artistic doctorate are set up in Sweden, Norway, and Austria (Borgdorff et al., 2020, pp. 4, 8, 13).

The question concerning a rethinking of what "discursivity" means, I will pick up on later, to some extent in the present chapter, and more in the analysis and the discussion. The debate on method that ABR and AR give rise to leads to what I find to be a central insight concerning scientific inquiry: that research methods not only represent or facilitate access to the research object, but form and participate and act in and on it (to some extent in the same way as the semiotic influxes on the symbolic, see Section 2.4 above). Borgdorff et al. argue that

research methods do not only observe and represent materials, issues, and events but in fact act upon and intervene in these materials, issues, and events. Research not only analyzes, documents, and informs, but also performs realities and ontologies and reforms and transforms them through the act of researching. (2020, p. 7)

Borgdorff et al. refer to Law (2017), who explores how exhibitions, writing poetry, simulations, art-science interactions or activism and participatory methods constitute "knowing spaces" and "performative webs" (Law, 2017, p. 48). In a similar manner to Borgdorff et al. (2020), Law argues that an adequate position concerning method, no matter what kind of research it is or what it is about, might be as follows:

That methods are shaped by the social; that they also shape, stage, and structure the social; that they are performative and heterogeneously enact objects, worlds, and realities; that they are situated, productive, essentially political, and normative; and that they might be otherwise. (Law, 2017, p. 48, in Borgdorff et al., p. 8)

I find that such a notion of method might address the way method – much in the same manner as singing – is never only exterior to what it serves as an approach to and addresses. Nor is it exterior to the researching subject(s) applying it and their life conditions but is instead integrated into all aspects of social life. Articulated this way, the notion of method is equivalent to what I find is a matter of urgency in musical performance as well, as this notion takes into account how "the unique experience of music blurs our 'sensations and perceptual boundaries'" (Leavy, 2009, pp. 113–114, citing Stubley 1995, p. 59).

### 3.1.4 Towards a Clarification of how AR and ABR are linked to this Study

While this study applies a conventional methodological approach using group interviews to obtain and analyse empirical material, it is still informed by the notions of method articulated by Borgdorff et al. (2020) and Law (2017) above: I use my own concerts to generate data as a basis on which to generate, test and rework hypotheses, and as a basis on which to conduct the interviews during which parts of the concerts are listened to, interpreted and discussed, and during which what I do and experience as a performer and researcher comes into play as

dialogical dynamics in concert and with the audience-participants in the groups, generating diverse meanings and perspectives.

As the study is developed within the academic and artistic environments of Scandinavia, the strands of ABR and AR referred to are mainly those that have had an impact there, especially in Norway, which to a considerable extent have been informed by the tenets represented by scholars such as Crispin (2013, 2014, 2021) and Borgdorff (2007, 2010, 2020). The Norwegian Academy of Music is a member of the Association Européenne des Conservatoires (AEC), according to which AR may be defined as

a form of research that possesses a solid basis embedded in artistic practice and which creates new knowledge and/or insight and perspectives within the arts, contributing both to artistry and innovation. AEC, 2015<sup>17</sup>

According to this definition, the present study might have been defined as an AR study. However, as the rest of Section 3.1 will show, I do not consider the text of the thesis as part of the artistic practice to such an extent that fits the tradition in Norway, in which the project is also evaluated in terms of its artistic quality. Further, applying interviews in a conventional qualitative manner, I consider the present study not as an AR study, but as qualitative research informed by AR in terms of method, my own involvement and choice of themes. The main discipline of the study can be defined as ABR research within performance practice.

Nevertheless, as the rest of Section 3.1 aims to develop, the extent to which I consider the present study to be an ABR project goes no further than the acknowledgement that all inquiries, including research texts in their most conventional sense, are never only about something, but intervene in what they are about, are situated in it, and in this sense perform realities. Therefore, even though ABR and AR inform the design of this study, ABR and AR do not provide anything fundamentally new in terms of method or language for exploring the ethical-political implications of singing.

In the rest of section 3.1 I briefly summarise the tendency to approach, use or represent art in research as part of a larger methodological movement from the quantitative to the qualitative methodological paradigm, tracing and discussing how the use of art in research can be understood as a methodological-political development and widening of the qualitative paradigm. The rest of 3.1 can therefore be read as an effort to identify the position of this study concerning ABR and AR.

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<sup>17</sup> The AEC White Paper on Artistic Research: [https://aec-music.eu/userfiles/File/customfiles/aec-white-paper-engeorg-schulzfinal\\_20160125084530.pdf](https://aec-music.eu/userfiles/File/customfiles/aec-white-paper-engeorg-schulzfinal_20160125084530.pdf)

### 3.1.5 The Use of Art in Research as methodological-political Development: Renegotiating Scientific Standards

Leavy (2009) argues that because “positivist science applies deductive methods” (p. 5), whereas “qualitative research is generally characterized by inductive approaches to knowledge-building” (p. 6), then understanding the historical shift from positivist science and the culmination into the qualitative paradigm

is directly related to contemplating the newer category of arts-based research practices because the main concern levied against these methods centers on validity and trustworthiness. [...] The resistance, by some, to the newer breed of arts-based practices is therefore linked to these larger struggles about scientific standards of knowledge-building. [...] Although arts-based practices are an extension of the qualitative paradigm, these methods practices have posed serious challenges to qualitative methods conventions, thus unsettling many assumptions about what constitutes research and knowledge. [...] This trepidation parallels the fear quantitatively trained researchers expressed when qualitative research was emerging and struggling for legitimacy. (2009, pp. 6–9)

Leavy argues further that what has “most propelled the arts into qualitative research practice are the power and immediacy of artistic mediums and the oppositional possibilities of art” (p. 255). First, the emotional and evocative power of art has given rise to a turn towards artistic forms of representation that “bring social research to broader audiences, mitigating some of the educational and social class biases that have traditionally dictated the beneficiaries of academic scholarship” (p. 255). Second, Leavy finds, the shift toward ABR is “particularly entwined with the surge in social justice research within and across the disciplines” (p. 255). ABR must be seen in relation to how the qualitative paradigm was formed by the social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s (the civil rights movement, the women’s movement (second-wave feminism) and the gay rights movement). These movements resulted in

major changes in the academic landscape, including the asking of new research questions and corresponding approaches to research, both theoretical and methodological. [...] The common outgrowth from these diverse and progressive movements included a thorough re-examination of power within the knowledge-building process in order to avoid creating knowledge that continued to be complicit in the oppression of minority groups. (2009, p. 7)

According to Leavy, referencing prominent researchers, this re-examination included the shift towards awareness of the production of ‘partial and situated truths’ (Haraway, 1988); the attention within feminism on ‘the context of discovery’, not only ‘the context of justification’, which had been the focus of positivist research (Harding, 1993); the dismantling of dualisms such as subject-object, rational-emotional and concrete-abstract (Sprague & Zimmermann, 1993), all of which constitute dichotomies that presuppose a positivist notion of objectivity which, in light of these political movements, was now considered oppressive (Halpin, 1989). These perspectives

attend to issues of power and have caused a significant renegotiation and elaboration for the qualitative paradigm. [...] Researchers informed by postmodern and poststructural theories have adapted qualitative methods in order to expose and subvert oppressive power relations. (Leavy, 2009, p. 8)

It is within this politically, theoretically and methodologically diverse paradigm of the post-modern that ABR emerges, constituting an alternative methodological genre:

Postmodern theorists have also brought issues of representation to the forefront of methodological debate. Arguing that form and content are inextricably bound and enmeshed within shifting relations of power [...], postmodernists have been integral to the advancement of arts-based methods of representation. (2009, p. 8)

Therefore, according to Leavy, many within arts-based practices do their research “with the intent of increasing a critical consciousness, promoting reflection, building empathetic connections, forming coalitions, challenging stereotypes, and fostering social action” (p. 255).

Along similar lines, but within the broader discussion of how art might translate from the realm of aesthetics to the realm of the epistemic through AR practices, Kirkkopelto (2020) argues that there is “a political claim sustaining the emergence of AR as a new kind of academic and epistemic activity” (Kirkkopelto, 2020, p. 32):

As artists claim their right to knowledge production, art and art-making cease to be mere objects of research and become new kinds of media in the hands of new kinds of social agents. Research makes them less dependent on public opinion and recognition – in other words, the laws of the art market – and expands their role as critical social, political and pedagogical agents. (2020, p. 32)



However, this potential in art is not something new or newly unveiled with ABR or AR. Leavy argues that various art genres have previously been used as sites of resistance to social oppression, often within grassroots movements or by outspoken activist-artists, which have drawn on the arts in social protest and resistance both publicly and privately (Leavy, 2009, p. 256). What is new with ABR and AR, and constitutes the use of art in research as part of a bigger methodological-political movement, is that

the resistive potential of art is now being harnessed by social researchers increasingly committed to dismantling stereotypes, accessing the voices of marginalized groups, and engaging in research that propels social change. As new theoretical and epistemological perspectives, particularly those grounded in social justice politics, have emerged, a need for methodological innovation has also developed. The turn to the arts has been natural for some qualitative researchers because they view artistic inquiry as an extension of what qualitative researchers already do. [...] There is a congruency between the skills needed to conduct qualitative research and those that guide artistic practice. (2009, p. 256)

It is this congruency that ABR and AR presumably apply and develop more distinctly than traditional qualitative research, through a renegotiation of what constitutes scientific standards:

The emergence of arts-based practices has necessitated a renegotiation of the qualitative paradigm with respect to fundamental assumptions about scientific standards of evaluation. In particular, these methods have been interrogated around issues of validity, trustworthiness, and authenticity. Critics as well as those who practice arts-based research have asked: How can we evaluate knowledge constructed with these methods? (2009, p. 15)

Such questions become especially urgent with respect to traditional conceptions of validity and reliability:

Validity and reliability, which developed out of positivism, are inappropriate for evaluating artistic inquiry [that] produces partial, situated and contextual truths. [...] The aim of these approaches is resonance, understanding, multiple meanings, dimensionality, and collaboration. (2009, pp. 15–16)

The development of the research paradigms is thus characterized both by seamless and supplementary developmental features, as well as points of conflict and polarity. When designing a research project built on art, Leavy therefore argues that

although there is no standardized approach to attaining trustworthiness [in qualitative research], as there is in positivist science, there are many methods for achieving trustworthiness that should be considered during research design and ultimately built into the project. Although qualitative methods of assessment may be useful in some instances, in others, the new artistic methods require new, flexible methods of assessment or adaptations of more conventional approaches. (2009, p. 16)

Among these renegotiated ways to obtain validity and trustworthiness, albeit on the condition that validity and trustworthiness are regarded on terms set within the ABR practice, Leavy lists *aesthetics*, in terms of how the research work makes one feel; *interdisciplinary collaboration* and *reflection*, in terms of ascertaining information about audience response both as a data source and as a validity check; *subject-object bridging*, in terms of working on projects of import both to the researcher(s) and the public; *using theory explicitly during data analysis* in order to generate new interpretations and alternative meanings; *starting not with hypotheses and research questions, but with a literature review or a work of art*; *analysis cycles*, in terms of cycling back to re-examine earlier interpretations; and *ethics*, in terms of seeking full disclosure of context of discovery as well as context of justification (pp. 16–20).

Following the same line of criticizing traditional scientific standards, Borgdorff et al. (2020) argue that epistemological and methodological “controversies and demarcations [...] are almost always at play when a field or discipline is born” (2020, p. 19). Unlike previous developments of research fields, however, which according to Borgdorff tend to “black-box” and “conceal the contradictions and controversies involving the ‘first-principles’ of a research field and the (usually messy) ways in which the field gained its coherence, secures its stability and sustains its durability” (p. 19), artistic research has not yet reached such an established status and closure: “In fact, due to the fluidity of its substance [art works and artistic practices], it may never reach nor aspire to such a condition” (p. 19).

### 3.1.6 Research Specifically on/as Music as Expanding and Transcending the Qualitative Paradigm

The evocative, socio-politically engaged and method-criticizing characteristics of art and artistic practices, are also what makes music and singing a potent locus for, object of and practice of research. However, until recent years, music has not been considered on the same scale as other art forms. Leavy argues that

music (and dance) remains the least-explored art forms with respect to arts-based research methods, more frequently serving as subjects of social inquiry rather than

tools through which to conduct social research. [However,] in recent years exciting methodological innovations have begun to emerge. These emergent innovations are on the cutting edge of arts-based research. (2009, p. 106)

Daykin (2009) argues that an explanation for the moderate use of music in ABR is a “notion of aesthetic autonomy [...], made particularly in relation to Western classical music, which may partially explain why music has received relatively little attention in the field of human inquiry” (Daykin, 2009, p. 124). Daykin finds that this notion of autonomy is now receding, giving way “to a growing concern to explore the ways in which music generates meaning and how these meanings contribute to the reproduction of society and culture” (p. 124), which construct and maintain social hierarchies and identities (p. 124). Still, Daykin argues, these developments have been limited due to notions of autonomy:

The notion that the music “speaks for itself” has been a powerful one in music history. Hence, until relatively recently, issues of musical semantics have been treated with suspicion in mainstream music theory, which has focused inquiry on those questions “relating to the notes” (Leppert 1993). As Williams (2001) suggests, while claims to aesthetic autonomy have increasingly given way to notions of music as socialized energies, the impact of these claims is still felt. (Daykin, 2009, pp. 124–125).

These claims of musical autonomy are joined with “claims of an aesthetic sphere that lies beyond the social [which] represent a continuation of the elitism, essentialism, and conservatism of the Romantic period” (p. 125). They are also merged with “other, more democratic, impulses to protect musical values” (p. 125) resisting notions of “the potential of music to serve as an ideological tool in state nation-building projects (Shapiro, 2001) and other forms of social engineering (Frith 2003)” (p. 125).

In her evaluation of the possibilities for and limitations to the use of music as a basis for research, Daykin regards music as “a system of ‘signifiers without signifieds’” (p. 126, citing Tunstall, 1979, p. 44). Music cannot represent events in the same way as film or drama, only “allude to them semiotically, leaving the listeners to complete the rest of the event” (p. 126). And this allusion does not constitute

a simple and direct transfer of meaning through the chain of creator, performer, and listener, because “musical meaning emerges from a mix including the shreds of authorial intention, the voices inscribed in the text, and the subject positions of the readers/listeners”. (2009, p. 126, citing Williams, 2001, p. 61)

Therefore, Daykin suggests that the infrequent use of music in qualitative research in general and in ABR specifically “reflect particular problems of interpretation, reflection upon which may be useful in the context of current debates about representation, that to some extent, underpin the case for arts-based research” (p. 124). Consequently, the difficulties concerning research on and as music can be of great importance to the development of ABR epistemology (p. 125).

Similarly, Leavy (2009) argues that the use of music in ABR as a model for qualitative research represents methodological innovation both within qualitative research in general and within ABR practices in particular. She even goes as far as regarding some of the music-based research practices as “opening up a whole new language for interpreting and writing up or presenting qualitative data” (p. 261).

Borgdorff, too, although a decade later, argues that music represents methodological challenges which other art forms do not, especially in terms of temporality, lack of fixation and the possibility of mapping or being presented as an argument, claim or proposition (Borgdorff, 2020, p. 25).

In other words: the very problems that music presents in terms of method, are those which might enhance the methodological debate within qualitative research on a broad scale.

### 3.1.7 Research Specifically on/as Music as Operating within the Qualitative Paradigm

However, the shift towards the use of art in and as research and the methodological implications thereof does not in and by itself constitute, e.g., the use of singing as a new experiment in terms of method. Rather, it expresses the realization that in appropriate projects, such as the present study, music might be used within the tenets of existing methods (Leavy, 2009, p. 101). The use of certain aspects of music might become “a way of organizing and writing the data into textual pieces that embody musicality” (p. 110), so that what might seem unremarkable to qualitative researchers can be revealed by arts-based research as a musicality within the research process (p. 109).

For instance, “musical performances bear similarities to focus-group interviews, which also provide a ‘happening’ and which, regardless of the degree of structure and control imposed, are never identical” (p. 114). Consequently, Leavy argues, a research process based on music will also consist in

developing hearing skills, particularly in the context of a visual world, [that] can assist researchers in attaining the listening skill set that is critical to successful ethnographic or interview research. In addition, attending to the various components of music [...] can call our attention to often veiled dimensions of our data as well as our interpretive and writing process. (2009, p. 261)

Leavy refers to Bresler (2005), who theorizes about the relation between music and qualitative research, arguing that music can help sensitize qualitative researchers to the issues they are already interested in. She advocates approaches that apply “musical categories” such as form, rhythm, dynamics, timbre, polyphony, and melody as categories for conducting and analysing interviews, as well as for accessing other dimensions of the subject and the research process concerning perception, conceptualization and communication (Bresler, 2005, pp. 170–174).

Leavy finds Bresler’s approach to be an adequate use of music as a model for qualitative research during data collection, organizing and coding as well as analysis and interpretation, resulting in a closer relation between the object of research and its representation (Leavy, 2009, p. 216). It might also result in a closer relation between research and social action, placing the researcher within the qualitative paradigm of research as sustained by political claims and constituted as action for social justice:

Analyzing and interpreting the data using the musical categories [...] might thus further create a harmony between the subject and form as well as a synergy between the research purpose and audience, creating a holistic project with social action capabilities. Going further, the data could be [...] made into a musical performance. (2009, p. 116)

Leavy argues further that ABR and AR are not “discovering” new research tools, but rather sculpting them: “With the tools they sculpt, so too a space opens within the research community where passion and rigor boldly intersect out in the open” (p. 1). With this openness, ABR is an effort towards “full disclosure with respect to methodological choices (both the context of discovery and context of justification) [that] strengthens the resulting knowledge” (p. 20). Even though methodological disclosure is a conventional qualitative standard, according to Leavy, it becomes particularly important in art-based research (p. 20).

Thus, the aim towards full disclosure is precisely what can make ABR and AR advance the precision of conventional qualitative research, due to the open use of the researcher’s own subjectivity and the unavoidable blurring of this subjectivity over against any form of objectivity that art prompts. Indeed, the use of art might expose how this blurring is always present in

research as such, not just in research on or as music, and might thus enhance the knowledge of its implications. Understood as research within the qualitative paradigm, ABR, AR and TR projects can disclose and provide a better understanding of how creativity and intuition operate in research, that is, as something qualitative researchers already do (p. 10).

All in all, researchers differ as to whether they regard ABR and AR as developments within the realms of qualitative research or constitute a new paradigm. Some argue both, as Leavy (2009) seems to consider ABR to be both an extension of conventional qualitative methods and an establishment of new ones, as the use of art in research is “part of a larger shift from traditional qualitative practice to the interdisciplinary qualitative paradigm” (p. 254). Borgdorff et al. (2020) find that although methods and techniques in AR can have their provenance in traditional research paradigms, the fact that reasoning is located also in the material practices of art forces us to rethink what research is (Borgdorff et al., 2020, pp. 4–5). Kirkkopelto (2020) argues that even though there are affinities between the experimental and the artistic, AR is a new kind of academic and epistemic activity (Kirkkopelto, 2020, pp. 32, 37).

### 3.1.8 Research on Singing applying Aspects of ABR and AR as part of a Conventional Qualitative Research Approach

As a performer, I sympathize with the notion that music sometimes ‘gets’ to the current issues at hand and addresses reality in a more immediate, precise, and articulated way than science and traditional representation. This is intrinsic to the urgency of song and the motivation behind my project. However, the tendency within ABR or AR communities to consider themselves as conducting research in radically new ways, creating new methods and languages, better ways of (re)presenting an event, a relation, a reality, and consequently better ways to deal with the world and take political action, I find misleading. Taken to its extreme, this tendency ends in a conflation of the event, the research into it and its representation. Such an identification or collapse is always enticing. It seems at first glance to be more accurate in its approach and address, and gives rise to sympathy due to its (often) being prompted by a fully justified critique of positivist notions of method, rigid disciplinary boundaries and social conventions.

I find that such a presumed newly found accuracy in research-art-practice-as-representation – such as “dancing of data [facilitating] a movement away from and disruption of the monovocal and monological nature of the voice in the print-based paper” (Bagley & Cancienne, 2002, p. 16, in Leavy, 2009, p. 15), (auto)ethnographical research poetry (Leavy, 2009, pp. 65–71) and research poems (p. 260) – is often based on the belief that what research-cum-art generate, is a constantly flowing and anti-rigid representation, still performing, and therefore

more akin and true to its object than the linear text of a print-based dissertation. The general notion seems to be that the outcome of such research practice represents the diverse, multidimensional, complex, free, dialogical, anti-oppressive and multilogical experience of the original event in a more direct, true and representative manner, because event and research/representation are identical, at least in genre or character or tone.

I think this is what constitutes the core of Borgdorff's argument concerning the development of AR as a research field, which in contrast to others, might continually seek "the suspension or deferral of final result (Borgdorff et al., 2020, p. 27, see above). Such notions of art as inherently fluent and science/text as inherently rigid and linear might cement the dualism one seeks to overcome. No event is ever identical to another event, nor is even the most methodologically rigid and emotionally unequivocal of texts ever only linear; neither is art, song or dance more "real" than such a text, nor is any text innately more "false" or more concealing than performance.

In other words, although this study is based on my own singing performance, and assesses it as a form of sung reality, I try not to lean towards any notion of ABR or AR in which a (re)presentation as the performance of data is more honest or more suited to what is at stake in socio-political life than textual representation. I do not follow the strands of thinking in ABR or AR that regard the systematic use of art in research as something new, or the practice of art as a genuinely new research practice, inherently more attuned to claims of social justice etc. than conventional research.

Rather, I make the argument that singing operates in and as signification, in and as research, and that this is the way it always is. There is no escaping art in research, in search of a rigid methodological approach. Nor can art be considered a special characteristic of ABR or AR that sets them apart from conventional research. In my opinion, the "practice turn and the material turn in the sciences and humanities" (Schatzki et al., 2001, p. 4) serves first and foremost to make more explicit how researcher, research practice and (re)presentation function in and as part of the research process, in and as part of the interface between interpretation and analysis (Leavy, 2009, pp. 1, 11).

Moreover, the notion that ABR or AR represent something truer and radically new in terms of method can in fact cause a continuation of exactly what these research practices presume to criticize and overcome, namely the suppressive power caused by the belief that you represent something in a solid, methodologically fixed way, scientifically, politically, economically, socially. Such a belief is based on an immanentist understanding of domains resulting from notions of the subject derived from the Cartesian paradigm (Kapula et al., 2018, p. v; Daykin,

2009, pp. 128–129), which foregrounds the impression that it is possible for the subject, from a fixed position, to distinguish one domain from the next, and domain from method, and itself from the domains and the methods, enabling the subject – either as researcher or artist or both – to orient itself and interpret and articulate what is real and legitimate, which more often than not ends in some form of oppression. Even though traditional borders between domains, methods, objects and subjects are challenged by arts-based research, what happens is in many ways simply a strengthening of them.<sup>18</sup>

I find that a balanced attitude concerning research on art, research based on art, art as research and research as art, is that neither of these research strands represent entirely new ways of doing either research or art, but rather their continuous reshaping, foregrounding different dynamics of interpretation in both the performative and research processes. As a praxis within the field of conventional qualitative research, the question then becomes what ABR refers to in its (re)presentations, and how it refers. What is the chain of reference between art and the thesis based on that art?

### 3.1.9 Translation – Of What into What? The Problem of Exposition and Reference

Leavy acknowledges that “arts-based practices have a long way to go with respect to professional legitimacy and technical efficiency [and that] these methods have not reached their potential” (Leavy, 2009, p. 264). When it comes to adequate modes of research representation, she stresses the level of personal competence of the art form that a researcher bases her/his research on, arguing that

researchers intending to represent their data with arts-based methods must learn the rules of the discipline they are adapting [...]. In particular, the aesthetic qualities that help to define the arts cannot be lost in translation. Put differently, the final representation should be able to stand on its own as a piece of art while simultaneously communicating information. (2009, p. 265)

Such a position might be understood as toning down disciplinary boundaries between ABR and more “full-fledged” AR.<sup>19</sup> It exposes the problem of how ABR or AR produce what they claim to do, in terms of (re)presentations that are artworks in themselves as well as translations from artworks or art practices to another manner of communicating information. If

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<sup>18</sup> I am not criticizing that this happens as such, I simply make the argument that this might happen in the arts-based paradigm as well as in quantitative and qualitative scientific paradigms.

<sup>19</sup> It also connects ABR to certain strands within case study methodology in which the cases are to be read as narrations in their own right (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 139), see Section 3.2.



the outcome is not a full identification between the original event and the representation, but the result of a translation, what constitutes such a translation? And is that process any different from what goes on in other kinds of research? If not, why call it something other than conventional qualitative research?

This, then, is the problem of reference, which, given the content of the present study and the specific way singing taps into the referring function of language and the relation between sound and word, makes the methodological discussion even more pertinent and integral to the theme of the thesis.

Borgdorff (2020) argues that instead of having to solve the epistemological and methodological controversies of demarcation concerning AR, as these practices do not need to aspire to the condition of coherence, stability, and durability of traditional research, “the problem of demarcation comes down to the problem of reference” (Borgdorff, 2020, p. 19). Building on Latour (1999), who discusses the reference between world and words as a chain of transformations or translations, Borgdorff argues that in AR, the chain of reference goes

between artworks at one extreme and artistic research publications on the other. In this series of transformations, the work of art passes through several stages in which the “common operator” [referencing Latour, 1999] is matter at one point and form in the next, from material artefact to archived material, from archived material to presentation [...], from presentation to documentation, from documentation to publication and so on, whereby you gain some and lose some at every stage. [...] The transition into the epistemic realm is an explicit next move to inscribe the documented work together with other materials (for example: texts) in academia in order to make a claim, to convey knowledge and understanding, shot through with aesthetic experiences. (Borgdorff, 2020, pp. 21–22)

Here Borgdorff also builds on Schwab & Borgdorff (2014) who suggest the notion of ‘exposition’ as “an operator between art and writing [...] as the re-doubling of practice in order to artistically move from artistic ideas to epistemic claims” (Schwab & Borgdorff, 2014, p. 15. In Borgdorff, 2020, p. 22). As perhaps the most commonly known device for practicing such an exposition, presumably facilitating the move from artistic ideas to epistemic claims, Borgdorff treats the establishment and development of the internet-based Research Catalogue (RC).<sup>20</sup> He argues that epistemically, RC provides an experimental environment for the emergence of a theory of unstable knowledge which incorporates and embraces differences and ambiguities. Methodologically, it provides a framework for discovery, an experimental system that

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20 <https://www.researchcatalogue.net>

facilitates the realization and articulation of indeterminate “epistemic things” (referencing Reinberger, 1997). With regard to research outcome, publication and justification in academic discourse, the RC suspends or defers final results, seeing research outcomes always as work-in-progress (Borgdorff, 2020, p. 27).

Within this system of exposition, Borgdorff identifies “the moment in which the artwork passes the gap dividing the aesthetic from the epistemic” (p. 28):

The RC as a bridge in the chain of transformations can surely – precisely thanks to its interpretative flexibility – move from one point to the other in that chain, as long as the reference is not broken. In that respect, there is no stabilization of the RC as a technological artefact. No closure of the controversy [between academia and art] is needed. (2020, p. 27)

However, I fail to see what exactly is transformed, the point at which this happens, and consequently, what constitutes the referring event in the presumed transformative reference of the representation. The “go-to” position seems to be notions of “work-in-progress” – practices or (re)presentations characterized by suspensions or deferrals of final results. And Borgdorff does indeed acknowledge that

it is unclear, however, how the exposition as a programmable digital object can preserve the quality of being a technological bridge between the documentation of art and the publication of research – unless we begin thinking differently about what “research” is in the context of the RC. (2020, p. 27)

Thinking along the same lines as Borgdorff, Crispin (2013, 2014) regards performance-as-research as a practice in which the development of new knowledge occurs when the “materials” applied in the practice-based experimentation become “epistemic objects” (also referencing Reinberger, 1997), characterized by “an incompleteness of being and the capacity to unfold indefinitely” (Crispin, 2013, p. 70, citing Knorr Cetina, 2001, pp. 180–181). This means that neither the performance nor the research into the performance are completed, but have their own statuses as forms of “ever-becoming” (Crispin, 2013, p. 70, 2014, p. 149). Lively, multi-dimensional and on-line-based expositions of AR, constituted by a web of video, sound, hyper-links and verbal articulation occur in a fluent, ongoing concept (Crispin, 2014, pp. 148–150), challenging “standard dissemination mechanisms” (p. 142).

Thus, the exposition format, in which meaning emerges as “ever-becoming” or “perennial incompleteness” (p. 150, referencing Deleuze & Guattari, 2008), is seen as a methodological and

representational possibility which corresponds to the characteristics of music performance, refers more accurately to it, presents and is truly part of it, without deviating from a notion of immanent musical meaning. Despite the radical immanence in the human experience of the world, music, as constant creation and coming into being, as transcendence without becoming anything else, can be performed and written about.

However, as long as musical meaning is understood as radically different from verbal meaning, and as long as verbal language about the experience of this music is not assessed as genuinely relating to music other than by being a scaffolding for its exposition, i.e. as a presumably distinct and new method for showing research-cum-art results in progress, then performativity, both as art and research, risks ending up in the regressive position of exposing nothing but a closed self-reference. The art and the research is exposed, but it remains unclear what that exposition really expresses except immanence.

Kirkkopelto (2020) maintains that the emergence of AR is a new kind of academic and epistemic activity that shifts the focus of the research from results and outcomes “to modes of working, such as connecting and collaborating with other agents and negotiating with one’s medium, materials or surroundings, as well as to modes of exposition capable of communicating these shifts” (pp. 32–33). However, Kirkkopelto criticizes the use of notions such as “objects of knowledge”, “boundary objects” or “epistemic things”, disavowing the position that these objects are what AR (re)presents, performs, researches and produces, and further, that these are the objects on which the methodological legitimacy of AR hinges.

Kirkkopelto finds that the general consensus about these objects is that they are “objects of knowledge” with “an “unfolding, dispersing and signifying” nature” (2020, p. 36, citing Knorr Cetina, 2001, p. 184,), “boundary objects”, the use of which is a performance “that discloses open-ended possibilities for new assemblages [characterized by] the inclusion of a productive “not-yet-knowing”, the creation of a room for what is yet unthought and unexpected” (p. 36, referencing De Assis, 2013, p. 157); or “epistemic things”, “the “irreducible vagueness” of which constitutes the point of departure for scientific inquiry especially in experimental contexts” (p. 36, referencing Rheinberger, 1997, pp. 28–37; Borgdorff, 2012, pp. 112–120). Kirkkopelto finds that such notions miss the mark in terms of denoting how such “objects” take part in a translation of art and art practice from an aesthetic to an epistemic realm. Instead, Kirkkopelto articulates a fundamental epistemological challenge for AR:

Is there a point at which the “productive not-yet-knowing” finally turns into something “already known”, or, in Rheinberger’s terms, at which an “epistemic thing” changes into a knowable and controllable “technical object”? (2020, p. 37)

Instead of trying to find that particular point, Kirkkopelko criticizes the divide between “empirical” and “aesthetic”, as it reflects the modern idea that “an aesthetic object is isolated and cut off from its series and presented to a reflective subject as something as mysterious as the subject itself and, thereby, as its pledge” (p. 42). Kirkkopelto suggests that a difference between the empirical and the aesthetic simply makes no sense: “It is not the case that first there are entities who then communicate with each other by emitting quantified information: these entities are already quantified, otherwise what they emit could never work as their reliable measure” (p. 43). In other words, “things are given [or] they give themselves to us and to each other before or beyond the divide between the aesthetic and the empirical, in their simultaneous muteness and ambiguity” (p. 41). Based on such a position, I read Kirkkopelto as arguing for a rethinking of the procedures of translation, in the sense that the things that are to be translated and the things that are translated, are not different things in terms of their epistemological status (pp. 42–43).

### 3.1.10 Implications of the Art-Science Relation for Qualitative Research Based on Singing

As a study within the field of performance practice, this thesis can be read as an ABR study not simply in terms of designs and outcomes or representations, but also in terms of the potential for a critique of the sciences, methods and societies within which the study operates and within which it can give voice to and empower marginalized and silenced people and perspectives. I find that much of the methodological and epistemological discussion presented above highlights what is at stake in this thesis, as I aim at articulating how singing urgently raises an ethical demand and is a kind of participation in public, political discourse, not to be dismissed on account of a presumed lack of verbal characteristics and discursive legitimacy. I therefore fully agree with Borgdorff et al. (2020) that “one of the tasks now is to rethink what ‘discursivity’ means, what it is to make a claim in and through art” (p. 5), and with Kirkkopelto (2020) that the claim of artist-researchers to the right to produce knowledge as well as develop their role as critical social, political and pedagogical agents, “is based on their increasingly discursive, (that is, argumentative and critical) and methodological (innovative and inventive) capacities” (p. 32).

Nevertheless, even though one can make the argument that art is also present in the (re) presentation, and therefore assume that it is only a matter of time before the re-evaluation of methods and standards will make it possible to articulate how that which is there is in fact there, still I find it necessary for the positioning of this study to acknowledge the limitations of the use of art in science. An acknowledgement of the co-presence of seemingly contradictory facts or experiences – that there is a difference between art and science, and that they are the same – calls for awareness of the limitations of the use of art in/as research.

Even though Daykin (2009) regards the use of music as underpinning the case for arts-based research, she also addresses how the use of music does not establish something completely different from qualitative research as such (p. 124). This is due to what she considers the simple fact that music cannot speak for itself. This has nothing to do with notions of musical autonomy, but rather that music must be contextualized in one way or another if it is to convey or function as research on specific themes:

It is apparent that there is a need to set the music up by presenting some kind of preamble if we are to use it as a useful means of exploration of any theme relating to human rights or the complexity of diversity. The music cannot speak for itself in any direct way. Hence, representation through music is only meaningful as part of a process in which actors are engaged. (2009, p 127)

The fact that, according to Daykin, music does not speak for itself “limits the potential for musical works to serve as representational devices in their own right, if these are seen as an endpoint of research” (p. 127). However, the relation between music and qualitative research can be applied during other stages in the research process. This means that even though

the value of music as representational device is limited, the discussion does point toward the benefits that might be gained from using music as an arts-based approach during those stages of any research process, including dissemination, in which importance is placed on working with others to generate, explore, and interpret diverse meanings and perspectives. (2009, p. 127)

I find this also to be true regarding the position of this thesis and use of the concerts it is built on. This is not to say that music cannot speak for itself as such – I think it can, in its own way, both distinguishable and at the same time indistinguishable from verbal, referential language (a both-and, as this emerges in the analysis in Section 4.3). But I find that it cannot speak for itself in terms of research outcome and presentation.

Narrowing the implications of the art-science relation within qualitative research down to how research might be based on singing, I find that singing advances qualitative research and exposes dynamics within it, particularly with respect to how qualitative research praxis as a meaning-making process occurs as an act of claiming something (Borgdorff et al., 2020, p. 22) and producing knowledge and criticism (Kirkkopelto, 2020, p. 32).

As meaning emerges through labelling, identifying and classifying emerging concepts, through interrelating concepts and testing hypotheses, finding patterns and generating theory – research

into and based on singing foregrounds the meaning-making process (Leavy, 2009, p. 11) by forcing me, both as singer and as researcher, to always check whether or not the singing experience is somehow traceable in the (re)presentation, that is, in the text of this thesis, even though the text is not the singing performance.

While I do not have an exhaustive answer as to how research on singing does this, I think, despite its blurring of subject-object and performance-(re)presentation relations, it might be something like this:

One of the main characteristics of the artistic meaning-making process is that of stating something, and doing so in a manner that has to do with pre-conceiving, bordering on trusting or believing. This is not so much a belief in “meaning” as believing that the utterance/referring act is directed towards someone/something; that someone/something is sustained and confirmed as real by being claimed and referred to; and that I, when singing in that manner, am sustained by the same act. In this way, singing might bring to the forefront a meaning-making process which is both the object of and operating within this study, that is, ethical dynamics and public political discourse about people, and show how qualitative research, as with the work of artists, is about (re)presenting a set of statements to an audience.

Thus, research based on singing can enable a more transparent, accountable and exposed way of research, in which the researcher and his/her relation to the subject matter, to him-/herself and to the research process, are more explicitly made part of the entire working process, including the context of discovery, the context of justification and the (re)presentation. Research texts based on singing can generate a heightened sense of how and to what extent a chosen method facilitates the articulation of the subject matter and how the chosen method is influenced by the researcher.

I find that ABR and AR are deeply rooted in the qualitative paradigm, representing not so much a development away from this paradigm, but revealing more of what is already there, and often overlooked, namely the radical instability of the text brought on by the writing process. At its best, the artist-researcher knows and uses this actively, always checking the text, so that it serves to make what goes on in the research process – perception, interpretation, the semiotic-symbolic dynamics within the signifying process, the act of reference – more accountable and valid. My methodological position concerning art and science is therefore that the two are never distinct domains. They can be integrated as signifying events producing meaning.

And yet, art contributes something to this production of meaning that does not occur in any other way than through art. The experience of this something was what prompted this project in the first place. To identify and make proper use of this something, that is, to expand the singer's agency beyond being "merely a musician" (Goehr 2004, p. 8) can be to include into the artistic practice and expertise the discursive, argumentative and critical, as well as methodological, innovative and inventive capacities of the performer (Kirkkopelto, 2020, p. 32). This is also what Borgdorff et al. identify as one of the main tasks that the emergence of AR has given rise to: to "rethink what 'discursivity' means" (2020, p. 5).

I agree with the notion that a primary task for research as, into, or based on art is to explore what discursivity means in order to better understand and act upon what both art and research can function as, mean and motivate. The qualitative paradigm – as extended by the knowledge-building process of postmodern theory and often linked to or even identified as a critique of oppressive political, theoretical and methodological power – constitutes the basis for the development of the use of arts in research (Leavy, 2009, pp. 7–8). However, this development is discontinued if art and research collapse into an immanent referring-to of each other. Within such an immanentist logic, this referring becomes nonsensical, as a referring between two identical realms. I therefore find that both art itself and research based on art, if they are to be taken as discursive claims, must be discursive in the sense that they are about something else, claiming and approaching something that is not themselves, or as themselves.

### 3.1.11 Conclusion

In Section 3.1 I have discussed methodological challenges given rise to by the relation between art and science. The presentation and discussion of different approaches has been aimed at developing the position of this study concerning art and method, clarifying which aspects within traditions of ABR and AR are applicable to my field of study.

Specifically, I have discussed the connection between artist-researcher and the subject matter of the research, arguing that instead of being dismissed as impeding validity and trustworthiness, research on singing by the singer might serve to highlight general and conventional research dynamics within the tenets of the qualitative research paradigm. Singing and writing about singing might serve to explore what discursivity means (Borgdorff et al., 2020, pp. 4–5), and thus advance qualitative research by bringing to the forefront how qualitative research as a meaning-making process can occur (Leavy, 2009, p. 11): as an act of claiming (Borgdorff et al., 2020, p. 22) and producing knowledge and criticism (Kirkkopelto, 2020, p. 32).

## 3.2 Case Study Research as Exploratory approach

In Section 3.2 I present the implications of case study design as an exploratory research approach, the reasons for applying empirical material, and how the exploratory design of the case study might be seen as structured by different research logics, making it possible to write about my own singing.

### 3.2.1 The Issue of writing about Something

This thesis is an attempt to make sense of what goes on when I sing. I want to make sense of it because I believe that what goes on when someone sings is important in terms of how we are positioned towards one another when singing is involved. In some way or another, therefore, I also aim to generalize from a certain kind of experience that has caught my interest when performing: that I make something urgent happen, or that something urgent is happening, through the use of voice, that makes a difference.

The attempt to make sense of this urgency is exploratory, meaning that I explore my own performative experience before, during and after the concerts, in three distinct ways:

- Through the study of different strands of theory that structure, provide a framework for and lend terminology to the experiences I write about,
- Through interviews of groups attending the concerts, and
- Through analysis of the interview and discussions on the findings of the analysis.

Having worked for several years as a professional singer, my interest in the ethical-political implications of singing is not new. It has developed over time, through different kinds of performance experiences, working with different people, under varying circumstances and during different periods of my life. My interest in singing, ideas about what might be found and how to articulate them are deeply interwoven into the fabric of my life, both personally and professionally, in my body, my attitudes and personality, the way I perceive things and people, and how I deal with a wide variety of tasks often seemingly unrelated to singing. Therefore, an obvious challenge when the object of research is my own practice, particularly a practice located partly within my own body, partly in a shared public space, is how to balance the simultaneous roles of performer, researcher and author.<sup>21</sup> My interest in singing and my

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21 In his study of how ensemble singers talk about their own practice, Havrøy (2015) describes the complexity of describing not only a voice, but one's own:

When the singers of NVS [the vocal group in question] – or indeed any singer – describe their own singing, they draw their language from a number of discourses, and their description of their singing is partly a legitimization of their own choices. With their language choices and their self-description, they most certainly



performative experience as a singer blur the subject-object distinction of the research process, that is, I/me and singing, my sensations and perceptual boundaries (Stubbley, 1995, p. 59).

As stated in Section 3.1., this blurring of distinctions seems to arise in many projects based on or involving art. The epistemological and methodological implications of this, I find, ought to be applied as transparently and accountably as possible, as integral to the project as such, underpinning the method of the project and highlighting what goes on during the different phases of the research process (Leavy, 2009, pp. 19, 113). I try to bring as much as possible to the front of the meaning-making process and make it apparent in the text of this thesis. Consequently, writing about my own singing is at least partly connected to the singing performance, in that it is driven by the same sense of urgency, integrated into phrases, pauses, choices of emphasis; in the need to breathe, the ways breath and speed are portioned out during a phrase, an argument, a design and a methodological approach.

However, as discussed above, the awareness of method that art can give rise to does not differ in principle from any other form of research. Rather, art might serve to shed light on the different research logics operating in exploratory research. Therefore, even though I regard the singing performance and the writing about it as connected in terms of the urgency they both constitute and address, I do not argue that the present text *is* the performance event, or part of it or a translation of it, that the performance is still here in and as these words, through what Borgdorff (2020) sees as a “a transportation of the work from the aesthetic realm to the epistemic realm, [...] a translation or interpretation of the artistic work as research” (Borgdorff, 2020, p. 22). As a claim generated and driven by the same urgency as the singing performance, it would be beneficial if the text of the thesis was “shot through” with the experience of that performance (p. 22), but as a fundamental premise of this methodological discussion, the text is about something that is not itself.

Of course, for many, this is presumably self-evident. All texts are representations, and representations are not the actual events or the actual objects. However, given the overview of ABR and AR above and the different positions regarding the relation between event, process and (re)presentation, it seems to me that within certain ABR and AR approaches to art, such a notion of text is not self-evident after all, resulting in a form of absolutism, even though the attempt is to achieve the opposite.

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place themselves within a practice field and create an authority inside it, or, as Bourdieu describes it, they “constitute[s] a relatively autonomous space whose structure is defined by the distribution of economic and cultural capital among its members” (Bourdieu 1984/2010, p. 260. In Havrøy, 2015, p. 22).

These are dynamics I have taken into consideration both as I have written about my own voice and during the group interviews. They implicate on the way I hear the recordings, the way I describe what I see, hear and feel when I hear them, both alone and together with the groups, the way I introduce and discuss the chosen excerpts during the interviews, and the way the different participants choose to talk about them.

