

DISEMBODIED VOICES

Original English Version

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Disembodied Voices

1. Introduction

1.1 *Personal motives and objective*

Sitting in a café speaking to Kid Congo Powers¹, an idol of mine, and several other friends, my voice appears above me, from a speaker. I'm desperately trying to concentrate on the conversation and not let this disrupt the proceedings but I am too self-conscious: embarrassed due to my lack of focus as a result of my disembodied voice dispersing itself throughout the room, I draw attention to myself, try to stop the voice in its tracks by pointing it out. 'Oh, is that you?', Kid asks. I respond with a yes and then an almost apologetic statement, "its quite old now".

I have been pursued by my own voice for around a decade now. As I get older, my captured, disembodied voice remains frozen in time. The fleeting nature of the real-time human voice and the contrasting permanence of recording and transmission techniques have fascinated me since I embarked on a singing career. My experience of having to use and amplify my voice in varied 'stage' situations and more recently during workshops and talks has given me a certain amount of insight into how the voice in its material form can be implemented.

By carrying out a form of research of disembodied voices other than my own, I hope to unearth a few answers to why I am so attracted to the use of voice, (and also so perturbed when in its presence); to discover alternative intentions and strategies in using of 'disembodied' voices and what motivates other people to record, and have a record of, only their voices. Here I would like to state that for the purpose of this research I am interpreting 'voice' as something not only emitted through the mouth in the form of vocal sounds or articulated speech but also the voice in its text (written) form. I have selected two specific recordings of two female artists - namely the singing voice of Tina Turner during a live and a studio version of 'River Deep - Mountain High'² and the autobiographical voice of Yvonne Rainer in her 2006 book 'Feelings Are Facts'³. Both of these voices struck a particular chord with me: aside from the personal associations⁴ I could instil and affiliations I sensed between the artist's history and experience and my own, I felt it would make sense to concentrate in depth on the techniques displayed and utilised here and conduct an investigation that would aid me in the design and construction of an artwork specifically linked to the theme of disembodied voices. As I share experience with Turner as a performing singer, I also here share connections with Rainer as a writer in the fact that she reflects upon her artistic practice through writing, something I too will conduct via this research. I also intend my research to resolve my own queries of the functionality of such an artwork and to realise possible contexts in which it could be utilised.

1.2 *Artistic interest*

“It seems to be one or the other, working with the body or writing.” Yvonne Rainer⁵

I have, I admit, found it particularly hard to make theoretical and aesthetic links between my drawing and my singing praxis. As stated previously, during the past few years I have increasingly made use of my own vocals in installation environments also involving my drawings, rarely live, usually recorded⁶.

Already in my final year at Art school I had decided to examine the link between writing and drawing for my final dissertation, one step away from lyrics and thus the voice. As a strategic tool within artistic pieces, the voice has always been a prominent contender. Janet Cardiff, Suzsan Phillips, Laurie Anderson, Bruce Nauman are just a handful of contemporary artists who make use of the recorded and disembodied voice in their practice, implementing it in a variety of visual environments and processes. I have been commissioned by musicians and artists to sing over their music or for their pieces, offering my voice as a service or material for them to further process and manipulate⁷. My disembodied voice already exists in several forms available for public consumption: I fronted a band for 8 years, during which time we released several albums; I have had shows on various radio stations; I have had some personal, autobiographical excerpts published in magazines. Not to mention personal recordings from my childhood. These traces of my own voice, though perhaps not readily available, do exist - a frozen version of myself at a certain moment in my past. This is a somewhat disconcerting and almost science fiction-like notion - as time continues and my physical person gets older, experience aging me also, bits of me are trapped, reciting the same thing over and over again as long as someone is listening (or reading). I myself can then listen to these recordings (though I don't particularly enjoy it).⁸

1.3 *Personal, private or public voices*

A disembodied voice can only exist, for the moment completely ignoring any belief in paranormal phenomena, as a recording or a manner of transmission, i.e. via radio or microphone, where our field of vision does not, in the moment where we perceive the sound of the voice, encompass the image or view of the body that is currently emitting it. This is a formal constituent of a disembodied voice. The voice also has to be emitted from a *body* via an orifice that can act as a “speaker” to transmit the sound frequencies created by the disturbance of air passing our vocal chords. Voices are expressed in sounds of varying volume, in the form of spoken and written language, singing, talking, moaning, whispering...

As we are used to hearing (and reading) disembodied voices every day we rarely question whether these voices actually *are* emitted by a body, and whether the body and thus person in question is alive, dead or fictitious. We accept our own perception of dislocated voices that travel throughout the air as normal as we are continuously subjected to this phenomena: we hear voices from or on the street, back yard, neighbours, radio, television transmissions, off-voices in documentaries, films, voice transmitted via mobile phones into the ears of

others. We are surrounded by disjointed conversations, assuming that the reciprocating parties are actually communicating with a remote 'someone' on the other end of an invisible line⁹. Voices recorded singing songs, telling stories or explaining facts are made available to us via gramophonic technology, voices that although belonging to another person, are re-evaluated as material to be bought and sold in the form of a commodity item (such as a CD). The same applies to people's life stories, recounted and transcribed from oral form as articles, letters, diary entries, autobiographies or biographies. Voices actually come to be embodied in all sorts of physical formats.

In current times we are surrounded by everyone's public voice. As public opinion in the Western hemisphere remains 'free' within an open democratic framework, we are bound to be 'subjected' to the voices of others, even more so with the advent and no-cost factor of blogging. Voices that go unheard are considered to be suppressed - we are encouraged to 'voice' ourselves, our views, our opinions, and our dis/content. As communication becomes screen-based our voices take the form of typewritten blogs, emails, chats or digitally transmitted via VoIP systems¹⁰. The spontaneous and impulsive voices of the Internet are mostly silent, though cacophonous. These voices, in their written form, tend to be stilted (depending on typing prowess), ungainly and relatively uniform (dialect tends to vanish)¹¹. The typed, digitalised voice has taken on unusual characteristics: it is no longer fluid nor even correctly spelt and it has become abbreviated, resulting in an evolution of language which has come about through an attempt to alleviate complex disembodied emission methods. The sheer amount of voices we encounter in virtual space is overwhelming and noisy. It is almost impossible to focus on any of them,