It may seem equally obvious that my attempt to create methodological transparency is just that: an attempt that cannot fully succeed, as this is not possible, and hence, will not be transparent. Still, obvious or not, in introducing the methodological challenges concerning writing about my own voice and singing performances in a systematic way, I feel obliged to point out methodological issues, some of which art/singing makes more explicit. And even though this thesis does not fully share the AR struggle concerning how the representation refers to the performative event, but is designed as a conventional qualitative study, I have found that the main challenge, even so, is the issue of reference, which becomes even more of an issue when the case studied is constituted by my own voice and the urgent act of referring I perform with it.

The epistemological crisis, as it were, that drove motivated this project was the experience during singing that sound, phrasing, impulse and pitch created a more precise production of subject and meaning than words and arguments in their presumably pure referential function, as if something was articulated and was there for the taking – but with nothing to take it with, as it seemed to withdraw from the referential meaning of the words I opted to apply. But even so, the “something” that was there seemed to me to be referential in a manner more precise than verbal discourse, equally discursive, and of equal epistemological quality as words and arguments, and therefore ought to be utilized.

Initially, therefore, the problem seemed to be how to refer in an adequate manner to this urgent and precise “something” in song. I started out with a deep-seated intuition that sounds and words were, or at least ought to be, epistemologically equivalent, that the sound of the voice was as precise a meaning production as a discursive statement, that the sound was referential due to its appeal towards the audience, overcoming the word-sound divide in the signifying process, constituting me and the meaning I produced (Kristeva 1984, pp. 23–24) as an ethical demand in my making an overture towards the audience in and through my voice (Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 14–15). Finding out *how* the sound of the voice was as precise as a discursive statement, which seemed to me to be impossible and yet ought to be easy if words and music really were of equal epistemological status, would constitute the point at which singing might become empowered and genuinely participatory in what I felt that it was already addressing and participatory in: ethical and political reality.

My initial work mode was to state from the beginning what the title of this thesis suggests, that singing is as an ethical demand and a public political discourse, and that this statement represented both the context of discovery and justification, as well as a conclusion, informed by its ending from the onset, much like what goes on in the urgency of the opaque-yet-clear preconception of a cadenza as one inhales before the final phrase, and then write my way towards that conclusion, inevitably informed by it in an anticipatory manner, verging on bias, or perhaps even totally biased, but at least honest about it all the way through.

And this was what I did. It went as far as *Singing As*, and then I ran out of things to write, or at least things to write about in a way that felt honest, or worth writing about. I needed another way to get at the empirical material and to apply it in ways that reflected what I wrote about, in the referring act of writing, as well as within the research logics operating in the research approach as a whole, without the collapse of *as*.

The main methodological issue therefore turned out to be less a problem of negotiating notions of dichotomies of verbal language versus absolute music. Rather, the issue was turned upside down. From seeking to articulate how the sound of the voice refers in order to exist as ethical-political discourse, or how words in ethical-political discourse exist as sound when musicalized by the voice, the crucial methodological issue, made clearer through singing and interviewing, became this: does signification refer? Is it about something that is not itself? Therefore, rather than the type of reference discussed by Borgdorff (2020) concerning the relation of art and its (re)presentation, the issue of reference I address here is based on the semiotic theory of sign and the radical arbitrariness of the referent (see Section 2.4).

This is because when writing about singing and voice – what the voice is and does, what and who it makes the singer become towards the audience and the audience towards the singer and each other in singing and listening – the writing itself has become somewhat of a leap of faith, methodologically speaking. When writing about my own singing, as this writing is charged or “shot through” by the singing experience, both this singing and this writing bring with them the experience of having simultaneously to dismantle the dualisms that seem to obscure what goes on in singing, and re-establish those very dualisms in order to be able to sing or write anything at all, as these dualisms must precede any possibility of referring to anything which is not simply the referring itself. The urgent presence of the singing event, which causes a sense of unity of sound and word, voice and singer, voice and reality, had made me doubtful as to the methodological value of a strict dualism between sound and word and between the expression and reality, since what appeared to be sung was that reality, seemingly constituting singing as a more precise and direct act of referring than words. But what became clearer when writing about singing was that singing made the necessity of the dualisms it dismantles even more obvious and explicit as preconditions for any type of signification.

The methodological implications for this study were therefore that what started out as a project seeking to articulate musical meaning in the words of a thesis, due to the experience of music’s precise address and constitution of urgent ethical-political reality, circled back as an articulation of belief in ordinary language, that is, in music as deployed within and as language. Additionally, for that language to work, there must be a divide between signification and reality; there can be no total collapse, not even in singing, not even when singing seems

to blur exactly that divide. In a way, I have followed a circuitous route, ending up simply where, I suspect, many research projects start: with the implied belief – and therefore seldom called a belief, nor addressed phenomenologically as methodical issue due to its presumable self-evidence – that the words of the text in this thesis have referential meaning. This belief is coextensive with the belief that conventional research methods can be applied to researching what goes on in singing. Precisely because singing tends to blur the dualism between signification and reality, writing about singing can also be an effective means by which to address the methodological problems of writing about something as such in a methodologically accountable way, thus bringing the different phases of the exploratory approach to the forefront of the writing process.

### 3.2.2 Rationale for the Use of Empirical Material and Clarifying Different Research Logics

In this study, the effort of accountability involves considering that much was conceived of and written as preliminary drafts before I went about in a more conventional methodical fashion in terms of the case study approach as method and research process. Further, it took a long time before I really understood that what I was doing could be called case study research. At one point in the project, it felt as if things were done in the wrong order, by turning to empirical exploration in interviews following a theoretical framework and argumentation based largely on my own experience as a singer. What genuine function could interviews have so far into the research process?

It is, of course, unproblematic for the argumentation for an idea to be initiated before the methodological approach is completely clear. A research process never starts solely at one or the other end of an empirical-theory continuum. The dissertation as a text can therefore be said to be the result of an exploratory design whereby a theoretical framework was continually reformulated along the way under pressure from empirical exploration. A hunch arising through song and formulated as a hypothesis can be a legitimate claim to build on from the outset, as well as work towards.

Still, I worried that I had taken it too far. I had written and argued too conclusively and prematurely before I had done a single interview, and I felt dishonest in the approach to the empirical investigations. What I had already written would inevitably shape the cases and the way they were analysed and discussed. My previous experiences, which provided the ideas for the project and led to the hypotheses, were the same as those that I explored in the cases of my own singing and in the interviews. I was concerned not that the thesis was prone to bias to such an extent that it was essentially illegitimate as a research project and had fallen into

a “deductive trap” (Nilssen, 2014, p. 71. My translation). Could the concerts and interviews really have a valid function as empirical material? How was I supposed to use the empirical material, steeped as it was both in my own practice, in my own ideas about singing, and in what I had written and argued for? Halfway through the research project, the intuition that had spurred it no longer sufficed. The collapse inherent in the *Singing as* in the title made it impossible to write anything without a clearer justification for the use of empirical material and a clarification of the dynamics between different research logics in the exploratory research process.

As for a clearer *rationale for the use of empirical material*, this became apparent by the fact that everything I had written up until this point in the research process was wide and unanchored in concrete experiences and documented examples. In certain phases of a research process, that is a good thing, but I had reached a point where everything had to be narrowed down and exemplified, basing the analysis on data that was not only mine, but also outside myself and my own experiences, even though it was related to my voice. This way I could continue to explore what I was interested in and had anticipatory assumptions about, but by also using empirical material, approached with a prepared, simple method, and test and further develop the preliminary hypotheses. Interviews of members of the audience gave another entry, generating spoken statements that could provide a basis for an analysis and discussion of the experience of singing, using other words with concrete reference to experience from the concerts.

At the start of the interviews, I was unable to use such words myself. The sound logs reveal that I struggle to speak about the project without continuing the lines of thought and the words I was trying to avoid. This was due, among other things, to the fact that I had to present the project to the groups as it was then and there, that the invitation letter contained a lot of information that I had to follow up on, and that I noticed that the angle of the project might seem new. However, the sound logs also show that I hope that talking to the participants will lead to something new, despite my having to explain with the very words I wanted to avoid. The rationale for the use of empirical material is evident in the logs as my belief that there would be new input, other perspectives and other ways of talking about the topic, even if I started and to some extent steered the interview. I sought to be interrupted, challenged and sharpened by the dialogical group dynamics.

As for *clarifying the dynamics between the research logics* operating in the study, this was necessary at this point for two main reasons: to come to terms with the feeling that things had been done in the wrong order, having conducted interviews after a rather elaborated theoretical framework and arguments for hypotheses had been written; and because the

singing experience was constantly challenging the distinction between text about singing and the singing performance, and yet showed that such a distinction was necessary if I was to be able to write anything at all.

The reason for choosing case study research as an overarching method, is that it can accommodate the entirety the research phases in terms of how hypotheses arise, how they are tested, how new impulses are obtained inductively and how the hypotheses are thus reformulated. It can provide in-depth access to the researcher's own situation and assumptions, as well as the experiences articulated in interviews (Flyvbjerg, 2004, pp. 126, 133). Writing thus becomes a systematic and logically structured representation of a circular process with abduction, deduction and induction followed by a kind of new abduction (adjusted hypotheses), while the method ensures that the researcher, which might also be the practitioner and object of study, is immersed in a continuous process where writing does not need to happen as something distinct before or after the case (cf. Nilssen, 2014, pp. 56–57). In this way, I have made a sort of detour back to something obvious, namely that the text of the thesis is about what it is about. But to shed light on how an exploratory approach to my own singing accommodates different logics, how they operate and affect each other in a dynamic between idea, writing, empirical material, moderation and more writing, will hopefully position the study in the face of possible criticism that it is simply speculation and biased towards verification. At the same time, it is made clear that since the thesis is about song, different research logics are explicitly at play.

A strength of case study research lies in its not being linked to specific research logics, but its ability to clarify the interaction between them. It therefore works well as an exploratory, participatory approach to something that is unclear, chaotic and non-linear. The experience of singing in concerts can be explored by incorporating theory, my own performativity and group interview as natural and mutually supplementary elements in the exploratory process where different research logics work on each other in all phases of the research process.

A statement from the end of the first interview with Group 1 shows how different research logics operate at the same time and thus incorporate different research phases at the same time. The statement shows something that I already knew in advance, but had almost forgotten, was a bit embarrassed by, and which I would not have had access to if I had not grounded the project in empirical material and used case studies with interviews as a method. Even though I had written a great deal before the concerts and the interviews, and therefore had clear ideas about what the interview should be about, what could be thematized and tested, this quote shows that I am surprised by what happens, even if it is in line with what I had in mind. The statement from participant F takes on an inductive function, by which the dialogue forces me to say more clearly what I mean:

F: If the work allows it, and you, the communicator, are good, and able to convey something beautiful, then you think that you can tilt the audience in the direction of the good, politically speaking, towards the selfless, the common good, instead of self-interest, something like that?

I: Yes, I kind of think it has to..., it has to, it almost has to amount to that.

Even though I had a relatively finished overarching idea and hypothesis, and relatively clear and prepared categories, which F thematizes in his question, I am here confronted with the fact that this is actually what I think, feel and want, and I am almost forced to think and feel it again in front of the participants in the group, rediscovering the categories, and admitting something that I almost find embarrassing, or at least difficult to talk about, both because I think it is a bit grandiose, and impossible to demonstrate. In this way, however, what turns out to be the fundamental experience in the performance for me is made clearer: that I want to address and change something, in the “direction of the good”, whatever that might be. The art experience may generate reflection without identifying either “the good” or the way towards it, but insists that it ought to happen, anticipated in the act of art. The dialogical dynamics facilitate F’s clarification in his question at the very end of the interview – F almost has to drag it out of me, even though it is I who have introduced the project’s themes to F and the others in the group.

The quote shows that I am surprised at how directly this has to be said, that I must talk about “the good”, and probably also about what I think this good might be. Furthermore, the quote clarifies an implicit normativity in the whole project: that I, as a practitioner and researcher, must declare that I want something that has to do with “the good”, through singing and writing about it.

It is also symptomatic that I forgot this statement and my reaction to it. I do not recall paying particular attention to it either during the interview or while transcribing, and only rediscovered it several months later. While the interview was conducted on the 3rd of February 2020, I did not write about it until the 29th of May in a memo during the process of analysis: “I thought this was a bit fun to read and understand now. I probably wouldn’t have realized that if it wasn’t for the empirical evidence, the interviews, the statement from F, this data.”

Thus, the empirical material does not only assume a function as something that I can deductively test hypotheses on. The empirical material, i.e., statements from participants and my response, has the dialogical function of surprising me, in a way that is most often associated with presumptively distinct inductive logic and open coding (Nilssen, 2014, p. 14). Even with all the premises in this project, the empirical material shows me something new, that I may

have known, but had not figured out, seemed to quickly forget, and in any case find difficult to talk about. This can be seen in how I respond to F's question. It is hard to admit what F shows that I mean, feel and want, even though it is actually the main motivation for the project.

Methodologically, this quote became important: I became more aware of what I was looking for in the analysis in general. I became more aware of my own and often camouflaged bias as it brought out hidden aspects of the research approach – my own feelings, i.e., awkwardness, which showed that the conversation was getting close to something important; I became more aware of how intimate I felt the relationship between music and ethics was, something I could use in the analysis by being more aware that song implied a sense of responsibility that is future-oriented, towards something I do not know and therefore have to fear, both in the world in general, and particularly in the sung phrase; I became more aware that the project was aimed at public action; and finally, I became more aware how all this could be accommodated by an overall understanding of the project as a case study.

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However, as case study research can be understood as a genre where different research logics interact in the exploratory process, this has sometimes led to criticisms of case studies being prone to bias in a similar manner as arts-based research. In the remaining sections of 3.2, I present and discuss specifically the use of case study as a method and a narrative basis for understanding singing as ethical-political action. I build particularly on Flyvbjerg's (2004) arguments against what he regards as misunderstandings of case-study research, as well as supplementary methodological perspectives from Baune (1991) and Nilssen (2014), applying relevant aspects to the present study.

### 3.2.3 Generalization in Case Study Research

Flyvbjerg (2004) argues that even though a case study is a detailed examination of a single example, this does not mean that case-study research cannot provide "reliable information about the broader class" (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 118). Exemplified by Galileo's rejection of Aristotle's law of gravity based on "a single experiment, that is, a case study, if any experiment was conducted at all" (p. 123), he argues that the possibility for generalization "depends upon the case one is speaking of, and how it is chosen" (p. 123). In testing Galileo's thesis "random and large samples were at no time part of the picture. Most creative scientists simply do not work this way with this type of problem" (p. 124).



This applies not only to natural sciences but to the study of human affairs as well (p. 123): “The strategic choice of case may greatly add to the generalizability of a case study” (p. 124). Scientific validity cannot be dismissed based simply because a case study is built on a case of strategic sampling, since “if the thesis could be proved false in the favorable case, then it would most likely be false for intermediate cases” (p. 124).

As for the view that representative cases or random samples are more suited to generate valid results, Flyvbjerg argues that

atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied. In addition, from both an understanding-oriented and an action-oriented perspective, it is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur. Random samples emphasizing representativeness will seldom be able to produce this kind of insight; it is more appropriate to select some few cases chosen for their validity. (2004, p. 127)

This validity has to do with the contextualization that case study research inherently relies on. Flyvbjerg argues that “in the study of human affairs, there appears to exist only context-dependent knowledge, which [...] rules out the possibility of epistemic theoretical construction” (p. 120). Further, Flyvbjerg argues that case study research produces the type of context-dependent knowledge which is necessary to allow people to develop from rule-based beginners to virtuoso experts: “The highest levels in the learning process, that is, virtuosity and true expertise, are reached only via a person’s own experience as practitioner of the relevant skills (pp. 119–120). In the same manner, Flyvbjerg argues that “the most advanced form of understanding is achieved when researchers place themselves within the context being studied” (p. 134).

This involvement within the context that is studied, the closeness of the case study to real-life situations and life’s multiple wealth of details, is important for “the development of a nuanced view of reality, including the view that human behaviour cannot be meaningfully understood as simply the rule-governed acts found at the lowest levels of the learning process, and in much theory” (p. 121). Therefore, the case study can be an effective corrective against misguided tendencies to maintain “great distance to the object of study and lack of feedback” (p. 121). These tendencies can lead to “ritual academic blind alleys, where the effect and usefulness of research becomes unclear and untested” (p. 121).

Flyvbjerg agrees with Campbell (1975), who in his early writings dismisses case study methodology, but later describes the underlying premise and characteristics of all production of knowledge as in no way objective, dependable or unbiased: “It is all we have. It is the only route to knowledge – noisy, fallible, and biased though it be” (Campbell, 1975, p. 191, in Flyvbjerg, 2004). Therefore, rather than dismissing what is obtained through case studies as uselessly anecdotal, Flyvbjerg argues that what is obtained in specific cases is all there is to obtain, claiming that there are no predictive theories and universals in terms of context-independent knowledge in social science (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 122):

Social science has not succeeded in producing general, context-independent theory and has thus in the final instance nothing else to offer than concrete, context-dependent knowledge. And the case study is especially well suited to produce this knowledge [...]. As for predictive theory, universals, and scientism, the study of human affairs is thus at an eternal beginning. In essence, we have only specific cases and context-dependent knowledge. (2004, pp. 121–122)

Finally, Flyvbjerg argues that “formal generalization, be it on the basis of large samples or single cases, is considerably overrated as the main source of scientific progress” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 124). Rather, generalization may be considered as just one of many ways to gain and accumulate knowledge. Furthermore, even if certain types of knowledge cannot be generalized, that “does not mean that it cannot enter into the collective process of knowledge accumulation in a given field or in a society” (2004, p. 125).

The cases in this study are constituted by singing performances, and the empirical material of the cases is accessed through interviews of two groups, one strategic group of music professionals and one with unknown backgrounds in terms of profession and interests. The purpose of interviewing two groups was to generate a situation where, if the strategically composed group falsified the hypothesis that there are ethical-political implications in singing, then that would probably be even clearer in other the group. I find that in terms of how this study builds on strategic and critical cases – my own involvement in them, my experience and expertise as a practitioner of the relevant skills, my seeking feedback during what was a direct exposure of my own vulnerability when discussing my singing practice face-to-face in the group interviews – by generating an in-depth and context-dependent knowledge, the study is possible to generalize from, no less than from studies based on large samples.

### 3.2.4 Generating and Testing Hypotheses in Case Study Research

Against the notion that case study research is most useful for generating hypotheses, while other methods are more suitable for testing hypotheses and building theory (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 119), Flyvbjerg argues that “the case study is useful for both generating and testing of hypotheses but is not limited to these research activities alone” (p. 127):

The case study is ideal for generalizing using the type of test that Karl Popper called “falsification” [...]. If just one observation does not fit with the proposition it is considered not valid generally and must therefore be either revised or rejected. [...] Just one observation of a single black swan would falsify this proposition [“All swans are white”] and in this way have a general significance and stimulate further investigations and theory-building. The case study is well suited for identifying “black swans” because of its in-depth approach: what appears to be “white” often turns out on closer examination to be “black”. (2004, p. 126)

Discussing the nature of hypotheses, Baune (1991) defines a hypothesis as characterized by its stating relatively more than what can be observed, and that it is put forward to explain or predict something, or to be tested/justified (Baune, 1991, p. 33). Different hypotheses can complement each other in several ways: 1) they can indicate different causes that all separately produce the effect to be explained; 2) they can indicate various factors (causes) which in an interaction produce the effect; 3) they presuppose each other in the deduction of an empirical consequence; 4) they apply to different phenomena (p. 35). Auxiliary hypotheses are characterized by the fact that they are (for the time being) taken for granted, and that one has greater confidence in them than in the main hypothesis (p. 62). The auxiliary hypotheses are assumed to be true, i.e., as assumptions that must be made to deduce the empirical consequence of the main hypothesis so that it can be tested (p. 63).

Baune argues that testing and justification of hypotheses is done based on data (1991, p. 29), which are unexplained claims and statements that meet two demands: intersubjectivity, that there can be achieved intersubjective agreement about them; and relevance, that they can be used when testing or justifying hypotheses, perceptions etc. (p. 23). Crucially however, data is not to be understood as “prior to” or independent of our hypotheses or theories, i.e., “free of assumptions” (p. 25. My translation). This is due to, among other things, the fact that “collection of data is based on hypotheses”, and that such hypotheses will “normally be vague and unspecific” (p. 25. My translation), or that

what we perceive can be conditioned by the perceptions, experiences or expectations we otherwise have, i.e., our horizon [can] co-determine which data may be relevant in a given case. [...] Previous experience can [...] be enshrined in the horizon and thereby influence what we perceive. (1991, p. 28. My translation)

The consequence is that “data are in principle correctable” (p. 29), and not by definition un-influenceable elements that lie motionless and neutral as a basis for testing hypotheses. Certain types of data are influenced by the hypotheses and intuitions the researcher has about what the data will be like, which could lead to the data changing under the influence of the rules that the researcher puts forward hypothetically. This can happen in, e.g. grammatical theory, ethical theory and logical theory (p. 28). Similarly, Nilssen (2014), referencing Alvesson and Sköldberg (2008/2017), argues that “data is not something that can be collected; there is nothing out there waiting to be found. Data are created when the researcher decides through analysis that they should be” (Nilssen, 2014, p. 26. My translation).

Based on this, one can conclude that for some fields such as ethics, it applies that data and hypotheses are influenced by each other. However, it does not follow that data cannot be used to test hypotheses in such fields. Baune (1991) argues that

if data are not invulnerable, it is nevertheless due to their relative certainty that they are suitable for the role of what we test and base our hypotheses on. [...] It is logically sufficient that we assess them [data] as more certain than the hypotheses that are accepted or rejected in light of them. (Baune, 1991, p. 29. My translation)

Based on such an understanding of the relationship between hypothesis and data, the analysis conducted in this study can be understood as testing hypotheses by being exploratory. Although the project is exploratory and based on artistic experience, it follows a conventional methodological approach in that hypotheses are confronted with data:

Testing a hypothesis occurs [...] by logically deducing an empirical consequence from the hypothesis and examining whether it fits with the observable reality. “The observable reality” is either given to us by already-available data or by data that is obtained precisely to see whether the empirical consequence is true or false. (Baune 1991, p. 54. My translation)

In this study, while performing, I experience different feelings, dynamics and events, and through flashes and hunches, and writing and theorizing, I abductively arrive at what I think are the best hypotheses about what I experience and what takes place in the performance. These hypotheses are then tested against empirical consequences in the analysis of the group

interviews, and then modified. I find this to be in accordance with what Flyvbjerg considers to be a valid use of testing in case study research.

Applied to this thesis as an explorative case study, generating and testing hypotheses can be understood as structuring the dynamics between data, hypotheses and experience. The three auxiliary hypotheses supplement the main hypothesis in that they indicate various factors which, in an interaction, produce the consequences of the overarching hypothesis. Empirical consequences of the main hypothesis could be:

- Ethical and political implications of song are experienced by the participants in a way that is expressed in statements generating discourse towards intersubjective agreement.
- Urgency, as exposed humanity, is experienced and expressed in statements about power, care, connection, society, the good and political action, and a sense of being tilted or empowered, generating ethical-political action and discourse towards intersubjective agreement.

If the analysis would show that such consequences were not experienced in a way that was expressed in statements, it could be concluded that the hypothesis was falsified or weakened. Because it is a global test (the test presupposes one or more auxiliary hypotheses), no single hypothesis could be said to be falsified, but the totality of the main and auxiliary hypotheses. If an empirical consequence were experienced in a way that was expressed, it would still not be possible to verify that singing has ethical and/or political implications. According to Baune, the hypothesis could nevertheless be considered confirmed if it was not falsified or weakened (Baune, 1991, p. 55).

As a singer, I have certain individual ethical intuitions regarding the specific actions that take place in the performance towards the audience. So does everyone in the audience. From my side as a performer, such actions are that I stand up, take in or not take in the audience, that I sing in different ways, e.g. strong, weak, aggressive, sensitive, close, distant, nervous, confident, that I act out feelings of anger or joy and my continuous response to how I perceive the audience response to me, that I take applause, and that I leave the stage. From the audience's side, such actions can be that they have sat where they are sitting, that they expect me to stand up and sing, that they feel and react to what I do and sing, how they perceive me and themselves and the situation while I sing. The intuitive reaction to these actions, expressed through statements, represent data that can be used to test the main hypothesis. The mention and understanding of these reactions might also change during the course of the research, under pressure both from the project's hypotheses/established norms, and the way the dynamics in the groups developed.

In this way, the hypotheses in the project can be tested on the basis of the empirical consequences of the hypotheses, as expressed statements in the groups, and either reached or not reached intersubjective agreement over. The data appearing in the interviews will be influenced by the hypotheses I have, which in turn are influenced by my horizon of understanding and the experiences embodied in and active in it. By taking such dynamics into account, the hypothesis testing takes place in an exploratory course where the various research logics work in an interaction that constitutes a hermeneutic circle structuring an exploratory, emergent design (cf. Nilssen 2014, p. 27). I find that the structure of testing and generating hypotheses in this thesis is what makes it possible to refer in an accountable manner to my own singing and the ethical-political implications as empirical consequences, if any, weakening or strengthening the tested hypotheses, through the process of falsification and revising.

### 3.2.5 Bias in Case Study Research

Against the notion that case study research is more prone to bias than quantitative, hypothetico-deductive methods, Flyvbjerg develops further the implications of falsification in case study as method. He argues against the alleged deficiency of case study research and other qualitative methods as containing “a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 119), instead of applying “methods useful for ‘curbing one’s own tendencies to stamp one’s pre-existing interpretations on data as they accumulate’” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 132, citing Diamond, 1996, p. 6).

First of all, Flyvbjerg argues, bias toward verification is not solely related to the case study, or to research as such, but is a fundamental human characteristic (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 132). And in terms of case study, he finds that, given its in-depth, participatory characteristics, case-study research might contain “a greater bias toward falsification of preconceived notions than towards verification” (p. 135):

researchers who have conducted intensive, in-depth case studies typically report that their preconceived views, assumptions, concepts, and hypotheses were wrong and that the case material has compelled them to revise their hypotheses on essential points. (Flyvbjerg 2004, 133)

Because I conduct research into my own practice, lead and participate in the group interviews, and analyse and discuss the statements made, the project can easily be criticized on the basis of perceptions of case study research as biased and too strongly influenced by the researcher’s desire for verification.

In the analysis of the interviews, there was no “pure” open coding, in the sense that I “look at what is there and give it a name” (Nilssen, 2014, p. 82. My translation). What I was analysing was too familiar, leaving me with too many pre-defined notions of what it was, assumptions about how things were connected and could be understood, too many colloquialisms in the conversations with the groups and trodden lines of argument when I wrote. In the interviews, this is reflected in the fact that, with questions, comments and follow-ups, I probably set guidelines for how things are expressed and approached in order to be expressed. In addition, it may well be that the conversations were influenced by unconscious circumstances and interests of my own, such as wanting to find something, and also wanting the participants to like what they heard in the concerts. This might have led to dialogical dynamics in which what is perhaps peripheral for the participants receives a greater weighting than it might have received if I had not participated in the conversation myself.

Both in planning and analysing the interviews, the goal was to be as accountable as possible. Nilssen (2014) exemplifies, with a relatively strong emphasis on the inductive dynamics in qualitative analysis (p. 14), how coding and categorization are adjustable processes during the analysis and driven by what provides answers to research questions (p. 92). Even when inductive analysis

through an open coding allows us to grasp what the data material tells [by the researcher] letting go of the theories for a while, since they do not control the coding and categorization process [...] the coding and categorization process [will] always be characterized by theory, in the same way that the process is reflected by the researcher's experience, knowledge and preconceptions. This is what leads the researcher to see something as something, that data material becomes data. (2014, p. 64. My translation)

In an analysis, coding and categorization of the material is aimed at what can contribute to answering the research questions. In my study, these issues are predefined as hypotheses and the issues are expressions of my interest, my thoughts about and desires for my own practice, which the analysis and discussion can test, falsify or weaken, and explore by reformulating and developing.

Through different phases of the project, I have focused variously on the three auxiliary hypotheses, but all three have influenced how I have planned, conducted and interpreted the concerts and interviews. *Ethical Demand* and *Public Political Discourse* became codes and eventually categories that I coded into from the start of the coding process. The third, concerning singing as constituting subject and meaning, was too abstract to apply as a direct code or predefined category. This theme was also less important during the analytical phase of the study. It was

too difficult to talk about in the interviews. Instead, the code and category *Word and Sound* emerged, as the dynamic between language and music affected the conversations for several important passages.

Thus, none of the hypotheses or categories emerged purely inductively from the data material. They have developed over several years of my practice as well as more specifically in this study in response to the empirical material in the interviews. But the meeting between me and the data material has modified the hypotheses in terms of content and the weighting between them (Nilssen, 2014, p. 92).

### 3.2.6 Summarization – Not as Factual Findings but as Narrative and Intervention

Concerning the presumed need in science to summarize findings, Flyvbjerg holds that one should avoid summarizing dense case studies simply in factual “findings” or high-level generalizations of theory (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 136):

When writing up a case study, I demur from the role of omniscient narrator and summarizer. Instead, I tell the story in its diversity, allowing the story to unfold from the many-sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories that the actors in the case have told me. (2004, p 136)

The value of the case study, the way it contextualizes experiences of events, addressing and exposing interpenetrating dynamics, cannot be articulated by summing it all up in clean-cut and specialized philosophical concepts:

I relate the case to broader philosophical positions that cut across specializations. In this way, I try to leave scope for readers of different backgrounds to make different interpretations and draw diverse conclusions regarding the question of what the case is a case of. (2004, 136)

Noting that “narrative is an ancient method and perhaps our most fundamental form for making sense of experience”, he argues that

narrative inquiries do not – indeed, cannot – start from explicit theoretical assumptions. Instead, they begin with an interest in a particular phenomenon that is best understood narratively. Narrative inquiries then develop descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon from the perspective of participants, researchers, and others. (2004, p. 138)



As a result, “good studies should be read as narratives in their entirety” (p. 139). This, however, does not prevent the case study method from contributing to “the cumulative development of knowledge; for example, in using the principles to test propositions” (p. 139).

It is also by treating the case as a narrative that Flyvbjerg finds the basis on which to see case study research as a method for intervention in social and political affairs. He quotes MacIntyre (1984), who writes: “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’” (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 216, in Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 138). Also advancing Bourdieu’s notion of virtuoso social acting (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 8, 15), Flyvbjerg argues that

something essential may be lost by this summarizing – namely, the possibility to understand virtuoso social acting, which, as Bourdieu has shown, cannot be distilled into theoretical formulae – and it is precisely their fear of losing this “something” that makes case researchers cautious about summarizing their studies. Case researchers thus tend to be skeptical about erasing phenomenological detail in favour of conceptual closure. (2004, p. 137)

By using case study as a method, I link the themes and analysis to philosophical concepts across theoretical domains, strands and traditions without causing these concepts to be read as a summation of the findings. The cases remain my contextualized perspective, what I experience when I sing and when I talk about it with others who talk about their experiences when I sing. This also makes it possible to relate the cases to philosophical concepts and transcend theoretical domains even if these are not the latest cutting-edge philosophical, semiotic, ethical or political research, but broader strands, put together in a framework of theory that is not necessarily interrelated in any other way than by their applicability to the cases. I approach the cases narrowly, and can therefore discuss in broader strokes what I find to be the ethical and political implications, and linking these to philosophical considerations of subject and meaning, because I anchor the discussion in the narrow empirical material that the cases constitute. I do not attempt to create a new, all-encompassing theory, but I can analyse and argue and narrate from what I experience in song as social interaction.

In writing the case study as a form of narrative, the text of the study might constitute a story which researcher, participants or readers find themselves being a part of. If that experience generates some form of answer to what one ought to do in terms of ethical-political matters (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 216), then case studies as narratives reveal an affinity to research based on art and artistic research, as for instance Leavy (2009) sees ABR as creating a closer relation between research and social action (Leavy, 2009, p. 116), constituting a dynamic in which

“method meets art at the intersection of social and political progress” (p. 253). Applying case study to research one’s own singing as ethical-political action might also resemble aspects of Kirkkopelto’s (2020) notion of artistic agency, in that artist-researchers claim the right to produce knowledge and develop their critical, political, and pedagogical role based on their increasingly discursive and methodological capacities (Kirkkopelto, 2020, p. 32).

### 3.2.7 Conclusion

In Section 3.2 I have discussed how the explorative design of the case study might be seen as structured by different logics of research and the dynamics between them. I have argued that in this thesis, exploration, the use of empirical material and the way different research logics operate can be conceived of and addressed as an issue of textual reference to the singing event, that is, the text of the study as about the cases of the study.

An exploratory process in the ephemeral, subjective, performative experience of singing, needs as much clarity as possible, and must not place method and challenges concerning the act of referring in a silent “black box” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, pp. 298–299). By applying conventional methodological approaches of testing and generating hypotheses in that explorative process, I seek to anchor the writing more clearly in the empirical material that the text refers to.

Building on Flyvbjerg’s conception of case study as method, I have argued that conscious and unconscious premises, prepared themes, codes, categories and perceptions do not make this project’s use of empirical material a sham process that only confirms what I had decided and discussed already, steeped in my own performative experiences. At the same time, I have emphasized how an important indication of the adequate use of empirical material is that it generates surprises and (re)discoveries as I analyse the material.

I find that this study as a case study can be generalized from; that it can generate, test, weaken and strengthen hypotheses; that it is no more prone to bias toward verification than other methods but rather, due to its in-depth character, might serve to falsify and revising the hypotheses tested; that this in-depth, close-to-life and participatory character of the study prevents the case from being summarized in high-level factual findings, but rather might facilitate a reading of the study in its entirety, including the dialogical dynamics of the quotes from the interviews, as a narrative to be part of, in order to better understand both the experiences of the participants and me during the concerts, and possibly also an understanding of the performances as actions in ethical-political affairs (Flyvbjerg 2004, 133–138).

### 3.3 The Cases of Singing and the Interviews as Approach

This section presents the cases of the singing performances of the study, the group interviews, the group, reflections on research ethics and an overview of the process of analysis.

#### 3.3.1 The Performances

The project includes five productions, out of which the first and the fifth were dismissed from the analysis. Production no. 1, Bach's *St. John Passion*, was a pilot and the participants in the reference group were not the same as in the rest of the project but consisted of three colleges at the Norwegian Academy of Music. Production no. 5 was a specially-composed mass, Marcus André Berg's *Messe i C*. This was initially commissioned to provide material for an autoethnographic study in parallel with the regular case study. However, the case study provided enough thick descriptions to discuss the topics of ethics and politics in singing. Further, the methodological considerations that developed when confronted with the empirical material in the interviews and analysis prompted the dismissal of autoethnographic methodology, which might have situated the study too closely to approaches within artistic research. The mass was therefore not included in the material to be analysed as such but became a steppingstone for the discussion of the role of the researcher and methodology. Some autoethnographic elements remained in the process of analysis, such as small discussions written and coded during the transcription, and short recorded or written memos. These did not amount to any form of systematic log and were not applied as part of the methodical approach.

As cases for the analysis performances 2, 3 and 4 were the most appropriate. The performances consist of mainstream repertoire for a classical singer, spanning from the 18th to the 20th centuries. They were chosen in order to avoid drawing ethical-political implications from any newly written lyrics, heightening the issue of how singing as a whole, not just the lyrics, might be understood as ethical-political. The lyrics of the songs most discussed in the interviews appear in the text of the analysis. All the lyrics of the performed works are listed in Appendix 7. For purpose of description and documentation, the following lists all five productions and their contexts:

**Production no. 1 (Pilot Production):**

J.S Bach – St. John Passion, BWV 245  
31st March 2019, Fagerborg Church  
Orchestra: Nordic Harmony Orchestra  
Choir: Ullern kammerkor  
Five soloists, including Mathias Gillebo  
Conductor: Gjermund Brenne

What was sung:

The evangelist recitatives, the arias *Ach, mein Sinn and Erwäge, wie sein blutgefärbter Rücken*, and the arioso *Mein Herz* (author of arias and arioso unknown).

Three people from the audience were interviewed, a fourth person was invited but could not participate. I presented the topics of the study, building on these notes:

As someone sings, I find that what happens is about something,  
which is current and relevant,  
which is then and there,  
which happens then and there,  
and which is about us.

When the voice sounds, it creates, carries the reality in which it sounds.

In that reality there are people, and consequently, that reality, and the voice, are ethically charged, with power, care, connection, dependence, independence.

The voice sounds in and as all this, I think.

Let me give you an example: palliative care.

Memo after the interview:

After the interview, during which I found it sometimes hard to explain what I meant, and after having held a lecture on the voice at the Opera [not long after the interview], during which I felt, as I was speaking, that it had all become too much, too close, I have in the course of the spring and summer become more aware of the dangers of a fetish of presence, a then-and-there fetish (29.07.19).

I read this memo as the beginning of coming to terms with having to write forth a form of distance: both to my voice and my performativity, that is, that the text in the thesis is not *as* singing, and therefore that I reestablish a notion of distance and distinction between word and sound.

**Production no. 2:**

J.S. Bach – Christmas Oratorio (cantata I, II and III), BWV 248

7th and 8th Dec 2019, Vestre Aker Church

Orchestra: Barokkanerne

Choir: Vestre Aker kammerkor

Four soloists, including Mathias Gillebo

Flute: Torun Torbo

Conductor: Karstein Sigurd Ærø

Link to live video recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S21c0Nk5p6k>

What was sung:

The evangelist recitatives and the aria *Frohe Hirten* (author of aria unknown, but maybe C. F. Henrici, who wrote under the pen name Picander).

During the interview the conversation centered on *Frohe Hirten*.

**Production no. 3:**

Opera Recital

21st June 2020, Ljan Church Congregation House

Piano: Margrete Moen Birkedal

Soloist: Mathias Gillebo

Link to video recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gADCCBaRxDw>

What was sung:

G. F. Händel/N. F. Haym, adapted from A. Piovene – Aria: Ciel e terra, role of Bajazet, Tamerlano, HWV 18.

W. A. Mozart/L. Da Ponte – Aria: Un aura amorosa, role of Ferrando, *Così fan tutte*, K 588.

W. A. Mozart/L. Da Ponte – Aria: Il mio Tesoro Mozart, role of Don Ottavio, Don Giovanni, K 527.

R. Wagner – Aria: Mit Gewitter und Sturm, role of Steuermann, *Der fliegende Holländer*.

R. Schumann/H. Heine – Im wunderschönen Monat Mai; Die Rose, die Lilie; Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen, Ich grolle nicht and Die alten, bösen Lieder from *Dichterliebe*, op. 48.

E. Grieg/K. G. Slålien – Gjendines Bådnåt/Gjendine's lullaby, op. 66.

During the interviews the conversation centered on *Gjendines bådnåt*.

**Production no. 4:**

G. Mahler/F. Rückert – Kindertotenlieder

26th and 27th Sept 2020, Norwegian Academy of Music and Fagerborg Church

Orchestra: Nordic Harmony Orchestra

Soloist: Mathias Gillebo

Link to live video recording of concert 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ceqvbywDRSo>

During the interviews the conversation centered mainly on the first, third and last song. Before the concerts I sent the groups my own Norwegian translation of the German lyrics (see Appendix 6). In retrospect, I wish I had sent the translation to only one group, and thereby had a control sample. But given all the restrictions and uncertainties due to Covid, I wanted to provide as much material for the participants as possible, as attending the live concert might prove difficult. A second shutdown due to Covid 19 was imminent. The recorded performance shows an almost empty, dark Fagerborg church. The light is on the orchestra and me, a small group of people, seemingly alone. An initial plan to place a child's coffin in front of me was abandoned.

**Production no. 5:**

M. A. Berg – Messe i C(ommon time).

25th Nov 2020, Oslo Cathedral.

Organ: Marcus André Berg.

Soloist/priest: Mathias Gillebo.

Link to audio recording (not live): <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3U9n35kZUySmFy57qZlW8c?si=923786e927274f2e>

As a preparatory work I sent a text to the composer discussing the main liturgical elements of an ordinary mass, confuting the traditional meaning in every element, trying to re-evaluate them on the basis on my experience as a singer/priest. We made no changes to the text of the liturgy, but Berg opted to write the music in a manner that did not conform to the dramatic and redemptive structure and logics of the mass.

### 3.3.2 Group Interviews

Attending these performances, either then and there or, due to Covid-19, watching the video recordings, were two groups of three people. The group interviews were done in the following order, listed here with their corresponding concerts:

Christmas Oratorio:

03.02.2020: Group 1, Interview 1

Opera Recital:

24.08.2020: Group 2, Interview 1

25.08.2020: Group 1, Interview 2

Kindertotenlieder:

12.10.2020: Group 1, Interview 3

26.10.2020: Group 2, Interview 2

The first interview was held face to face sitting around a table eating pizza and drinking coffee. Shortly thereafter, Covid-19 made such interviews impossible. The rest of the interviews were done via Zoom.

Kvale and Brinkmann claim that there are no standard method to reach important meanings and implications in what is being said in an interview, and a desire for one specific method might lead to a focus on technique and reliability at the expense of knowledge and validity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, pp. 179–180, 217). The interviews were the means by which to access to the empirical material of the cases, and were structured around video playback of relevant sequences (Lyle, 2003; Tochon, 2008), facilitating the conversations about the experiences of the participants as well as my own. I wanted first and foremost a relational and reflexive approach (Finlay & Evans, 2009). Therefore, even though the interview questions were related to the overarching research questions of the thesis, I took a conversational approach throughout (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 57).

Kvale and Brinkmann (2017) list three types of interview positions: the investigator of opinions, the explorer and the participator (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, pp. 119–120). In the interviews, I was more of an explorer than an investigator of opinions, and in some respects, I was less an explorer than a participant in the conversations leading to meaning-production. However, even though I participated in a conversational manner, hoping that such participation would cause more interesting findings than rigid exploring methods, it seems to me that the notion of the interviewer as a participant easily obscures both the analytical process and a realistic view of the relation that the participants had to me.

I led the conversations as I presented the project and its main scope of interest, asking questions and follow-ups as we conversed. I varied the degree to which I did this, but found it necessary from time to time to change the subject or pivot the conversation towards the themes I was interested in. From the information and invitation letter they had received, the participants had some knowledge about the project. However, I found it necessary to explain this again and more thoroughly in the first phase of the interviews with each group, and also sometimes remind the groups of this during our conversations, either due to the course of the conversation, or when participants asked directly.

The descriptions, stories, experiences and points of view that the participants offered were not treated and analysed as facts that were uncovered or found, but rather “as utterances to be co-produced in the interview’s situated interaction, and which can be challenged during the conversation” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 129; cf. Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 136). I continually produced condensations and interpretations during the interviews with the interviewees (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 221).

The data of an interview “consists of meaningful statements which are themselves based on interpretations,” and consequently it is “not possible to distinguish sharply between data and interpretations of data” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 80). Further, even though I, as an “explorer”, would ask questions that a stranger would not (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 120) and pivot the conversation and drill into specific areas more than in a normal conversation, I considered myself as a participant in the conversations in the sense that I actively engaged in them as they unfolded, listening and letting the other participants lead (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 120).