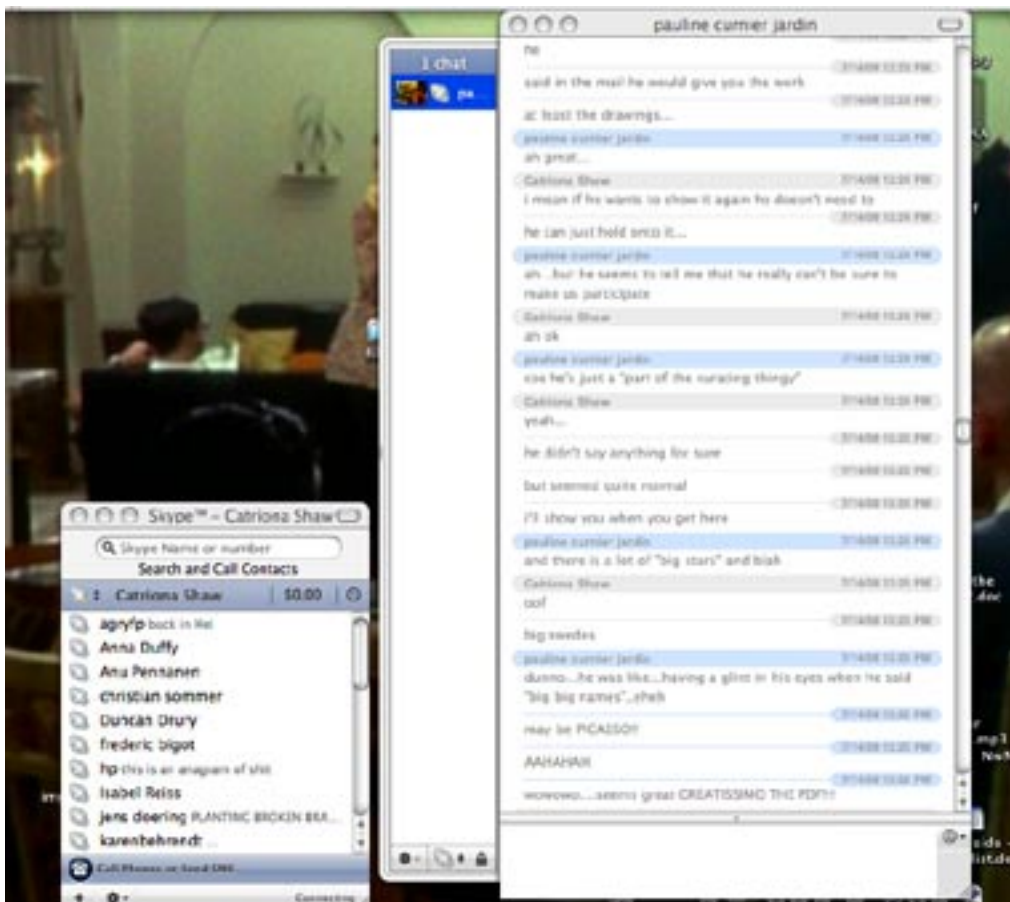


fig.1 An example of an on-screen chat using Skype

2. Tina Turner

2.1 Analysis: “River Deep - Mountain High”, two versions

“He told me I had an extremely unusual voice, that he had never heard a woman’s voice like mine, and that that was why he wanted to record me.” Tina Turner¹²

In 1966 a 26-year-old Tina Turner recorded ‘River Deep - Mountain High’, (penned by Ellie Goldsworth, John Barry and Phil Spector) in Spector’s recording studio, Gold Star Studios, in California¹³.

I first heard this song as a live version¹⁴ featured on a cassette compilation given to me by my mother in the early nineties called “Nice ‘n’ Rough”¹⁵, released in 1984, two years after Tina Turner went on tour using the same name and prior to her ‘comeback’ with the album ‘Private Dancer’. ‘Nice ‘n’ Rough’ featured a few studio recordings but was made up of predominantly live recordings, one of which was the ‘signature song’ “River Deep - Mountain High”, produced using Spector’s famous Wall of Sound technique¹⁶.

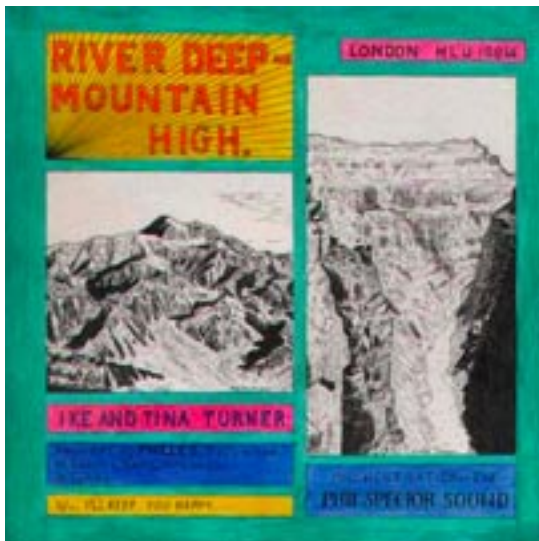


fig.2 River Deep - Mountain High - 7” record cover



fig.3 Nice ‘n’ Rough cassette cover

Initially the song didn’t have a huge impact upon me: I was impressed by Turner’s voice but didn’t find the instrumentation particularly appealing. On reaching the chorus however, the voice gains a climatic quality and pounding energy, Turner’s trademark, extremely rough timbre and almost fanatic attitude shining through. This is no doubt aided by the incredibly energetic dance moves that Tina Turner and the Ikettes performed during the show. In Awopbopalooop, Alopbamboom, the music journalist Nik Cohn wrote of an Ike and Tina Turner concert experience,

“...her energy is endless, she flings herself about the stage like some maniac and her hair flays her flesh and her butt, always her butt. Then the sweat rolls off her in sheets and her lips peel back from her teeth and she’s quite murderous.

All this time, Ike Turner, her husband, plays guitar behind her and looks mean, a neat little man with a goatee and sad cynical eyes. He looks like some elegant black magician, so calm and sinister, and Tina his spell, his servant possessed by spirits.”¹⁷

Context - cassette recorder / stage / studio

At the time I heard this, the whole story about the abusive relationship with Ike Turner had been widely publicised in the form of an autobiography, media reports and even a successful Hollywood film¹⁸. After her successful re-entrance and revamping as a solo musician it felt almost like blasphemy or betrayal to listen to recordings where the devil in the form of Ike was featured, to participate in a moment where a fellow woman is experiencing violence at the hand of her drunk, druggy and possessive husband. As wrong as it seemed I was overcome by the energy felt in most of the songs. Also my predilection for soul music and a growing interest in the burgeoning culture of rock and funk stemming from the late 60s fuelled me to pay attention to these recordings. When I finally got round to listening to the Spector version I was disappointed by what I heard. Although a celebrated and cult production, I found the control present in Turner's voice (and this not self-control, more a repressed control as a result of Spector himself, the infamous 'No-Ike' clause of the recording contract, and probably the enclosure and subsequent limitations of performability within the recording studio itself) considerably reduced my listening pleasure and also personal sense of the song.