Discussing what constitutes an encounter in music therapy, Stensæth (2017) builds on Bakhtinian perspectives of dialogical meaning-making as “a dialogical relationship between the genuine, personal, authentic question of one person seeking information and the serious reply by another person in a never-ending dialogue” (Stensæth, 2017, p. 29, referring to Bakhtin, 1990). The dialogue in the interviews, I found it important to note, did not start with the interview, but had already started with the concerts. To some extent, the group interviews became a continuation of and bore similarities to the encounter that had taken place during the performance (cf. Leavy 2009, pp. 114, 261). Paralleling the way meaning was produced in singing, the interviews could be analysed with an emphasis on how the choice of both words and expressions are charged with and create the social, discursive context (Habermas, 1984), and how meaning emerges in the discursive interaction (Fontana & Frey, 2005). That the social, discursive interaction does not start with the interviews but with the concerts, I find not to be a problem in terms of “contaminating” the interview setting. Rather, I had to be aware of it and acknowledge it as part of the dialogical meaning-making that was to be analysed. However, it sometimes made it difficult to distinguish what exactly constituted the case I was analysing. What was the case study a case about – the singing performance or the interview about it?

On the one hand, this rather proves the point that singing can cause the blurring of distinctions. And in terms of facilitating interesting conversations, it was important to let the dynamics of the encounter in the performances continue and develop in the interviews. The ethical-political implications of the singing event could not be confined within the concert



event as such but had also to be sought in the impact on the discussions about the concerts. Moreover, as Kvale and Brinkmann show, an interview inquiry is always a moral inquiry (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 95). This applies in terms of the means and specific aims of the interviews but is also due to the simple fact that the human interaction that constitutes the setting of the interview affects both the interviewer and the interviewees. Further, our views on the basic human condition affect the knowledge that is produced in the interview, and vice versa: the knowledge that is produced in the interview affects our views regarding the human condition.

On the other hand, in terms of methodological transparency, and as part of the process of analysis, it was important to differentiate between the singing and the interviews: the singing was the case and the interview the means providing the analytical access to the empirical material of the singing event.

My role as a moderator in the group interviews was to create a benevolent and open atmosphere in which it was possible to express personal and contradicting opinions and experiences. The aim was not to agree on everything, or anything for that matter, convince anyone of anything, or reach conclusions that resolved issues, but to explore the themes that emerged in the conversation, that is: what was experienced by the participants and/or by me during the performance and/or while watching video excerpts or talking together during the interviews, through the emotional and expressive dynamics that evolved within each group in the course of the conversation in each group.

### 3.3.3 Interview Guide

In semi-structured interviews, the interview guide contains an overview of the themes that are to be addressed and suggestions for questions. Kvale and Brinkmann (2017) suggest making two guides, one with the questions the researcher is planning to ask and one with the thematic and dynamic dimensions of the research process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 162).

During the interview, Kvale and Brinkmann argue, descriptive questions such as what happened and how did it happen prompt more spontaneous descriptions and help to avoid the possibly over-reflexive, intellectualized answers to questions about “how”. Questions with “how”, e.g., concerning the reasons for the actions and thoughts of the interviewees, should be asked towards the end of the interview (pp. 164–165). They argue further that the analysis of “why” from a phenomenological perspective is primarily the task of the researcher when analysing the interview after it is finished (p. 165).

Even though I see the merit in Kvale and Brinkmann's argument, and to some extent tried to follow it in guiding the interview, I found it important in the interviews to let the participants take part in the analytical process or start it together with me in a dialogical manner. This proved to come naturally, as this analysis was part of how they described their experiences of the performances.

After the pilot project, where I mapped out central aspects of the themes and tested formulations and questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 151), the interview guide was set up in the following manner (see Appendix 1 for the full interview guide):

- Each initial theme of the thesis
- Overarching research questions relating to the themes
- Questions intended to throw a back-light on my experiences during performing
- Questions I wanted to explore during and after the interviews
- The interview questions I planned to ask

I was planning to avoid the use of the terms "ethics/ethical demand" and "public political discourse" in the interviews, at least not to any extensive degree. Though I used them occasionally, especially while explaining the project to the participants, I planned and tried to find other more conversational words, such as:

- Ethics: "here and now", "reality", "relation", "meaning", "feeling"
- Public political discourse: "together here", "outside/after this concert", "in this concert and afterwards", "society", "debate", "world", "what does it matter today", "what does it matter in terms of the future"

I did not apply the interview guide in a strict manner, adapting it continually as a basis for conversation. It was also mainly aimed at ethics and public discourse, because these were themes that could be addressed more directly. Taken together, however, the interview questions were also aimed at providing an empirical basis for discussing auxiliary hypothesis 3, and ultimately the overarching research questions of the thesis.

### 3.3.4 The Groups

In planning the project, I opted for two groups and obtained the necessary NSD approvals. However, after the pilot interview, I was not sure to what extent the project would be empirically based or if I should be aiming mainly for a theoretical angle. Therefore, I started out with only one group attending the first production, two concerts with the *Christmas Oratorio* by J.

S. Bach. Four people, two women and two men, attended either the first or second concert. One of the members did not attend the interview and dropped out of the project. Participants were all people with musical or stage backgrounds or interests known to me, and one of them I had worked with in a concert production. They were all approached via Facebook or SMS.

In opting for this form of strategic choice of group, even though, as argued above, the group was not the case as such, I was following Flyvbjerg's argument that "the strategic choice of case may greatly add to the generalizability of a case study" (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 124). Although this group was not representative or a random sample of a population attending a concert, the scientific validity of a case study built on strategic sampling need not be dismissed, because "if the thesis could be proved false in the favorable case, then it would most likely be false for intermediate cases" (p. 124).

As for the view that representative cases or random samples are more suited to generate valid results, Flyvbjerg argues further that

when the objective is to obtain the greatest possible amount of information about a given problem or phenomenon, a representative case or a random sample may not be the most appropriate strategy. This is because the typical or average case is often not the richest in information. Atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied. In addition, from both understanding-oriented and action-oriented perspectives, it is often more important to clarify [through the use of critical case selection; he gives an example on p. 128] the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur. Random samples emphasizing representativeness will seldom be able to produce this kind of insight; it is more appropriate to select some few cases chosen for their validity. (2004, p. 127)

Still, after interviewing this group after the first production, I came to the conclusion that two groups would be better both in terms of testing my hypotheses in two different conversational contexts and for exploring emerging themes. This was not with the aim of comparing the experiences of the groups per se, but to obtain a "thickness" of descriptions that the groups combined might offer on their experiences during the concerts (Dey, 1993, p. 47).

The second group was put together using Facebook invitations to random names. It ended up consisting of three women of whom I had no prior knowledge, neither in terms of educational

or working backgrounds, nor in terms of social network.<sup>22</sup> Group 1 consisted of S, P and F, and Group 2 consisted of D, H and M.

Before the interviews, the participants in both groups received a formal invitation letter with more information, and an attached informed consent form (see Appendices 4 and 5).

The groups provided an environment where new information emerged that created distance to my own practice, language and ways of interpreting and understanding, preventing the research from becoming only introspective (cf. Kjølborg, 2010, p. 121). The interviews gave access to the cases generating validated data (Leavy, 2009, p. 18) which could be discussed in relation to the relevant broad strands of theory presented in Chapter 2.

The use of group interviews thus contributed to the exploring of the field of knowledge I was interested in and developing the research questions and hypotheses. The interviews also created a continual space for group dynamics that provided a more wholesome understanding of singing as a social phenomenon.

Audio and video recordings of the interview sessions were transcribed and analysed qualitatively through coding, meaning condensation and categorization (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017), using the *NVivo* qualitative analysis program. In the analysis, I focused on the meanings and themes that emerged over time in the discursive interaction (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017): singing as interaction in ethically charged relations; as participation in a public, political discursive sphere; and how the dynamics and choices that occur during singing can be interpreted as making the performances into forms of statements and actions, constituting subject and meaning.

### 3.3.5 Research Ethics

During the group interviews, the participants contributed with their own personal and sometimes private experiences and points of view. This required strategies and awareness concerning my role as both researcher, performer, co-creator of meaning in the interview conversations and interpreter (Kvale & Brinkman, 2017, p. 97). Both the subject matter and the methods applied put me under a methodological and ethical obligation to distinguish clearly between my own interpretation and that of the participants. In the analysis, nuances and contradictions are referred to in detail and as a citation. Special attention has been required of me as to how forms of power and ways of speaking could sometimes develop, either by

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<sup>22</sup> Perhaps due to Facebook algorithms, one of the participants turned out to have a PhD in musicology.

participants or by me, which at times might have prevented variation in the expression of meanings (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2017).

In all qualitative research, tensions might occur between the desire to create new knowledge and the obligation to uphold the ethical considerations required. Kvale and Brinkmann (2017) argue that the intensity and depth of an interview imply a risk of violating the interviewee, whereas the respect for the integrity of the interviewee might result in superficial empirical data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 96). Referencing Fog (2004), they find that the interview becomes shallow if the interviewer does not confront its basic human condition of vulnerability and mortality. In a way, I find that these dynamics are similar to the dialogical aspects of a singing performance. As argued above, the encounter with the interviewees did not start with the interview, but with the performances. This made it easier to articulate personal experiences and develop perspectives on how singing exposes basic human conditions. At the same time, my involvement in the subject matter, my exposure through singing and the discourse about my voice, demanded that I had to be constantly aware and try to facilitate ways to talk in the groups, so that the participants did not feel pressured to share more than they wanted simply because I was already exposed in a personal manner.

The precondition for making these interviews meaningful was an openness concerning my opinion that the project had value, that it was opting for something meaningful, that a normativity integrated into its approach to the subject matter, and that I as researcher-cum-artist was not unaffected by this at any point, but deeply involved, and therefore both vulnerable and in a position of control. Arguing in the same manner concerning his interviewing undocumented migrants in Gothenburg, Sweden, Wyller (2017) finds that such an approach must be characterized as phenomenological: “The phenomenological means that all the information that I present in the following has grown out of my own bodily presence in this room” (Wyller, 2017, p. 20).

Due to the exploration of at times private issues in the interviews (most poignantly, the death of a child), ethical considerations had to be made as to how such statements might be published. Kvale and Brinkman (2017) specify such ethical considerations pertaining to different stages in course of the research (Kvale & Brinkman, 2017, p. 97). During the thematizing stage, the purpose of the study ought not to be discussed simply in terms of scientific value but also in terms of improving the human situation and conditions that are explored. In planning the project, one must also take into consideration what possible implications participation might have for the participants, both in the study as a whole and more specifically during the interviews, for instance, experiences of stress and a change in one’s self-image. During transcription of the interview, an assessment must be made as to what it means to transcribe

participants' statements truthfully if confidentiality is to be adequately maintained. In the ensuing analysis of critical parts of the interviews, an assessment must be made as to how deeply or critically the statements are to be analysed, and whether the participants ought to be involved in deciding how the statements should be interpreted.

I found that the statements of one participant concerning the death of a child would not reveal the identity of that participant. My assessment during the interview, transcription and analysis was that the statements were given voluntarily and in pertinent relation to the discussion of Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder*, not caused by any form of pressure in the interviews, and not for the purpose of the exposure of private experiences as such, but in order for the participant to highlight certain aspects of the experiences that the participant had during my performance. My assessment was therefore that the statements were of such a character that I was not obliged to involve the participant in the ensuing transcription, analysis and writing process.

All participants in the groups were anonymized, and participation presupposed free, informed and written consent. The project was approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (See Appendix 3).

### 3.3.6 Process of Analysis: Hypotheses

An explorative design might encompass several different research approaches (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, pp. 224–225). In the following, therefore, I simply label the research design as explorative built on the overarching research question:

What are the ethical and political implications of singing?

This overarching research question corresponds to the main hypothesis:

Singing has ethical and political implications.

Before the interviews, the research question and hypothesis generated themes that, even though they were interrelated, served to unpack main aspects of the overarching hypothesis. For purposes of distinction and description during the explorative process, I articulated these themes in three auxiliary hypotheses:

1. Singing constitutes an ethical demand between singer and audience.
2. Singing is a form of participation in a public political discourse.
3. Subject and meaning are constituted within the dynamics of a singing voice.

Each of these hypotheses generated a research question, constituting a form of “thematizing” in the exploratory, analytic and discussive processes both in the theoretical contextualization of the study, the planning and conducting of the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann 2017, pp. 137–139), as well as in the ensuing analysis and discussion. In conducting and analysing the interviews, I explored the hypotheses by applying the interview guide in a conversational manner, transcribing the interview recordings, coding and categorizing the transcriptions, and writing up the emerging themes.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 thus constituted prepared categories. Parts of the analysis therefore also consisted in testing these hypotheses in terms of looking for their deduced empirical consequences in the interview material. Further, the hypotheses were modified (not in wording but in content) based on the emerging perspectives of the analysis and through the following discussion.

Unsurprisingly, auxiliary hypothesis 3 proved difficult to test deductively, and did not constitute a prepared category. However, the analysis, and especially the emergent category of *Word and Sound*, provided a basis on which to inductively modify and discuss it in Chapter 5.

Throughout the process of analysis, new perspectives emerged that modified the initial hypotheses. Some of these perspectives related closely to my initial scope of interest, others deviated from them and contrasted them, and some could even be interpreted as contradicting them. The emergent perspectives were generated in the process of (semi-open) coding, in the analysis and through the discussion following the analysis.

Finally, in Chapter 5, based on the analytic process and discussion of the auxiliary hypotheses, I discussed, modified, and made conclusions concerning the main hypothesis.

### 3.3.7 Process of Analysis: Coding and Categorizing<sup>23</sup>

For the auxiliary hypotheses 1 and 2 I created two codes in advance, *Ethics* and *Political Discourse*, defined on the basis of theoretical material in Løgstrup/Jonas and Habermas. This way I specified for my own part what I was looking for from the start of the analysis, i.e., from and including the conducting of the interviews, and to some extent even from during the concerts. Under these codes I put statements and passages in the interviews that I considered relevant. Apart from the codes *Ethics* and *Political Discourse*, all other codes and categories emerged during the analysis work.

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23 See Codebook in Appendix 2.

Most of the codes were generated while coding the first interview, Group 1, Interview 1: *Aesthetics; Body; Communication; Concentration; Direct Questions from Me; Directly to My Performance; Dissemination, Conveying, Interpretation; Emotion; Ethics; Expression; Just Doing It; Liturgy; Meaning; Music; My Comments during Coding; My Comments, Summaries and Analyses during Transcription; My Responses to What is being Said; My Stated Intentions and Hypotheses; P's Opinions; F's Opinions; S's Opinions; Play; Politics; Presence; Religion; Room; Statement; Word and Sound; Work.*

The following codes were added while coding Group 2 Interview 1: *D's Opinions; M's Opinions; H's Opinions; Context of the Performance; Voice; Demands on the Audience; Method; Contra from the Participants; Coronavirus; Meeting; Community; Power; Sense of Belonging; Confirmation; Closeness.*

The following codes were added while coding Group 1, Interview 2: *Recognition; Internal Demands; External Demands; Lack of Presence, Play, Expression, Performative Action; Private Appearance.*

The following codes were added while coding Group 1, Interview 3: *Fragility; Introversion; Audience; Reality; Demand; Medium; Relation; Change; Transcendence.*

The following codes were added while coding Group 2, Interview 2: *Touched; What it is About; Difficult, Boring, Feeling Distracted; Genuine; My Bolding Out during Transcription<sup>24</sup>; Function and Usage; Credibility and Authenticity; Honesty.*

When new codes emerged, I reviewed previously coded material in light of the new codes where this was relevant and coded the already-coded texts based on these as well. Some codes addressed new aspects, while others provided nuance to previous codes. In the first round of the coding process, I placed all the codes at the same level, deliberately avoiding code hierarchies. This was to avoid any nuances that seemed marginal in the beginning disappearing by being subordinated too early in the analysis process.

In the initial stages of the coding process, I also included my own statements and passages of conversation that I participated in, such as introductions to the interviews, stated intentions with the research project, explanations, responses and comments. These appear in the code book, but were for the most part removed from the analytical graphics and charts in the process of analysis in order not to affect the weighing of themes and perspectives. In the citations of the analysis, they are part of the dialogical dynamics of the conversations.

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<sup>24</sup> As in making selected section of the text **bold**.



However, in the explorative analysis *during* the interviews, my comments served as successive “then-and-there” interpretations, analytical follow-ups and condensations of meaning that took place in the course of the conversations. In the ensuing analysis, these served to contextualize the statements of the participants and the conversational passages where new themes and perspectives are formed.

Coding my own statements could also clarify when I was laying down guidelines for the interview conversation, trying to understand/analyse during the interview through follow-up questions, or when I was asked questions that made me discuss things about myself or understand something new that was then discussed in turn by the participants, etc. In this way, coding my own statements has increased the methodological accountability. Where I have coded my own statements, this appears in the codebook, and I make it clear in the text of the analysis when this is used in the analysis beyond the interview itself.

Written comments that I made during transcription and coding were not coded to other codes than *My Comments during Transcription* and *My Comments during Coding*, unless they are related to the statements of the participants. If so, this appears explicitly. Much of what is coded under these codes also became early drafts of analysis.

For the third auxiliary hypothesis, concerning subject and meaning, I had no predefined codes. Material from the interviews that related to this auxiliary hypothesis would therefore have to emerge during the analysis and applied inductively in the discussion. In the interviews, I was primarily focused on the auxiliary hypotheses 1 and 2 about ethics and public political discourse, for two main reasons:

First, the idea of singing as constituting subject and meaning is related more to my own person than to the articulated experiences of the interviewees. It would be difficult to ask direct questions based on this auxiliary hypothesis to the groups, or to test it in the sense that there might be empirical consequences in the interview material. Therefore, this hypothesis is addressed more directly in the discussion section in Chapter 5.

Secondly, I set up the project so that dialogical dynamics pertaining to how subject and meaning are constituted in song would depend on the analysis and discussions about ethics and politics. The guiding assumption is that subject and meaning, if constituted in song, are constituted in an ethically-politically charged setting when the voice is used, and in the process of which the symbolic-semiotic relation between word and sound is dynamized (see Section 2.4).

The codes were organized in hierarchies and categorized.<sup>25</sup> This process resulted in the following categories: *Actual Reality*, *Ethical Demand*, *Public Political Discourse*, *The Rest*, *Transcendence*, and *Word And Sound*.<sup>26</sup> The category *The Rest* was created for the codes which I did not find relevant, or which were covered by other codes. *Actual Reality* and *Transcendence* seemed important but became less identifiable as independent categories during the coding process.

In the thesis, *Ethical Demand*, *Public Political Discourse* and *Word and Sound* are therefore also applied as headings in Sections 2.2-4 indicating also the pertinent strands of theory by which to reference the analysis and discussion.

### 3.3.8 Reliability and Validity

The study can be considered to be reliable, because the findings can be generalized (in terms discussed above concerning case study research) and because analytical and methodological accountability have been fundamental to the entire writing process (Kvale & Brinkmann 2017, pp. 137, 272).

The study may be considered valid as it explores what it was intended to explore and the results pertain to the stated objectives of the study (Kvale & Brinkmann 2017, pp. 137, 272).

One might argue that analysis constitutes a systematization, that the delving into the empirical material, listening repeatedly to the recordings of the interviews during transcribing, making notes, developing codes, devising code hierarchies, creating categories and connecting them in overarching themes, searching for patterns across interviews, and finally translating findings from Norwegian to English, make the material, the process and the representation of analysis more accountable, trustworthy and valid. However, I find that this does not make the analysis any less speculative than my reflections on and subjective perceptions of what I experience in the performances, the interviews or in the process of analysing them.

Given all my reservations – amounting not to the impossibility of describing musical experience in a conventional methodological fashion, but a critique of the self-assured methodological fashion itself – I adopted an analytical approach in which I trust that music, both in itself and in verbal language, operates and moves and generates the utterance. Articulated with that

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25 See Code Book in Appendix 2. The categories are in capital letters and listed with 0 references, as these are not coded directly from the transcripts, but are overarching thematic names organizing the codes.

26 In the code book, these categories are subsumed under the overarching category SINGING AS. I also ended up with a category I did not know where to locate in the analysis and discussion. It consisted of interrelated themes relating to the interviews and analysis themselves more than to the concerts discussed. I did not find a suitable way to apply this category in the written text of the analysis and discussion but found it to be useful in terms of how the discussion of method concerning research on/as art was active within the process of the study as a whole.

language, that is, an ordinary referring language, I find the study of my own voice reliable and valid as I apply a conventional methodological approach and analysis. This approach, then, as ordinary qualitative analysis emerging in a dialogical manner in and through the interviews, might in terms of its addressing capacities be no different from what constitutes the sound of the voice.

### 3.3.9 Conclusion

In section 3.3 I have presented the cases of the singing performances of the study and the group interviews. Further, I have presented the groups and discussed how dialogical dynamics started in the concerts and developed in the interview situations, as well as in the analysis as such. Further, I have discussed research ethics in terms of my role as singer, interviewer, conversation participator and analyst, as well as how these roles might have affected the participants and what they were saying. Finally, I have presented the process of analysis, including assessments of reliability and validity.

## 4 Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of the performances and group interviews. The cases analysed are the performances, and the group interviews are the means by which empirical material about these cases was obtained. I present the analysis of the different categories and the dynamics between them, describing the development of different strands of meaning that unfolded during the interviews and my continued analysis during transcription, systematization and writing up themes (Kvale & Brinkman, 2017, pp. 221–222).

I deliberately avoid summarizing in factual “findings” or high-level generalizations of theory (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 136). I treat examples which might indicate empirical consequences of the hypotheses, but the main approach is to let the broad philosophical positions presented in Chapter 2 provide frames of reference for the analysis of interview excerpts and the development of themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 73; Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 136).

The excerpts are applied in a manner that shows how themes emerged, developed and were discussed in the groups, how they modified the hypotheses and constituted a basis for the discussion in Chapter 5. The successive description of this evolution of themes constitutes a contextualizing narrative of exploration (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 223), resulting in dense descriptions of experiences generated in the cases (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, pp. 112, 251, 337; Flyvbjerg, 2004, pp. 133–138). In doing so, I follow Flyvbjerg’s argument that studies can “be read as narratives in their entirety” (2004, p. 139), and that this can be done without preventing the case study method from contributing to “the cumulative development of knowledge; for example, in using the principles to test propositions” (2004, p. 139). I also find this procedure to be in line with how Kvale and Brinkmann (2017) discuss the criteria that should be met by the presented interview sections. They argue that one must avoid qualitative hyper-empiricism by looking at quotes as isolated data, seeking instead a dramaturgical development of stories that can provide insight (Kvale & Brinkmann, pp. 296–298).

I identified one main development in each category which made the theme of the category clearer. These developments also related to the developments in the other categories and could be built on successively during the whole analytical process, from *Ethical Demand* to *Public Political Discourse* and finally *Word and Sound*. Respectively, these developments were:

1. Ethical Demand – Towards what is without collapsing in it.
2. Public Political Discourse – Towards a modification of intention, meaning and stating something through singing.

3. Word and Sound – Towards a both-and of the integration and distinctiveness of word and sound.

The float chart (Figure 1, p 164) illustrates these core issues and a development towards a basis for discussion. The development of the themes served partly to strengthen and partly to weaken the hypotheses. To some extent the developments indicated possible findings in terms of empirical consequences of the hypotheses. More importantly, the analysis provided a basis for new or modified insights that could be developed through the discussion of the thematic developments and findings.

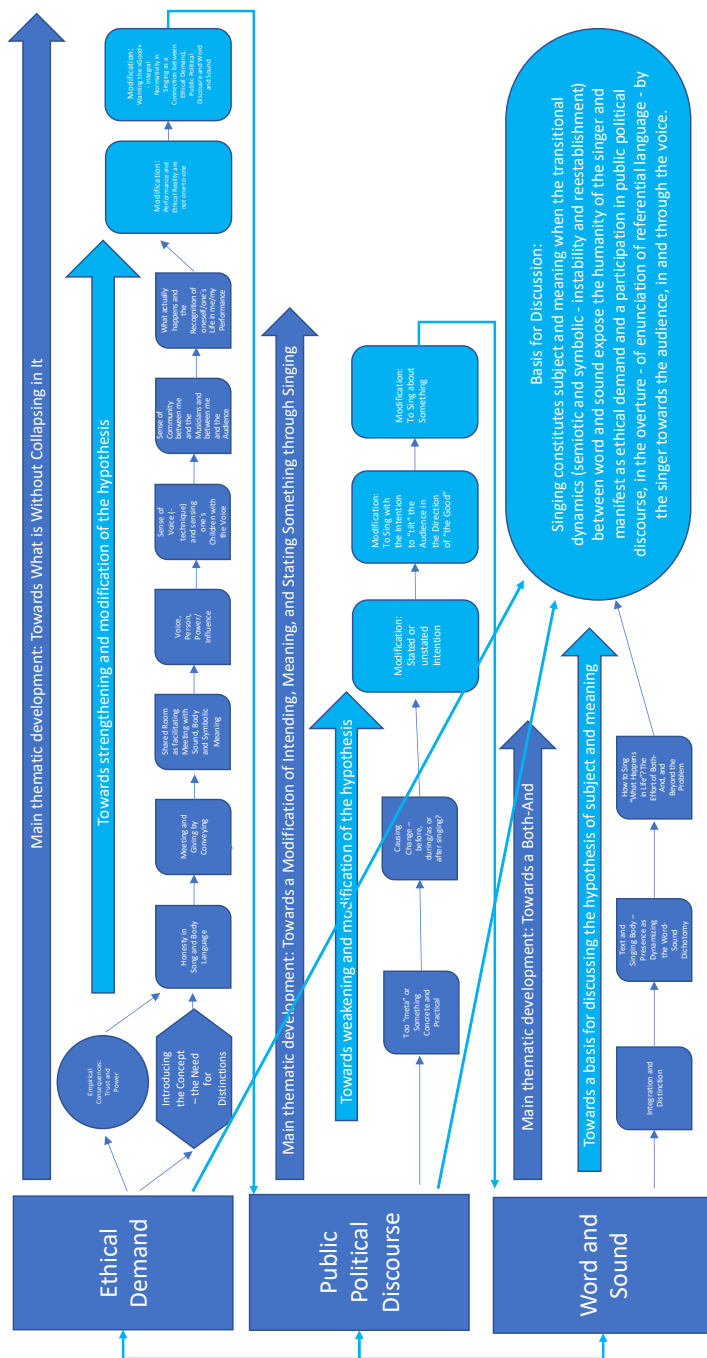


Figure 1: Float Chart of Thematic Developments in the Analysis

## 4.1 Ethical Demand – Towards What Is Without Collapsing in It

*You are shown a trust from the audience that you manage through-out the concert.*

– P commenting on my turning my back to the audience.

*I'm hurting as well, or I feel it, am affected by it. But it would have been stronger if you had dared to let go of the shield, resist the urge to hide from the pain, and just dare to stand in it.*

– S commenting on *Kindertotenlieder*.

The analysis in section 4.1 is guided by auxiliary research question 1:

To what extent and how does singing constitute an ethical demand between singer and audience?

The category *Ethical Demand* builds on statements and passages in the interviews concerning the relational and dialogical dynamics between me and the participants during the performances. I coded statements and passages that addressed power, interdependence, trust, vulnerability, experience of closeness and the like, systematizing them in a code hierarchy constituting the overarching category (see Code Book in Appendix 2).

Firstly, the analysis serves as a way of testing the hypothesis/theme of singing as an ethical demand. This testing can be seen as establishing my singing as a critical or strategic case, particularly concerning Group 1, as this group was in no way a representative, large or random sample of a population attending a concert. The participants were invited based on known backgrounds as musicians and singers, though not necessarily professionals. Instead of seeing this group contributing to a potential bias towards verification, I build on Flyvbjerg's (2004) argument that "if the thesis could be proved false in the favorable case, then it would most likely be false for intermediate cases" (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 124). The analysis revealed that the hypothesis had not been falsified, but to a great extent strengthened.

Secondly, the category serves as a basis for inductively generating a modified hypothesis. Here, I follow Flyvbjerg's argument that "the strategic choice of case may greatly add to the generalizability of a case study" (2004, p. 124). When introduced in the interview conversations, the concept of ethical demand generated debate and passages of conversation which added

nance to the concept. Thus, although the category of *Ethical Demand* was prepared before the interviews, and mainly strengthened in terms of testing, it also resulted in inductively generated findings and insights that could be developed through discussion.

Both during the interviews and in the continued analysis afterwards, statements and passages were analysed within the broad meta-ethical position that all of reality is ethically charged (Løgstrup, 1997), and that there is an “ought” in the “is” (Jonas, 2014) (see Section 2.2).

#### 4.1.1 Initial Examples of Empirical Consequences: Trust and Power

The dynamics constituting the dialogical relation during the performances between the participants and myself were experienced and talked about differently both by the individual participants and at group level. In the last interview with Group 1, discussing my performance of *Kindertotenlieder*, P criticizes my performance for being too introvert, and not inviting the audience into what I am doing on stage. I ask what this does to the relation between us:

I: What does that do to you? If I didn't invite you in, if it was closed, what does that do to the relationship between us then and there?

P: It weakens, it disappears, it is not there. Well, it is there, because as an audience you seek out situations where you pay to listen to something. But you don't build that relationship if you don't invite us in.

I: It is not there regardless of an invitation or a sort of openness?

P: No, I think that's hugely important. You invite the audience in when you start the concert, and then you are shown a trust from the audience that you manage throughout the concert. [...] You seek and build that relationship through the concert.

P initially suggests that the relation between him and me is not only weakened if I do not “invite in,” but ceases to exist all together. Then he rephrases, asserting that the relation is there, but that the “trust” it is built on, is not well managed or sustained if I do not continually invite him in, actively seek the relationship and build it throughout the concert.

This response by P might indicate an empirical consequence of singing as constituting an ethical demand, in the sense that neither I nor he can choose to withdraw ourselves from the ethical charge of the singing event. A relation is there, built on trust. This trust is upheld or broken by me during the performance. But to break it is not the same as withdrawing from the ethically charged relation. Both to uphold and to break the trust on which the singing event is based, is part of the ethical charge of that event.



As the development of this category will show, the material indicates that singing without upholding the trust on which the relation to the audience is built, that is, singing without meeting and participating in the ethical demand which singing constitutes, is a radically impoverished form of singing. Or, put in more positive terms: what is experienced as a good performance, is always an ethically engaged performance.

Discussing the opera recital, M articulated a notion of power that the audience has over the performer, which might indicate another empirical consequence of singing constituting an ethical demand, but the other way around. Power in the public sphere constituted by the singing event could be understood as not only a power wielded by the soloist, but by the audience over against the soloist:

M: The audience can suddenly gain power over a singer. If the singer feels that he is not doing well enough, and there is someone in the audience who looks down or away and don't like it, then it's like "I'm not good enough today".

M addresses here a feeling I have had on several occasions while singing, and which takes on many forms and pertains to two very different, but still intertwined aspects of performance as the public action of getting up in front of a paying audience. It is *representative*, as I carry and express something that can be experienced by other people as their own emotions and situations, so that I become a personification that can be both of something positive and of something resembling guilt or frustration, and then develop this through the course of phrasing; and it is at the same time *economically charged*, based on the outcome of the representative dynamics, in terms of the possibility of re-engagement by the decision-makers of the production, the likes or dislikes of managers, conductors, audience and the media.

Both P and M articulate different aspects of the Løgstrupian concept of interdependence. The meeting of the singing event constitutes a dynamic of trust and power which goes both ways.

#### 4.1.2 Introducing the Concept of Ethics in Singing and What it gave Rise to in the Dialogue: The Need for Distinctions

In the interviews I made no attempt to disguise my proposition of an ethical demand present in singing. This was because I had to present and explain the scopes of the project to the participants, but also so that the propositions of the project could serve as explicit points of discussion, rather than underlying and hidden assumptions I had as an interviewer. I tried to avoid the overuse of terms like *ethics* or *ethical demand*, as in the following initial explanation in Group 2, stating the intentions driving the project:

I: I write about how the relationship that arises between the performer and the audience is charged with a kind of ethically... of dynamics that have to do with power and care and dependence, connection, and how that sort of constitutes and drives the whole setting, but also maybe the manner of singing as such, the manner of making music.

Asking for some clarifying distinctions, D responded as follows:

D: To what extent it is the music itself? How much concerns the text and the action in opera for example? Or is it the external context?

The tendency among the participants to ask for such distinctions, or to articulate them and building on them in their responses, was evident from the start and recurring throughout the interviews. The conversations were at their most fluent and accentuated, and statements generated most approval by the other participants, when such distinctions were either stated as opinions, talked about directly or implied in what was discussed.

In the end, this recurring tendency led me to a firmer awareness of the necessity of *difference* and *distinction*, not only *integration*, between myself and singing, between sound and word, and of the possibilities and limitations concerning dynamics of *reference* in singing. Yet, at this point, I tried to avoid too strong distinctions in order to steer way from a discussion based rigidly on dichotomies of lyrics vs. music, plot vs. sound etc. Discussing the Mozart-arias I had performed, *Un aura amorosa* and *Il mio tesoro*, in which the lyrics were, respectively, about love and revenge, I gave my explanation of the intentions of the project another try:

I: I'm unable to distinguish between all those things [that D asked for distinctions on]. They have become a chaotic unity, which is at the same time quite clean and simple. Perhaps especially in the way classical or opera singing relates to this [the distinction of words and tones], the distinction is not so obvious, as for example in hip hop or other types of song. And that is both a plus and a challenge in terms of what the song is about, what is happening. You could say that this opera aria is about this and that, and someone must die, and someone must be avenged. But I think very often that is not what the audience finds significant while this is being sung. What is important and what gives meaning to people when something is sung in that way, perhaps far away on the stage, has more to do with connection, and power, care. Is what I've been thinking. But it could be completely wrong.

I was aware that I was pushing the limits here in terms of setting narrow guidelines for how the performance might be talked about. I found it necessary to make such a fundamental proposition clear on my behalf. At the same time, I tried to avoid any pressure towards consensus, opting only to facilitate that the proposition could be discussed openly, and possibly rejected by the participants. I was cautious to stress that this was my opinion, and that I was interested in what they were thinking:

I: I am presenting a bit of the concept here, but that is because many seem to think that it is a bit strange, the approach that I have chosen. So that's why I explained a little at the start. It was not to add further leads to the conversation. What I'm interested in is to get hold of how you would describe your experience of this and what you think about it.

D finds that the notion of ethics and a performance of power resonates with her experience as a concertgoer:

D: Yes, in a way it resonates, or there is something to it. At the same time as you have the context of opera, it is the music that is an experience that gives you a violent, almost like an existential joy, right? It touches very close to the heart, and this perhaps means that you get into the innermost... it's linked to the innermost values. And it also creates a community. [...] And some of those [Mozart] operas were a protest against power. But what values did they convey? And do they convey something else, do we receive something different today than they did? Well, there are many questions that came up.

D asserts that many questions arise from discussing music and singing in terms of ethics. This was what I was opting for in the initial stages of the interviews, not decisive opinions, but rather to open up ways of thinking and talking about the performances. I find that the main issues present in the questions raised by D, are implied by the term "convey": It runs straight to the core of a problematization of the distinction and integration between singer and the experience generated by singing, the distinction and integration song and reality, the distinction and integration of word and sound, and the dynamics of reference in singing.

The following sections 4.1.3–4.1.9 develop different aspects of distinction and integration of reality, ethics, and singing performance, towards modification of the hypothesis of ethical demand.

### 4.1.3 Towards Modification: Honesty in Song and Body Language

In Group 1 there emerged an emphasis on body language just as much as on my voice and singing. More so than about the way I sang as such, the participants talked extensively and freely about how they experienced the way I stood, how I held my arms, where I was looking, whether I closed my eyes and whether they could see my eyes. For instance, this was the case concerning the last song of concert 2, which was an improvisation – both planned and due to forgetting the lyrics – over the traditional Norwegian lullaby *Gjendines bådnlåt*. I sang two verses of the lullaby, and improvised some of the lyrics as I forgot the original words. The pianist and I took our time, the pianist improvising over elements from *Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen* from *Dichterliebe* between the verses:

Baby is laid down in the cradle,  
sometimes crying and sometimes laughing.  
Baby is laid down in the cradle,  
sometimes crying and sometimes laughing.  
Sleep now, sleep now, in Jesus' name.  
Jesus safekeep the child.

*Piano improvisation over Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen from Dichterliebe*

My mother sat me on her lap,  
dancing with me back and forth.  
My father sat me on his lap,  
dancing with me back and forth.  
Dance so, with the little ones, dance so,  
thus shall the baby dance.

Improvising this so that the lyrics were also about the father doing the same as the mother, made me sorrowful, as I could not remember any of my own parents ever playing or dancing with me in the manner that I find the song suggests. For me personally, it was as if the lyrics, when sung, made possible a statement that combined different times and lives and tensions of the verb “dance”. Stating the “thus shall” of a reality that was passed and had not been as I was stating that it should be, combined with the fact that I did not need to mobilize more than just a fraction of muscle activity, and therefore stood completely relaxed, merged the statement of the imperative, with my own past and with the future of what was now my responsibility as a father.

However, this was me and my sentiments. What was commented on by S was not on the impact of the lyrics on the performance as a distinct dynamic, but on how I stood and carried myself during this song, contrasting it with what I had sung previously in the concert (Wagner, Mozart, Händel and Schumann):

S: I felt now that I was sitting and breathing with you. You're calm as you stand there without doing anything, like "here I am, it's at the end of a concert, I've given all that I've got", and then this thing just comes along. I feel that I [puts hands to the chest, exhales] sink into the chair really well.

When I reply with a reference to technique, S responds abruptly:

I: Yes, that's completely different, it was falsetto in a way, that last bit there. For me it was nice, there wasn't much more to give.

S: No, but the fact that it was nice for you, then it kind of became nice for me.

S connects a sense of pleasure or calm that she experiences in my singing to her own breathing, her own body, how she sits in her chair while we listen to the video recording and continue the dialogue during the interview.

Focusing on my hands, S finds that I tend to close myself up while singing, more so in the opera arias than in *Gjendines bådnlåt*, specially in the Wagner aria *Mit Gewitter und Sturm*, with the lively and somewhat *Helden*-character in melody and lyrics:

Mit Gewitter und Sturm aus fernem Meer  
mein Mädal, bin dir nah!  
Über turmhohe Flut vom Süden her -  
Mein Mädal, ich bin da!  
Mein Mädal, wenn nich Südwind wär',  
ich nimmer wohl käm' zu dir!  
Ach, lieber Südwind, blas' noch mehr!  
Mein Mädal verlangt nach mir!  
Hohojo! Hallohoho Jollohohoho!

Von des Südens Gestad', aus weitem Land -

Here, as well, I forgot the lyrics, raised my arm and waited for what seemed like ages to remember what came next:

ich hab' an dich gedacht!  
Durch Gewitter und Meer vom Mohrenstrand  
hab' dir was mitgebracht.  
Mein Mädal, preis' den Südwind hoch,  
ich bring' dir ein gülden Band;  
Ach, lieber Südwind, blase doch!  
Mein Mädal hätt' gern den Tand.  
Hohojo! Hallohoho Jollohohoho!

Commenting on the performance of the aria, again comparing it with *Gjendines bådnlåt*, S prefers the latter, not because of the way I sing, but due to what happens in terms of my body language:

I: What is happening or what does it make you feel when I stand with my hands like that [collected in front of me]?

S: That you actually have a lot to show, but you hold it back.

Even though the Wagner-aria was sung at the top of my lungs, S finds that the way I carry myself during the lullaby at the end of the concert shows more, even though I sing very softly, verging on the inaudible. This might indicate that the presumably very expressive sound and way of singing, and the way I carry myself in the Wagner aria covers or hides something essential which ought to be shown and issued from me towards S. I find that this is not simply a case of *less is more* in terms of sound, although the lullaby can be interpreted as a classic case of just that. What S addresses here, and the way the dialogue unfolds above, seems to relate to much more than volume or relaxed technique as such. As S finds me to be holding something back, either voluntary or involuntarily, it makes her feel something both within herself, and about me, making assumptions about me that has to do with what I am doing in relation to her.

What happens on my part during the Wagner-aria is that I am nervous, I engage lots of muscles which perhaps cause me to tighten up a bit, holding my hands rather stiffly in front of me, especially during the seconds that I try to remember the lyrics. Some of that muscle activity is necessary, and personally I like the position of the hands. But at this point it is not something I feel I can choose to have or leave out as I like. In terms of how I was conceiving “singing as ethical demand” when this concert was performed, the body language represents a form of acknowledging and even showing the challenges both in terms of technique, emotional and physical costs and, in a way, the call to bravery, which such an aria presents the singer with. At this point in the process of interviewing and analysis, I thought of this showing of

challenges as a form of on-stage honesty, providing what I figured might be a more direct access to the reality of the situation, both for me as a singer and for the audience: the ethics of the situation in terms of the exposure of general human conditions of trust, interdependence, vulnerability and power.

However, this became one of the major points of development and modification: to sing reality in terms of ethics and raw display of humanity, is not the same as just to show what is or what goes on through singing, even though what is and what goes on can be interpreted as constituting an ethically charged reality in which I trust the audience with my vulnerability. Such an act of trust does not represent the full extent, nor the best way, to be honest on stage. It is not what the notion of singing reality must entail if it is to make sense to the audience. It comes across as holding back.

Similarly, in a discussion on what effect it has on the audience when singers close their eyes, as a form of protection and way to handle insecurity, which is then visible to the audience, F points to his own experience as a performer, addressing the risks of shutting the audience out. The following dialogue between F and P ensued:

F: You must balance it very carefully. Suddenly your bubble doesn't embrace everyone, just yourself. [...] I think many are waiting for a sense of security, so that they can open their eyes and...

P: What do you mean? Are they insecure?

F: Yes, a little...

P: The singers?

F: Yes, a little insecure.

P: Yes, but then they are not ready to be singers.

F: Hmmm. Well, but they...

Implicit in F's argument is the conception that closing one's eyes can be a "bubble that embraces" the audience, but that it is a difficult balancing act. To manage it, performers must obtain a sense of security or confidence, in order to freely open their eyes and take part in the relation toward the audience. P finds the lack of such a security to be incompatible with being a singer.

These two opinions can be seen along the same lines as what I address above, with F tending (at this point) more to the notion which I (also at this point) have of an honest singer addressing and showing reality as it is, although hoping for it to change with the arrival of more confidence, and with P wanting something else, something more ready and finished, and which has less to do with the inner struggles of the singer, or at least not reduceable to that.

#### 4.1.4 Towards Modification: Meeting and Giving by Conveying

Group 1 also focused on what was happening as I entered the room and started the concert, and especially when I started again after the pause in concert 2, which was with the above-mentioned Wagner aria.

S: When you enter as a private person, the step towards conveying something becomes bigger. That is basic Music Academy knowledge, to acknowledge the audience when you enter the room, to come in and show...

I: I entered showing my back instead?

S: Yes, and wiped your nose a little. It is important to recognize that there is someone sitting here who has come to listen to me and listen to a concert, and here I am to convey. Then you kind of get into it easier, into what you're going to sing.

P: I think this was very well put. You can of course be yourself, but there is something about how you carry yourself when you walk in and how you receive the audience without words, which they will register. And it cannot be as if you just stroll in or apologize or anything like that. You must somehow meet the audience.

I interpret this as another finding of an empirical consequence of ethical implications in singing: the unspoken expectation that one must meet the audience. That is expected, it is an obligation and demand. It can be achieved in many ways. But the fact that the concert is experienced as constituting a demand which must be met in an active and explicit manner, is clearly expressed in this section.

If the demand is not met, an element of annoyance occurs for the audience. P and S articulate this in the following, during another thematization of the singer's obligation to keep the eyes open during performance. The participants in the group find it difficult to recognize my gaze or point of visual focus during the opera recital, prompting them to refer to experiences from other concerts where this has happened.



S: Not only is it disturbing, but it's also annoying.

I: Why is it annoying?

S: Because you sing for yourself. Give it to me.

P: Exactly, exactly. And it is said, isn't it, that the eyes are the mirror of the soul, and those eyes are supposed to convey the content of the song.

I know I am pushing it here and become irritated with myself as I hear my own question. I get the feeling that what I ask about is experienced as rather obvious, and I find it obvious too. But as the interviewer I feel I must ask directly in order to obtain or not obtain the empirical consequence of what is at stake in the performative setting: What becomes clear here is that I cannot sing in a manner that is experienced as if singing for myself during a concert, no matter the reasons for doing so. If I sing in a manner that is experienced as singing for myself, the demand that the singing event constitutes is not met, because the expectation is that singing ought to be directed towards the audience, and experienced as such. This indicates that singing is experienced as ethically charged by the audience.

Even though the passage above concerns the eyes, the irritation is also directly related to voice. As S points out, closed eyes might give the impression that the singer sings to her-/himself, not "giving it" to her. For me, the demand that something ought to be given, and that this giving has to do with meeting the ethical demand issued from the interaction of the event, led to a new insight concerning the concept of *conveying* something in singing. In line with what I discussed above – that my initial notion of 'to sing reality' had led to a false sense of constituting and exposing honesty as an ethical implication of the singing event – I had also developed a skepticism concerning the concept of conveying something through singing, in terms of 'something else' and external to the reality of the performance.

That something is or needs to be conveyed in song or through song, might seem self-evident in terms of analysing what constitutes a singing event. But I was interested in how the act of singing addresses and constitutes something, rather than conveys any presumed distinct meaning or plot or story of the particular song, often identified in or conceived of as represented by lyrics. Instead of relating singing to reality, I had found the concept of conveying often bluntly dualistic, adhering more to notions of aloof aesthetics detached from reality, whereby music is to be enjoyed with sublime disinterestedness.

Up until now I had been conceptualizing singing as conveying first and foremost the reality it constitutes as performative interaction in the exposure of the singer's humanity through the use of voice. It now started to become clear that this sense of singing reality was not enough, and indeed contra-productive in terms of my wish to addressing an ethical-political reality. Instead it resulted in, as S points out, a «holding back» of what I had, not «giving it». Therefore, the concept of conveying presented itself to me as a revitalized demand: even though I and my voice were always immersed in the reality that unfolded in the concert, and perhaps even might be interpreted as constituting this reality and its intersubjective relations in messy and blurring ways, something had to become clearer as a giving, as a dynamic from me towards reality and towards the audience. This had to occur as happening across something, not only as immersed in it, which was experienced as a holding back, and therefore also preventing the experience of the urgency of song, let alone the potential for tilting the audience in any particular direction, as F had made me rediscover was a core issue for me (Section 3.2.2 and 4.1.12 below).

Based on this development, I find that the act of *conveying* to some extent coincides with the issue of *referring*, which I find lies at the heart of the thematic and methodological development in this thesis. It comes down to a question of a belief in the transcendental ability of utterance, of stating something about the world, be it what the song is “about” or the reality that unfolds, through sound, issuing from the singer across to the audience, prompted by the demand to give in the meeting with the audience. The singing had to be about something, not only about itself if it were to give something. The conveying of something through song was intertwined with and indiscernible from the addressing and constitution of reality – even though this conveying was also a conveying of something distinct from the intersubjective reality of the singing event. Conveying was both external from the reality of singing, and intrinsic to it. If I did not opt to convey something, this was experienced as too passive, not “giving”, i.e. what I would understand as addressing and constituting reality.

Consequently, this belief in the possibility of referring to reality through song, even though immersed in and constituting the reality referred to, concerned both singing and words, that is, the words of this thesis. This development in the interviews and the performances also caused a methodological reorientation concerning the concept of performativity and text: from opting for textual characteristics in the thesis that might somehow be a continuation of the musical performances by specific means that might evolve by the text being based on music performance, I found this to be futile, since I had encountered an empirical basis on which to argue that words were *already* musicalized in the act of conveying.

#### 4.1.5 Towards Modification: Shared Room as facilitating Meeting with Sound, Body and Symbolic Meaning

The acuteness of body language and the physical presence of both the performer and the audience, became an even more important topic due to the circumstances caused by Covid-19. Some of the participants could only watch the video recording of the concerts. The situation presented the groups with the possibility of discussing the act of singing from different perspectives, dependent on whether or not they had been present in the room. F found that for him, the expressiveness and sense of community during a concert of classical music seemed difficult to capture in a video recording:

F: For me it is even more important when it is classical music that you are in a room. The room becomes very important in classical music. I noticed that the distance [watching the video recording] was very long. Being there as an audience is also a collective thing, which you can sense from the stage as well. If suddenly many people get the same feeling, then there is something about the atmosphere that shapes the concert. And you only get that very indirectly [through the video recording].

F furthers his argumentation on being in the same room during the performance of classical music, focusing on how acoustics and the physical sensation of sound differ from when the music is amplified through microphones and speakers:

F: The thing with the acoustics is that classical music has so much natural volume, and that bodily feeling of it became very distant. I've seen a few corona concerts during this period, but no classical ones. It struck me that maybe I needed to be there even more during classical concerts.

F addresses here the room as vital for the experience of the sound of the voice in classical music, as this sound is a constitutive premise for the concert as a public event generating a collective atmosphere and bodily feeling shaping the concert. The recorded sound was experienced as more distant than in "corona concerts" with other kinds of music, causing the bodily feeling of the sound to become comparatively distant.

P addresses some of the same issues concerning the lack of physical effect when watching video recordings:

P: The physical effect that the sound has on the body matters. I never really bother to watch opera on TV or at the cinema, because there is so much that is lost, even if it's like The Met and great hi-fi sound. It's not the same.

Discussing the opera recital, P firmly states that the physical effect of sound on the body means something. This is not to say that this statement by P contradicts his other opinions concerning the necessity of words for there to be a meaning that can be articulated. But what P addresses as lost when simply watching a concert on a screen, can be interpreted as the real meeting, not only with a person and a body, but a meeting with sound. Both P and F talked about aspects concerning intonation and sound that had bothered them when watching the recording, but which S, who was present in the audience during the concert, had not noticed then and there:

P: When you and I are in the same room when you sing, you send a lot of energy to me. This might sound esoteric, but it's not meant that way. The physical aspect of the concert is extremely important. It gives a lot of energy to the listener which is lost on screen. And then those factors that did not matter for S live at the concert, they become greater, because you lose the physical. You are met by the sound in a completely different way.

According to this statement, and even though P often distinctly separates lyrics from sound, and the conveying of the meaning of a song from the constituting of the singing event, here the sound means something and constitutes something, a meeting, which becomes perhaps more obvious when it is *not* there, watching and listening to the video recording.

This therefore is also a finding of an empirical consequence: the sound, not only in terms of a singer giving sound to lyrics, but sound as such, constitutes a meeting, which means something, and which by the definition of ethics applied in this analysis, is of an ethically charged nature, issuing and *ought* from the *is* of the encountered other. Sound, presumably purely semiotic, means something that has ethical implications.

#### 4.1.6 Towards Modification: Voice, Person, Power/Influence

In Group 2, body language and bodily presence was given less focus than in Group 1. The participants talked more about the music, the singing and voice as such.

Addressing the fact that in the concert 2 there were two performers, the pianist and me, H comments on the impression she had that even though the pianist had her own solo pieces,

the concert seemed to be more *my* concert than a shared concert. H states that this was partly because I talked more with the audience between the pieces, but also because she experiences the one who sings as «more exposed»:

H: It became “your concert”. I’ve been to very few concerts like that, but I think that has something to do with the fact that the person who sings will always be more exposed.

I: Why is that?

H: It’s because it is..., the voice is more personal.

In H’s response, the link between the person who sings and the voice tends towards identification in terms of how she experiences them over against herself. The singer is “more exposed” than an instrumentalist, because the voice is “more personal”. Therefore, the singer is experienced as exposing more of him- or herself in the performance. Interpreted within the framework of ethics in this thesis, such an exposure is essential to the ethical demand, as it presents the audience with the person of the singer, or in Løgstrupian terms, the life of the singer is put in the hands of the audience. As I step out of myself through my voice, I exist in the voiced relationship, and the exposure lies in the fact that the sound can be declined or ignored, which means that it is I who is ignored, as far as it is I who have made the overture in and through my voice (cf. Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 14–15).

It is this exposure in being delivered over to one another through dynamics of interdependence, that makes Løgstrup speak of how we are always and in advance in the power of the person(s) with whom we associate (pp. 53–54). Presented with the themes of the project, and taking first and foremost the voice as point of departure for the discussion, Group 2 developed strands of thinking concerning what sort of power a singer has or performs:

D: The voice you have..., the singer who stands in front of the audience..., represents himself, but at the same time a whole musical treasure and tradition through the individual voice. It contains so much. Instead of political power and such that you [I] talked about, this is a kind of alternative power or influence that gives an alternative, more like aesthetics, which gives something else than the political powers. It is something which gives life a different dimension than just discussing politics. The voice has this alternative power.

Here D articulates the contrasting experiences of a voice that “contains so much”. The voice represents a person here and now as the singer represents her-/himself with the voice. But at the same time, through this individual sound, what is represented is also a musical tradition, and a form of power that D regards as different from what operates in mundane politics, an “alternative” power of “influence”, characterized as what D labels “aesthetical”, giving life “another dimension”.

M picks up on the notion of power discussed by D:

M: It's strange to call it power, I would rather think of it as a power of influence. If you grow up with parents who talk nicely to each other, those voices will always be with you. But if you grow up with those who argue, then they will also always be with you. You are shaped by what you experience through voices [...] because a voice is much closer than an instrument. A violin – then you have an arm in between. But if I'm sad and upset – then you listen to the voice, right? So, it's more difficult to be a singer.

The general takeaway is that the voice is experienced as exposing the person more than what is the case when playing an external instrument, and that this exposing is directly related to a form of performance of power or ability to influence the lives and future development of people, starting already from childhood.

#### 4.1.7 Towards Modification: Sense of Voice (-technique) and sensing one's Children with the Voice

After watching excerpts of the video recording of *Kindertotenlieder* together with Group 2, the conversation touched upon different experiences the participants had both upon watching it for themselves and together in the interview session. I then chose to address an experience I had that devolved in preparing for the concert as well as during the performance of a connection between voice-technique or sense of voice, and fatherhood. This experience was not very clear or defined to me but made a significant impact on me during the rehearsal period as well as during the performance. I was thinking a lot about my children, and as I was singing both during rehearsals and in concert, the best way to describe the experience of my use of voice was that it was almost like *sensing* them as I sang with the voice, both their physical being and their lives, as well as the radical responsibility I have for them and the fear for their wellbeing. In the days following the concerts these feelings stuck with me and developed each time I watched the recording. They could be triggered by the rhythm of my breathing when I was walking or doing things completely unrelated to the songs, but first

and foremost when I was alone and away from my children. These were feelings akin to a bad conscience, a constant reminder of their vulnerability and mortality, and even of a sense that I was actively exposing them to a threat both by singing these songs and using my voice, but also simply by being their father.

*Kindertotenlieder* is often done by a lower voice, a bass or alto. The score used in this production was therefore a transposed version for higher voice, and was arranged for chamber orchestra, not the full orchestra that gives a strong, swelling backing to the singer, but a smaller group of instrumentalists, playing without a conductor. I had not come across any recordings made by a tenor or soprano, and watching or hearing the conventional recordings of this work, I often get the feeling that the singer, i.e., the mezzo/alto or baritone/bass, rests upon a kind of given, self-explanatory, and implicit motherly or fatherly sound, dark and calm and grounded, confident even in the desperate passages.

Prior to the concerts, much of the preparatory work consisted in finding a way to sing the songs when such an innate givenness or self-confidence of fatherhood was not represented in a conventional way by my voice. On the one hand these were technical preparations, because an original composition is almost always best suited to its original type of voice, its tessitura and natural ways of accessing the tones of the melody. But first and foremost, the preparatory and performative work consisted in finding ways into the theme of the songs that could make it a music that I could sing, despite the convention of the calm and confident mother or father sound, and also despite the – I find, thematically related – often released or redeemed sensation that is put forth towards the end of the last song, a notion of turning the children into the hands of God, a convention both musical, cultural, and theological, which I find that I cannot accept.

I think that these were the reasons why an experience occurred both pre-, during and post performance of a connection between singing technique and parenting, especially with song 3 and 5. In song 3, the lyrics are as follows:

Wenn dein Mütterlein  
tritt zur Tür herein,  
und den Kopf ich drehe,  
ihr entgegen sehe,  
fällt auf ihr Gesicht  
erst der Blick mir nicht,  
sondern auf die Stelle,  
näher nach der Schwelle,

dort, wo würde dein lieb Gesichten sein,  
wenn du freudenhelle  
trätest mit herein,  
wie sonst, mein Töchterlein.

Wenn dein Mütterlein  
tritt zur Tür herein,  
mit der Kerze Schimmer,  
ist es mir, als immer  
kämst du mit herein,  
huschtest hinterdrein,  
als wie sonst ins Zimmer!  
O du, des Vaters Zelle,  
ach, zu schnelle,  
zu schnell erlosch 'ner Freudenschein!

To sing this and at the same time to concentrate technically on some of the high notes, I found to be a strange and complex combination. One element is about the daughter's death, the sorrow and fear denoted in the lyrics; another is the melody and the orchestration; yet another is my own feelings, memories and images of my children; my identity and self-evaluation of me as a father; yet another are the connections between being a father and the use of voice when talking with or singing to my children, or when I have raised it in impatience, stress or anger. But what made it strange and verging on slightly embarrassing to talk about, was that in this mix of different aspects at play simultaneously in the performance, was also something that can easily be interpreted as comical, self-absorbed, generic tenor issues concerning the tessitura and fear of sounding strained or even cracking. And yet all these elements connect here, I think through a feeling of bad conscience, shame and even guilt.

This connection develops even further in song 5, when the father sings that he should not have sent the children out into the storm. It starts violently in the orchestra, only to increase throughout the song, in jerks and throws both in instruments and in the melody of the voice. The children are carried out of the house, into the storm. Sometimes the father sings that he could not do anything, he just had to let them be carried out. But then he also sings that he should never let them out, implying that he could have prevented it, but did not.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,  
Nie hätt' ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus.  
Man hat sie getragen hinaus,



Ich durfte nichts dazu sagen!

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus,  
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus,  
Ich fürchtete sie erkranken;  
das sind nun eitle Gedanken.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus,  
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus;  
Ich sorgte, sie stürben morgen;  
das ist nun nicht zu besorgen.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus,  
nie hätt' ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus!  
Man hat sie hinaus getragen,  
ich durfte nichts dazu sagen!

The self-accusation of the father recurs through the song's hammering character, with outbursts and unpredictable throws and twists. This way the self-accusation develops from the fact that I should have prevented the children's death, towards something even worse. The singing does something with my body and my voice which approaches the experience of being aggressive and brutal: that what I sing *is* violence, constituted by my voice, causing the death of children.<sup>27</sup>

Towards the end of the song the orchestra calms down, and the melody becomes more legato and softer over what is tending towards a more predictable chord progression in the orchestra. And it is at this point it is easy to sing the ending as a reconciliation and redemption, as if the father sings that all will be well with the following lyrics:

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus, in diesem Braus,  
sie ruh'n, sie ruh'n als wie in der Mutter Haus.

Von keinem Sturm erschreckt, von Gottes Hand bedeckt.  
sie ruh'n wie in der Mutter Haus.

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27 For a further discussion of the singer's violence as something that can be interpreted as having caused the death of the children, see Nussbaum, 2008, p. 289. In my article *Sang som negasjon og påstand. Å synge 'Dette er ikke' ved å synge 'Dette er'* (Gillebo, 2022) I build on Nussbaum's thinking and develop this theme as an example of how singing can be an act of criticizing what one sings about (Gillebo, 2022. In Holm & Varkøy 2022). Part of the analysis here and the discussion in Chapter 5 concerning this song, builds on elements in this article.

Singing that something horrible is happening to the children, and that I am not doing anything, that I could have done something different, reminds me of my own shortcomings and betrayal as a parent. To me, *Kindertotenlieder* shows the absoluteness of parental responsibility, a responsibility that transcends all boundaries, including death, made clear by the fact that the everyday responsibility for where the children are, how they are, if they get cold in the storm, does not disappear even if they are dead. It continues, in the addressing of the children, which becomes like an appeal to the children, across death, as if to comfort them, even if I do not accept the conditions that sustains the comfort.

In the recording I sing the end with a steady voice, as the melody is finally more legato and predictable, supported and approached in the chord progression by an equally calm and predictable orchestra. But this predictability and calmness, with lyrics that I find both address the children and are about them, is in my opinion no reconciliation. Nothing is accepted. The song shows to the extreme that lyrics in song need not, and in this case, should not, be taken at face value. To sing that the children calm down, to claim that they are protected by God's hand, and rest as in their mother's house, that is, as in the womb, I find is also to give voice to protest, that it ought not to be so.

In a way, I find that I must sing it like a conventional reconciliation, at least to some extent. I have never lost a child. Therefore, my dismissal of reconciliation as cultural, religious and musical convention and cliché can come across as immature and slightly stubborn or heroic pathetic. But watching the recording, I see and hear that what I sing is at least not only a reconciliation. If it is there, it is there simultaneously with my negation of it.

I sing these songs while thinking about who and how I am as a dad to my children; what my children are to me; how they are in the world independent of me, when they are alone, in kindergarten or at school; what I fail at as a parent; things I regret, such as becoming tired of or angry at them; things I feel have been lost, periods of time which are over. These are things pertaining both to being a parent, as well as to what is activated when entering into that role in the concert. While I sing the songs, I think about and sense my children, see them before me, sense the way I talk to them, and about them, the way I sing to them, with the same voice that I sing the songs.

In this manner, as a matter of private, performative experience for me, which I hear and see in the recording, the performance is driven by a strong connection between my own voice, my experiences and worries as a father, and my sensing my own children, even though they were not at the concert. In the recording I can see what goes on with me. I not only sing the role but take on the guilt and responsibility I sing about.

My experiences during the performance, and my analysis of it, are obviously influenced both by my interest in theory on the semiotic and symbolic function of the voice, and probably also by my background as a theologian and studies concerning logics of sacrifices and scapegoating as a premise for redemption and atonement.<sup>28</sup> As a result, I sang the songs with a slightly involuntary morbid, forced feeling and interpretation that the songs might also express a Western, Christian-Judaic notion that the children are sacrificed for the sake of the father, and further that my feelings of guilt could be ascribed to the fact that I have spent much of my children's childhood away with work, for reasons of ambition verging on selfishness, ambition, even then and there as I sang these songs.

Though private and to some extent embarrassing, I chose to share and ask about this complex experience in the interview with Group 2. It developed into a discussion on the connection between voice-crack and sense of worthlessness towards the audience, and voice-crack and sense of guilt and inadequacy towards my own children. Aware that these were my own, private experiences that I was inquiring the group about, I asked whether these personal matters resulted in a too introvert expression. D objects, and addresses instead the connection between what I revealed as a fear of voice-crack and the experience she has of a sense of fragility in the poem, the music, and the performance:

D: I don't think you were too preoccupied inside yourself. It's interesting to hear it afterwards, when you tell us about the high tessitura. The tragedy that is happening and that you had a fear that the voice might crack – perhaps that added an extra vulnerability or a fragile tone to the song, because the poem is exactly at that point of intersection emotionally. And it was so interesting in relation to the instrumentation. That it was thinner perhaps made this fragility appear. That was the feeling I got when I listened to it, felt it. It's very fragile. The voice was fantastic, but the feeling that this could crack, the experience that it is so tragic that it is at the breaking point, came closer.

Sensing the danger that I might have presented too much of a guidance for the conversation, I reply:

I: I'm not trying to put words in your mouth about that, I just thought I might as well be honest about the fact that it was a bit like that for me, at certain points. And ask what effect it might have had on your experience.

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28 This connotes the connection Kristeva makes between enunciation, the artist and the archaic scapegoat, on art as a kind of murder, representing mimetically the constitution of social order and symbolic language (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 70, 75–79), see Chapter 5.

I wanted to put this issue out there to be discussed, even though I knew that this might influence the responses. I did not want the participants to agree, but to make use of my own experience both during the concert and during reviewing the recording in the interview, as a basis for discussion.

Both H and M reply that they had not heard or thought about what I address:

H: I haven't heard much Mahler, so I just think that it was beautiful, and then it was quite like, I guess I felt that you were trying to convey something, but I never felt that it was like, "oh, now he's on the verge of". Maybe it would have been different if I'd been there. Then I'd have been more in that mode with all these kids of his that died. I don't think I really allowed myself to go there, because I've reached an age where I'm so incredibly easily touched. You asked if I, as a mother of small children, if I thought on my son and such, but I did not.

Corresponding with the fact that these connections were not very clear or defined to me during performance, and that the dialogical process of the interview conversation is also part of the analytical process, M states that this is «a metaphor which you reached now»:

M: It was a metaphor or in a way a picture of the whole thing that you reached now. And it's brilliant, that the voice almost cracks, because it's far too much, too heavy and difficult, what's being performed. It resonates in your voice. I understand it, when you explain it, then I see it. But I didn't hear it, I only hear that you manage the high notes.

M states that she likes the metaphor I have suggested, interpreting it as caused by «it all becomes too much», too heavy and difficult, that what is performed resonates in the voice. But she also states that this was not something she heard or had thought about.

In other words: this was me and my issues, staying with me during the performance, and did not come across as a shared experience.

What went on during the performance for me was the development of a sense of responding to something issued by the dead children, or by my own children, or by the human condition of mortality; a participation in and addressing of this condition by singing these songs as an appeal to the audience, by exposing the instability of voice sound as a dynamic of the semiotic and symbolic, in order to sing the seemingly reconciling lyrics of the ending as protest and negation of what I find to be unacceptable and wrong, and at the same time sing

it as a comfort to the dead children, stating the lyrics as something good for them, as a form of parental obligation to take care of them.

But based on the statements of the participants, my sense of responding to and participating in an ethical demand constituted by the singing event were not experienced as such in ways that can be traced in what their statements. Of course, my intention was not that these issues would show or be heard and received directly as such. But I might have had some form of anticipation that the exposure of instability of meaning in and through my voice would be amplified by these dynamics as central to my interpretation of the songs and of the situation of the concert. Maybe they did, but all I know is that this was what I did, it was generated by a sense of voice (-technique) and sensing my own children with my voice, and then something came across which was experienced as something else.

#### 4.1.8 Towards Modification: Sense of Community between me and the Musicians and between me and the Audience

The sense of fragility addressed by D concerning the orchestration, sound, and voice in *Kindertotenlieder*, was talked about in a similar fashion by F in Group 1, relating the fragility to the musical expression and communicative interaction between the instrumentalists and me:

F: I saw that several of them looked at you as well, quite a lot, turned to you, it was very intimate and a bit fragile. I really enjoyed it.

I: Fragile, in what manner?

F: It was nice that it was not so precise collective ins and outs of phrases, as when there is a conductor. The sound was so good. It kind of softened, there was initiative, but a bit cautious, and it sometimes seemed like they were waiting. It was cool to see that in classical music someone relates to the singer like that.

Here F addresses a connection between fragility and how the musicians and I related musically to each other during the performance, in terms of waiting and initiative, resulting in a less precise or unified phrasing, and what he senses as a «softness» in the expression.

S also speaks about the contact between me and the orchestra, and sees it as generated by how the orchestra encircled me as I sang:

S: You would have been part of it all if you had stood in front of them also, but now you became part of it in another way. I liked it, and for that music too, that you had them close and they had you close, it really created contact.

Discussing the opera recital in terms of its capacity for creating a sense of community and relations, the conversation in Group 2 focused on how an experience of community during concerts, or the lack thereof, depends on factors other than the interaction between performers, such as how the performance is perceived by the audience, what is sung at what point in the program, and whether one as a concert-goer knows anybody else in the audience:

D: A shared feeling becomes stronger during the concert when you listen to several works and enjoy it, maybe sometimes also suffer through it. It creates a sense of community. At the very end you could sing *Gjendine's lullaby* which then became even more intimate because you had come closer and closer throughout the concert.

M recognized this sense of community in the opera recital, emphasizing that meeting other people had been impossible for a long time, which made the physical aspect of the meeting much more apparent:

M: When it all stopped [due to Covid 19] and everyone sat at home listening to some Italian support concert for the hospital in Bergamo, it was so strange. Because it was worldwide and at the same time incredibly remote, because the social element was not there. But that came back in your concert, that there is actually a meeting then and there between people. Until that moment many had only stayed at home without anything nice to do. So, the song is so much more than communication, it is community, and the feeling of belonging and being involved in something, and then it becomes much more.

M articulates how the physical presence in a concert with performers and audience, is what constitutes the meeting between them, and between the audience as such, generating a real sense of belonging. Then the song “becomes much more”, it becomes community and involvement. D responds to M by connecting the community to the enjoyment of the music:

D: You share something good. If it were thoughts or ideas that you don't like, then you wouldn't be able to enjoy it, then that sense of community would not become stronger through the concert. But the whole thing of being there, and you convey something good, peaceful, or friendly, then that maybe is also good for you as part of the audience.

D connects enjoying or disliking something of a cognitive or aesthetic character, to the increase or decrease in sense of community, peacefulness and friendliness. When what is conveyed musically is “good”, then that may be good for the audience in terms of belonging to a community. M points out that a shared sense of community, is something that one carries with oneself after the concert:

M: You carry it with you. You have been with someone and heard something great and share that with maybe friends and acquaintances.

Similarly, D accentuates if one liked the concert, then the experience «lives on for a long time»:

D: It’s something that you take with you and can live on for a long time if it is a great experience.

H attended the concert alone and without knowing anyone, and repeatedly states during the interviews that she is not «that into» classical music. When the group discusses the sense of community, she initially says that she is a little unsure if she understands what D and M are talking about. Immediately after, however, she makes an interesting point concerning how a sense of community can occur even if you go to a concert by yourself:

H: I’m a bit unsure if I understand what you mean. I think I understand, but it’s a bit like, I’ve always felt ripped off when the band doesn’t say anything, just play. After all, you are at a concert for a sense of community, even though you may be there alone. You want to hear the music, but you also want that in-between the music.

H puts listening to music into a social context, which is there regardless of whether you are at a concert alone or with someone you know. The event is not created solely by the music, and it demands something of the performers in terms of appealing to and approaching the audience. H had cycled to the concert in rainy weather and knew no one. Since H was the only one in the group who was present during the concert (the others saw it on video recording only), I find the following quote important in terms of understanding the socially charged setting of performance:

H: Seeing and hearing something makes it more exclusive than if you found some melodies and songs and arias on the internet.

I: Which doesn’t emerge, in your experience, through the music alone? There must be something that “wraps around” it or a kind of facilitation of it?

H: Yes, if there is going to be a concert, you have to actively make the choice that “now I’m going to walk or cycle or take the subway,” or “now I’m going to spend my time on something.” Then there is the expectation that you are part of something bigger which you are not when you just listen to music at home. You are part of something bigger, something more than the music.

H claims that by going to a concert you make an active choice with an expectation of being part of something bigger and more than the music. The sense of community does not arise from the music alone. It generates within a context in which the music is important, but not capable in and of itself to constitute or encompass the whole reality of the event.

#### 4.1.9 Towards Modification: What actually happens and the Recognition of oneself/one’s Life in me/my Performance

In the interviews after the last concert with *Kindertotenlieder* I was more familiar with the groups, and found it easier to ask direct questions to the participants concerning what they experienced as going on when I sang and what the situation between us was about. This resulted in quite direct and personal passages of conversation. After watching the last song, *In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus*, the following dialogue ensues in Group 2, which for purpose of the narrative and dialogical structure of the analysis is included more or less in its entirety:

I: What do you feel is happening here towards the very end?

D: Are you thinking about the presentation or the content?

I: How it feels for you, as this rounds off and calms down, if it is possible to say something about that?

D: It’s a tough and serious incident, the fact that children die. And then there are the parents, who think about it and what they have done wrong. There are many thoughts that occurred to me. But at the end the child or children have died. It seems like a very difficult piece to sing, because it is quite calm and melodious, while there is much underneath that is dramatic. This violent explosiveness appears in the last piece, at the same time as it calms down and becomes kind of optimistic, the light tone that it ended in. This balancing act when you sing, between the light and the dark, that caught my attention when I looked at you. You were very into it, I think you brought out this duality very well, that it’s a tremendous tragedy, but there is something nice with melody at the same time. There is something beautiful about



it, the duality, that it is all turned over to God. The child dies and it is taken care of by God or heaven, or what it is supposed to illustrate [shows with hands away from herself]. I was strongly taken by that.

I: How do you feel that it becomes strong, what do you feel then?

D: For example, your facial expression, it was filled with violence..., tragedy, seriousness, horror, but at the same time also with the sense that it calms down. So, one is really touched inside by that. And it's a bit private but, it was almost a good thing I wasn't there, because I have lost a child myself. The first child I had died at birth. I don't mean to affect this whole interview, but it was my point of view. I have studied musicology and I've been to *Kindertotenlieder* when I was young. And I know it by its name. But that this was what it was about, that was a new awakening. It was very heavy to watch, and I'm almost glad I wasn't there because it would have been too tough.

In this dialogue with D, what is expressed becomes quite close and personal, as D shares this episode from her life (see Section 3.3.5 Research Ethics). She states that she is glad she did not attend the concert physically, because it would have become too tough emotionally.

This shows how charged the dynamics of a concert can be, as one risks recognizing or being reminded of something about oneself and one's own life in what is being sung, in the person singing, and in the performative event as a whole, participating in it by being sung to.

This form of recognizing something fundamental about oneself and one's own life in what I was doing or what the event of singing constituted, was also addressed by F when talking about *Gjendines lullaby* at the end of concert 2.

F: When I saw this and you sang the last one, it's a kind of lullaby, isn't it? Then I thought that he is a father, without knowing, but I thought that immediately, probably because I'm a father myself. So that came through, at least to me.

I: How does that happen?

F: It has to do with the way you..., so the voice is a very..., an instrument when you speak, for emotions, which is amplified when you sing. And also, your facial expression and your composure. You stood differently than when you sang the classical ones. You had your arms straight down. Having a child is such a big cost, which

you are happy to pay, it's familiar to everyone who has children. So, it's such a mix of..., it's a kind of sacrifice, but also a great joy, that comes across through singing.

As he listened to the song, F was imagining something about me in terms of what role and type of relation I have towards someone in my life. The performance generated an immediate recognition of me as a father, «probably because I am a father myself», and a recognition of the song as a lullaby, not due to its lyrics, but to how I sang and stood.

My follow-up question “How does that happen?” aims directly for something that I at this point start to be aware as a key issue, both thematically, but also concretely in terms of how I sing and stand and come across to the audience: the parent-child relation connects sound, body language, content, conveying, one's own private reality and the shared reality of the concert, by being recognizable. F even finds that the feelings that the voice is an instrument for, are amplified through singing, making the recognition immediate. This parent-child relation resembles what was addressed in Section 2.2 with Løgstrup and Jonas, who both find the relation towards the child to be the locus of exposed trust and where the *is* presents itself as an *ought*, in the most a poignant fashion.

#### 4.1.10 The Hypothesis as Strengthened and Modified

The analysis indicates that what I do when performing is ethically charged. A relation is there, based on a trust I manage well or poorly throughout the concert. For some members of the groups, the sound of the voice and the way I sang and conducted myself led to a form of recognition of something fundamental about themselves, their own lives and relations, in how and what I sang, what I was doing and what the event of singing as a whole constituted. Based on the definition of the ethical demand by which the interviews are analysed, namely that the demand to safeguard anyone who has exposed him- or herself through trust in me represents a reality that I have neither created nor have the opportunity to recreate in the sense of modifying or removing, but am involved in simply by virtue of being faced with another human being (Vetlesen, 2014, p. 91), the relational dynamics of the singing event indicate that auxiliary hypothesis 1, that singing constitutes an ethical demand, is strengthened.

In addition, these findings all point towards a modification of on-stage honesty, of conveying something and of what constitutes the reality of the singing event. The findings were similar to what I had expected, but throughout the conversations I could always detect a sense of resistance by the participants, and increasingly also by myself, towards the concept of singing reality and singing as ethics, without a clearer conception of the distinctions and integrations

of reality and performance, and of ethics and performance. In the remaining parts of Section 4.1 the analysis outlines how the hypothesis was modified.

#### 4.1.11 Performance and Ethical Reality are not one-to-one

Initially I had a notion of ethical demand and public political discourse that tended towards a one-to-one relation between how I am, feel and sing, and what constitutes a production of reality in song, both in terms of the sound of the voice, of body language and staging. I had found this to be a more adequate conception of singing than notions of conveying something, in terms of something else than what happened then and there. That way, singing for instance slightly strenuously when a passage was difficult, or positioning my arms as a protection and a way of controlling nervousness, became integral to the performative reality “package”, since to protect oneself and controlling nervousness is part of an ethically charged reality as one feels exposed to the audience.

But as the analysis above shows, this turned out not to be the case. Such elements could not simply be left as they were and as such inform or constitute an ethical demand between me and the audience. They did not expose or generate stated experiences by the participants of shared human conditions in the singing event, even though being nervous or protecting oneself is part of being human and of social interaction.

The development towards a modified understanding of the relation between performance and ethical reality is traceable in my responses to what the participants say in the interviews. This is most noticeable in the last interview with Group 1, with whom I had met in person in the first interview, and in which a frank and direct way of communication had emerged. Discussing *Kindertotenlieder*, the dialogue was characterized by a heightened resistance towards how I conceptualized ethics in singing, and it was beginning to have an impact on my own opinion:

I: Since I experienced them as dangerous songs, there was less need to stage anything. It was overwhelming enough simply to get through. But of course, that is my perspective and it will be different for the audience, if it appears as if I am stiff or don't do enough.

The group was not satisfied by my explanations. Their experience was that I appeared too introvert. This prompts me to see, somewhat hesitantly, that I might have taken the singing-reality concept too far, or at least not nuanced it enough:

I: This is interesting to hear because I'm unable to obtain any outside perspective on this. When I watch it, it's like a one-to-one relation between what I do and the way it looks and sounds. Although I see my own protective tendencies here and there, I tend to think that "that's the way it must be", that it's "part of the package".

And further, connecting the notion of singing reality to my skepticism towards notions of conveying, it all comes to point at which this notion seems empty and needless to pursue any further:

I: In my project the idea is that what is sung or what happens in the concert is a reality – and *that's it*, in a way. I am not presenting anything else; I am not conveying any Mahler- or Rückert-intention or anything other than what happens as a singing event. That is the reality, and as such it is not a mediation of anything other than what is being played out. And I guess I have been thinking that what happens then, happens. If I'm in pain, that's what I sing.

At this point in the interview, as I say this and hear as I say it that it is not what I want to say, I seem to realize more what I mean by a sung reality. The way I had applied it as a hypothesis in the performances and the interviews comes to, if not a dead end, then at least a point at which there emerges a sense of need to move on, that to sing reality can no longer simply be summed up in a manner of "that's the way it must be, part of the package." That is not a part of the ethical demand, at least not in a direct sense. Rather, the private might block the demand, since it gives me a way out, as I seek more protective strategies such as singing to one side, not standing still even if I would like to, and makes my performance come across as sometimes passive and introvert.

In other words: my experience of the songs as constituting ethical reality, may in fact block the conveying and dissemination of anything substantial, and thus in fact also prevent any ethically charged addressing and changing of reality, since whatever goes on remains mine and mine alone, and is not something that is experienced by the audience as a shared reality. F addresses this:

F: All singers are different and have different expressions, and some are very expressive and extroverted, while others have a bit more, like, their own world. I've been thinking that you have that, and that it's not very accessible, but it is there. I didn't think about that as something negative. But the feelings that you describe now, that you had during the concert, they didn't really come through to me. They remained yours. So, being present and standing in the music is perhaps more important than that the singer feels something.

In the dialogue an insight emerges that something must be expressed in my singing, which does not have to be me and my reality. This something resembles what I treated above concerning the conveying of something other than myself or the singing event (4.1.4). The sound of the voice and the performance must be about something. Singing must be a transcendent act of enunciation, referring to something else than singing. And to do so, I had to be able to “stand in the music” and be “present”, without mixing that with a collapsing identification of the music with myself.

After countless singing lessons and masterclasses that were mostly either about technique or about conveying the content of the song, the lyrics and the plot, and inspired by music therapy research on singing to children in neo-natal care (see Section 1.1.1), my impression had been that the concept of conveying or presenting something in performance involved a greater degree of theorizing than the one-to-one concept of ‘to sing reality’ and ‘to sing the relation’. The concept of conveying struck me as bringing something in between, a third element, other than what goes on directly between performer and audience, e.g. a plot and a history and sets of words without any relevance to current issues or the dynamics that unfold between those present in the singing event.

But these passages in the interviews indicate that it may be the opposite: that what I thought was a more intuitive and basic notion of performance, to sing reality and the relationship, quickly turns into yet another version of an overly theorized concept of singing, and indeed that an effort to convey something might have been experienced by the audience as less theorizing than what I came across as doing when trying to sing a reality that simply was there as such.

P, who other places tends to focus on distinctions between singer and private person, text and sound, dissemination of a song and ethical-political reality, confronts F when F emphasizes the need for a certain distance and abstraction in my performance of *Kindertotenlieder*. But F remains quite firm on this, pointing out that even though I had abandoned the initial plan to place a child’s coffin in front of me in the concert (see Section 3.3.1), this concept was perhaps still affecting negatively on the ability to convey, in that it became too private:

P: I hear what you are saying, but when you go to a concert called *Kindertotenlieder*, then you know what you are attending.

F: But you need to convey it in a way that . . . , to hold on to it, there must be an element of abstraction. Otherwise, people can’t bear to deal with it. Using a child’s coffin as a kind of psychological guide in the concert would have become too much for you as interpreter. If you think about the whole world, and at least at that time, 70, 80

percent of the world's population had experienced the death of a child. I think it would have been better to find another way to convey it.

Before conducting the interviews, trying to position the project and its notion of ethics toward aesthetics, I had written in initial drafts of the thesis that as a performer, I did not know what aesthetics were. What I had in mind, were particularly any romantic notions of the sublime, the disinterested sense of the pleasing etc., which Bernstein (1992) argues against (Section 2.1.4).

However, based on how the interviewees respond to my performance, especially in *Kindertotenlieder*, I was confronted here with the experience that some notion of aesthetics might serve a purpose after all, namely as that which creates the necessary distance to what goes on, a distance which, paradoxically, makes it possible to “stand in the music” and be “present” in the reality of what is constituted so directly in singing, without collapsing in it.

Of course, as a meta-ethical position one might argue that what goes on during singing is shared no matter what, as a reality which singing is part of, immersed in, and constitutes. But that is not a very interesting argument in the long run, and not much can be gained from an analysis based on such terms (cf. Street, 2012, p. 7). As S points out, concerning *Kindertotenlieder*:

S: I'm hurting as well, or I feel it, am affected by it. But it would have been stronger if you had dared to let go of the shield. Instead of this one [twists her face to one side, imitating a tendency I have on certain notes], rather resist the urge to hide from the pain and just dare to stand in it.

Early in the analytical process, I might have interpreted the statement that “I'm hurting as well” as what an ethical demand manifests itself as, in praxis and tactile experience, as sung reality, and as an example of how a spontaneous response occurs to the appeal that issues from the singer exposing pain or trust. But what S states here, indicates that this reality would in fact have been shared ‘more’, and in a way sung ‘more’, if not all parts of that reality, such as my tendency to shield myself, singing to my safe side, etc., were left just as they were, just as they played out. Rather, I should have more actively dared to «stand in» them, dealt with, confronted, and changed them. Although shielding oneself is part of reality and exposes humanity, the ethical demand would have been clearer, the exposure of the situation stronger if I had “dared to let go of the shield” and dared “to stand in it”. Only then would nervousness and other such issues of my own have been on true display, the reality of trust and interdependence on true display, and integral to the performance, not just mine, but comprehensible and possible to take part in for the audience.

As F states above, some level of abstraction is needed. Not as something that makes the reality of performance less real, but as something that is necessary if one is to take part in that reality, address and change it.

More and more during the interviews, it dawned on me that 'aesthetics' might be this kind of abstraction of ethics, of reality, necessary to convey it, address it and change it, and a premise for operationalizing singing as a form of ethical-political action. A small step out from it all, as it were, not to avoid anything, but simply not taking it so deadly serious, an element of distance, even though this would go against what the experience and sense of voice seems to suggest, namely the condition of being totally immersed in the room and the time and the relations of singing, the voice-prompted intuition of overcoming subject-object-dichotomies in the all-encompassing chronotope of song, as it blurs the semiotic and symbolic, sound and language, materiality and referring. Aesthetics could instead be a nuancing of this voice-experience/-sensation/-intuition, upholding a difference that resisted the collapse of necessary dualisms, and instead facilitated an utterance as a transcendental act of referring, which does not need to repeal dualism as such, but applies dualism to state something about something.

At this point in the interview process, this seems to dawn on me more clearly, not only theoretically, but in terms of how I speak with the participants, how the dialogue works on me, and consequently, what I think about performing: singing, real as it is, still requires this small step out from one's own experience of the reality that the singing constitutes, so as not to prevent the audience from experiencing this reality. Still, the passage above with S shows that when put under pressure during performance, due to nervousness or stress or old habits, I am unable to do so completely, and sometimes mistakenly identify the urgency of performance as simply the result of letting things stay the way they are.

The participants, especially in Group 1, pressed me further on the issue concerning constituting reality as such through and as singing versus communicating or expressing something which pertains to the song. They argued that they are not identical, and that the first runs the risk of blocking the other:

P: I would like you to convey. You don't share much with me, you keep a lot to yourself. Because when S says, "I see that you're in pain", that is an interpretation, but it's not like you're saying with your expression that you're in pain, if you understand the difference.

I: Don't know...

F: Yes, I thought about that too. It's one thing to interpret it psychoanalytically. It's another thing to get hold of what you consciously want to say.

I: Say something more about that difference.

F: If you start thinking about how the person who stands and sings is really doing, and what is he really thinking about, then you might start to think that's because the expression is a little poor.

P: There is a huge difference, Mathias, between if you are in pain, and are by yourself, for yourself, and we see that you are in pain, or if you convey to the audience: I am in pain because.... That's kind of the difference.

P continued this topic, insisting on the distinction:

P: There is a very big difference between taking the listener into your slightly closed world where you are a bit introverted, but you bring the audience in and you show them sometimes how you feel in there – or that they remain outside involuntary, because you are introverted. Even in this type of repertoire which suits being not so extroverted, the audience must experience that now Mathias is taking me into something completely incredible and so awful that he must be a bit introverted, but constantly gets to know from him along the way how things are going. There is a difference between that and not sharing.

I consider this as an important finding both concerning my own practice as a singer and the overarching research question of the thesis as to what extent and how there are ethical implications in singing: There might be such implications in terms of the exposure of a shared relational reality. But my own experience during performance, of singing as constituting ethical reality, runs the risk of preventing any conveying of that reality, and hence, the addressing and changing of it.

I had thought that what I sing 'is what is', whatever it is, feelings or expressions or nervousness or being in pain or being courageous or protective or constituting a relation. But as I hear the participants talk, especially about *Kindertotenlieder* (and also how the project had developed at the time of these interviews with regard to method and the issue of representation and reference, see Section 3.1), a modification occurs here: what was intended as a more direct, spontaneous and raw understanding of what the singer does, a non-aestheticization



as it were, risks ending in the opposite, namely that it does not come across to the audience because it is more complicated than conveying something after all.

The project had been driven partly by a protest against having to convey in one way or another, this or that meaning dictated by lyrics as a presumed distinct verbal domain, or this or that conviction of a composer's intention. These are guidelines that singers are often told to apply by, and which I find disempower them as actors in the public sphere compared to singer-/songwriters, hip-hop artists etc. I had sought an empowerment of the performer of classical song, an acknowledgment of the performer's voice as a precise addressing of reality, and to give weight to the fact that what happens when I go on stage, is real, is what happens, affects the voice, me and the audience. From there it would simply be a matter of seeing and participating in what emerges, informed by the lyrics and the score, but only as parts of a whole supply of resources for singing. And then no matter what it turned out to be, it would still be reality and a precise addressing of that reality, and not the interpretation and conveying of something else, the work or thoughts or feelings of someone else.

But in the interviews it becomes clear that such an intention of directness, of a one-to-one relation between song and ethical reality, cannot be sustained. It becomes apparent that a one-to-one notion can lead to exactly what was intended to be avoided, namely that I am perceived as passive during the performance.

I might be fully aware that distinctions are simplifications, and that dualism can lead to inadequate understandings of what is at stake during the performance, and therefore also can lead to inadequate interactions toward the audience, as one risks overlooking that which is created in the interaction, in the transition between sound and word. Even so, one must apply such distinctions in order to be able to say anything at all, and really also to sing anything at all. Without the distinctions, everything becomes nothing, and nothing becomes everything. This development in the analysis of the concerts and interviews runs parallel to the discussion in Chapter 3 concerning method, presentation, and reference: the expression, in singing as well as in writing about it, quickly becomes passive, there is a risk of immanence, both in how I sing, what I do on a stage and what I write about it. Singing collapses into itself, in the same manner as writing about something without a method that sustains a distance to what is written about.

That, of course, was never the intention. The intention was rather that what happens between the audience and me might dynamize how I sing, what I bring to the stage, to the sound-word relation as an ethically charged transitional dynamic in the effort to address what is real. It was not that I come to the stage unconditionally and passively. But at this point in the interview process, it has become clear to me that I risk being perceived that way, both

when I sing and when I talk and write about it. Even though this insight had developed in the project for some time, especially concerning the act of referring in song and the need for re-establishing the dualism that the voice constantly challenges, it was all still there in how I expressed myself in the interviews. I was still marked by the performative experience that the voice somehow swallows all distinctions before I get to utter anything at all. Which perhaps it does, but not only that.

Therefore, the interviews show that a small step out from it all is required, something one might as well call an aesthetic distance, which paradoxically could make the performance more direct and accessible, and the singing easier to talk about, and not so immersed in what it constitutes that it ends up meaning nothing. Rather, the act of singing had to be an act of conveying something which the singing itself was not, and therefore a belief in referring language, denotative, symbolic words, in and through the semiotic act of singing, in and through the voice constantly challenging the divide between referring and what is being referred to. This might be what makes the song-act of 'to sing reality' into something that does not prevent the conveying of reality, and thus defeat the object of doing something good or right by constituting, addressing, and changing reality.

This leads the analysis to a further modification.

#### 4.1.12 Wanting the «Good» – Integral Normativity in Singing as a Connection Between Ethical Demand, Public Political Discourse and Word and Sound

It is one thing to proclaim a general meta-ethical position and find indications that this position holds true in the case of singing. The interviews urged me to be more concrete, at least to the extent that I had to admit I had a normative motivation in performing, that I wanted something that I conceived of as «good», and that this needed to be more specified in terms of ethical-political values. Initially I felt embarrassed by this, especially since to define «good» and, perhaps even more difficult, what «good» might mean in the performance of music, might not only presumptuous, but potentially a rather questionable undertaking.

Vetlesen (2014) finds that, even though meta-ethical positions such as those articulated by Løgstrup and Jonas, do not deal directly with concrete dilemmas or hard-case ethical puzzles, it is possible to argue that something is morally valid, and something is not, even from such positions. Even though “good” can be a rather vague definition of what one aims for in an action, that does not mean that one can have, and in face of certain realities must take, a fundamental position that something is right, and something is wrong, and that this may

be argued for in a way that makes sense, both in principle as well as in concrete situations (Vetlesen, 2014, pp. 118, 14–141).

As discussed in Section 3.2.2 concerning case study and method, the following passage between F and me became a turning point in the process of interpreting what I aim for as a singer and with this project:

F: If the work allows it, and you, the communicator, are good, and able to convey something beautiful, then you think that you can tilt the audience in the direction of the good, politically speaking, towards the selfless, the common good, instead of self-interest, something like that?

I: Yes, I kind of think it has to..., it has to, it almost has to amount to that.

In terms of method, this part of the dialogue became important both for a clearer understanding of what I was looking for in the analysis; the project as a case study aimed at ethical-political action in song; and in terms of bias and to bring hidden aspects in the research process to the surface, such as the embarrassment, which indicated that the question F raises touches upon something that is important to me.

In terms of the theme of *Ethical Demand*, the need to be more concrete and to specify values and opinions concerning the “good”, led to a modification of the meaning of auxiliary hypothesis 1. It became clear that not only did I look for ethical implications in song, but I had intentions concerning my performances that were normative, integrated in my performances, and even a particular normativity: of taking responsibility both for particular persons and for the common good, as a member of society, as it were. And for this responsibility to not simply be a meta-normativity, it had to be followed up by a particular choice of political opinion in and through singing, something I had to choose as coherent with that responsibility. This integral normativity in singing constitutes a connection between the category of *Ethical Demand* and *Public Political Discourse*, and even with *Word and Sound*: I have to mean and state something with singing, actively in the public sphere of performance, and have certain aims I am oriented by, both concerning the ethical-political and the work I sing.

One aspect of F’s question to me concerns the possible ethical-political effect of music, the capacity of performance to “tilt” the audience towards doing something good, for instance acts of selflessness for the common good. Still, the ability to provide motivation to do good is an effect, not a direct act in and as singing. I find that the question from F presses the issue further, in terms of how the music performance as such might be an act of good by the performer

actively wanting to “tilt the audience” in specific ethical-political directions. Taken to mean something like that, amounts to a possible integral normativity in and as singing, or as D puts it concerning the experience of an aesthetically good performance, that the singing event is about an increasing sense of community during the concert constituted by “sharing something good”, which is connected to the aesthetically good of the singing (see above Section 4.1.8).

Although not presuming to provide precise answers to moral dilemmas, singing might, based on the statements of F and D, be interpreted as an effort by me to participate in a public discourse of what is right and wrong, through exposing basic human conditions at play in the inter-relational, community-enhancing dynamics of a concert, in and as the musical activity of singing.

The interviews revealed that it was not enough to speak in general terms about the musical-ethical implications of the fact that everything is charged, that singing is a responsibility that is future-oriented, towards something you do not know, and therefore must fear and act upon (Jonas, 1984, pp. 202–203). The implications had to become more distinct, if not in terms of answers to ethical questions, then at least in terms of my personal attitude towards what I wanted to happen during and as a result of singing to those present, what I wanted to address and change: the integrated normativity of my performances had to be specified, in terms of what I mean by taking responsibility for someone when performing.

#### 4.1.13 Conclusion

In Section 4.1 the analysis of the performances and the interviews has been guided by the research question pertaining to auxiliary hypothesis 1:

To what extent and how does singing constitute an ethical demand between singer and audience?

The material indicates that dialogical dynamics between the group members and me started in the concerts and continues in the interview conversations. As these dynamics evolve, the material sheds light on how singing and ethics can be connected. Dynamics of trust, power, community, relation and exposed and shared human conditions were recognized by the participants in the groups, who articulated experiences of such dynamics and developed their notions of them further during the interviews.

The analysis therefore indicates that the hypothesis that singing constitutes an ethical demand is strengthened. Singing is at the same time an artistic expression, a way to address reality, and an intersubjective interaction and meeting, in which the basic and shared human conditions of

performer and the audience are exposed and in play. Based on the definition of ethics applied in the analysis, the material indicates the presence of an “ought” in the “is” of the other who is encountered in and through singing, be it the performer or (a member of) the audience.

The hypothesis is also modified inductively. First, in the sense that the interviews led to a redefining of what constituted the sense of urgency in the ethical demand. It is not something that necessarily entails a private dimension in terms of a one-to-one relation between how the singer is or feels and what is a production of reality through voice. The analysis often indicates the opposite: the anti-theorizing and anti-aestheticism of performance that the notion of ‘sung reality’ was intended to constitute, by seeking a performance practice that opts not to convey anything but the reality it creates, risks ending up as exactly what it tries to avoid, namely the overly theoretical, and as my feelings alone, not an articulation of a shared reality. The analysis shows that the urgency of reality is not lessened by a notion of conveying, even though the concept of conveying seldom emphasize the immersive and blurring and qualities of the voice. If anything is to be conveyed to the audience which is not simply my own personal issues, the performance and ethical reality must not collapse into each other. I must maintain a distance, which facilitates song as a transcendental act of referring towards the audience, through which an ethical demand is present, and which does not need to repeal dualism as such, but applies dualism to state something about the shared reality, both by conveying what the song is about, and addressing the present interaction of the performative event.

Second, the hypothesis was modified to become more specific in terms of what I aim to articulate an opinion about (although the critique of vagueness is not always pertinent, as Vetlesen (2014) points out). The interviews generated the awareness that I could not speak of singing as an ethical demand only in general terms. Though I might not be able to apply singing as any form of raising questions about, let alone answers to, ethical questions or dilemmas, it might prompt a requirement to articulate my personal attitude towards what I want to happen both as, during and as a result of singing. This included, amongst other things, that I wanted to “tilt” the audience towards something “good”. I had to acknowledge and make more distinct the integrated normative intentions in my performance.

The main development that the category of *Ethical Demand* facilitates, goes from an initial understanding of singing as an all-encompassing event, addressing reality by being emerged in it and overcoming dualisms of interior and exterior, singing about and singing as, towards an understanding of singing as constituting what is without collapsing in it, so that something is conveyed, articulated and addressed.

This development is continued in the analysis of the next category of *Public Political Discourse*.

## 4.2 Public Political Discourse – Towards a Modification of Intending, Meaning, and Stating Something through Singing

*”What happens between us,” you say. Everyone is on the lookout for that transcendent effect of music. But that appears when the room and the audience is good, when you are prepared and have a plan. And then you do it, and these extra things happen which are, I haven’t got a better expression, transcendent, emergent, which come out of this, which are somehow more than the sum of the audience, the music and you. But that doesn’t come from passivity, you have to steer the ship even harder.*

F commenting on the last song of *Kindertotenlieder*

*Then I thought, “damn it, I’ve bought a ticket, I want to know what you think about that song, not just, just hear the sound”.*

– P commenting on my singing with closed eyes

The analysis in Section 4.2 is guided by auxiliary research question 2:

To what extent and how is singing a form of participation in public political discourse?

The category of *Public Political Discourse* involves statements and passages in the interviews concerning experiences constituted by the singing event that have the characteristics of statements and/or conveying meaning related to ethical-societal issues in the public discursive sphere. I coded statements and passages that addressed *Political Discourse*, *Change*, *Statement*, *Religion* and *Audience*, and systemized them in a code hierarchy constituting the overarching category (see Code Book in Appendix 2).

*Public Political Discourse* was a more nebulous definition to code into than *Ethical Demand*. As a hypothesis, I contextualized it in theory pertaining to Habermas’ notions of communicative action and the public sphere (Habermas, 1984, 1987, 1996a, 2006), as this is also expanded by Uberg Nærland’s (2015) discussion. In the analysis I also made use of Rancière’s notion of the politics of the senses (Rancière, 2004, 2009), which to some extent contrasts the Habermasian concept of consensus, as well as Goehr’s notion of political voice, aesthetics and autonomy (see Section 2.3).

I presented the groups with the concept of singing as public political discourse as an overarching theme to see if it resonated with their experiences of my singing. Further, I was interested to see how such a discursive notion might shed light on the cases and facilitate the articulation of the experiences and points of interest that arose during the singing events. In the interviews, I looked for experiences articulated by the participants of my singing as a communicative action in public political discourse, an action which might be perceived as destabilizing and re-stabilizing such discourses as conveyed intention and statement, accessible for deliberation in the groups representing the audience.

As with the category of *Ethical Demand*, *Public Political Discourse* would be a case of testing a hypothesis/theme in a strategic case of singing, particularly when interviewing Group 1. In contrast to *Ethical Demand*, the auxiliary hypothesis of *Public Political Discourse* was weakened, as it was perceived as too “meta,” and difficult to ascribe directly to the performance, since a general concept which says nothing more than that “all music is political” would be insufficient as empirical justification for the proposition.

However, the category served to inductively modify the hypothesis, as the concept of public political discourse gave rise to articulations of what goes on during singing as a public event. When introduced in the interview conversations, the theme generated discussions that addressed important aspects of the performances, highlighting them in ways that would not have occurred otherwise. Thus, the prepared category of *Public Political Discourse*, although weakened in terms of testing, still generated articulations of a discursive function of singing as communicative action in the public sphere. The category made intelligible a field of recognition that provided a basis for inductively generated findings (Eliassen, 2016, pp. 11, 13). These findings could therefore still be analysed within the frames of reference of the broad theoretical positions that I applied in the first place (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, p. 73; Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 136).

#### 4.2.1 Towards Modification: Too “meta” or Something Concrete and Practical and Part of Everyday Life? Defining Political Discourse in terms of Singing

I did not want the notion of ‘singing as political discourse’ to be presented as a difficult or complex theme with all its connotations concerning verbal and non-verbal dichotomies, absolute music vs. song and statement vs. sound. What I aimed at was a dialogue about how I had sung to the audience could have meaning, what kind of meaning, and how this meaning was felt and interpreted.

As it turned out, many of the statements in both groups indicated that a notion of singing as political discourse was too distant both from what they had experienced during the concerts, and also as a general perspective on music performance. P, backed by S, articulates this in a direct manner in the first interview, discussing the *Christmas Oratorio* by J.S. Bach. He argues that to conceive of my singing Bach as a participation in political discourse is hard to grasp at a concrete level:

P: Unless you understand it on a more general or meta level of course, that the power that lies in the music moves people to...

S: That is true.

P: But that's very meta.

S: Yes, it is.

I therefore tried to make it more concrete, discussing the aria *Frohe Hirten* in *Christmas Oratorio*, in which I address the shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem after their visit by angels, telling them to run and see the infant in the cradle:

Frohe Hirten, eilt, ach eilet,  
Eh ihr euch zu lang verweilet.  
Eilt, das holde Kind zu sehn!  
Geht, die Freude heißt zu schön,  
Such die Anmut zu gewinnen,  
Geht und labet Herz und Sinnen!

Responding to watching the recording, S stated a similarly notion as what P expressed, summing it up quite neatly:

S: If it is to be politically oriented, then it must be said in advance so that it is “this is what you are going to hear, with this motive”. That doesn't come by itself.

This also occurred during the first interview of Group 2. After I had presented the scope of the project, and we had talked for some time about the opera recital, M opposed to the notion of power in singing as having anything to do with politics and the public discursive sphere:

M: I'm a bit unsure about this principle of power, what did you mean by that? I don't feel that a singer has any power like that at all. It's completely different things that govern society. People who have power are journalists and politicians.



The quotes of P, S and M represent several statements and passages which I perceived both as a general unfamiliarity with possible political implications of singing, and further, when presented with the concept, a reluctance towards connecting singing and the performance of music to the exercise of power in any shape or form, not least political. The reluctance from the participants on this issue prompted me to specify on several occasions what I meant by power, describing the Løgstrupian concept of interdependence and the givenness of the other between singer and audience during performance:

I: It's not necessarily decision-making power or direct influence, but what occurs when someone is facing each other, as a mutual dependence. We are in a way given to each other in that setting, and that also means that you can either reject or receive the other. There is a power dynamic connected to that encounter, which comes into being through singing. It's a long way from a panel debate on TV, it's not that kind of power. But at the same time, the fact that something is made clear by someone singing can be something that generates, through ripple effects, an influence, and there is a power in that.

Attempts such as these eventually developed towards a more consistent use of the term *power* in singing in its relation to ethics and politics: the power to reject or receive the audience, the power of the audience to reject or receive the singer who is exposed in and through the voice, and the power to make something clear or to generate a meaning that has an effect and somehow makes an influence. But it remained difficult throughout the interviews to talk about this kind of power in ways that was accepted by the participants as political power.

The difficulty with applying terms in a manner that made sense and incited discussions about my singing as political discourse, was noticeable already during the planning of the interviews. The questions in the interview guide were *What was expressed*, *How was it expressed*, *Why was it expressed*. With these questions I was opting for a straightforward approach, avoiding as much as possible any existential or philosophical problems causing over-intellectualized answers and stiff conversation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, pp. 164–165). But as the following passage discussing *Frohe Hirten* shows, the questions were wrapped in by many layers of meaning and tangled up in different philosophical and methodological aspects of the thesis, revealing at this point in the interviewing process my unfinished concept of what I am looking for:

I: I sing about happy shepherds, “run along”, that's the lyrics, represented by the fast notes, that is a conventional way of interpreting them. But can you sing such an aria, as if it was about, if not the state budget, then at least somehow connected to something that also applies after the concert? What is at stake? As you say, my

nervousness that shows there, or the interaction with the flautist there, whatever comes across to the audience – is it possible to talk about it as something that revolves around a type of everyday life or a type of political current affairs? Since it after all is a public setting, people are together, it's not a private, closed room.

P: What do you mean by asking, «is it possible to talk about»?

I: Is it possible to talk about the performance as part of a public activity of expression? If we experience a meaning attached to it – is it possible to talk about that meaning as not only linked to the musical work, to the conveying of something, but as addressing something?

P: If so, it will be on a very meta level.

I: Yes, but I don't want it to be, so that's why I try to...

P: Yes, but this is a public statement. A religious statement. Just as you have calls to prayer from the mosques, you have a Christian message in a concert that you can buy a ticket to and go in and listen, where you convey the birth of Jesus, right? It is a statement that you can interpret in a political context. But either the listener must do it, or you must do it, or the producer must do it. It doesn't simply happen by itself. You could say that “now we're going to perform the Christmas Oratorio, but it's about the occupation of the West Bank” or what not, which one might want to put into a political context.

I: An active move must be made for it to have a political significance?

P: Yes, what else would the political significance be?

This passage shows how defining political discourse in terms of singing is difficult because any form of articulable political significance is primarily related to verbal, referential language. But since the methodical premise in this thesis does not give primacy to such a dichotomy, any question aimed at the political significance of the performance becomes a much more complex effort of articulation.

My questions and definitions became clearer during the process of the interviews. And even though I am struggling in the excerpts above, I find this struggling to be a good thing in terms of the validity of this analysis: it shows how I try to strip away any bias towards verification,

so that even though I might sing the *Christmas Oratorio* as a form of participation in a public sphere, and doing it in ways that I find address current political issues, I do not to force the hypothesis on the participants. Rather, I put it out there so that it can be questioned, objected to, modified or rejected. The openness towards the experience that there were not political implications in my performance, I found to be important in terms of vitalizing the dialogical dynamics in the interview and the process of analysis as such. My rephrasing of the question, when P asks me what I mean, is indeed what I am interested in. What I am asking about, also reveals a relation between singing as political discourse and the dynamics between word and sound, which underpins the possibility of understanding singing as an ethical-political act of expression, in which words and sounds are not completely separate domains of meaning but meet and perhaps integrate in the ethical demand and the public political discourse, where I experience that subject and meaning are formed in the utterance. But this was, at this point in the interview and in the project as such, too theoretical to be put into an interview question that made sense and incited conversation.

A more concrete and practical address of the public sphere and life world context of the concerts was articulated by H. As the discussion in Group 2 concerning the opera recital turned towards notions of ‘music as such’, ‘sound as its own meaning’, etc. H opposed such concepts:

H: Music is about something, but I’m not sure if I can identify it within just the music in the concert. Because this concert is part of a larger context, in my life, how I got there, I had just got a new electric bike, and then I wondered how long the ride was and then my raincoat didn’t work, so I was soaked. And then I wondered if the bike was safe outside, but the area is not exactly a stronghold of crime.

These were elements that fed into the experience H had of the concert event. Notions of meaning in music as such were not fit to describe the event as integrated in her day. And even though to walk into the concert venue marked a distinction that set the concert apart from the rest of the day, the concert was still experienced as part of a bigger whole:

H: And then I came in, and then I had to readjust. A concert is about the experience you have as it plays out: Do you have a positive impression, do you like the music, what do you remember? And this was a concert with classical music, which is not something I attend very often. So that the song and the music alone..., there’s so much around that, which this concert is part of. The music means something, but I can’t get it down to what I felt right then and there and what the song meant to me. The concert was part of a bigger whole.

H states that even if singing means something, it would be difficult, maybe impossible, and perhaps not particularly interesting to “get it down to” what that sound means right there and then. The important thing is that it is part of a bigger whole. That someone sings to someone means something by being part of a larger context from which musical sound cannot be disconnected as such: the everyday life of the individuals as they come together and partake as audience.

At the time of the concert, a big part of everyday life of everyone, was the Covid-19 situation. H expanded her argument concerning the concert as finally coming together at a public event again:

H: It's difficult to separate this concert from the corona situation. Many of us hadn't been to anything cultural for months, so *that* in itself was an event. And you said “nice to stand and sing again”. I think, when you do this research of yours, remember that this concert happened at a very special time, which shapes the experience, certainly yours, but also for us who were there. It felt a bit special and fun and like “now something cultural happened” and “I was at a concert again”.

H comments indicate that the concert is experienced as part of a public coming together, and that it meets the need to come together at an event. The concert is both an integrated part of everyday life, whatever that life is like at the moment, and at the same time it represents something different, something “cultural” that “happens” as a distinct and concrete event. But crucially, it is as part of the coming together and participation in the public sphere that the singing obtains meaning to the people that are there.

#### 4.2.2 Towards Modification: Causing Change – before, during, as or after singing?

During the interviews and in the process of analysis, it became evident that what was sometimes causing misunderstandings concerning the scope of the project, as well as my challenges in defining key concepts in the conversations, had less to do with singing-as-political-discourse as such. To some extent, such a notion could be acknowledged as long as one did not become too concrete in terms of what characterized it. Rather, the misunderstandings and points of disagreement came down to how the concept of word *as/or/* and sound lay at the heart of important strands of the conversations. This did not only affect me and my way of talking. It also influenced how the participants talked and the general atmosphere of the conversations. The conversations were more fluent and energetic and the input from the participants were most spontaneously agreed upon by the others in the group, when what was said either explicitly addressed or implicitly assumed dualistic distinctions, such as differences between

music and text, music and person, music and relationship, sound and meaning, music and content, song and performer. As soon as such distinctions were challenged or something was talked about in ways that could imply a less clear difference, it became much more difficult to speak, both for me and for the participants, until the distinction was somehow reactivated. The following dialogue in group one, discussing the possible political implications of the *Christmas Oratorio*, shows this dynamic:

F: There are maybe two or three songs that in a way carried the civil rights movement in the USA, and kind of synchronized people emotionally. And I think music can do that. And ...

P: I agree, but then it was probably the civil rights movement that chose to use music in a political context, or as a political emotional tool to consolidate the movement. You can do that with this too [the *Christmas Oratorio*], but then, as I understand it, someone has to..., do it.

S: Someone has to do it, yes.

P: Someone has to do it.

F: Yes, yes, I think so too.

In this same manner, it proved easier to talk about attitudes, principles, and distinctions preceding the concert than what might be considered as going on as a form of change during or as or caused by singing:

F: Let's imagine that Siv Jensen and Erna [at the time Norwegian minister of Justice Department and The Prime Minister] were at the concert. Erna went out of the church, felt moved, and said: "Yes, we must bring home this IS child". Siv Jensen went out, felt spiritually filled, and thought that: "No, the exalted eternal principles are important, we cannot bring home the IS child". It's a bit like that, I feel that people remain..., they find power from the music, to what is in a way already there.<sup>29</sup>

Even though on several occasions F seems inclined to think otherwise, when asked whether or not the music might also change what he states "is already there," during the musical event, and as musical practice, the flow in the conversation is halted:

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29 After the defeat of the Islamic State (IS), a polarizing public debate developed concerning whether the State of Norway had a moral and legal obligation to bring home mothers who were Norwegian citizens, who had taken part in the IS, and were now living in refugee camps with their children, by law also Norwegian citizens. Opinions differed even within the coalition government.

I: And the music cannot change what “is already there”? It’s more that it confirms something?

F: Yes, you get that emotional impulse, which is needed for action or to decide something.

I interpret these passages as indicating that the concept of singing as a dynamizing power in the public sphere, seems to be recognized, but is at the same time too vague to be defined and articulated as such a power. When addressed, the ways of articulating it keeps it outside of political discourse as a something that might have an effect on it, not as something that is and functions as its own politically discursive expression.

An underlying premise in looking for empirical consequences of the hypothesis of this category, which became more apparent during the conversations, had to do with how I conceived of singing as continually dynamizing the word-sound dichotomy, opening methodical possibilities to rethink what discursivity is (cf. Borgdorff, Peters & Pinch et al. 2020, p. 5). On that premise, singing might be understood as direct participation in political discourse, not simply coinciding with or embodying particular political (often verbalized) sentiments (Street 2012, p. 67). However, I did not want to go into too much detail on this during the interviews, nor ask too many questions concerning such dichotomies, as it all might have ended up in an over-theorizing conversation, preventing the participants from telling me what they had experienced, what they had not experienced, and what they were thinking and feeling. Yet, even though it will be treated as a category of its own, I find that the word-sound relation is in play in the analysis of the present category (as well as in *Ethical Demand*) both as a struggle for words, and as the issue of what constitutes an act of referring in terms of song.

### 4.2.3 The Hypothesis as Weakened and Modified

The examples show that a general conception in the interviews was that political significance belongs first and foremost within the verbal domain. Any political take in relation to song had to be a form of extra-musical contextualization of the performance, made explicit and verbalized, not in and through and as the music performance itself. The interviews reveal no material that by any stretch can imply a fundamental dissolving of the distinction between sound of the voice and political discourse. Sometimes stated directly, other times implied, the statements and passages show that such a dissolution seems unfamiliar, too far-fetched, too “meta”. According to the statements in the groups any political take within which music might be performed must be made explicit in advance in a manner that “must be said”, if the performers or the audience are to be able to use the music in line with any political agenda;

the political significance or result must stem from something that was there before, as attitudes residing in the participants (both performer and audience) of the event, and which are given an impulse to action by the performance; or the performance reminds the audience of ethical-political principles, which they can become more aware of as an effect of the performance, but towards which the music-performance itself is neutral (cf. Street, 2012, p. 69).

Therefore, based on most of the statements and passages in the interviews, auxiliary hypothesis 2, that singing is a form of participation in a public, political discourse was weakened.

However, the material also served to inductively modify the hypothesis (not in its wording but its content) as the concept of public political discourse gave rise to articulations of what was experienced as going on during the concerts as public events. When introduced in the interview conversations, the theme generated discussions and passages of dialogue which addressed important aspects of the performances, highlighting them in ways that would not have occurred otherwise.

The material shows a discrepancy in terms of to what extent singing is experienced as expressing intention, meaning and statements. Even though the participants state explicitly that any political implication of the performance cannot be located in the performance or sound of the voice as such, they sometimes address a form of *intention* that needs to be active in the performer, that is, not stated or made explicit, neither by the performer, the lyrics or the performative setting. This intention is spoken of as a necessary premise that must be active for the music and the song to communicate, and is spoken of in a manner that borders closely on the characteristics of *statement*.

In the remaining parts of Section 4.2, the analysis outlines how the auxiliary hypothesis 3 was modified with respect to the stated requirement of *intention* and *statement-characteristics* of singing. The analysis shows how the material does provide a basis for an inductively generated, modified proposition of singing as a participation in public political discourse.

#### 4.2.4 Stated or unstated Intention

The modification that developed in the analysis of *Ethical Demand*, that the relation between performance and ethical reality is not one-to-one, also applies here: my notion of song as political discourse developed from the idea that something simply happens, albeit actively facilitated in a public sphere, towards the insight that it is not enough just to be «in» what happens or «immersed» in the public sphere constituted by the performance. Then it simply becomes a fetish of presence, where intentions, thoughts, feelings and assertions remain mine alone.

What I experience and what is meant by me as a direct addressing of, spontaneity within and openness to the reality that goes on, risks ending up as the opposite, namely that it does *not* come across. The ‘small step out’ from the ethical reality constituted by and as singing, which I think can be a way to understand aesthetic function of song (but which does not amount to aestheticism), applies in the same manner within the category of *public political discourse*: that I (paradoxically) stand more «in» it, I am more immersed in it, when I do so with a sense of distance. Everything then becomes less chaotic, less ‘voice-flooded’, as distinctions are restored not as reductive simplifications of what goes on, but as what make the singing event more articulable and approachable, both for analysis, but also for the singer as a performance practice characterized by an expertise of wielding clear intentions, which ultimately also makes the singing event more approachable in the act of reception by the audience.

As in the analysis of *Ethical Demand*, this means that conveying and interpretation become relevant conceptions of what goes on in performance. From having discarded them early in the exploratory process as distancing aesthetic theorizing, they appear as necessary distinctions and dichotomies.

P, often attentive to distinctions, addresses the singer’s thoughts ‘about’ the song, as opposed to creating something ‘through’ the song. He criticizes the tendency that singers close their eyes or, as in my case during the opera recital, look too much to the floor and not at the audience, exemplifying what he means by another concert he attended:

P: NN, who had a concert at the opera a few years ago, also stood with his eyes closed. Then I thought, “damn it, I’ve paid for a ticket, I want to know what you think about that song, not just hear the sound, so I’d like you to open your eyes”. I think is completely reprehensible.

S: Agree!

P further emphasizes a link between what my thoughts “about the song” are, as a basis for conveying, and what might be the outcome of me being a “medium” for “what is in the song”:

P: When you’re going to sing, it is not you as a private person that you want to offer, it is you as a medium for what is in that song.

These two statements by P might seem to contradict each other. However, in the course of the dialogical process of the interviews it became evident that this was not necessarily so. Rather, what P addresses with these statements points towards how the ethical-political reality of the



singing event – if it is to occur, even when it is not part of what the song is about – occurs by an intentional conveying of the meaning of the song, or the thoughts about it that I have, as something distinct from, or at least not identical to the relational dynamics between me as a private person and the audience. During the interviews it became clear that both the ethical-political reality of the singing event *and* the meaning of the song can be there at the same time, overlapping without collapsing into each other. I can mean something ‘about’ the song without that opinion obstructing what I mean through the song as an act of addressing the ethical-political reality it occurs within and as. The ‘about’ and the ‘through’ are dependent on each other.

Still, I find that to convey what the song is about cannot be distinguished as something completely outside of myself, outside of my voice and the situation the singing occurs in and constitutes. When I sing, it is to someone, by forcing my humanity on them, appealing to them, so that they are called out to me, are positioned towards me. That is how I find that the voice ‘happens’, and that is the event by and through which I mean something, and by which singing perhaps can address and change reality. The concert as a public political act, I find, must be governed by a moral obligation to address the basic human conditions it constitutes and makes explicit.

This is the same for both *Ethical Demand* and *Public Political Discourse*. But pertaining to first and foremost to the latter category, this conveying will in the following be analysed in terms of an intended statement or claim about something.

#### 4.2.5 To Sing with the Intention to “tilt” and “empower” the Audience in the Direction of “the Good”

Questions raised in Group 1 revealed my conception and intention of applying an integral normativity in singing. P articulates it as a form of “empowerment” of the audience, whereas F talks about my seeking to “tilt” the audience. However, these were questions concerning what I wanted, not statements about their experiences of my singing:

P: Do you mean that you want to convey ethical power with your song, which the audience should take with them to make good political choices, because you are doing it in an ethical cultural context where they are empowered by you through song?

And likewise, with F:

F: You think that you can tilt the audience in the direction of the good, politically speaking, towards the selfless, the common good, instead of self-interest, something like that? <sup>30</sup>

As questions to me, these sections of the dialogue do not constitute findings concerning singing as political discourse. However, what they do in terms of analytical process is making me become more aware of what I want as a singer: the quotes shed light on what kind of understandings and articulations the concept of political discourse gave rise to through the dialogical dynamics of questioning me as the performer. It is this part of the dialogue, which was about *Christmas Oratorio*, which leads me to see that I have an intention to “tilt” and “empower” the audience through singing, in a direction of what I consider to be of ethical-political importance. This intention is what motivates me as a singer: to tilt or empower the audience in the direction of something I find to be ethically good, addressed through singing as an act of participation in political discourse.

In this intention to “tilt” or “empower” through singing, the ethical and political cannot be separated from the musical, but appears as a phenomenological condition of human expressive voice. As the analysis of the “tilt” in Section 4.1.12 indicated, the integral normativity in singing constitutes a connection between the ethically charged, the politically discursive, and even (see next category) the dynamics of word and sound as operating simultaneously in the use of voice: I have to expose myself in the appeal towards the audience in song; mean and state something in the public sphere of performance; and do so by letting the voice constitute the coextensiveness of my humanity with the dynamics of the relation between word and sound.

However, to identify ethical-political intentions as integrated in the musical practice as sound or phrasing, does not amount to an explanation concerning exactly what is stated as specific ethical-political opinion through singing. In the same way that one can say that all music is ethical, one can say that all music is political. But if the analysis stops there, it does not really say much. If the analysis is to be about something else than a collapse into the immanence of all is one and one is all, one must say what kind of ethics and what kind of politics, i.e., what one wants to achieve with the communicative action (Habermas 1999; 1984), what one wants to destabilize and re-stabilize, articulate as dissensus, fractionate, and re-distribute (Rancière 2004, 2009).

As treated in Section 2.3.5, Street (2012) articulates this problem as he addresses how research on political implications of music often sees the political potential of music either as dictated

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<sup>30</sup> Also quoted in Section 4.1.12 concerning the integral normativity in singing, as well as in section 3.2.2 in connection with the dissertation's basic understanding and application of method.

by the social context or acknowledges the political power in music to such a degree that the social context is eliminated. Street argues that a more interesting analysis is generated by emphasizing music's specific political contribution. By seeing "music as action as participation", he connects "music directly to one particular political outcome: social democracy" (p. 70).

The notion of identifying the specifically political in music by connecting it to one specific political outcome, contrasting others, corresponds to the fact that I have ethical-political intentions in singing – that is, intentions integrated musically in singing as the exposing of basic human conditions of interdependence, power and trust in the appeal to the audience – which I connect to certain political values and opinions that stand in contrast to other political values and opinions, namely the responsibility towards others and the common good. However, intentions do not in and of themselves reveal my ethical-political aims in my musical praxis. Neither do they point to specific solutions or answers to problems or dilemmas.

Therefore, the intentions to tilt and empower the audience might very well be what motivates my performance, and they might very well be there in my singing practice, but beyond that, not much could have been articulated about them as politically significant in terms of an analysis based on what the participants said about them, were it not for the fact that these intentions were spoken of with characteristics resembling a statement. The following section analyses this tendency in the interviews.

#### 4.2.6 To Sing about Something

An emphasis on intention also appears after *Kindertotenlieder* in Group 1. The following excerpt is the most densely coded part of all the interviews. This is where the discrepancy concerning the statement-characteristics of singing comes to its fullest expression. It is characterized by how the participants oppose explicit political implications of the singing performance, due to the lack of verbal characteristics of political opinion, and at the same time demand that something is stated through song, that it is *about something*. It proves difficult for the participants to identify exactly what ought to be stated, but they argue that I must not only express something 'purely' musically through the singing practice but also actively mean and say something if the performance is to communicate. Commenting on the last song of *Kindertotenlieder*, F develops this opinion:

F: "What happens between us," you say. Everyone is on the lookout for that transcendent effect of music. But that appears when the room and the audience is good, when you are prepared and have a plan. And then you do it, and these extra things happen which are, I haven't got a better expression, transcendent, emergent, which

come out of this, which are somehow more than the sum of the audience, the music and you. But that doesn't come from passivity, you have to steer the ship even harder.

I: You have to claim something, or mean something?

F: Yes.

Given that the concert is a public event, it follows that the song – as a claim, or the elements in the song which has a claim- or statement-character, and which in this part of the dialogue cannot be reduced to what the lyrics are 'about' – must be part of a public discourse about something addressed with intention, if what is sung is to get through to the audience.

This passage with F marks a vital point in the explorative process, which had been latent for some time in my theoretical preparations, and anticipated with the passage concerning "tilting the audience". Here it is made explicit towards the end of the entire interview process:

A development from something that might come across as a passive, introvert and theorizing concept of performance, or language about performance, towards a notion of performance stressing the need to be driven by intention, that is, as addressing something towards which one has a will or wish or claim, and perhaps even changing reality by addressing it, by claiming it to be as one claims/sings, a belief that enunciation in fact can do that. In other words: An act of reference, transcendent by nature and in its effect both on the enunciator/singer, his/her relations, and the circumstances of the concert.

In a way, it is self-evident that intention is needed if something is to be conveyed and stated and make sense. And I never wanted the concept of 'to sing reality' to be a passive form of performance. But here a stronger sense of intention is demanded of me by F, without any mention of lyrics.

This does not entail a unity or collapse between singing and statement.<sup>31</sup> But it indicates that I must intend, mean, and state something, with the song. My initial thought had been that such an intention, meaning and stating would have been more direct and apparent and less theoretical within a concept of singing reality, of singing as ethics and politics. This concept had now proved to become too passive, as I had been reluctant to bring into it any form of conveying/interpretation, any form of third element in addition to me and the audience. But here that process leads to the statement from F that I indeed had to state something through

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31 As Street (2012) argues against a notion of art as "merely politics represented in symbolic form" (Street, 2012, p. 154), see Section 2.3.5.

singing, which is not identical with or reducible to lyrics. I find this to serve as an inductive modification of the hypothesis that singing is a form participation in public political discourse.

At the very end of the interview, I follow up on F's statement, because the opinion that I had to state something came as quite a surprise. This was because earlier in the interviews the participants had shown a reluctance towards ascribing any symbolic meaning to sound. But mainly it was because the demand now that I had to state something through singing after all, and display a clearer intent and statement-character in my performance, was caused directly by a dialogue revealing that what made the performance seem passive had to do precisely and paradoxically with my intent to state something more clearly through the concept of singing reality. In the interview I therefore find it important to double check:

I: So, it is not too far-fetched to say that you claim or mean something quite distinct with music? Is that what happens? Or that should be what happens?

P: Yes, of course you can ask yourself how much you mean or whether you are a medium for the composer and lyricist. But it is definitely an expression of opinion that is happening.

F: Yes, I think that in all exchanges of opinion, you must start by meaning something, and then that is tested on the audience, the orchestra. And then it can be allowed to develop. It is very difficult to start by meaning nothing. Then you might not find out, that is, the consequence in philosophy is in any case that you don't find out what you mean yourself.

These passages, indicating the necessity of intended statement or meaning in and through the practice of singing, not reduceable to lyrical content, could perhaps be interpreted as findings of empirical consequences deducted from the proposition of the category of public political discourse. However, I find that this is not the case, as the findings arise from a dialogical process in which I become gradually more aware of the (paradoxical) necessity to take a step out from the reality I experience as constituted through song, if singing is indeed to be an act of singing reality and stating something by singing that reality.

The analysis shows the same here as in the analysis of *Ethical Demand*: my experience of reality in singing prevents the conveying of reality through singing. But more specifically concerning public political discourse, the perceived passivity that F addresses may stem from the fact that I am too preoccupied with transitions and blurring dynamics between words and sound, which may cause me to be less clear and oriented towards the audience and what I want to express

an opinion about, both in the way I sing during performance and the way I ask questions during the interviews. Because when F says that I have to start by meaning something, and that my opinions do not come across clearly enough, or that during the interviews I might have expressed that I do not want to mean something during performance, but simply to let things develop and happen – then naturally the concept of singing is perceived as too passive. Even though I had “steered hard”, as F finds lacking, and tried to do so exactly by letting the reality of the performance play out and trying to stand in that reality when I sing the songs, it had to some extent backfired. In the interview I present this as a question, asking what, if anything came across despite the passiveness:

I: Even if you think that here it was introverted or that my feelings could block what I possibly meant or wanted... If there is something coming across of meaning or feeling here still, what would you say that is?

P: Well, what was in the music, hopefully. Or do you mean what we feel that you got through to us?

I: What do you feel came across? P: Well, it was pain.

F: Yes, it was that mix, melancholy and..., the mix of pain and the beauty of the memories.

Surprisingly at this point, these things, these *some things*, whether they be feelings or interpretations, or shared human conditions constituted and made clearer, were exactly what I had tried to facilitate, what I had planned, meant, and stood in, to sing about and constitute as reality. As such, these statements can be understood as empirical consequences of the hypothesis of singing as a form of participation in public political discourse, if one understands an expression concerning the loss of children as part of a political discourse on humanity. But this consequence could only be found through an exploratory and inductive process of dialogue, in which the entire concept of ‘to sing reality’ as a form of public political discourse was destabilized and re-stabilized, dissented from, fractionated and re-distributed through a sometimes quite direct conversational interaction. What I had thought to be the way of expressing intent and meaning and statement, had to be changed.

#### 4.2.7 Conclusion

In Section 4.2 the analysis of the performances and the interviews has been guided by the research question pertaining to auxiliary hypothesis 2:

To what extent and how is singing a form of participation in public political discourse?

Introduced in the groups, the concept of singing as a participation in public political discourse gave rise to articulations by the participants of experiences during the performances that activated a sense of inner values or experiences of song as an exercise of power and impact between the performer and the audience. But the concept was also met with hesitation and reluctance and sometimes dismissed altogether. It often led to misunderstandings during the conversations. Especially in Group 1 a consensus emerged that if singing were to be understood as participation in a public political discourse, any specific political conception or angle had to be there beforehand, said explicitly, or if unspoken, at least existing as principles independent of the performance and only activated in the reaction to the music, not developed in and through the singing performance as such. To a wide extent, the hypothesis was weakened.

Even so, the hypothesis was modified through an inductive process similar to the analysis of the *Ethical Demand*: a notion of one-to-one relation between reality and singing prevents singing from constituting reality and prevents genuine participation in it. With *Ethical Demand*, the analysis showed that one way to look at this is as an issue concerning the relation of word and/vs/as sound. To avoid collapse between ethics and singing, the singing had to refer to something, not simply be immersed in it or constitute it. This became even more evident with *Public Political Discourse*, due to its more obvious connection with presumed distinct verbal meanings and opinions that is often meant by 'political discourse'. Singing, not only in order to be interpreted as a participation in public political discourse, but in order to come across to the audience as song at all, had to be performed as *intended statement*.

Thus, a discrepancy emerged concerning the discursive and statement-characteristics of song: on the one hand, the participants rejected the notion that political opinions were constituted through my singing. On the other hand, the participants demanded that my intentions had to be clear and communicative, in and through and as performative event: I had to intend, mean and state something through singing, and this was talked about in a manner that came close to characteristics of verbal statement and expression of opinion.

The main development that this category facilitates, furthering the development of the previous category, can therefore be described as a development through the weakening of the original hypothesis of singing as a form of participation in public political discourse, towards an inductive modification of intending, meaning and stating something through singing.

This will be analysed further in the last category *Word and Sound*.

### 4.3 Word and Sound – Towards a Both-And

*If you had told me, this was a song about death, then I would have said, “What?!”*  
– F commenting on the aria *Frohe Hirten*

*Most people will care the most about the voice they hear.*  
M commenting on lyrics of *Un aura amorosa* and *Il mio tesoro*

*That is what can happen in life. How are you to sing it?*  
– D commenting on *Kindertotenlieder*

The analysis in Section 4.3 is guided by auxiliary research question 3:

To what extent and how are subject and meaning constituted by the singing voice?

The analysis of the previous categories indicates that at key moments in the interviews, the dialogue is informed or affected by the dynamics between word and sound. The category of *Word and Sound* encompasses statements and passages in the interviews concerning experiences during the concerts that either directly addressed the relation between lyrics and sound, could be interpreted as being based on an assumption concerning this relation, or could be analysed as affected by how this relation manifests in the performances (see Code Book in Appendix 2).

As treated in Chapter 1, from my experience as a singer, strict dichotomic descriptions of word and sound do not fit the dynamics of what goes on in the voice during singing. What comes across as important, at least in classical singing, can only in a limited manner be ascribed to lyrics as such. This has led me to search for analytical approaches to singing based on other premises than those implied by a categoric distinction. In the voice, lyrics are no less musical than melody and sound, and melody and sound no less symbolic and referring than words (cf. Kristeva, 1984; Rolvsjord, 2002). Rather, I find that a dichotomy of word and sound, however intuitive and functional it may be for analysis, often disempower and somehow silence the performer as “merely” a musician (Goehr, 2004, p. 8) who does not address anything outside the artistic practice itself. It reduces the potential for participation of the singer/musician in the public sphere which is constituted by his or her very performance.

Since the categories *Ethical Demand* and especially *Public Political Discourse* connote verbal articulation, and since much of what proved difficult to articulate during the interviews seemed



to come down to how each of the participants in the groups, including me, were thinking about, negotiating, or hesitating in the face of the word-sound relation when trying to express our concert experiences, the present category of *Word and Sound* emerged.

However, the category does not provide an analysis that doggedly parallels music and lyrics in the concerts, in terms of juxtaposing what went on musically when this or that word or sentence was sung. The participants said very little about the impact of the lyrics on the performance. This happened only with *Kindertotenlieder* (Section 4.1.7; 4.3.1; 4.3.3), the lyrics of which I had translated and distributed beforehand (see Section 3.2.1). One reason that the participants spoke little about the lyrics as such, might have been that most of the repertoire was in German or Italian. Another reason might be that most of the participants tended to focus on the event as a whole, in which their knowing or understanding the lyrics seemed less important for what was experienced as coming across to them (Section 4.3.1). Methodically, therefore, in terms of facilitating concert situations from which it is possible to generalize, it can be argued that this might be the case for many who attend a concert with classical music. For instance, with *Gjendines bådnlåt* the song was recognized as a lullaby and discussed in terms of what was recognized as important and relatable, not due to its lyrics but to how I sang it (Section 4.1.9).

In general, the angle that the participants took concerned less the impact of lyrics on the performance. Rather, they took as point of departure that the relation between word and sound simply was there, either by stating that as such, or as a premise in terms of what they focused on, e.g. on coming to terms with characteristics of language vs. music, discussing singing as conveying what was in the text vs. a relational event, or reflecting about the performative effort of singing what the lyrics were about, but then still first and foremost on the effort of it all. Therefore, the fact that the impact of lyrics on performance was rarely addressed as a distinct dynamic, might speak to the probability of the assumption that what comes across as important in classical singing, can only in a very limited manner be ascribed to lyrics as such. For most people, it has to do more with the dynamics of the voice (Section 4.3.1).

Further, the approach of this thesis implies in many ways that lyrics and music are not two separate signifying systems, but sees them as adhering to coextensive processes of meaning production, constituting subject and meaning (see Section 2.4). The analysis does not treat lyrics solely as a distinct domain of meaning, or as a completely distinguishable level of the song. This is also in accordance with the general impression of the interviews. Even though the word-sound often seems to lay at the heart of important sections of the dialogue, it is less in terms of what the words mean than in terms of how to speak of what goes on in the performance, how the performance states something and makes something happen which it is possible to refer to.

A fundamental proposition in this thesis is that a vital aspect of the ethical-political implications of singing might be unavailable to any analytical perspective if one does not account for the (presumed) non-referential characteristics of sound. If such a problem is left untackled, one risks ending up with two unrelated realms of meaning, one of words and one of sound, and that the dynamics between the two, although present and experienced during performance, remain outside what can be explored, prevented by the methodological approach.

Given the repertoire in the cases of this analysis – the *Christmas Oratorio* by J.S. Bach, standard repertoire opera arias by Händel, Mozart and Wagner, Schumann lieder, a traditional Norwegian lullaby, and Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* – I am obliged to look at parameters beyond interpreting the lyrics as referring directly to current societal issues of ethical-political implications. That is, at least beyond lyrics as something completely distinct from the sound of the voice.

However, in an analysis which does not differentiate categorically between sound and text, the analysis of lyrics is also an analysis of sound. Therefore, as have already been done in the analysis above, at certain points the lyrics are given more focus. But since the participants say little concerning how lyrics impact on the performance, these parts of the analysis pertain more to my own experiences during singing.

Further, the analysis shows a development in the way I conceive about the relation of word and sound. Initially I had been convinced of the necessity of a unity of word and sound in singing, and the unity of the semiotic and the symbolic for sound to become symbolic and referential. The dialogical dynamics of the interview point towards a notion of a *both-and*, an integration of word and sound in which the two retain their distinctiveness. This dynamic of integration and distinction of word and sound is most clearly on display when what is sung is experienced by the participants as activating, addressing or constituting something that has to do with one's own life.

The category of *Word and Sound* does not relate to the third auxiliary hypothesis in the same direct manner as the first two categories to their hypotheses. The relation between the category and the hypothesis is based on the concept of semiotic and symbolic meaning presented in Section 2.4: when the subject enunciates with its voice, semiotic sound becomes symbolic language, constituting both subject and meaning in the signifying process (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 23–25, 45, 48). However, such a process was difficult to identify and discuss directly in the interviews. The analysis therefore focuses on the word-sound relation, providing a basis for discussing the third auxiliary hypothesis more directly in Chapter 5. There, together with the discussion of the other two categories, I develop a notion of singing as an event in which

subject and meaning are constituted when the ongoing transition between sound and word occurs as ethical demand and public political discourse.

#### 4.3.1 Integration and Distinction

As the analysis of *Ethical Demand* and especially in *Public Political Discourse* shows, it became apparent that an issue of “word as/and sound” lay at the heart of important strands of the conversations in the interviews. This occurred in different ways. Distinctions and differences between sound and word could be stated directly or implicitly, they could be taken for granted as a necessary or self-evident dichotomy underlying other themes, or the relation could be understood, talked about, and explored as something that had a more dynamic character. When the latter took place, the conversation often got stuck, the participants or I ran out of things to say, arguments became weaker, before distinctions that were more easily dealt with took hold of the conversation again, moving it in other directions with more clearly indicated premises and conclusions.

Still, the dialogical dynamics were more interesting when the word-sound relation was not treated as two separate domains of meaning simply happening upon each other. When this was avoided, more layers of the different experiences of the performances came into play and were articulated. Crucially, these were experiences of the dynamics of word and sound that were somehow coextensive with the experiences of meaning concerning the relation between me and the audience. The analysis shows that this theme is never resolved. The participants, and in the end also I, talk about the relation of word and sound as both an integrating and a distinguishing dynamic.

P often stated or implied notions of ready-made distinctions, as in the following passages discussing the performance of *Christmas Oratorio*:

P: One thing is timing and rhythm and phrasing, and differences between classical and hip hop. But for me it also means a lot if I understand the words. Listening to the *Christmas Oratorio* takes on a completely different meaning when you can follow what the singers are singing. For me the singer’s ability to communicate is linked to whether I feel that he or she is expressing what the text says.

More than the other participants, P articulates the importance of understanding the lyrics during performance. This is seldom emphasized by the others as having an impact on the experience of the performance as something that can be distinguished as pertaining solely to the lyrics. Still, the premise for what P articulates is a distinction between word and sound

that the interviewees in both groups often express. It seems to be the most intuitive conception of what a song is built up by, and how it is build up, namely of layers or dimensions of different and separable elements, which work together:

P: But that of course does not mean that timbre and phrasing are not important. Because an experience becomes magical if the singer can phrase the beauty of the melody that makes you almost have like a metaphysical experience. But understanding the words adds another dimension.

The connection between music and lyrics is articulated slightly differently in these two quotes. In the first one, the communicative capacities of singing are linked to the all-encompassing “expression of what the text says”. In the second quote this is nuanced to “adding another dimension” to the experience. In neither case is the relation perceived, or at least not spoken of, as an outright integration between sound and text, nor is textual meaning seen as operating as a necessary part of the experience of phrase and melody in singing.

In another passage, F articulates a more intertwined relation, sharing from his own experience as a songwriter:

F: When I’ve written the melody and a few more parts, I know very quickly: “yes, this is what the song must be about”. And then I try to write that out in the lyrics.

F articulates a form of “knowing” what the song is about, simply based on the development of the melody, which indicates a form of integration of referential meaning in sound, and a direction concerning the production of meaning that goes the opposite way from what P maintained concerning the singing as expressing what is in the text. F furthers his argument by drawing parallels to how one hears and interprets a foreign language:

F: If you hear something in a completely foreign language then, then you can kind of relate to it on some level.

However, as P responds to this, everyone quickly acknowledges the distinction he makes, and so the discussion concerning integration fades:

P: Yes, but then it will be the individual’s association with the sound that creates the understanding of what it is, because you don’t have the words to..., it won’t necessarily be the same feeling or understanding.

F: Yes, no, absolutely.

The example shows how difficult it was for the dialogue to gain momentum concerning any notion of integration. That is not to say that the distinctions that were pointed out were irrelevant or misleading, nor that the suggested notions integrations were completely suitable for developing the theme. But the effort to go beyond distinctions were often halted by the dialogical dynamics. However, all in all these dynamics proved highly rewarding, as the resistance developed my notions of what an integration might be. After *Kindertotenlieder*, P pushed me on the issue of singing what I presented simply as “what is” instead of defining singing as a conveying of what the text of the songs was about:

P: I struggle to grasp the concept. Because you say that you will only sing what is. But that is not something that you do not influence as a performer. You have a relationship with it, even before the performance starts. And then there is a content in the music when there is text that you convey. You must decide on that and relate to that.

P does not accept the concept of singing “what is”; and maintains the notion of text as something distinct in song, as the premise for there to be any content in music. Even though I disagree with such a categorical conception, I agreed more and more with the basis for his conception, namely the dismissal of the possibility of simply singing “what is”.

F expanded his argument countered by P concerning music and language, suggesting that there are ethical implications in music, if certain criteria are in place concerning knowing the language. Discussing the unfamiliar language and words of *Christmas Oratorio*, he makes a connection between understanding a language and grasping musical meaning, even in instrumental music, and links this to music as ethical action:

F: Perhaps a criterion is that that people must know the language if there is to be genuine communication in song. And the same sort of thing applies to the tone. If you bring a symphony orchestra to a tribe in the Amazon who have never had contact with the outside world before and expect them to sort of feel and understand..., I’m a little unsure of that. Because that’s also a kind of language. There must be some such criteria for there to be a kind of musical ethical action that one engages in when one plays music.

Using himself as an example of an – in terms of classical music – unschooled member of the audience listening to *Frohe Hirten* in the *Christmas Oratorio*, an aria which S and P unanimously interpret as conveying a sense of joy, F continues:

F: If I were to deduce some sort of message from it, then I would have struggled. I'm not even sure if I would have been able to say that joy was a main element. [...] But via negativa, if you had told me this was a song about death, then I would have said, "What?!" But if you say it's about joy, then it's more like "Yes". But I couldn't have said on my own that here the main message was joy.

After the opera recital, M expressed a feeling that no matter what language I was singing, I came across as wanting to present or deliver something in a clear, strong, intense manner. But she was not sure exactly what this something was:

M: All those big emotions, they are there no matter what. And people want that no matter what, even if they don't understand Italian or German, they still want to catch on. In your concert you went straight to the point and were very clear that you wanted to show or give something. I wasn't quite sure what you wanted to give, though. But you were very clear, strong, intense, "here I am to tell something". Everyone would have realized that.

In a similar line of thought, discussing the arias of *Un'aura amorosa* and *Il mio tesoro*, she addresses the importance of the voice over against the referential meaning of the lyrics or the plot of an opera:

M: Most people will care the most about the voice they hear. I've been to the opera with people who are not the most musical or interested in classical music, but they listen and enjoy themselves and want to listen to it.

She modifies this a bit later, and finds that at times I would have come closer to the audience if I had sung in Norwegian:

M: If you were to get a little closer with the music, a little more, a bit textual, and "Norwegianize" it, you would have reached a little more "into the tent", as it were.

But then again, after *Kindertotenlieder*, M finds that lyrics, or at least the language in which they are sung, have no significance in terms of producing the meaning of the singing event:

M: There is no doubt that if it were [foreign language] you would understand that here there is only pain and depravity, suffering, and still very beautiful.

In Group 1 this was also the experience of F, articulating that the meaning and content of *Kindertotenlieder* came across independently of the lyrics, before he had read them. And when he did read them, they fitted into the totality of the performance:

F: I heard it without knowing the text or anything, but I saw that there was melancholy, beauty, sadness, and the brokenness when a child is dead. But then the text also testified very much to the enormous love for this child. This also came across very well. And there is also something universal, pain and in a way happiness, which is often a mixture.

These quotes articulate different experiences and to some extent inconsistent opinions concerning word and sound. Word and sound are sometimes experienced as distinct realms of meaning, while at other times they are talked about as united and indistinguishable. These two modes of experience occur not only at separate times, but on certain occasions also simultaneously. This points towards the final phase of this analysis: that the word-sound relation is never fully resolved, the dynamics of the dialogue keep the tension going. Based on the interview material, therefore, how the two interact cannot be fully explained, the dynamics between word and sound do not add up or display neatly. As the remains of the analysis will show, this might be because these dynamics of word and sound relate to the experience of one's own life in song when someone sings: they facilitate a constitution of subject and meaning, but one that does not depend on the word and sound being neither steadily distinct nor steadily integrated. It is *both-and*, and in the groups we speak of both simultaneously.

#### 4.3.2 Text and Singing Body – Presence as Dynamizing the Word-Sound Dichotomy

Despite a tendency to resort to clear distinctions, P simultaneously articulates a deep connection between text, technique and body that he finds constitutes a stage presence that goes beyond the limits of the self of the singer. Discussing the aria *Frohe Hirten* and *Christmas Oratorio*, he argues that presence is to convey in a manner that is not limited to text and what the text is about. As the singer is a “medium” for conveying, and ventures out of her- or himself, the distinctive realm of words is dynamized through the presence of the singer:

P: To convey is much more than the text. It's about having a presence and convey the message. It's very basic, you work with your body, you get used to being on a stage, which doesn't really have anything to do with the content, but that you use yourself as a medium, that you are not inside yourself but venture out of yourself.

I: That's presence?

P: Yes.

Likewise, after *Kindertotenlieder*, discussing how introversion can prevent singing from functioning as a statement, P emphasizes the importance of physical gestures and facial expressions for how I express what lies “in the text”, what I want to say, or what “Mahler wants to say” through me as the singer:

P: I don't mean that you should jump around and twirl but have a well thought out relationship to gestures and facial expressions with respect to how you want to express what lies in the text. They are not the easiest poems to read at the same time as you listen to the songs. So, it's important to express more clearly [physically] what it is Mathias wants to say, or Mahler wants to say through Mathias.

Referring to his own singing education, P argues further that when singing is fully incorporated into the body, the ability to convey as such becomes less significant or even “disappears” as something of importance. F agrees fully:

P: I worked very physically to integrate the coloratura, like this [sings], or drawing with your arms in the air as you were singing, to get it into your body, to get the physical things you did to settle in your voice. Then the coloratura anchored and became free. And then, in a way, the singer's intellect and ability to communicate will disappear, because that's not what it's about. It's just a matter of you being able to use yourself as a medium for what Bach has created.

F: The intellectual and rational and the relationship with the texts disappear. You just sort of do it.

These examples show a tendency towards dynamizing the relation of word and sound when the physical aspects of my performances are addressed. When dynamized by the presence of the singing body, even the notion of conveying becomes less important in terms of what was going on in performance.

Still, the participants would not resort to any consistent notion of integration. Again and again the dynamics of the dialogue were characterized by whether or not the participant speaking based the argument on a distinction between word and sound, and in which words had referential characteristics and sound did not. Once such distinctions were challenged, it became much more difficult to speak, both for me and for the participants, and the statements became more hesitant. Further, even when the word-sound relation was talked about as a more transitional connection, other distinctions were still held on to, which I would have thought were connected to and affected more by such a dynamization: I remained a medium



of something and someone else, mainly the composer or the composer's intentions, not myself and my reality; the work was one thing and the performance another; I was a conveyer of meaning, not its generator; singing was an overcoming of the rational, not an expression that erased any clear distinction between reason and emotion; ethical-political content and statement in song were products of what occurred outside the singing event, not constituted by the relation of the voice appealing to the audience.

These are all clear-cut dualisms, all of which relate to a dichotomic notion of word and sound, in which producing sound is not the same as producing symbolic, referential meaning. It became clear that this dualism lay at the heart of the conversations also when they were more explicitly pertaining to ethics and politics. This becomes apparent when the discussion turns towards what kind of reality my presence on stage, even in dynamizing the word-sound relation, might constitute. For instance, when P discusses the performance of the *Christmas Oratorio* and its possible ethical-political significance, what his argument is based on can be interpreted as the word-sound dualism, by which also the notion of conveying reappears:

P: If you sing Bach and believe that what is in his music has a force that people need today to make the right choices, then, to succeed, you need to have an emotional intensity in your expression that will move people, even if you don't say anything other than the lyrics.

As the analysis in the two previous categories shows, I became increasingly aware of the risks inherent in the project of collapsing the reality of the performance with an ethical-political reality as such, resulting in a one-to-one connection not really doing (ethically) or saying (discursively) much. The performance and the reality had to be regarded as both separate and integrated, instead of only integrated through some form of presence.

Before the interviews, my conception of singing as ethical demand and political discourse had been that this was achieved through the signifying process of a dynamic integration of semiotic sound and symbolic word, as this integration constituted me and the meaning of my singing: me as a subject through my articulating ethical-political, that is, symbolic meaning in my making the "overture" through my voice towards the audience (Løgstrup, 1997, p. 15; Kristeva 1984, pp. 23–24, 48). However, in the discussion concerning word and sound the participants displayed a reluctance towards any consistent notion of integration of word and sound. Sometimes it was talked of as such, sometimes not. The theme of *Word and Sound* therefore developed – in a similar manner as in the two other categories – towards a re-establishment of dualism, not instead of, but simultaneous with the integration: towards a *both-and*. This became particularly apparent in the discussion of *Kindertotenlieder*, as the next section will show.

#### 4.3.3 How to Sing “What Happens in Life”? The Effort of Both-And, and Beyond the Problem

Having lost a child at birth (see Section 3.3.5 Research Ethics), D was curious as to how I would sing *Kindertotenlieder*. I had sent the participants the German lyrics and my own translation before the concert. D addressed the question of *how* I was going to be “able to sing it”, that is, what the poems she had received on paper were about, in a way that seemed to me less concerned with *what* they were about in terms of content, or *what goes on* in terms of different dynamics between text and sound, but simply: This is what it is, this is what happens in life, it is horrible, so how are you going to be able to sing it?

D: I don’t fully understand this “Now the sun will rise so bright.” There is a child who is dying, and then there is this radiant sun, and making room for the light of the sun. It is a duality between the violent tragedy and letting in the light. I was thinking “how are you going to be able to sing it, it’s so difficult, how will you bring out that duality?”. How did you do that? It seemed natural and nice.

D’s interpretation of the song as invoking both the tragedy and the light of the morning sun at the same time generated a development in the conversation less concerning a question of addressing or resolving or conveying what the lyrics was about and more a question of how I was going to sing it. There was an eagerness in the way D questioned me on this, prompting me to ask directly:

I: What do you feel I did, then?

D: When I hear it again now [after we had seen the recording during the interview], I think that the first piece is also performed as something sad, it’s heavy. At the same time, there is something about the sparse instrumentation, every single voice is audible. And this makes it more vulnerable in a way, and brighter. Maybe the duality became more explicit that way. I don’t know if there should be a duality either, it’s just that this is something I was wondering...

I: Yes, it’s a very strange opening to a song cycle about dead children, and *to* dead children, that the sun rises, and then “I greet you” to the sun.

D: ... that ties it back to the end, that the child is in God’s hand and now it has calmed down, now it is gone over into something good.

D seemed to identify a relation between the first and the last songs in terms of how I could sing them, the acuteness of them, which I found moving, and which presented me with a concrete example of what could be at stake for members of the audience: not in terms of what is sung as such, but *how one is to be able to sing it*. D talked about this in a manner that went beyond the problem of word and/or/as sound. It did not matter – they were both united *and* distinct in the effort of simply being able to sing “it”, which related to something real in her life, now sung by me: when asked what the group finds that it is “about” – the fact that I stood the way I stood, sang the way I sang, that the lyrics were the way the lyrics were – D answered that it has to do with what happens in life:

D: You are expressing despair. The music is so beautiful in itself, but at the same time it can hold so many layers, it’s very painful, it’s a tragedy that is vented through music. It conveys what happens in life, this kind of redemption or... , what happens, tragedies, the way it is.

I: “What happens in life”..

D: But that’s also the thing with music, music is also music in itself. It’s something that you also experience and enjoy *as* music. It doesn’t always have to be connected to your own experience or events. This song cycle could also be experienced just as music and enjoyed as the beauty that it is. At the same time, you have this cycle of poems that you must relate to, or as one *does* relate to, and that in a way adds more dimensions to the song and the music.

Here the distinction is reestablished. The poems are spoken of as that which forces the meaning of the songs in a particular direction, different from how they can be experienced and enjoyed in and of themselves as music. But soon after, the “music” is again referred to as what goes directly into the painful area of the death of children:

D: Since he created this piercing, painful, tragic cycle, then you understand that even back then, when the child mortality rate was much higher, it was the worst one could experience. And even today, but I guess even more so then, it is common to think that one should forget it quickly. Children who die, it’s so horrible that you don’t want to deal with it. Even so, Mahler made such a piece of music that goes directly into this almost taboo area.

Music and text are talked about in more integrated terms when what happens in the performance is experienced as expressing, representing and activating “what happens in life”. But

at the same time, when one tries to put what happens into words, music and text are often put next to each other as different domains or parameters of meaning.

When one's own life is experienced in the song event, that what happened in the song act was about life, and about one's own life, then the relation between word and sound comes into play and is dynamized. But the dialogue shows that one goes beyond the problem as the focus shifts simply towards *how on is to be able* to sing it. And even then, to describe it any further reactivates distinctions.

#### 4.3.4 Conclusion

In section 4.3 the analysis of the performances and the interviews has been guided by the research question pertaining to auxiliary hypothesis 3:

To what extent and how are subject and meaning constituted by the singing voice?

This research question does not facilitate a similar form of analysis as the questions guiding the other two categories, as it does not generate specific findings in the statements of the participants. The findings that are attainable concern the relation of word and sound, not the signifying process as a whole. Therefore, the category of *Word and Sound* does not relate to the third auxiliary hypothesis in the same direct manner as the first two categories to their hypotheses.

The material shows that the participants negotiate the relation between word and sound during my performances as a concept of both integration and distinction. The relation between music and language comes more urgently into play when what happens in the singing event is experienced as shedding light on, activating memories from and representing life, and especially the participant's own life. Nonetheless, it remains difficult to put into words. The conversations often return to ways of speaking in which words and sound are referred to more as two separate dimensions of meaning.

The fact that the relation is experienced as more dynamic when what goes on in the performance relates more closely to one's own life, provides a basis for addressing the third auxiliary hypothesis more directly in the final discussions in Chapter 5. There I discuss how and to what extent the ongoing transitional dynamics between word and sound expose the humanity of the singer and manifest as ethical demand and a participation in public political discourse, in the process of which subject and meaning are constituted, when the performer sings something that is experienced as real, or as what happens in life.

## 4.4 Conclusions of the Analysis of the Categories – Towards Focal Points of Discussion

The analysis in Chapter 4 outlines three main thematic developments that emerges cumulatively through each category:

1. Ethical Demand – Towards what is without collapsing in it.
2. Public Political Discourse – Towards a modification of intending, meaning and stating something through singing.
3. Word and Sound – Towards a both-and of the integration and distinctiveness of word and sound.

As focal points towards the discussion in Chapter 5, I put forward the following preliminary conclusions concerning auxiliary hypotheses 1 and 2:

1. Singing constitutes an ethical demand between singer and audience.

*To what extent:* The act of singing radically exposes fundamental human conditions.

*How:* In the overture towards the audience with the voice, a meeting and relation is constituted that can be perceived and interpreted as an ethical demand of interdependence and an ought-in-the-is of the other.

2. Singing is a form of participation in public political discourse.

*To what extent:* The act of referring to and stating something about the shared reality through the singing voice radically constitutes a participation in public political discourse.

*How:* By constituting a meeting and relation between singer and audience within and as a public political event, based on an ethical demand of interdependence and an ought-in-the-is of the other, the singer is prompted to have an opinion of this shared reality and state/convey this opinion through vocal expression, with the aim of empowering and tilting the audience in particular directions politically.

As presented in the Chapter 1, the questions of “to what extent” might suggest a quantitative methodology, and can, as shown here, be answerable only in relatively vague terms – to a greater or lesser extent, or not at all. However, I found these questions to be warranted as they generated a more vital dialogue in the interviews when I did not take for granted that my assumptions made sense to the participants. Therefore, even though the questions of ‘how’ provide a richer basis for the discussion in the last Chapter 5, I find that as part of the overall

analysis and discussion, the questions of 'to what extent' have their place, even within an explorative approach.

The emerged category of *Word and Sound* did not relate to hypothesis 3 – concerning subject and meaning – in the same direct manner as the first two categories to their hypotheses. Therefore, preliminary conclusions to *how* and *to what extent* concerning this hypothesis are not viable on the basis of the analysis as such. These questions must be treated through a discussion in which the implications of the analysis as a whole are taken into account. Thus, the discussion in Chapter 5 develops an understanding of singing as an event in which subject and meaning are constituted in an ethical-political public sphere, when the dynamics between sound and word occur as ethical demand and public political discourse.

## 5 Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss the overarching research question of the thesis:

What are the ethical and political implications of singing?

I aim to develop the discussion in terms of what ethical responsibility and the public sphere might mean in relation to singing. In Section 5.1 I discuss the findings within each category and the connections between them. In Section 5.2 I further the analysis guided by auxiliary hypothesis 3, discussing the ongoing transitional semiotic-symbolic dynamics between sound and word and how this transition might be understood as constituting subject and meaning. Finally, in Section 5.3 I discuss how the ethical-political might be understood as integral to singing as the dynamizing relation of word and sound opens up symbolic discourse articulated as song. I pursue the discussions by drawing upon the theoretical concepts introduced in Chapter 2.

### 5.1 Development of Themes as Basis for Discussion

The main developments identified in the interview material served to explicate the themes of each category as well as the relation between them, as the developments could be built on successively during the whole analytical process. These developments indicate possible findings in terms of empirical consequences of the hypotheses, as well as in terms of modified and new insights that will be developed further in the present chapter.

#### 5.1.1 Ethical Demand – Towards What Is without Collapsing in It

In the analysis of the category *Ethical Demand*, I have analysed the concerts and interviews using broad meta-ethical perspectives drawn from the theoretical framework of the thesis: that reality is always ethically charged and that every encounter issues an ethical demand. The category relates directly to auxiliary hypothesis 1, and the analysis sheds light on how singing and ethics can be connected.

If I sang without continually upholding and managing what was perceived as a *trust* on which the relation to the audience was built, that is, if I sang without meeting and participating in the ethical demand which my singing constituted, my singing was experienced as impoverished

and introvert. What the participants experienced as a good performance, was always also what could be interpreted as an ethically charged performance.

This occurred for instance as different forms of *recognition*. During certain songs and ways of singing, the participants made assumptions about me concerning who I was in relation to them, or what types of identities and roles I had in my life which they related to in their own lives, with their own experiences, or experiences of the way I stood and my breathing that influenced their own.

This was particularly noticeable concerning experiences that had to do with the parent-child relation. The addressing of parent-child relation seemed to be experienced as connecting sound, body language, content, conveying, one's own private reality and the shared reality of the concert, by being recognizable. The heightening of urgency that my singing generated by being about or creating recognition of the parent-child relation, seems to confirm what Løgstrup and Jonas identification of the meeting with the child as the most poignant locus for the ethical demand and call for responsibility.

Another way that singing was experienced as ethically charged had to do with the expectation that I *had to meet* the audience. This could be achieved in many ways, but it was always expected. If I at any point in the concerts was experienced as singing in a manner that came across as if singing for myself, this was pointed out as insufficient, and not giving enough. The concept of the project of singing reality, proved to inherently risk being experienced as too passive and introvert. The demand that the singing event constituted was experienced as not met by me in an adequate manner, because the expectation was that my singing ought to be directed towards the audience, and experienced by them as being directed in such a manner.

Further, the meeting constituted by the singing event was not only between the audience and me as interacting persons. The meeting was also to be *met by sound*. This was sound less in terms of me giving sound to lyrics, but the physical sound of my voice as such. The sound was conceived of as constituting a meeting, which means something, and which by the definition of ethics applied in this project, is of an ethically charged nature, issuing and *ought* from the *is* of the encountered other. Sound, presumably purely semiotic, meant something that has ethical implications. And this was perhaps made even more apparent when the physical aspect of sound was not possible to the same degree due to Covid-19, and the concerts had to be viewed and listened to via recording and audio equipment.



The fact that sound was talked about as constituting a meeting also indicates that the sound of song is never only semiotic, but always also symbolic, and becomes so by constituting an appeal towards the listener from the singer, addressing the conditions of their shared reality. This dynamic of the semiotic and symbolic will be treated in Section 5.2 below.

In terms of findings, the analysis show that singing is at the same time an intersubjective interaction, an artistic expression and a way to experience and address life and reality, exposing the basic shared human conditions of performer and audience: interdependence, trust, power and responsibility (Løgstrup, 1997). Statements and passages concerning the relational dynamics between me and the participants during the performances indicate that singing is ethically charged, as neither I nor the participants could choose to withdraw from the relational dynamics that the singing event constituted. There is an “ought” in the “is” of the other person who is encountered in and through singing, be it the performer or a member of the audience (Jonas, 1984). Therefore, based on the analysis, the hypothesis that singing constitutes an ethical demand was strengthened. Notions of trust, power, community, and relation exposed a shared humanity that was recognized, articulated, and developed further by the participants during the interviews.

At the same time, the material shed light on how this ethically charged reality and the singing event are not identical. They must remain distinct if anything is to be conveyed to the audience beyond simply my own personal issues. The analysis shows that identification prevents conveying, both of what goes on as ethical reality, and of the musical work.

Thus, auxiliary hypothesis 1 was also modified in terms of what constituted the sense of urgency in the ethical demand. This urgency does not necessarily entail a private dimension or a one-to-one relation between how I am or feel and the reality produced through singing. The analysis shows quite the opposite: the anti-theorizing, performative and direct quality of singing practice that the notion of “sung reality” was intended to constitute – by seeking a practice that opts not to convey anything but the reality it produces, the specific addressing of reality by being immersed in it as it is constituted by voice, blurring the distinctions of word and sound, and performer and audience – risks becoming exactly what I tried to avoid, that is, an overly theoretical concept of singing, and my feelings alone, not an articulation of a shared reality.<sup>32</sup>

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32 Løgstrup (1997) also comments on the ethical demand including a necessary distance in conveying something (Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 19–20, 40). See Section 5.2.2 below.

The analysis showed that this reversed and unintended effect sometimes happened when I was singing, which could result in the participants having a weakened experience of any kind of present, urgent reality. Instead, the interviews indicate that the participants' experience of an urgent reality was not lessened when they experienced me as conveying the musical work, or my intentions concerning the work. This came as a surprise to me, since the statements about such conveying often connoted dualistic premises that I had thought would prevent the experience of a sung reality rather than generate it. What I had assumed would create distance rather than urgency, aestheticism and theorizing rather than direct performative experiences, often proved to have the opposite effect. The notion of conveying something through singing rather kept my voice and me as a singer from being reduced to a passive element in the social dynamics of the performative event, and instead enabling me to "stand in it," as S pointed out, and produce something, not just be part of what more or less accidentally was going on. To sing reality as an act of constituting an ethical demand, therefore cannot be identified fully with the performative notion in the performative turn as proposed by Schechner that 'as if' = 'is' (Schechner, 2003, p. xviii). Rather, based on the interviews, such a notion tends towards the collapsing of reality with the act of singing which risks preventing a genuine production of meaning.

The proposition that to sing is to sing a reality which exposes ethical dynamics of trust, recognition, and interdependence, is not a novel insight, as the vast literature on music and ethics plainly shows. Nor do I propose that to sing a reality which exposes ethical dynamics is any different from singing as such. That reality is sung as one sings is self-evident. What I aim to articulate with the expression "singing as ethical demand" is therefore not that the act of singing constitutes reality as such. I argue that the reality that is sung, is the exposure of the humanity of the singer and its forcing onto the audience. Furthermore, in the singer's act of exposing her/his humanity, we are all exposed and something demanded of us due to our interdependence with one another.

The main development that this category facilitates started from an initial understanding of singing as an all-encompassing event, in which I addressed reality by being immersed in it and overcoming distinct dualisms of interior and exterior by presenting myself over against others in and through my voice. This developed into an understanding of singing as constituting what is without collapsing in it, that is, by being aware of the need to have clear intentions, developing these, and conveying them as something beyond simply being in and participating in the social interaction. I had to become more specific about what I meant by facilitating the social situation of the performance, as well as what I thought about the musical work and wanted to do with it.

The auxiliary hypothesis was also modified in terms of an integral normativity in the singing practice. I treat this modification in Section 5.3, taking into account also the discussion of the other categories.

### 5.1.2 Public Political Discourse – Towards a Modification of Intending, Meaning, and Stating Something through Singing

The category *Public Political Discourse* was generated from statements and passages in the interviews concerning how the public discursive sphere constituted by the singing event might relate to ethical-societal issues. The category related directly to auxiliary hypothesis 2, and the interviews shed light on how singing and public political discourse were perceived both as connected and as separate domains.

The underlying premise of looking for empirical consequences of the hypothesis of this category, which became increasingly more apparent during the conversations, was that singing challenges and continually dynamizes the word-sound dichotomy. During the analysis I sought to explore how such a dynamization might open methodical possibilities to rethink what discursivity is (Borgdorff et al., 2020, p. 5), both as a widening of the notion of political discourse based on singing, as well as acknowledging that public political discourse may take on different forms, and that mediated political communication does not need to be a fully fledged deliberation (Habermas, 2006; Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 52). Under such a dynamized notion of political discursivity, singing might be understood as direct participation in political discourse, addressing and issuing opinions about reality through song, instead of simply containing in its lyrics something that coincide with or embody verbalized, political sentiments (Street 2012, p. 67).

Participants articulated experiences during the performances of an activated sense of inner values or experiences of song as an exercise of power or impact between me and the audience. However, the notion of singing as political discourse was also met with doubt and at times even dismissed altogether. The general opinion was that singing could only be understood as a form of participation in public political discourse if a specific political take was expressed before or external to the performance as such, said or written, explicitly addressing specific problems or issues. If not, the sense was that any political dynamics that singing gave rise to could only be attributed to pre-existing principles, independent of the performance and more as something residing in people's minds, activated by their reaction to the music. In short, participants did not experience me as directly participating in public political discourse, neither through my singing nor the conveying of something political in the music itself. This seems to confirm what Street (2012) argues must be in place beforehand if music is to

have a political significance, namely “forms of organizations – that enable musicians and political actors to work together” (Street, 2012, p. 71). The lack of experienced impact or specific political discursive characteristics of the performances might also be understood as confirming Habermas’s view that “the capacity of the public sphere to solve problems on its own is limited” (Habermas, 1996a, p. 359).

Therefore, in terms of finding explicit empirical consequences, the hypothesis that singing is a form of participation in public political discourse was significantly weakened. In some respects, of course, this is a finding in itself. A premise in the explorative approach was always to maintain the possibility of falsification, which I found gave vital impulses to the dialogical dynamics in the interviews, as well as providing a rich and accountable basis for discussion. The development of the theme of *Public Political Discourse* was one of modification through weakening.

The analysis of *Ethical Demand* shows that a notion of a one-to-one relation between reality and singing, prevents singing from constituting what can be experienced as a shared reality, thus also preventing any participation in it. The blurring of distinctions that the voice generates between sound and word, the semiotic and the symbolic, act of reference and materiality, could be analysed as correlating to the blurring of private and public, my own issues and a shared reality, impeding the signifying, conveying and constituting function of the voice. This became even more evident with *Public Political Discourse*, due to its more obvious connection with the presumably distinctly verbal and denotative meanings and opinions: to come across to the audience as song, the performance had to go beyond the blurring characteristics of singing that I had conceived of as a participating and addressing expression, and develop towards an intended and clear statement.

A discrepancy emerged in the conversations and in the analysis concerning the discursive and declarative characteristics of song. On one hand, the participants rejected the notion that a distinct political opinion was constituted through my singing. On the other hand, the participants demanded that my intentions had to be clear and communicative, in, through and as performative event – I had to intend, mean and state something through singing, both about what I meant with the work I sang, and what I wanted to do with it in the public event of the concert. These meanings and intentions were discussed and characterized as if they were verbal statements about reality.

It became apparent that both my opinions “about” the song in terms of its content, and the ethical-political action “through” the song as what I wanted to produce with the use of voice, could be there at the same time, perhaps sometimes overlapping, but without collapsing into

identification. It was this “through” that had been at the heart of my intention of this project. Through singing, as the exposure of humanity through voice, I wanted to explore the possibility of “tilting the audience in the direction of something good”, that is, through singing as intended statement about and as reality. This was what I opted to do through the display of my singing as ethical demand in a show of trust and responsibility, as an act of power and care towards the audience, in and through the public event of performance. This might resemble what Habermas argues that the public sphere must do:

The public sphere must [...] amplify the pressure of problems, that is, not only detect and identify problems but also convincingly and influentially thematize them, furnish them with possible solutions, and dramatize them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by parliamentary complexes. Besides the “signal” function there must be an effective problematization. (Habermas, 1996a, p. 359)

In the interviews, I realized that I could mean something “about” the song in terms of conveying its plot and drama and a content talked about by the participants as located in the lyrics, without that opinion obstructing what I meant through the song as an act of addressing the ethical-political reality it occurred within and as. Rather, the “about” and the “through” were dependent on each other.

Habermas claims that “we understand a speech act when we know what makes it acceptable” (Habermas, 1996a, p. 297). When the terms of validity are met, either by what is said or by the implicit guarantee given by the speaker to meet the terms, the communicative act is characterized by rational commitment, and by which it assumes an action-coordinating function (Habermas, 1984, pp. 297–302). To some extent this notion of an assessment of the communicative act fits what the participants were doing in their evaluation of my singing, conceiving of my performance as implicit claims of validity.

However, as far as what was explicitly uttered by the participants, this assessment had less to do with experiences they had while I sang, and related more to the dialogue afterwards when we discussed the recordings. In theory, therefore, singing might satisfy the Habermasian precondition for a rational, discursive, communicative action, in terms of being susceptible to criticism, being open to judgement and expressing some kind of content that in one way or another can reassure critics, observers and non-participants (Habermas, 1984, p. 15, 20). But the conversations did not indicate that the concerts had such an action-coordinating and evaluation-generative function during performance itself. Any political function of singing was located outside of the practice.

Goehr's conception of how vocal expression is autonomous and political, how singing is "both a musical and a political act" (p. 127) might to some extent present a more direct link between the musical practice in performance and an assessment of it as a communicative action in the public sphere. When singing "is regulated by suitable regulative or formal ideals that have neither been overdetermined nor closed by ideological content" (Goehr, 2004, p. 37), the performance is an open practice "in which participants are required constantly and independently to reflect upon, and to judge whether the actions undertaken and the products produced meet these ideals" (p. 131). Thus, Goehr's notion of how "singing is both a musical and a political act" (p. 127) might serve to connect singing to a Habermasian notion of assessment and political discourse oriented towards consensus.

Further, Goehr's notion of music's freedom within society (Goehr, 2004, p. 13), seem to resemble how the concerts were experienced as both an integrated part of everyday life, and at the same time as representing something different, something "cultural" that "happens" as a distinct and concrete event, that made both the music and one's own everyday life "part of something bigger", as H stated. Crucially, it was as part of the coming together and participation in the public sphere of the singing event, that the singing practice obtained meaning to the people that were there.

However, in terms of *how* the singing act is such a participation, neither the framework of Habermas, nor that of Goehr, provides much explanation. They are first and foremost theories that can shed light on *that* singing occurs as participation in political discourse. And the same goes for what the material in the interviews generates of findings. Singing might constitute a participation and be assessed as such during the performances. But putting into words exactly how, proved difficult.

What became clear, nonetheless, was that the intention of singing as a participation in public political discourse "through" the use of the voice as sound, was dependent on a clearer intent also concerning the "about" of the song as symbolic content. My intent could not come across through song without the song being also about something that was not reducible to the social dynamics of the public sphere.

The main development within this category, building on and furthering the development of *Ethical Demand*, was a weakening of the original hypothesis of singing as a form of participation in public political discourse towards an inductive modification of intending, meaning, and stating something through singing.

As with the auxiliary hypothesis 1, so was also hypothesis 2 modified in terms of an integral normativity in the singing practice. I treat these two together in Section 5.3, as it hinges on the discussion of the dynamics of word and sound.

### 5.1.3 Word and Sound – Towards a Both-And of the Integration and Distinctiveness of Word and Sound

*Word and Sound* was generated from statements and passages in the interviews concerning experiences during the concerts that concerned the relation between lyrics and sound. The analysis of the previous categories indicated that many key moments in the conversations were affected by the dynamics between language and music. No matter how this relation was conceived of by the participants, it seemed to be affecting the conversations about the other two categories. *Word and Sound* therefore emerged during the analysis of *Ethical Demand* and *Public Political Discourse* as a continuation of the analysis of these two, focusing on the dynamics between sound and word in the voice as what goes on in and as ethical demand and in and as public political discourse.

The category did not relate to auxiliary hypothesis 3 in the same direct manner as the first two categories to their hypotheses. The research question that guided the analysis, to what extent and how subject and meaning are constituted in the act of singing, proved difficult to apply directly in the conversations. Before the interviews, my conception had been that to sing as ethical demand and political discourse was achieved through the signifying process of a dynamic integration of semiotic sound and symbolic word, as this integration constituted me and the meaning of my singing: me as a subject through my articulating ethical-political, i.e. symbolic meaning in my making the “overture” through my voice towards the audience, trusting and exposing the interdependence between us (Løgstrup, 1997, p 15; Kristeva 1984, pp. 23–24, 48). However, discussing how they perceived my singing, the participants displayed a reluctance towards any consistent notion of integration of word and sound. Sometimes it was talked of as such, sometimes not. The theme of *Word and Sound* therefore developed – in a similar manner as in the two other categories – towards a re-establishment of dualism, not instead of, but simultaneous with the integration: towards a *both-and*.

Often, the participants negotiated the relation between word and sound in my singing as a concept of both integration and distinction, without really addressing it, much less problematizing it. However, the relation between music and language came more urgently into play when a sense of recognition was activated, when the participants talked about how experiences in their own life was activated and present during the singing event, when what happened in the singing event was experienced as being about, shedding light on, activating

memories from and representing lives and relations. When the distinction in the statements of word and sound was not so clear, more layers of the different experiences of my singing and how I carried myself came into play and were articulated. Passages in the conversations show a tendency towards dynamizing the word-sound relation when the physical aspects of my performances are addressed. When dynamized by the presence of the singing body, even the notion of conveying what is in the lyrics becomes less important in terms of what was going on in performance

Therefore, I interpret the dynamization of the word-sound relation as sometimes and somehow coextensive with the experiences of meaning related to the dynamics between me and the audience. Most poignantly, this occurred during the sometimes personal and direct dialogical dynamics pertaining to *Kindertotenlieder* and *Gjendines Bådnåt*.

At these moments, the conversations are often characterized by hesitation and a struggle to find the right words. A general tendency is therefore that the participants return to ways of speaking in which words and sound are referred to as separate realms of meaning. Then conversations then become more vivid and enthusiastic again, and the statements made are confirmed more easily by the participants, including me, even though what is talked about as a theme still contradicts the clear distinctions between word and sound.

In the end, the analysis shows that this theme is never really resolved. The participants, and increasingly also I, talk about the relation between word and sound as both a distinguishing dynamic and an integrating one, singing as simultaneously a referring to something from a distance and an identification of sign and reference by being immersed in the reality it constituted. However, the problem of word and sound in itself did not matter nearly as much as the expectations and experiences concerning my attempt simply to sing the song when the song was recognized as having something to do with one's life in an urgent way. At certain moments, therefore, the conversations can be analysed as going beyond the issue of integration and distinction of word and sound, and focusing simply on of the effort of singing in terms of how I am going to be able to sing "it", that is, "it" as relating to something real in life, now sung by me.

The position of the thesis has been that analysing ethical-political implications of opera and classical singing, might bring to the surface the certain dynamics of word and sound more effectively than the analysis of pop music, which tends to give weight to the referential capacities of lyrics, rendering the music more a supportive element of a presumed distinct textual meaning, furnishing the lyrics with sound (cf. Uberg Nerland, 2015, pp. 50–51).



That is not to say that the challenges facing the classical singer are fundamentally different from those facing the pop singer in terms of how the relation between word and sound operates in the performance. Nor do I find that lyrics are necessarily less important in classical than in popular music in terms of the meaning production. However, the interviews show that the lyrics in classical song might not be understood due to language and phrasing (Section 4.3.1), and – if understood – not experienced as directly relevant to any current ethical-political issues, nor necessarily as what feels important as my voice carries from me towards the audience. For many in an audience it will be first and foremost the voice that they care the most about, in terms of the physical sound that meets them, and to which they attach meaning and feeling (Section 4.1.5, 4.3.1). These factors concerning classical singing became even more apparent by the fact that some of the concerts were listened to and watched only as recordings due to covid-19. As F points out, being in the same room as me seemed more important due to how the voice sounds in the room during classical concerts. P emphasized how he could not be bothered to watch opera on screen, because the physical meeting with singer and sound was absent (Section 4.1.5). These findings indicate that the physical sensation of voice sound and the meeting that this sound constitutes in song without microphones and amplifying equipment, does not occur through a recording, perhaps more apparent in classical singing. The interviews show that it was this meeting was the most important thing in the experience of classical singing, made apparent when this meeting was not possible.

The question of words and sounds are not a question of, respectively, popular singing as different from classical. But the analysis of classical singing as a production of meaning can to a much lesser degree take the lyrics as point of departure for understanding what goes on in the relation towards the audience. As presented in Section 2.3, Uberg Nærland's analysis of popular music finds its political implications in the "explicitly political lyrical content" and "politically explicit characteristics" of hip hop (Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 56). Street (2012) largely bases his analysis on popular music with lyrics having contemporary relevance. Aware of this problem, he investigates how sound, melody and rhythm may be labelled ethical-political without reducing the scope of the inquiry to lyrical content or what is "inscribed in lyrics" (Street, 2012, p. 151). However, the analysis never really abandons a fundamentally dichotomic understanding, as the distinction between lyrics and other presumably more musical elements is upheld. This is perhaps unavoidable if one is to be able to analyse anything at all. As my own analysis shows, my initial conception of an integrated relation of word and sound during performance had to be modified towards a both-and, thus re-establishing the dichotomic distinction, although as simultaneous to an integration.

Essentially these are the same issues regardless of genre, they are simply more apparent in classical singing, which makes classical singing a critical case in which I have looked for other parameters beyond the lyrics, to identify any ethical-political implications of current interest. That is, at least beyond lyrics understood as distinct from the sound of the voice. I find that this premise for the approach to analysing the word-sound relation might also be appropriate for an analysis of rap and pop music as well, so as not to be too focused simply on the lyrics.

The category *Word and Sound* emerged inductively during the interviews and analysis, although anticipated during the theoretical preparations. The main development that this category facilitates can be described as a development away from my initial assumption that word and sound must be integrated if singing is to have a legitimate ethical-political discursive status. The analysis generated a development towards a notion of *both-and*, that is, a simultaneous integration and distinctiveness of word and sound, especially when what was sung is experienced as connected with one's own life.

Even though this thesis explores the dynamic relation between word and sound as ethically and politically significant, I cannot, based on the interviews, explain in any concluding manner how word and sound interact, nor how lyrics impact on my performances. In the next section, I discuss it from my own performative perspective, within the theoretical framework presented in section 2.4, tracing the implications of auxiliary research question 3. This research question guided the analysis of this category, but served less to produce something that could be tested, and more for providing a basis for the discussion and developing perspectives both concerning auxiliary hypothesis 3 and the main hypothesis.

Still, I consider the discussion in the following section 5.2 to be based on the thematic developments within the analysed categories, even though I discuss more freely in terms of what I experience as a singer. The discussion, scaffolded by strands of theory presented in Section 2.2 and 2.4, develops an understanding of singing as an event in which subject and meaning are constituted in an ethical-political public sphere, where the ongoing dynamics between sound and word manifest as ethical demand and a form of participation in public political discourse.

## 5.2 The Ongoing Transitional Dynamization of Word and Sound – Constituting Subject and Meaning

### 5.2.1 Destabilizing

The moments in the interview conversations at which the dynamics of the word-sound relation were most clearly in play, was when the singing in question was experienced as being about or activating memories from or ongoing aspects of life, giving rise to a sense of recognition of the theme of the song or of me as representing something in their lives while I sang, be it breathing and relaxation, parenthood or even the loss of children. The ongoing transitional dynamics of word and sound in the voice seemed in these cases to correspond to a more vital and compelling dynamic between the audience and me, in the sense that I was representing or producing something that they recognized from their own life.

As treated in Section 2.4.2, Kristeva (1984) claims that in the signifying process, on “the threshold of language” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 45), subject and language are put into process, established and constituted as signifying and social (pp. 23–24, 48). Through the use of voice, subject and language are established as the semiotic continually breaches the symbolic, which is “opened” and “remodelled” (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 62–63).

According to Kristeva, this process becomes even more apparent in artistic expressions. Even though the semiotic is a precondition for the symbolic – that is, for referential language and the constitution of the subject in and through its enunciation – at the same time, it is exactly the semiotic influx and instability in language that always threatens to destroy both the enunciating subject and its language, erasing self and meaning (Kristeva, 1984, p. 79). Artistic expression shows more urgently how subject and language are produced, destroyed and reformulated under the pressure of the semiotic: “In ‘artistic’ practices, the semiotic – the precondition of the symbolic – is revealed as that which also destroys the symbolic” (p. 50).

It seems to me that what is at stake in the transitional, destabilizing dynamics of the semiotic and symbolic, between word and sound – and, as the analysis indicates, correspondingly affecting the relation between me as singer and the audience – can be understood as what Kristeva considers to be the “constituting” event of art, namely the destruction of a subject, that is, sacrifice or murder (p. 70). Drawing on theory from social anthropology concerning sacrifice and murder as constitutive acts in societies, Kristeva argues that the artistic practice *mimes* a sacrifice, the slaying of a victim upon which the symbolic and social order can be built (p. 76). Such sacrifices “reiterate the structure of the symbol: the reserving of substance, of the self, of the ‘referent’” (p. 75). The sacrificial object is “charged with representing the

thetic moment founding the symbolic and/or social contract” (p. 76). In the artistic practice this is mimed as art “takes on murder and moves through it. It assumes murder insofar as artistic practice considers death the inner boundary of the signifying process. Crossing that boundary is precisely what constitutes ‘art’” (p. 70).

In that destruction of subject and meaning, Kristeva argues that

semiotic violence [of the artistic practice] breaks through the symbolic border, and tends to dissolve the logical order, which is, in short, the outer limit founding the human and the social. [...] This practice is the laboratory for, among other things, theatre, poetry, song, dance – art. [...] It *mimes* in the full sense of the term [...] By reproducing signifiers – vocal, gestural, verbal, the subject crosses the border of the symbolic. (1984, p. 79)

Thus, in the artistic expression, as the subject enunciates with the voice and imposes influx into the symbolic, “it is as if death becomes interiorized by the subject of such a practice; in order to function, he must make himself the bearer of death. In this sense, the artist is comparable to all other figures of the “scapegoat”” (p. 70).

Following this line of thinking concerning song more specifically, the singer takes death upon her-/himself in the act of enunciating. In order to signify, the singer carries death, interiorizes it, like a scapegoat on behalf of those who experience the artistic expression, opening up and destabilizing the symbolic meaning, the ongoing transitional dynamics of sound and word, and carry this expression and the meaning to the border across which there is no more expression, no more meaning (pp. 69–71): “On the other side of this boundary is the a-symbolic, the dissolution of order, the erasing of differences” (p. 76).

Though rather dramatic, I find that this notion of the dynamics between word and sound, and me and audience, articulates to some extent what the analysis of the material indicates concerning certain passages of the performances and the conversation about them. This applies especially to the discussions of *Kindertotenlieder*, to the risk that is taken vocally and emotionally, the acknowledged challenges not only in terms of voice-technique, but simply as to how I was to be able to sing something “so horrible”, but which is what “can happen in life”, as D pointed out. In other words, how would my singing signify? How would my singing become symbol?

I find that the risk of this bordering on the a-symbolic and death, represented by the singer over against the audience, becomes apparent in classical singing with its high or low notes and the naked acoustics. The voice might crack, and even if does not, it radically exposes me, my

reliance on strength or luck, on nerves and health, the ability to venture forward in the voice, that is, my humanity and person, in and through my voice, for everyone to see, hear and sense. The analysis indicates that the sound of the voice in classical singing is experienced as a constitutive premise for the concert to make sense. Without its live exposure and direct, physical effect, much is lost both in terms of the ethically charged meeting, and of the meaning-making process.

The argument that singing constitutes subject and meaning, that singing is not simply a conveying of a work, but constitutes what goes on then and there, may seem plausible when I sing softly in the high tessitura at the end of the *Kindertotenlieder* concert, or the risky and loud high b's in *Mit Gewitter und Sturm* from *Der fliegende Holländer* in the opera recital. What I expose myself as when singing those notes, is also what goes on *as* song, what the song is about, the sound of basic human conditions then and there in the presence of other people: I venture forward in my voice towards the audience, and the risk taken in that action of breathing and accent of voice is also the urgency of the performative setting, the exposed humanity, on behalf of the audience: as I inhale and accent the voice, I cannot know what will come out of my lungs, larynx, glottis, mouth, or if anything comes out at all, or if it will be strong enough, or mean anything to the audience, or if they will receive it, that is, receive me. Therefore, the efflux of sound – limited in time and space, constituted by time and space as well as constituting the time and space as a chronotopic event towards the running out of breath, an action which therefore in a way mimes death – this efflux of air and sound is perhaps a form of representation, on behalf of the audience, a radicalization of how semiotic influx always happens, in the moving of symbolic meaning towards and into the destruction and emptying of self and meaning, as a mortal rite of performance.

I find that singing, in light of Kristeva's theory, can be understood as the signifying artist exposing humanity on behalf of those present. The instability of the voice, the semiotic influx in the symbolic, the musicality in and as language, without which symbolic, referring language does not exist, always threatens to destroy language, meaning and subject. Enunciation, which is continually charged with the present ethical-political reality in which and toward which it sounds, always runs the risk of being halted, of being devoid of or emptying itself of meaning.

In the attempt to establish oneself as a subject over against the audience, in the attempt to orient oneself in the reality of the performance, in which the signifying subject breathes and accents the voice, the voice must be used without the subject knowing in advance if or exactly what it will signify. And there is limited time and space, the event of phrasing and sound only lasts as long as there is breath. When the subject has no more air, voice and movement, and therefore in a way mimes death, distinctions are also blurred, ruled out and collapse, between the semiotic and the symbolic, between word and sound.

## 5.2.2 Re-establishing

And yet, that cannot be all that happens. As the analysis shows, if this is part of the representational function I have as a singer, which dynamizes the relation between me and the audience when what and how I sing generates a recognition of something that has to do with life and reality, then this destabilizing of subject and meaning in song cannot be what constitutes the full reality of the performance. Even if a destabilizing bordering on destruction is what goes on, the expressed experiences of the participants of the groups were still always oriented beyond this event, beyond the word-sound dynamic, towards how I was to “be able to sing it” or how I ought “to stand in it,” so that it would come across to them, or so that they were invited to come across to me.

Again, this was most apparent with *Kindertotenlieder*. The sense of responsibility I felt while singing these songs, towards the audience, towards the dead children, and towards my own children to take care of them, and the sense of inflicting violence on them by singing, prompted me to sing about the reconciliation with God as something else. Singing the songs as if to my children forced me to imbue the words with other meanings, other referents, trying to represent other ways of coping with the reality of dead children than by giving servile thanks to a God that takes them away. However, watching the video recording during the interview, F plainly stated: “Your feelings stayed with you.” This indicated that if a mimetic act of representational sacrifice, the destruction of subject and meaning, was to take place through the blurring of the sound-word relation in order to remodel the meaning of the expression and enunciate something else; if the singing was to represent a protest against the symbolic words that I sang, in and by singing them, against a social symbolic order built upon sacrifice – then I also had to re-establish a certain distance, as this internalizing of death in the form of a fully blurred word-sound relation seemed to prevent the audience from participating in the reality I tried to constitute.<sup>33</sup>

Kristeva argues that the semiotic impulse of the voice into and within articulated symbols, which destroys the symbolic, is also what at the same time rebuilds and reformulates them (Kristeva, 1984, pp. 50, 62). The semiotic influx, destabilizing subject and language, is also what constitutes a living subject and a meaningful language (cf. Rolvsjord, 2002, p. 56). Therefore, the artist is not just a scapegoat that takes death upon her-/himself and signifies until silence and death:

In fact, what makes him an artist radically distinguishes him from all other sacrificial murderers and victims. In returning, through the event of death, toward

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33 As in Section 4.1.7 I draw here from elements in the essay *Sang som negasjon og påstand. Å synge ‘Dette er ikke’ ved å synge ‘Dette er’* (Gillebo, 2022, in Holm & Varkøy, eds., 2022).

that which produces its break; in exporting semiotic motility across the border on which the symbolic is established, the artist sketches out a kind of second birth. (Kristeva, 1984, p. 70)

Thus, according to Kristeva, the deadly semiotic influx is necessary in signification, not only as its precondition, but because it – in the same impulse as it destroys the symbolic – also gives meaning to the symbol. The destruction of subject and meaning in the artistic expression, poignantly present in singing as a radical dynamic of words and sounds, is at the same time an act of *protection* against this death, against the sweeping away of subject and meaning, against nonsensical expression. It is a necessary protective action, an ongoing founding of meaning, subject and social order, charging the performative situation: the signifying artist, in enunciating, carries semiotic meaning across the border that simultaneously destroys and re-establishes the symbolic, as a necessary ethical-political action on behalf of the audience, an imperative of responsibility constituted by the singer-audience relation, a representative and mimetic event of breathing and sound, in order to continually re-establish subject and meaning, as an act of care and responsibility.

Applied to singing, one might argue that the events of destabilizing and re-establishing do not occur at the end of the phrase or the running out of breath. These dynamics of the signification process are there in and as inhalation, in and as the accent of the voice, in and as anticipation of the constitution of meaning and the subject, charging enunciation as the singer ventures him-/herself forward in and through voice, in and through the appeal towards the audience, as the symbolic discourse of song is “opened out within a semiotic articulation” (p. 63).

To some extent this description of the signifying process resembles what Coessens, Crispin & Douglas (2010) argue goes on both in the artistic practice and the research on it:

Something matters behind, beyond the matter, an additional or unknown depth to the material world that we ourselves, as human perceptual and interpreting beings, add. A process of signification comes to the foreground, a process that reaches out across the frame, the form and the content of the representation. (Coessens, Crispin & Douglas, 2010, p. 31)

Coessens, Crispin & Douglas refer to how art, by being inherent to and a constituent part of the human condition, brings to the forefront how signification might occur, and that this can be made explicit also when the research on the art practice tries to represent it in different ways. I find that in terms of singing, this moment when the signification process surfaces is when the singing practice and research practice might seem to overlap, both in what they are

motivated by, directed towards, and the quality and characteristics in their effort to “reach across”, be it across to the audience or the not-yet-known of the melody phrase, or across the frame, form and content of the representation of the research on that singing.

More poignantly, I find that Kristeva’s notion of the signifying process resembles the appeal in the tone of the voice as Løgstrup (1997) argues that “for a person inadvertently or even intentionally not to hear the note in what we say, therefore, means that it is we ourselves who are being ignored, provided it is we ourselves who dared to make the overture” (Løgstrup, 1997, pp. 14–15). The act of signification in singing is the act of giving one’s self over to the other, to the listener, to hold in her hands or not, to constitute the singer or not.

In terms of whether it is sound or word, semiotic or symbolic meaning, that make language intelligible, I find that Kristeva’s notion of destruction and re-establishing of meaning and subject through speech – as the subject manages to draw into its dead language the semiotic meaning of enunciation as “the tone that calls song” (Kristeva, 1989, p. 55) – is akin to Løgstrup’s (1976) argument that it is the “tone that comes to convey the meaning of the speech, ‘before’ it becomes the meaning of the individual words” (Løgstrup, 1976, p. 11). Meaning is what goes on “in language in its transcendence, in its reference and communication as such” (Løgstrup, 1995c, p. 288), not the words as a distinct, symbolic realm of meaning.

Further, I find that the rebuilding of the symbolic runs parallel to Løgstrup’s argument that the ethical demand has as its precondition that an ethically charged encounter between people cannot merge into a communion of non-distinctions. Rather, the ethical demand serves as a force of individuation:

The radical character of the demand manifests itself in various ways. It prevents the encounter in which the demand arises from becoming a fellowship in which we lose ourselves completely. [...] The demand has the effect of making the person to whom the demand is directed a singular person. Ethically speaking the demand isolates him or her. (Løgstrup, 1997, p. 45)

This also means that the expression of the voice is not a direct expression of the ethical demand, even if singing might be experienced as expressing reality and the human condition: “Life has been given to us. We have not ourselves created it. This is why we cannot give it a direct expression. If we attempt to do so all the same, we falsify it in pathetically or sentimentally unstructured effusion” (pp. 19–20).

This distance between the ethical demand and the expression must be upheld if the demand is to be met. And if it is met, according to Løgstrup, the demand then bridges this distance:



The gap between persons may be bridged in many different ways. But one thing is certain: if persons are to encounter one another in a manner which is redeeming and liberating to the individual's spirit and energies, it will be effected through something intermediate. We must be united in some common enterprise, some common interest or distress.<sup>34</sup> (1997, p. 40)

Thus, even if it is in the tone of the voice that the subject has ventured forward, trusting, demanding, and by which its destiny is decided, and in which the subject and meaning are constituted, and by which sound as appeal takes on the status of symbolic – still, the reality of the ethical demand is not coextensive with the artistic expression of song.<sup>35</sup> The analysis of the occasional correspondence of the transitional dynamics of singer-audience and word-sound, the blurring of distinctions and the re-establishing of them in and through singing, shows that a direct identification between singing and reality, as a constitution of subject and meaning, makes little sense. The blurring of distinctions, the semiotic destruction of the symbolic that singing can cause, and which makes singing an act of both addressing reality and letting oneself be immersed in that reality, must also be followed by a rebuilding of distinctions if a constitution of subject and meaning is to occur.

I end this section by returning to the case of the parent-child relation in neo-natal care referred to in Chapter 1 (McLean, 2018). As the analysis indicates, and as described above, the responsibility towards my own children that I could sense while singing *Kindertotenlieder* prompted me to sing about reconciliation with God as something else than what phrases such as “*ruh'n von Gottes Hand bedeckt*” conventionally mean, even when that meaning is enriched with the “*als wie in der Mutter Haus*”. Even though these feelings to a large extent “stayed with me”, as F pointed out, I still find that this last song may serve as an example of how the ongoing transitional dynamics between word and sound can be understood as constituting subject and meaning. In a way my singing became an effort to bring the meaning of the words across a border to where they did not make sense. I tried to do this because I could not bring myself to express the conventional meaning of reconciliation. I felt this almost as a moral obligation towards my own children, even though they were not there, and further, as an obligation on behalf of any child that dies. This effort of trying to make the words signify something else was perhaps what made me come across as introvert, and it was with this song that participants demanded a way of singing that amounted to making a declarative statement. I was

34 I find that a better and more direct translation of this sentence would be: “It is in something third, in a conveying, or how one might phrase it, that people must encounter each other, if the encounter is to redeem and liberate the individual's spirit and energies” (Men i noget tredie, i en formidling, eller hvordan man nu vil udtrykke det, må mennesker mødes, om mødet skal virke forløsende og befriende på den enkelts sind og kræfter) Løgstrup, 2010, pp. 51–52).

35 The question of the coextensiveness of the ethical demand, the conveying of an enterprise or interest and the expression as such seems to me to be unresolved in Løgstrup's writings.

struggling to make it signify something else, something to do with the vitality of my children, my addressing them and caring for them, even if they were not there.

To the child that is sung to by parents in neo-natal care, the semiotic function of the parents' voice might be all there is, all that the child senses, the parents' voice is reality, is what makes the child what it is, and the parents what they are over against the child. The parent's voice is the response to the ethical demand, the unarticulated, silent imperative of the child to be cared for. As what is sensed by the child, the voice is care, is the taking on of responsibility, creating its way of being (cf. McLean, 2018, p. 172). Thus, the semiotic sound is symbolic reality, is the construction of subject and meaning, in the attempt to sustain life.

This resembles aspects of what Jonas (1984) articulates concerning responsibility towards the child, when "the plain being of a *de facto* existent immanently and evidently contains an ought for others" (1984, p. 131). To take on this responsibility by singing when perhaps no other means are available is to answer the imperative of the "ought" in the "is." It is to answer

the mandate to the begetters to avert [the infant's] sinking back into nothing and to tend its further becoming. [...] Its observance (even by others) becomes an ineluctable duty toward a being now existing in its own authentic right and in total dependence on such observance. (1984, p. 134)

To sing can be to take responsibility for the life of the child, which with every breath it takes

unites in himself the self-accrediting force of being already there and the demanding impotence of being-not-yet; the unconditional end-in-itself of everything alive and the still-have-to-come of the faculties for securing this end. (1984, p. 134)

In other words, to sing, regardless of any presumed distinct verbal meaning, and certainly beyond the problem of word and sound, but in a way by having internalized the fragile dynamics of destruction and re-establishment of that relation, can under certain circumstances be to constitute the child as an independent subject, answering its demand issued by its being, that it must be taken care of if it is to exist.

These dynamics of urgency in a situation of care, I find can also be present in professional performance, and part of a notion of artistic expertise as a heightened awareness of responsibility acted upon through the singing practice to uphold subject and meaning. Singing from a stage, also with the kind of repertoire applied in this study, can take into account that the song is marked by the feature of the sign that makes it "suggest what is not, but *will be*, or

rather *can be* (Kristeva 1996b, p. 71), and anticipate and constitute this, that is, the being of others, through song as a signification process of breathing, accent of voice and phrasing.

Taken together, Kristeva, Løgstrup and Jonas can be seen as providing related and nuancing perspectives on what constitutes subject and meaning in and through singing, as artistic practice and in life as such: in relation to someone, as you breath in and accent the voice, throughout the sounding phrase, the singing is never pure semiotic function. Even as unarticulated sound it is never without signification, but signifies both an answer to an “ought”, that is, the responsibility to take care of and uphold another person’s life, and an appeal towards the listener to take care of and uphold yours. The material in this study indicates that this becomes apparent when what is sung is experienced as representing or even referring – through a both-and of the integration and distinctiveness of word and sound – to what happens in one’s own life, by the risk of destruction that is taken through the use of voice. Then, following Kristeva’s argument, semiotic meaning in the voice can be characterized as “raised to the status of a signifier” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 57), as the voice is sensed not only as semiotic, but as taking part in the production of the symbolic, working on it from within (p. 117), constantly opening up symbolic reality of subject and meaning to what it can be (Kristeva 1984, p. 63; 1996b, p. 71).

### 5.2.3 Conclusion

The discussion in this section has been guided by auxiliary research question 3: To what extent and how are subject and meaning constituted within the dynamics of a singing voice?

Perspectives from Kristeva, Løgstrup and Jonas have served to contextualize the discussion, and develop the analysis of the category *Word and Sound* further. I have argued that the event of the sounding voice is a dynamizing of the relation between sound and word, a both-and of identification and distinction, which opens and remodels symbolic discursive meaning. The voice exposes the humanity of the enunciating subject, and by representation, also that of the listeners, constituting meaning and subjects. At these moments of dynamization, there sometimes seems to be a correspondence between the transitional dynamics of word and sound and a more dynamic relation between singer and audience, constituting both singer and audience in the event of enunciation.

However, I find that this argument does not answer auxiliary research question 3 in a satisfying manner, neither the “how” nor the “to what extent”. Nevertheless, I have attempted to show how the question is generated abductively in the urgency of performance, and how the question has guided the exploration and discussion of how it might in fact be that what goes on in singing is a constitution of subject and meaning.

### 5.3 Ethical Political Discourse and the Integral Normativity of the Effort of Singing

The dynamization of the word-sound relation as a semiotic-symbolic process of destabilizing and re-establishing might serve to conceptualize ethical political discourse in which it is opened and remodelled by an as singing, and integral to the artistic practice.

In the analysis of the categories *Ethical Demand* and *Public Political Discourse* an important thematic development and modification concerned a heightened awareness of the integral normativity in my performance practice: breathing, accent of voice, sound and phrasing came together as a practice of ethics towards the members of the audience, as well as a performance through which I wanted to tilt and empower the audience in the direction of what I conceived of as ethically-politically “good”.

The dialogical dynamics in the interviews revealed that I could not speak of singing as an ethical demand only in general terms. I had to become specific about what I aimed to articulate and make happen in and through singing, if not in the form of producing answers to ethical questions, then at least in terms of becoming aware of and articulating my attitude and intentions towards what I wanted to happen during and as a result of singing to those present. The integrated normativity of my performances had to be specified, not the audience, but to myself, in terms of what I meant by taking responsibility and caring for someone in and through performing, and to have an opinion concerning what I found to be “good”.

In turn, this also meant that I had to be specific about the political values that I found to be coherent with the responsibility I conceived singing to be an act of. The participants talked of my singing as an expression of my thoughts, feelings and opinions, expressed by me in an intentional manner through song in the public sphere of the concerts.

My singing was described in a manner that resembled characteristics of statements by which I claimed and meant something, that is, about something else than the songs (Section 4.2.6). Still, the participants criticized the notion of singing as a political discursive statement by which I claimed ethical-political opinions. It became evident that my analysis and discussion of the ethical-political significance of singing would not arrive at any specific outcome unless my normative aspirations in my performances were also discussed, that is, the ethical-political aims integral to my musical practice.

As I have outlined in the previous section, the ongoing transitional dynamics of word and sound in the singing voice, which makes the voice signify, can be conceivable as what “opens

up” and “remodels” a wider notion of what ethical-political discursivity is (cf. Kristeva, 1984, pp. 62–63; cf. Borgdorff et al., 2020, p. 5). But the analysis indicates that my singing cannot provide specific solutions or answers to concrete ethical and political issues concerning current public discourses, as the following passage indicated:

I: Is it possible to talk about the performance as part of a public activity of expression, in a way? If we experience a meaning attached to it [to musical sound] – is it possible to talk about that meaning not only linked to the musical work, to the conveying of something, but as addressing something?

P: If so, it will be on a very meta level.

[...]

I: An active move must be made for it to have a political significance?

P: Yes, what else would the political significance be?

In the interviews, I sought to explore how and to what extent my singing was experienced and talked about as entering, destabilizing and re-establishing meaning in a public political discourse, and that this could amount to something of political significance. On that premise singing could be a form of participation in a public sphere generated through communicative action, as a meeting between singer and audience, if not specifically and explicitly to address and tackle conflicts and communal problems together, then at least with the potential result of becoming aware of the need to do so, through a signaling effect and amplifying pressure on problems (Habermas 1996a, pp. 359–360; Eriksen & Weigård, 2016, p. 273). But this proved to be too wide a notion of public political discourse to conceptualize singing within.

Further, even if the voice sound was experienced as constituting symbolic meaning and as being about something on its own terms regardless of lyrics or political contextualization, it would be difficult, as H pointed out, to “identify it [the meaning] within just the music in the concert. Because this concert is part of a larger context, in my life”. H emphasized that the experience of someone singing to you means something to you first and foremost by the experience of being part of something, and that the sound is part of a larger context from which it cannot be disconnected.

Therefore, based on the material in this study, and even if the participants acknowledged singing as claims of my opinions within a public sphere, singing cannot be identified with the notion of the political in music that Street (2012) aims to demonstrate when he argues that

how music works on us, and how we act upon music, are intimately connected to the way we think and act politically. This is not just a claim about individuals, but about the collectivities and institutions they form. It is true for governments, parties and social movements, and the power they wield or seek to wield. (2012, p. 8)

This conception of the political in music might very well be true, but the empirical material of this study offers little to nothing in support of explaining how this connection works. As outlined in Section 2.3.5, Street's approach to identifying how music works on us politically, is by connecting it to one specific political outcome, contrasting other outcomes. He argues that music under certain conditions can enhance democracy: to explore "music as action as participation" is to connect it to social democracy (Street, 2012, p. 70).

This approach to and acknowledging of specific political implications and outcomes of music corresponds to the necessity made apparent in this study for specifying my own ethical-political intentions in singing, what I aim to do through exposing the basic human conditions of interdependence, power, trust in the appeal to the audience. However, the intentions of that exposure of trust, interdependence and power do not necessarily in and of themselves point to particular opinions or meanings. Nor do they necessarily reveal much of my own political aims for my musical practice. And they certainly do not point to specific solutions.

The same goes for the assessment of intentions in singing both within Goehr's notion of the expressive voice as autonomous and political within society, as well as Habermasian notion of communicative, rational action in the public sphere. To some extent the characteristics of communicative actions and the assessment of them can be applied to singing, as the act of singing can assume implicit claims of validity, which is assessed by the audience either during or after the performance. But it proved difficult in the interviews to talk about these claims in terms of what they were about. To assess the validity of the expression of song, through the criteria of whether the expression is true, whether it is right with respect to specific normative context, and whether the manifest intention of the singer is meant as it is expressed (Habermas, 1984, p. 99), is difficult in real life, and perhaps even more so with classical repertoire due to how the lyrics refer less directly to a reality that can be assessed in terms of ethical-political implications.

It can be argued that singing to a certain extent meets these criteria and thus constitutes a public discursive sphere as song, so that it in its own way “feeds into public political discourse proper” (Uberg Nærland, 2015, p. 94). The way Habermas accents different ways in which a communicative action can be defined as rational opens the theoretical possibility of analysing any music performance as constituting a speech act, and to assess singing as a communicative action no less rational than other forms of expression in a public, political discourse. The concerts in this study functioned as speech acts in the sense that the participants could acknowledge that I had ethical-political intentions that could have an impact on the audience also after the concert. For Habermas, the rationality of an artistic expression in the public sphere always hinges on whether the performer is “able to reassure critics in regard to the revealed experience by drawing practical consequences from it and behaving consistently thereafter” (Habermas, 1984, p. 15). In this manner, my singing could be interpreted as resembling a form of participation in the public sphere as an effort to “amplify the pressure of problems” (Habermas, 1996a, p. 359). As F stated commenting on *Kindertotenlieder*:

F: In all exchanges of opinion, you must start by meaning something, and then that is tested on the audience, the orchestra. And then it can be allowed to develop.

Singing can expose a shared humanity in a manner that states something, and this expression of meaning is “tested” on the audience and fellow musicians, so that the meaning can “develop”. However, even if this testing and developing resembles an assessment by the communicating actors in the public sphere, in this study the material and analysis do not show how ethical-political intentions are revealed in ways that make them accessible for such an assessment in terms of what is meant specifically in terms of ethical-political opinions. Normative intentions might be experienced as being expressed, even expressed clearly, but not in terms of what they are about, as M pointed out:

M: In your concert you went straight to the point and were very clear that you wanted to show or give something. I wasn’t quite sure what you wanted to give, though. But you were very clear, strong, intense, “here I am to tell something”. I think everyone would have realized that.

Therefore the empirical material in this study, does not offer any satisfying examples or explanations of *how* normative intentions in singing feeds into public political discourse and becomes integral to it, much less in a manner that points to what my political aims were.

I find that what Ranci re articulates as a more direct, affirmative political role for art, resembles more closely the experience I sometimes had while performing during this study. The way

I read Rancière's argument, his affirmation of art's political role does not only concern the effect of art in politics, but the performance of art as such, as a form of meaning production, i.e. political action.

The relation between voice, subject and meaning as discussed above, as something that is continually destroyed and rebuilt in the enunciation, might exemplify Rancière's notion of the redistribution of the sensible as the manifestation and development of politics, when those who are seen as only making sounds place themselves in a public room and prove that

as inhabitants of a common space [...] their mouths really do emit speech capable of making pronouncements on the common which cannot be reduced to voices signalling pain. This distribution and redistribution of places and identities, this apportioning and reapportioning of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of noise and speech, constitutes what I call the distribution of the sensible. (Ranciere, 2009, pp. 24–25)

Rancière's assessment of art's unfamiliar way of generating meaning, through disturbance of the established order of things, is what I find happens as an expression of integral normativity in the voice while singing, and what can make singing ethical-political in and through the performance. Thus, aspects of what Rancière discusses about the senses, art and politics, which circumscribes other elements that the apparently straight forward verbal ones, and which concerns something else than what must be articulated and defended in a consensus-seeking discourse after the performance, could to a certain extent be applied in analysing my own singing of classical and operatic repertoire as a form of care and taking responsibility for someone, by representing them. For Rancière, art has the egalitarian function of making the anonymous sensed in a public sphere, that is, seen and heard by the community:

For all time, the refusal to consider certain categories of people as political beings has proceeded by means of refusal to hear the words exiting their mouths as discourse [or] in the simple observation of their material incapacity to occupy the space-time of political things. (2009, p. 24)

It may be argued that the opera singer is not a particularly anonymous figure in Western society. But in terms of being regarded as a political actor expressing ethical-political opinions in and through artistic practice, the singer of such repertoire most certainly is (cf. Goehr, 2004, pp. 8, 148–149). Nevertheless, it was after the concert of the *Christmas Oratorio* that F articulated my ethical-political intentions of wanting to “tilt” the audience through singing, and the conversation turned towards the extent to which and how singing might be performed, heard



as, and activate political convictions and actions concerning granting asylum to mothers and children living in refugee camps. As the analysis shows, the ensuing conversation forced me to heed my own integral normative intentions, that is, a notion of singing as taking responsibility for someone in and through the performance, and to mean something concerning what is “good” for others, by performing. This in turn pushed me to be concrete about what I find to be politically coherent with a responsibility for someone, and that I wanted this to be explicit and effectual both during, as, and after the performances. The conversations revealed that I regarded singing as a participation in the addressing of what is right and wrong concerning ethical-political issues and wanted to move the audience in certain directions, by exposing my own human condition in and through the sound of my voice in such a manner that the audience might be compelled to consider what the event of the concert, represented by my sound, phrasing, breathing, body language and physical, mental and technical effort, stated about our shared reality and about right and wrong. That is, through singing not as an act of giving precise answers to moral dilemmas, but an act of addressing and participating in the human condition with the intent of having an impact on the audience in ways that might generate ethical-political action, and therefore an ethical-political action itself.

Vetlesen (2014) argues that ethics is more than finding solutions to dilemmas and concrete cases, more than answers that can be operationalized to gain control of situations or conflicts. He advocates an approach to ethics more in line with those of ancient Hellenistic philosophy, in which ethical theory does not consist of mechanisms by which solutions can be produced, but is rather something which must be ‘lived’ (Vetlesen, 2014, p. 140). Furthermore, building on Løgstrup and Jonas, amongst others, Vetlesen argues that even in terms of making normative assessments and holding something to be right and something to be wrong, that is, as forms of “answers”, one might indeed apply more general principles of ethics and meta-ethical approaches (Vetlesen, 2014, pp. 118, 140–141).

This is what I have attempted in this study. I have applied general principles of ethics and meta-ethical approaches to the specific public act of singing in front of an audience, applying the integral normativity of such an action by exposing both my own experiences and that of others – personal but made representational over against the audience in a public political sphere by exposing the risk of the signification process in the effort of singing.

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this study, I have analysed and discussed the meaning of ethical responsibility and discursive participation in the public sphere in relation to singing. I have argued that from inhalation, through the accent of the voice and development of sound, in articulation and development of melody phrasing, singing can be understood as constituting subject and meaning within an ethical-political reality, by addressing and stating something about this reality towards the audience, in and through the signifying voice.

Taken together, the presentation and development of the theoretical themes, the methodological discussions, the analysis and the discussions of the performances and the interviews are an attempt to propose and justify – theoretically, methodologically, and as part of the expertise of the artistic practice – classical singing as a form of participation in ethical-political discourse. I remain unsure whether this has proven possible or not. The attempt has been guided by my performative experiences as a singer, both from before embarking on this study, as well as in the productions pertaining to it, that such a participation is in fact what goes on. Still, I have aimed throughout the dissertation to let the impact of this assumption be shown as accountably as possible, and never taken the answer to the overarching research question for granted.

I hope this dissertation may contribute to the ongoing work on the relations between art and science, especially through its attempt at accountability regarding the methods applied and the analytical processes in order to produce valid, trustworthy outcomes (cf. Leavy, 2009, pp. 15–16) Only then, it seems to me, can any outcome contribute to the understanding of the ethical-political implications of singing in a manner that may be applicable also beyond the disciplinary borders of art.

The significance of the attempt of this study is its contribution in articulating the mandate that professional singers have through their practice in terms of participating in the ethical-political discourse in the public sphere. Through the meaning-production of their personal voices, singers can articulate the human condition in a precise manner. This concerns especially the way singing can heighten awareness of the “ought” in the “is”, a charged quality in the phenomenon of being, which can be understood as both addressed by and made apparent through the characteristics of singing as it consists of human sound and breathing issuing an ethical demand and responsibility between the singer and the audience.

This ethical demand and responsibility can be understood as most poignantly present in singing to newborn children, as constituting their being and the reality they are sensing. However, these ethical dynamics are also what this study – supported by literature, analysis

and discussion of empirical material – argues go on, or ought to go on, in the performance of professional operatic and classical singing as well: the main ethical-political implication of singing found by this study is that singing is an act of responsibility in the effort of constituting and protecting subject and symbolic reality by signifying them, that is, stating something about the human condition.

To my knowledge, the study also represents a contribution in terms of methodology and research design. I have interviewed members of the audience in my own concerts, and analysed the empirical material in a manner by which the dialogical dynamics of the concerts affected the conversations and meaning-making processes in the interviews, while all the time maintaining conventional qualitative research criteria aimed at reliability and validity (cf. Street, 2012, pp. 2, 67; Kvale & Brinkmann 2017, pp. 137, 272). This has been done in order to position the study within a broader field of research, so that the findings in this study, although being a study about and based on my own singing practice, might be relatable also for other research fields and purposes, and not necessarily only concerning art. As I argue in Chapter 3, an exploratory process based on the ephemeral, subjective, performative experience of singing must not place methodological considerations, choices and challenges concerning singing in a silent “black box” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2017, pp. 298–299). By adopting conventional methodological approaches, I have sought to anchor my writing verifiably in the empirical material that the text of the dissertation refers to.

One of the primary tasks for research on art is to explore what discursivity means in order to better understand and act upon what both art and research can function as (cf. Borgdorff et al., 2020, p. 5). The qualitative paradigm constitutes the basis for the development of the use of arts in research (Leavy, 2009, pp. 7–8). As I have argued, and as the analysis indicates, this development is discontinued if art and research collapse into an immanent referring-to of each other. Both become in effect silent, as the writing in this study did at one point, and as my intended artistic expression was experienced as “staying with” me. Both singing itself and research about or based on singing, if they are to be discursive claims, must be discursive in the sense that they are also about something else than themselves, claiming and approaching something that is not themselves or as themselves. Only then can singing and research on singing contribute something new to the discourses of art and research.

The methodological choice of occupying the roles of singer, interviewer and analyst of the empirical material presents in many ways a disadvantage in terms of both research ethics and transparency. It might have been easier to design the study differently, for instance by using a third-party interviewer and obtaining another form of distance from the material. That might

also have served as more of a guarantee that the participants of the groups spoke freely, not having to consider my personal feelings when discussing the performances.

Because of this methodological choice, I had to be aware of and actively apply as part of the dialogical meaning-making in the interviews that the social, discursive interaction had already started with the concerts. During the analysis, therefore, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish what exactly constituted the case I was analysing – the singing performance or the interview about it. However, some of these methodological concerns rather prove the point that singing can cause a blurring of distinctions. In terms of facilitating interesting conversations, I found that it was important to let the dynamics of the performances affect the interviews, since any ethical-political implications of singing ought not to be confined to the concert event as such but affect the discussion about it. To obtain this, I found that the advantages of participating outweighed the advantages of using a third-party interviewer. My role as interviewer and participant in the conversations did not result in an absence of criticism or questions concerning both my performances and the theme of the project, but seemed to contribute to the open and direct tone in the groups, resulting in analytical conversations that were at once personal, critical and explorative, effectively testing and developing assumptions, themes and understandings.

Therefore, as research on my own artistic practice of breathing, production of sound and phrasing, the study of singing as ethics and politics has brought to the forefront methodological issues and highlighting dynamics of exploration concerning bias and the act of referring to something, both because the research has been done by me as both performer and researcher, and because of the nature of singing: it is both an act of referring and anticipating what can be (cf. Kristeva, 1996b, p. 71).

The referring and anticipatory characteristics of song – anticipating destruction and re-establishment of meaning in the referring act, ever reaching towards an ending where there is no more air, and where the meaning that one arrives at was already present and anticipated from the moment of inhalation – serve both to highlight the signifying process and issues concerning bias. Singing as subject matter of a text, and as what possibly “shoots through” the text (Borgdorff, 2020, pp. 21–22), compels the effort towards truthfulness concerning method, research process and conclusions.

Given these methodological conditions and the subject matter of the dissertation, it has been important to argue nothing more than that the overarching proposition of the thesis might be plausible, as well as exploring possible ways in which this might be the case. The study therefore might provide less in terms of explicit empirical findings and lush conclusions,

and perhaps more in terms of methodological insights and basis for discussion, pointing to further research.

Based on the interdisciplinary and methodological challenges I imposed on this study, seeking to articulate the extent to which the sound of the voice refers to something in an ethical-political signifying act of appeal, and remaining unsure if the attempt proved this to be possible, future research on this topic might consider other approaches. One way might be to separately interview singers and audiences, both through in-depth interviews of singers and smaller audience groups as well as more general audience surveys. This might provide material suited for a comparative analysis that may more satisfyingly answer the “to what extent” questions posed in the present study. Further, the ethical-political implications of music might also be explored within the interactions between the musicians and singers of an ensemble, using both individual and group interviews. One could then compare the analysis of the interviews and the performances over a period of time to see if any pattern might evolve, for instance between sense of trust and musical expressiveness. Be that as it may, I would still like to see, both in higher music education as well as in the professional practice of classical singers, an enhancing and widening notion of artistic expertise in terms of active and conscious participation in an ethically-politically charged reality through singing, by always singing as if something urgent is answered and appealed to, and by which singer, audiences and meanings are continually destabilized and re-established as something new.

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## Appendices

Appendix 1	Interview Guide
Appendix 2	Code Book
Appendix 3	Approval Norwegian Center for Research Data
Appendix 4	Invitation Letter Pilot
Appendix 5	Invitation Letter Group 1
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## **Appendix 1**

### **Interview Guide**

# Appendix 1

## Interview Guide

Interview Guide Page 1

Themes	Overarching Research Questions of the Thesis	Questions Operationalized in the Action Research (in performance)
Music as	How are meaning and subject constituted within the dynamics of a singing voice?	<p><b>Main Question:</b> How does the act of singing constitute an ethical demand between the audience and myself within a public sphere?</p> <p><b>Subordinate Questions:</b> How do I experience the relationship with the audience through moments of singing in the performance?</p> <p>How do I perceive the impact of singing on the quality of my relationship with the audience?</p> <p>How do I perceive the impact of my relationship with the audience on the quality/sound/phrasing of my singing?</p>
Ethical Demand	How is an ethical demand between performer and audience constituted through singing?	
Public Discourse	How does such a voice-constituted demand affect public discourse?	<p>What is expressed in the performance?</p> <p>How is it expressed?</p> <p>Why is it expressed?</p>

Interview Guide Page 2

Questions Operationalized in the Group Interviews

Interview Questions

**Main Question:**

How is singing a production of (ethical) reality?

- Can you describe what happened during the performance?
- How did it happen?
- Why did it happen

**Subordinate Questions:**

How do you experience the relationship between you and me through moments of singing in the performance?

- What did you feel (happy, sad, angry disgust, moved etc)?
- How did you feel what you felt (activation of memories, pictures, colors, physical sensations such as comfort, discomfort, breathing, heart rate etc)?
- Why did you feel the way you did (explorative discussion)?

How do you perceive the impact of singing on the quality of the relationship between you and me?

How do you perceive the impact of the relationship between you and me on the quality/sound/phrasing of my singing?

- What did you feel about the relation between you and me?
- How did you feel it?
- Why did you feel it?

What is expressed in the performance?

How is it expressed?

Why is it expressed?

- What was expressed in the performance?
- How was it expressed?
- Why was it expressed?
- Was the expression distinct as a musical expression? If so, how and why? In not, why?
- Is musical expression distinct from other kinds of expression? If so, how and why?
- Does it matter that someone sings instead of speaking? If so, how and why?
- What are your thoughts on how the performance affects the way of talking together in this group?





## **Appendix 2**

### **Code Book**

# Appendix 2

## Code Book

The coding of the interviews was done using the NVivo coding program, and was completed March 24th 2021.

Name	Description	Files	References
MY COMMENTS		0	0
MY COMMENTS DURING TRANSCRIPTION AND CODING		0	0
My bolding out during transcription		1	8
My comments during coding		5	29
My comments, summarizations and analyzes during transcription		5	76
SPOKEN BY ME		0	0
Direct questions from me		5	84
My responses on what is being said		5	135
My stated intentions and hypotheses		5	51
OPINIONS OF PARTICIPANTS		0	0
Opinions of D		2	28
Opinions of F		3	86
Opinions of H		2	28
Opinions of M		2	41
Opinions of P		3	88
Opinions of S		3	72
SINGING AS		0	0
ACTUAL REALITY (litt det som skjedde)		0	0
Communication		5	33
Concentration		2	5
Context of the performance		4	32
Corona		2	6
Credibility and authenticity		1	2
Directly to my performances		5	92
Genuine		1	3
Honesty		1	2
Introversion		1	14
Private appearance		2	12
Lack of presence, play, expression, performative action		2	19

Name	Description	Files	References
Reality		4	27
Aesthetics		5	31
Recognition		3	13
Room		5	38
Sense of belonging		2	5
Touched		2	7
What it is about		5	28
ETHICAL DEMAND		0	0
Body		5	33
Closeness		5	28
Community		4	40
Confirmation		2	3
Demand		2	5
Ethics		5	116
Fragility		2	8
Meeting		5	50
Power		4	17
Presence		5	15
Relation		4	11
What it demands of the audience		4	9
PUBLIC POLITICAL DISCOURSE		0	0
Audience		2	10
Change		1	2
Political Discourse		4	44
Religion		3	7
Statement		5	16
THE REST		0	0
Contra from the participants		5	16
Difficult, boring, feeling distracted		1	6
Dissemination, conveying, interpretation		5	64
Emotion		5	99
Expression		5	23
External demands		2	4
Function and usage		1	2
Internal demands		1	5
Just doing it		3	5
Medium		4	8
Method		4	12
Play		3	5
Voice		4	33

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Files</b>	<b>References</b>
TRANSCENDENCE		0	0
Transcendence		2	4
Liturgy		3	17
WORD AND SOUND		0	0
Word and Sound		5	57
Meaning		5	26
Music as such		5	27
Work as such		4	12

## **Appendix 3**

### **Approval Norwegian Center for Research Data**

# Appendix 3

## Approval Norwegian Center for Research Data

Approval Page 1



[Notification form](#) / [To Sing Reality, Singing as Ethical Demand and Public Discou...](#) / Assessment

### Assessment of processing of personal data

<b>Reference number</b> 536561	<b>Assessment type</b> Standard	<b>Date</b> 21.03.2019
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**Project title**  
To Sing Reality, Singing as Ethical Demand and Public Discourse.

**Data controller (institution responsible for the project)**  
Norges musikkhøgskole / NordART - Arne Nordheim-senteret

**Project leader**  
Mathias Gillebo

**Project period**  
04.03.2019 - 30.06.2021

**Categories of personal data**  
General

**Legal basis**  
Consent (General Data Protection Regulation art. 6 nr. 1 a)

The processing of personal data is lawful, so long as it is carried out as stated in the notification form. The legal basis is valid until 30.06.2021.

[Notification Form](#)

**Comment**  
Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg 21.03.2019 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

**MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER**  
Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:

[https://nsd.no/personvernombud/meld\\_prosjekt/meld\\_endringer.html](https://nsd.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html)

Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

**TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET**  
Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 30.06.2021.

**LOVLIG GRUNNLAG**  
Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

**PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER**  
NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til

## Approval Page 2

behandlingen

- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke behandles til nye, uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

### DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

### FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1 f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og/eller rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

### OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Kontaktperson hos NSD: Jørgen Wincentsen  
Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)





## **Appendix 4**

### **Invitation Letter Pilot**

# Appendix 4

## Invitation Letter Pilot

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

### To Sing Reality - Singing as Ethical Demand and Public Discourse?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt der formålet er å utforske hvordan det å synge kan forstås som etisk interaksjon og offentlig ytring. I dette skrevet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva en eventuell deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

#### Formål

I denne doktorgradsstudien utforskes situasjonen mellom utøver og publikum som en etisk ladet interaksjon i det offentlige rom. At noe gjelder i utøvelsen, at noe erfåes som nødvendig og står på spill når noen synger, innebærer at makt, gjensidig avhengighet og omsorg også er del av den musikalske hendelsen. Gjennom konserter hvor han synger selv og i intervjuer av fokusgrupper, vil prosjektleder Mathias Gillebo undersøke denne etikken på tre nivå:

- I selve stemmen: hvordan klang, frasering, rytme og artikulasjon fortolker og forandrer virkelighet
- Intersubjektivt: hvordan den relasjonelle dynamikken mellom utøver og publikum utgjør selve materialet i utøvelsen
- Samfunnsmessig: hvordan sang er deltakelse i det offentlige rom

Studien inneholder en pilotkonsert og tre påfølgende konserter/forestillinger fordelt over to år fra våren 2019 til og med våren 2021.

#### Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Norges Musikkhøgskole er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

#### Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Denne forespørselen dreier seg om deltakelse i en fokusgruppe i forbindelse med prosjektets pilotkonsert, Johannespassjonen av J. S. Bach i Fagerborg kirke i Oslo, 31.03.2019. De som har fått spørsmål om delta er trukket ut på bakgrunn av kjent faglig/yrkesmessig kompetanse innen musikk, kommunikasjon, etikk og/eller filosofi.

#### Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du inngår du i en fokusgruppe bestående av maks 8 personer som er tilstede under konserten i Fagerborg kirke 31.03. 2019. Gruppen intervjues i etterkant av konserten gjennom en samtale ledet av Mathias Gillebo.

Hovedspørsmål i intervjusamtalen vil være:

- Hvordan vil du beskrive hva som skjedde under konserten?
- Hva opplevde du under konserten?
- Hvordan opplevde du det?

Videopptak av utvalgte hendelser i konserten vil kunne brukes som grunnlag for intervjusamtalen. Det gjøres lydopptak av intervjuet, opptaket transkriberes og brukes i forskningsprosjektets analyse. Alt som sies av deltakerne i intervjuet vil anonymiseres og vil ikke være mulig å spore tilbake til en gjenkjenner person for andre enn de som har deltatt i gruppen.

Selve konsertene/forestillingene vil også være gjenstand for aksjonsforskning, dvs. at Gillebo i arbeidet med og under konsertene/forestillingene forsker på sin egen sanglige praksis gjennom sin sanglige praksis: kontinuerlig loggføring av forventninger og erfaringer samt video- og lydopptak av konsertene/forestillingene, vil utgjøre råmaterialet for en skriftlig systematisering av dynamikker og valg som skjer underveis i utøvelsen og hvordan disse preger sanghendelsen som interaksjon og ytring.

### Det er frivillig å delta

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, kan du når som helst trekke ditt samtykke tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli anonymisert umiddelbart. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

### Ditt personvern - hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrevet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Det er kun jeg og min hovedveileder Øivind Varkøy som vil ha tilgang til opplysningene om deg, dvs. det du sier under intervjuet.
- Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil jeg erstatte med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrig data.

Ingen deltakere vil kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjon. Det er kun anonymisert materiale som vil publiseres.

### Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?

Prosjektet planlegges å være avsluttet 30.06.2021. Ved prosjektslutt slettes alle personopplysninger og lydopptakene av intervjuene.

### Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

### Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Norges Musikkhøgskole har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

### Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Norges Musikkhøgskole ved Mathias Gillebo, på epost [mathias.gillebo@nmh.no](mailto:mathias.gillebo@nmh.no) eller mobil: 414 24 704.
- Vårt personvernombud: [personvernombud@nmh.no](mailto:personvernombud@nmh.no)
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost ([personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Mathias Gillebo  
Prosjektansvarlig

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### Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet **To Sing Reality. Singing as Ethical Demand and Public Discourse**, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju
- å delta i aksjonsforskning

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet, ca. 30.06.2021.

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

## **Appendix 5**

### **Invitation Letter Group 1**

# Appendix 5

## Invitation Letter Group 1

### Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

#### To Sing Reality - Singing as Ethical Demand and Public Discourse?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt der formålet er å utforske hvordan det å synge kan forstås som etisk interaksjon og offentlig ytring. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva en eventuell deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

#### Formål

I denne doktorgradsstudien utforskes situasjonen mellom utøver og publikum som en etisk ladet interaksjon i det offentlige rom. At noe gjelder i utøvelsen, at noe erfarer som nødvendig og står på spill når noen synger, innebærer at makt, gjensidig avhengighet og omsorg også er del av den musikalske hendelsen. Gjennom konserter hvor han synger selv og i intervjuer av fokusgrupper, vil prosjektleder Mathias Gillebo undersøke denne etikken på tre nivå:

- I selve stemmen: hvordan klang, frasering, rytme og artikulasjon fortolker og forandrer virkelighet
- Intersubjektivt: hvordan den relasjonelle dynamikken mellom utøver og publikum utgjør selve materialet i utøvelsen
- Samfunnsmessig: hvordan sang er deltakelse i det offentlige rom

Studien inneholder tre konserter/forestillinger fordelt over to år fra høsten 2019 til og med våren 2021.

#### Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Norges Musikkhøgskole er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

#### Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Denne forespørselen dreier seg om deltakelse i én av to fokusgrupper som er tilstede under prosjektets tre konserter/forestillinger og intervjues i etterkant. Utvalget som får spørsmål om å delta er trukket ut på to ulike grunnlag:

- Fokusgruppe 1 trekkes ut på et så tilfeldig grunnlag som mulig mht. faglig/yrkesmessig bakgrunn.
- Fokusgruppe 2 trekkes ut på grunnlag av kjent faglige/yrkesmessige kompetanse innen musikk, kommunikasjon, etikk og/eller filosofi.

Denne todelingen i utvelsesgrunnlaget innebærer ikke at personer i fokusgruppe 1 ikke vil kunne ha faglig/yrkesmessig kompetanse innen de nevnte fagfelt, men at dette i så fall er tilfeldig.

Du får spørsmål om å delta på bakgrunn av et tilfeldig utvalg (Fokusgruppe 1).

#### Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du inngår i én av de to fokusgruppene som hver består av fem personer. Gruppene intervjues hver for seg i etterkant av konsertene gjennom en samtale ledet av Mathias Gillebo. Begge gruppene vil få de samme spørsmålene. Grunnen til at det er to grupper, er for å sammenligne svar og finne evt. forskjeller.

Hovedspørsmål i intervjusamtalene vil være:

- Hvordan vil du beskrive hva som skjedde under konserten?
- Hva opplevde du under konserten?
- Hvordan opplevde du det?

Videoopptak av utvalgte hendelser i konsertene/forestillingene vil kunne brukes som grunnlag for intervjusamtalene. Det gjøres lydopptak av intervjuene, opptakene transkriberes og brukes i forskningsprosjektets analyse. Alt som sies av deltakerne i intervjuene vil anonymiseres og vil ikke være mulig å spore tilbake til en gjenkjenner person for andre enn de som har deltatt i gruppen.

Selve konsertene/forestillingene vil også være gjenstand for aksjonsforskning, dvs. at Gillebo i arbeidet med og under konsertene/forestillingene forsker på sin egen sanglige praksis gjennom sin sanglige praksis: kontinuerlig loggføring av forventninger og erfaringer samt video- og lydopptak av konsertene/forestillingene, vil utgjøre råmaterialet for en skriftlig systematisering av dynamikker og valg som skjer underveis i utøvelsen og hvordan disse preger sanghendelsen som interaksjon og ytring.

### Det er frivillig å delta

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, kan du når som helst trekke ditt samtykke tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli anonymisert umiddelbart. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

### Ditt personvern - hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrevet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Det er kun jeg og min hovedveileder Øivind Varkøy som vil ha tilgang til opplysningene om deg, dvs. det du sier under intervjuene.
- Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil erstattes med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrig data.

Ingen deltakere vil kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjon. Det er kun anonymisert materiale som vil publiseres.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet? Prosjektet planlegges å være avsluttet 30.06.2021. Ved prosjektslutt slettes alle personopplysninger og lydopptakene av intervjuene.

### Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

### Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Norges Musikkhøgskole har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

#### Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Norges Musikkhøgskole ved Mathias Gillebo, på epost [mathias.gillebo@nmh.no](mailto:mathias.gillebo@nmh.no) eller mobil: 414 24 704.
- Vårt personvernombud: [personvernombud@nmh.no](mailto:personvernombud@nmh.no)
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost ([personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Mathias Gillebo  
Prosjektansvarlig

---

### Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet **To Sing Reality. Singing as Ethical**

**Demand and Public Discourse**, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju
- å delta i aksjonsforskning

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet, ca. 30.06.2021.

---

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)



## **Appendix 6**

### **Invitation Letter Group 2**

# Appendix 6

## Invitation Letter Group 2

### Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

#### To Sing Reality - Singing as Ethical Demand and Public Discourse?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt der formålet er å utforske hvordan det å synge kan forstås som etisk interaksjon og offentlig ytring. I dette skrevet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva en eventuell deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

#### Formål

I denne doktorgradsstudien utforskes situasjonen mellom utøver og publikum som en etisk ladet interaksjon i det offentlige rom. At noe gjelder i utøvelsen, at noe erfarer som nødvendig og står på spill når noen synger, innebærer at makt, gjensidig avhengighet og omsorg også er del av den musikalske hendelsen. Gjennom konserter der han synger selv og i intervjuer av fokusgrupper, vil prosjektleder Mathias Gillebo undersøke denne etikken på tre nivå:

- I selve stemmen: hvordan klang, frasering, rytme og artikulasjon fortolker og forandrer virkelighet
- Intersubjektivt: hvordan den relasjonelle dynamikken mellom utøver og publikum utgjør selve materialet i utøvelsen
- Samfunnsmessig: hvordan sang er deltakelse i det offentlige rom

Studien inneholder tre konserter/forestillinger fordelt over to år fra høsten 2019 til og med våren 2021.

#### Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Norges Musikkhøgskole er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

#### Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Denne forespørselen dreier seg om deltakelse i én av to fokusgrupper som er tilstede under prosjektets tre konserter/forestillinger og intervjuer i etterkant. Utvalget som får spørsmål om å delta er trukket ut på to ulike grunnlag:

- Fokusgruppe 1 trekkes ut på et så tilfeldig grunnlag som mulig mht. faglig/yrkesmessig bakgrunn.
- Fokusgruppe 2 trekkes ut på grunnlag av kjent faglige/yrkesmessige kompetanse innen musikk, kommunikasjon, etikk og/eller filosofi.

Denne todelingen i utvelsesgrunnlaget innebærer ikke at personer i fokusgruppe 1 ikke vil kunne ha faglig/yrkesmessig kompetanse innen de nevnte fagfelt, men at dette i så fall er tilfeldig.

Du får spørsmål om å delta på bakgrunn av kjent faglig/yrkesmessig kompetanse (Fokusgruppe 2).

#### Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du inngår i én av de to fokusgruppene som hver består av fem personer. Gruppene intervjues hver for seg i etterkant av konsertene gjennom en samtale ledet av Mathias Gillebo. Begge gruppene vil få de samme spørsmålene.

Grunnen til at det er to grupper, er for å sammenligne svar og finne evt. forskjeller. Hovedspørsmål i intervjusamtalene vil være:

- Hvordan vil du beskrive hva som skjedde under konserten?
- Hva opplevde du under konserten?
- Hvordan opplevde du det?

Videopptak av utvalgte hendelser i konsertene/forestillingene vil kunne brukes som grunnlag for intervjuene. Det gjøres lydopptak av intervjusamtalene, opptakene transkriberes og brukes i forskningsprosjektets analyse. Alt som sies av deltakerne i intervjuene vil anonymiseres og vil ikke være mulig å spore tilbake til en gjenkjennerbar person for andre enn de som har deltatt i gruppen.

Selve konsertene/forestillingene vil også være gjenstand for aksjonsforskning, dvs. at Gillebo i arbeidet med og under konsertene/forestillingene forsker på sin egen sanglige praksis gjennom sin sanglige praksis: kontinuerlig loggføring av forventninger og erfaringer samt video- og lydopptak av konsertene/forestillingene, vil utgjøre råmaterialet for en skriftlig systematisering av dynamikker og valg som skjer underveis i utøvelsen og hvordan disse preger sanghendelsen som interaksjon og ytring.

### Det er frivillig å delta

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, kan du når som helst trekke ditt samtykke tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle opplysninger om deg vil da bli anonymisert umiddelbart. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

### Ditt personvern - hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrevet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernergelverket.

- Det er kun jeg og min hovedveileder Øivind Varkøy som vil ha tilgang til opplysningene om deg, dvs. det du sier under intervjuene.
- Navnet og kontaktopplysningene dine vil erstattes med en kode som lagres på egen navneliste adskilt fra øvrig data.

Ingen deltakere vil kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjon. Det er kun anonymisert materiale som vil publiseres.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet? Prosjektet planlegges å være avsluttet 30.06.2021. Ved prosjektslutt slettes alle personopplysninger og lydopptakene av intervjuene.

### Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

### Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Norges Musikkhøgskole har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

#### Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Norges Musikkhøgskole ved Mathias Gillebo, på epost [mathias.gillebo@nmh.no](mailto:mathias.gillebo@nmh.no) eller mobil: 414 24 704.
- Vårt personvernombud: [personvernombud@nmh.no](mailto:personvernombud@nmh.no)
- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS, på epost ([personverntjenester@nsd.no](mailto:personverntjenester@nsd.no)) eller telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Mathias Gillebo  
Prosjektansvarlig

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#### Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet To Sing Reality. Singing as Ethical

Demand and Public Discourse, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- o å delta i intervju
- o å delta i aksjonsforskning

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet, ca. 30.06.2021.

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(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

## **Appendix 7**

### **Lyrics of the Performed Arias, Recitatives and Songs**

## Appendix 7

### Lyrics of the Performed Arias, Recitatives and Songs

Production No. 2: Weihnachtsoratorium, BWV 248  
(Evangelist Recitatives and Aria)

(H. S. Drinker, Trans.)

*2. Recit:*

Es begab sich aber zu der Zeit, dass ein Gebot von dem Kaiser Augusto ausging, dass alle Welt geschätzt würde. Und jedermann ging, dass er sich schätzen ließe, ein jeglicher in seine Stadt. Da machte sich auch auf Joseph aus Galiläa, aus der Stadt Nazareth, in das jüdische Land zur Stadt David, die da heißet Bethlehem; darum, dass er von dem Hause und Geschlechte David war: auf dass er sich schätzen ließe mit Maria, seinem vertrauten Weibe, die war schwanger. Und als sie daselbst waren, kam die Zeit, dass sie gebären sollte.

And in those same days it came to pass, that there went out a decree from Augustus Caesar, that all the world enroll for taxes, and everyone went, that he might be reborded, each going into his own city. And also there went up Joseph from Galilee, up out of Nazareth, to the city of David, in Judea, which is called Bethlehem, for Joseph was of the house and of the lineage of David; that there he might be enrolled for tax with Mary, his wedded wife, being great with child. And while they yet were there it came the time that she should be delivered.

*6. Recit:*

Und sie gebar ihren ersten Sohn und wickelte ihn in Windeln und legte ihn in eine Krippen, denn sie hatten sonst keinen Raum in der Herberge.

*And there she brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped Him around in swaddling clothes, and made His cradle in a manger, for there was no room in the inn for them.*

*11. Recit:*

Und es waren Hirten in derselben Gegend auf dem Felde bei den Hürden, die hüteten des Nachts ihre Herde. Und siehe, des Herren Engel trat zu ihnen, und die Klarheit des Herren leuchtet um sie, und sie fürchten sich sehr.

And abiding in the field in that same country nigh to Bethlehem were sheperds, who with their flock by night watch were keeping. An lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of God shone round about them; they were sore afraid.

*13. Recit:*

Und der Engel sprach zu Ihnen:

And the angel spoke and said:

*15. Aria:*

Frohe Hirten, eilt, ach eilet,  
eh ihr euch zu lang verweilet.  
Eilt, das holde Kind zu sehn!  
Geht, die Freude heißt zu schön,  
such die Anmut zu gewinnen,  
geht und labet Herz und Sinnen!

Happy shepherds, haste, ah, haste ye,  
Why the precious moments waste ye?  
Haste, the lovely child to see.  
Let your joy unbounded be;  
There will find ye grace perfected,  
Grace to freshen hearts deflected.

*16. Recit:*

Und das habt zum Zeichen: Ihr werdet finden das Kind in Windeln gewickelt und in einer Krippe liegen.

This sign do I give you: in Bethlehem wrapped in swaddling clothes ye shall find Him, a babe in a manger lying.

*20. Recit:*

Und alsobald war da bei dem Engen die Menge der himmlischen Heerscharen, die lobten Gott und sprachen:

And suddenly there appeared with the Angel, a multitude of the Heav'nly Host, all praising God and saying:

*25. Recit:*

Und da die Engel von ihnen gen Himmel fuhren, sprachen die Hirten untereinander:

And as the Angels were gone into Heaven from them, then did the shepherds say to each other:

*30. Recit:*

Und sie kamen eilend und funden beide, Mariam und Joseph, dazu das Kind in der Krippe liegen. Da sie es aber gesehen hatten, breiteten sie das Wort aus, welches zu ihnen von diesem Kind gesaget war. Und alle, für die es kam, wunderten sich der Rede, die ihnen die Hirten gesaget hatten. Maria aber behielt alle diese Worte und bewegte sie in ihrem Herzen.

And the shepherds hastened, and found there Mary, the mother, and Joseph, and found the babe in a manger lying. And after they themselves had seen it, they reported the saying which had been told unto them concerning this same child. And all men, who heard these things, listened to them in wonder to all that the shepherds told them; but Mary kept to herself all the things that happened and she pondered them in her heart.

*34. Recit:*

Und die Hirten kehrten wieder um, preiseten und lobten Gott um alles, das sie gesehen und gehöret hatten, wie denn zu ihnen gesaget war.

To their flocks the shepherds then returned, praising and glorifying God for all the wonderful things that they had heard and witnessed, as it was told to them.



**Production No. 3: Opera Recital**  
**Ciel e terra armi di sdegno**

G. F. Händel/ N. F. Haym, adapted from A. Piovene.

Opera: Tamerlano, HWV 18

Role: Bajazet

Ciel e terra armi di sdegno  
Morrò invicto, e sarò forte,  
Chi disprezza pace e regno,  
Non potrà temer la morte.

Heaven and earth are weapons of indignation.  
I will die undefeated, and I will be strong.  
He who despises peace and kingdom,  
will not fear death.  
(My translation)

**Un'aura amorosa**

W. A. Mozart/L. Da Ponte

Opera: Così fan tutte, K 588

Role: Ferrando

Un'aura amorosa  
Del nostro tesoro  
Un dolce ristoro  
Al cor porgerà;

A breath of love  
from our beloved  
will give our hearts  
sweet sustenance.

Al cor che, nudrito  
Da speme, da amore,  
Di un'èscia migliore  
Bisogno non ha.

A heart nourished  
by the hope of love  
has no need  
of greater inducement.  
(My translation)

**Il mio tesoro**

W. A. Mozart/L. Da Ponte

Opera: Don Giovanni, K 527

Role: Don Ottavio

Il mio tesoro intanto  
Andate a consolar,  
e del bel ciglio il pianto  
Cercate di asciugar.

Run to my beloved,  
and console her,  
and dry away the tears  
from her lovely eyes.

Ditele che i suoi torti  
A vendicar io vado;  
Che sol di stragi e morti  
Nunzio vogl'io tornar.

Tell her, I am going to avenge,  
and I will return  
Only as the messenger of  
punishment and death.  
(My translation)

**Mit Gewitter und Sturm aus fernem Meer**

R. Wagner

Opera: Der fliegende Holländer

Role: Steuermann

Mit Gewitter und Sturm aus fernem Meer  
mein Mädél, bin dir nah!  
Über turmhohe Flut vom Süden her -  
Mein Mädél, ich bin da!  
Mein Mädél, wenn nich Südwind wär',  
ich nimmer wohl kãm' zu dir!  
Ach, lieber Südwind, blas' noch mehr!  
Mein Mädél verlangt nach mir!  
Hohojo! Hallohoho  
Jollohohoho!

In gale and storm from far-off seas,  
my maiden, I am near you!  
Over towering waves from the south,  
my maiden, I am here!  
My maiden, were there no southwind,  
I could never come to you!  
Ah, dear south-wind, blow even stronger!  
My maiden longs for me!  
Hohojo! Hallohoho!  
Jollohohoho!

Von des Südens Gestad', aus weitem Land  
ich hab' an dich gedacht!  
Durch Gewitter und Meer vom Mohrenstrand  
hab' dir was mitgebracht.  
Mein Mädél, preis' den Südwind hoch,  
ich bring' dir ein gülden Band;  
Ach, lieber Südwind, blase doch!  
Mein Mädél hätt' gern den Tand.  
Hohoje! Halloho...

On southern shores, in far-off lands  
I have thought of you!  
Through storms and sea, from Moroccan coast  
I have brought you something.  
My maiden, praise the south-wind highly,  
I bring you a golden ring.  
Ah, dear south-wind, blow stronger!  
My maiden would like the trinket.  
Hohoje! Halloho!

(My translation)

**Dichterliebe, Op. 48**

R. Schumann/H. Heine

(R. Stokes, Trans.)

*Song 1*

Im wunderschönen Monat Mai,  
 Als alle Knospen sprangen,  
 Da ist in meinem Herzen  
 Die Liebe aufgegangen.  
 Im wunderschönen Monat Mai,  
 Als alle Vögel sangen,  
 Da hab ich ihr gestanden  
 Mein Sehnen und Verlangen.

In the wondrous month of May,  
 when all the buds were bursting into bloom,  
 then it was I confessed to her  
 love began to blossom.  
 In the wondrous month of May,  
 when all the birds were singing,  
 then it was I confessed to her  
 my longing and desire.

*Song 3*

Die Rose, die Lilie, die Taube, die Sonne,  
 Die lieb' ich einst alle in Liebeswonne.  
 Ich lieb' sie nicht mehr, ich liebe alleine  
 Die Kleine, die Feine, die Reine, die Eine;  
 Sie selber, aller Liebe Wonne,  
 Ist Rose und Lilie und Taube und Sonne.

Tose, lily, dove, sun,  
 I loved them all once in the bliss of love.  
 I love them no more, I only love  
 she who is small, fine, pure, rare;  
 she, the most blissful of all loves,  
 is rose and lily and dove and sun.

*Song 10*

Hör' ich das Liedchen klingen,  
 Das einst die Liebste sang,  
 So will mir die Brust zerspringen  
 Von wildem Schmerzdrang.  
 Es treibt mich ein dunkles Sehnen  
 Hinauf zur Waldeshöh',  
 Dort löst sich auf in Tränen  
 Mein übergrosses Weh'.

When I hear the little song  
 my beloved once sang,  
 my heart almost bursts  
 with the wild rush of pain.  
 A dark longing drives me  
 up to the wooded heights,  
 where my overwhelming grief  
 dissolves into tears.

*Song 7*

Ich grolle nicht, und wenn das Herz auch bricht,  
 ewig verlor'nes Lieb! ich grolle nicht.  
 Wie du auch strahlst in Diamantenpracht,  
 es fällt kein Strahl in deines Herzens Nacht.  
 Das weiss ich längst. Ich sah dich ja im Traume,  
 und sah die Nacht in deines Herzens Raume,  
 und sah die Schläng', die dir am Herzen frisst,  
 Ich sah, mein Lieb, wie sehr du elend bist.  
 Ich grolle nicht.

I bear no grudge, though my heart is breaking,  
 O love forever lost! I bear no grudge.  
 However you gleam in diamond splendour,  
 no ray falls in the night of your heart.  
 I've known that long. For I saw you in my  
 dreams,  
 and saw the night within your heart,  
 and saw the serpent gnawing your heart -  
 I saw, my love, how pitiful you are.

*Song 16*

Die alten, bösen Lieder,  
die Träume bö's und arg,  
die lasst uns jetzt begraben,  
holt einen grossen Sarg.

Hinein leg' ich gar manches,  
doch sag' ich noch nicht was;  
Der Sarg muss sein noch grösser,  
wie's Heidelberger Fass.

Und holt eine Totenbahre  
und Bretter fest und dick;  
Auch muss sie sein noch länger,  
als wie zu Mainz die Brück'.

Und holt mir auch zwölf Riesen,  
die müssen noch stärker sein  
als wie der starke Christoph  
im Dom zu Köln am Rhein.

Die sollen den Sarg forttragen,  
und senken ins Meer hinab;  
Denn solchem grossen Sarge  
gebührt ein grosses Grab.

Wisst ihr, warum der Sarg wohl  
so gross und schwer mag sein?  
Ich senkt' auch meine Liebe  
und meinen Schmerz hinein.

The bad old songs,  
the bad and bitter dreams,  
let us now bury them.  
Fetch me a large coffin.

I have much to put in it,  
Though what I won't yet say;  
The coffin must be even larger  
Than the Vat at Heidelberg.

And fetch a bier  
made of firm thick timber;  
And it must be even longer  
than the bridge at Mainz.

And fetch for me twelve giants;  
They must be even stronger  
Than Saint Christopher the Strong  
In Cologne Cathedral on the Rhine.

They shall bear the coffin away,  
And sink it deep into the sea;  
For such a large coffin  
deserves a large grave.

Do you know why the coffin  
must be so large and heavy?  
I'd like to bury there my love  
and my sorrow too.

**Gjendines Bådnåt, op. 66**

E. Grieg/K. G. Slålien

Barnet legges i vuggen ned,  
stundom græder og stundom ler.  
Barnet legges i vuggen ned,  
Stundom græder og stundom ler.  
Sove nu, sove nu, i Jesu navn,  
så skal barnet sove.

Min mor hun tok meg på sitt fang,  
danse med meg frem og tilbake.  
Min far han tok meg på sitt fang,  
danse med meg frem og tilbake.  
Danse så, med de små, danse så,  
så skal barnet danse.

Baby is laid down in the cradle,  
sometimes crying and sometimes laughing.  
Baby is laid down in the cradle,  
sometimes crying and sometimes laughing.  
Sleep now, sleep now, in Jesus' name.  
Jesus safekeep the child.

My mother sat me on her lap,  
dancing with me back and forth.  
My father sat me on his lap,  
dancning with me back and forth.  
Dance so, with the little ones, dance so,  
thus shall the baby dance.

(My translation)

## Production No. 4: Kindertotenlieder

### Kindertotenlieder Rückert/Mahler

Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgeh'n  
Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgeh'n,  
Als sei kein Unglück die Nacht geschehn!  
Das Unglück geschah nur mir allein!  
Die Sonne, sie scheint allgemein!

Du mußt nicht die Nacht in dir verschränken,  
Mußt sie ins ew'ge Licht versenken!  
Ein Lämplein verlosch in meinem Zelt. Heil sei dem  
Freudenlicht der Welt!

Nun seh' ich wohl  
Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen  
ihr sprühtet mir in manchem Augenblicke.  
O Augen! Gleichsam, um voll in einem Blicke  
zu drängen eure ganze Macht zusammen.

Doch ahnt' ich nicht –  
weil Nebel mich umschwammen,  
gewoben vom verblendenden Geschiebe –  
daß sich der Strahl bereits zur Heimkehr schicke,  
dorthin, von wannen alle Strahlen stammen.

Ihr wolltet mir mit eurem Leuchten sagen:  
Wir möchten nah dir bleiben gerne!  
Doch ist uns das vom Schicksal abgeschlagen.

Sieh' uns nur, denn bald sind wir dir ferne!  
Was dir nur Augen sind in diesen Tagen:  
In künft'gen Nächten sind es dir nur Sterne.

### Sanger ved barnedød

Nå vil solen stå opp, så lys  
Nå vil solen stå opp, så lys,  
som om ingen ulykke skjedde i natten.  
Ulykken skjedde bare med meg.  
Solen, den skinner for alle.

Du må ikke lukke natten inne i deg,  
du må senke den i det evige lyset! E  
t lite lys sluknet i teltet mitt.  
Vær hilset, verdens gledeslys!

Nå ser jeg klart  
Nå ser jeg klart hvorfor dere sendte meg  
så dunkle flammer i mange øyeblikk.  
Å øyne, å øyne, som, for helt, i ett blikk,  
å samle sammen all deres makt.

Men jeg forstod ikke –  
for tåke hyllet seg rundt meg,  
vevet av forblindende skjebne –  
at strålen beredte seg til hjemreisen,  
dit hvor alle stråler stammer fra.

Vi vil gjerne være nær deg!  
Men det har skjebnen hindret oss.

Se på bare oss, for snart er vi langt borte fra deg.  
Det som bare er øyne for deg i disse dagene,  
i fremtidige netter skal de bare være stjerner.

Wenn dein Mütterlein

enn dein Mütterlein  
tritt zur Tür herein,  
und den Kopf ich drehe,  
ihr entgegen sehe,  
fällt auf ihr Gesicht  
erst der Blick mir nicht,  
sondern auf die Stelle,  
näher nach der Schwelle,  
dort, wo würde dein lieb Gesichten sein,  
wenn du freudenhelle  
trätest mit herein,  
wie sonst, mein Töchterlein.

Wenn dein Mütterlein

tritt zur Tür herein,  
mit der Kerze Schimmer,  
ist es mir, als immer  
kämst du mit herein,  
huschtest hinterdrein,  
als wie sonst ins Zimmer!  
O du, des Vaters Zelle,  
ach, zu schnelle,  
zu schnell erlosch'ner Freudenschein!

Oft denk' ich

Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen.  
Bald werden sie wieder nach Hause gelangen!  
Der Tag ist schön, O, sei nicht bang,  
sie machen nur einen weiten Gang.

Ja wohl, sie sind nur ausgegangen,  
und werden jetzt nach Hause gelangen,  
O, sei nicht bang, der Tag ist schön!  
Sie machen nur den Gang zu jenen Höh'n!

Sie sind uns nur voraus gegangen,  
und werden nicht wieder nach Haus verlangen.  
Wir holen sie ein auf jenen Höh'n,  
im Sonnenschein, der Tag is schön  
auf jenen Höh'n!

Når moren din

Når moren din  
trer gjennom døren,  
og jeg snur hodet o  
g ser mot henne,  
faller ikke blikket mitt  
først på ansiktet hennes,  
men på det stedet,  
nærmere dørstokken,  
der hvor ditt kjære, lille ansikt skulle vært,  
når du, gledesstrålende,  
ble med inn,  
som før, min lille datter.

Når moren din

trer gjennom døren,  
med stearinlysets skinn,  
er det alltid for meg som om  
du også kom inn,  
subbende etter,  
som du pleide inn i rommet.  
Å du, pappas celle,  
Akk, for tidlig,  
for tidlig utslukkede gledeslys!

Ofte tenker jeg

Ofte tenker jeg at de bare er gått ut.  
Snart kommer hjem igjen.  
Det er en fin dag, ikke vær redd,  
de går bare en lang tur.

Ja vel, de er bare gått ut,  
og nå vil de komme hjem igjen.  
Ikke vær redd, det er en fin dag!  
De går bare turen opp på den høyden.

De har bare gått i forveien foran oss,  
og vil ikke komme hjem igjen.  
Vi tar dem igjen på den høyden,  
i solskinn, det er en fin dag,  
på den høyden!

In diesem Wetter

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,  
Nie hätt' ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus.  
Man hat sie getragen hinaus,  
Ich durfte nichts dazu sagen!

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus,  
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus,  
Ich fürchtete sie erkranken;  
das sind nun eitle Gedanken.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus,  
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus;  
Ich sorgte, sie stürben morgen;  
das ist nun nicht zu besorgen.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus,  
nie hätt' ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus!  
Man hat sie hinaus getragen,  
ich durfte nichts dazu sagen!

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus, in diesem Braus,  
sie ruh'n, sie ruh'n als wie in der Mutter Haus.  
Von keinem Sturm erschreckt,  
von Gottes Hand bedeckt.  
sie ruh'n wie in der Mutter Haus.

I dette været

I dette været, i dette brusset,  
ville jeg aldri sendt barna ut.  
Man bar dem ut,  
jeg kunne ikke si noe mot det!

I dette været, i dette suset,  
ville jeg aldri latt barna ut.  
Jeg var redd for de ble syke-  
nå er det meningsløse tanker.

I dette været, i denne gruen,  
ville jeg aldri latt barna ut.  
Jeg var redd til ville dø neste morgen.  
Det er ikke noe å bekymre seg for lenger.

I dette været, i denne gruen, v  
ille jeg aldri sendt barna ut.  
Man bar dem ut,  
jeg kunne ikke si noe mot det.

I dette været, i dette suset, i dette brusset,  
roer de seg, roer de seg som i sin mors hjem.  
Ikke skremt av noen storm,  
beskyttet av Guds hånd,  
roer de seg, som i sin mors hjem.

(My translation)



## **Appendix 8**

### **Video-Links to the Analysed Performances**

# Appendix 8

## Video-Links to the Analysed Performances

### **J.S. Bach, Christmas Oratorio. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Dec 2019, Vestre Aker Church**

Aria Frohe Hirten and the recitative Und Sie kamen eilend Orchestra: Barokkanerne.

Conductor: Karstein Sigurd Ærø Flute: Torun Torbo

Link to live video recording from 7<sup>th</sup> December: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S21c0Nk5p6k>

### **Opera Recital. 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020, Ljan Church Congregation House**

Video recording of arias and lieder by Händel, Mozart, Wagner, Shumann and Grieg.

In addition, some solo pieces for piano

Piano: Margrete Moen Birkedal

Link to live video recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gADCCBaRxDw>

### **Mahler, Kindertotenlieder. 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> Sept 2020, Norwegian Academy of Music and Fagerborg Church**

Orchestra: Nordic Harmony Orchestra

Link to live video recording from Fagerborg Church: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ceqvbywDRSo>



In this study, Mathias Gillebo explores the nature and extent of the ethical-political implications of singing. He takes as point of departure the experience of urgency when singing to someone: that something is at stake; that something is at once established, destabilized and re-constituted – a reality which the singer is both immersed in, addresses and changes through the use of voice as it sounds towards the audience in the public sphere of the performance.

Gillebo applies three concert productions as the cases of the study, and in which he also performs as a soloist: *Weihnachtsoratorium* by J. S. Bach, an opera recital with different arias of W. A. Mozart, G. F. Händel and R. Wagner, and *Kindertotenlieder* by G. Mahler. He then engages in extensive dialogue with members of the audience in post-performance interviews, attempting to approach and describe what constitutes the ethical-political potential in singing.

Analyzing and discussing these cases in light of theory of ethics, public sphere theory and semiotics, the study furnishes insights into how singing might be understood and practiced as constituting subject and meaning: in the overture by the singer towards the audience in and through the voice, the transitional dynamics between word and sound expose the humanity of the singer and manifest as ethical demand and a participation in public political discourse.

Discussing the relation between music, method and accountability in research, the study also offers a critical view of the possibilities and limits of its own hypotheses. With its elaborations on singing as ethical demand and public political discourse, done by the singer, the study gives a thought-provoking contribution both to the international scientific literature of arts-based research and of the actual singing itself.

Mathias Gillebo is an opera and oratorio singer (tenor), theologian and music researcher.

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