fig. 4

Phil Spector, Tina Turner and Ike Turner

"For the first week we just worked on getting the melody for the verses right, nothing else - over and over and over. It was like carving furniture."¹⁹

True, the dramaturgy, intonation and vocal choreography of the delivery is more precise, perhaps more 'fitting' to the lyrics but the presence of the woman behind the voice became for me flimsy, static and difficult. Tina in fact ended up stripping off most of her attire to rid herself of the constraints of both studio and Spector's specific production demands, implicating that Turner was experiencing a kind of unnatural state or usage of her instrument, her voice, herself.

"That intro - "When I was a little girl..." - I must have sung that 500,000 times and I don't know if I ever got it just the way he wanted it...Pretty soon I was drenched with sweat. I had to take off my shirt and stand there in my bra to sing, that's how hard I was working on that song."²⁰

2.2 *The voice as recorded material (sound)*

“Tina’s voice was very powerful, and also very idiosyncratic - easy to pick out. ‘River Deep - Mountain High’ was an excellent record because she had the voice to get out in front of Phil Spector’s so-called wall of sound.” Mick Jagger²¹

“On River Deep, she came across as a voice of vast potential, a hurricane, but she must have been Svengalied by Spector because she’s never been quite so good again.” Nik Cohn²²

Two white males from opposite poles within the ‘music biz’ (Jagger, English, a lead singer and producer, Cohn an American rock and pop music critic) comment on Tina Turner’s vocal performance in the song River Deep - Mountain High (studio version). Both talk of Turner as just a voice, and thus regard her to be exactly as Spector intended her to function - as an instrument. Aside from the fact that Tina was obviously intimidated by Ike, his mere presence making her meek towards him due to the ensuing violence, I would speculate that Spector was obviously well aware that a too emotional situation would have a very different effect on Tina’s voice. It would ‘cause’ the voice to have a body and persona attached to it, probably rendering it more difficult to mould and fit within his production. The feminist music theorist Renee Cox Lorraine mentions that Spector was “attracted to what he regarded as the expression of feeling and physicality in African-American music” and that the “female ‘voice’ in these songs is not usually a passive one,”²³

Personally I am not so sure - although it must also be said that during these times it was quite impossible to associate any notion of women’s rights with productions such as these.²⁴ The voice is restructured and ‘cut to fit’, tailored by Spector and his producer team. Whilst Ike Turner was experiencing a kind of self-made emancipation, (considering his status as an

African-American man successfully working and managing his own business in the music industry of the 1960s), Tina was not, being both a person of colour and female, ensured the same kind of self-managerial position. Though he was not present during the recording session, Ike was the one to manage the ‘deal’ between Spector and Tina, acting as her representative and probably pocketing most of the cash, as he was the self-appointed head of the organisation.²⁵ This yet again highlights the commercial and thus material aspect of Tina Turner’s voice, a voice to be bought and sold as commodity goods.

Studio or stage



fig. 6 Tina Turner and Phil Spector in the studio, 1966

The recording studio is a lonely place, a place of interrogation, of inhibition. Your voice is channelled into a machine to be cut, filtered, subjected to multiple mutilations, doubled, tripled, harmonised, manipulated and finally 'contained' in order to be projected to a listening audience, one that no longer has visual access to your physical presence aside from perhaps a photo or short piece of text printed on the cover of the LP.²⁶ So whose image is transported by the voice? It has been said that River Deep - Mountain High's lack of success in the US was due to Spector's relatively clean production and the lyrics rendering it too white for a black audience but Turner's voice making it too black for a white audience²⁷. In the live recording we encounter a quite self-assured, energetic and more rocking version of the song and singer, faster in tempo and without the echoing reverb on the instruments, quite far from the syllabic, controlled studio track. Reappropriating her voice, Tina really *struts her stuff* both vocally and on stage - dance manoeuvres²⁸ automatically change the quality and intonation of the voice, as well as lending it a different rhythm through pure, physical action. Turner, in other live versions of the song from the 1970s, announces that this is 'their' version. And their version it truly is. The instrumentation is completely different, gone is the cavernous reverb that has both encased and completely isolated Turner, giving an impression of vulnerability. The voice kicks in with a high pitched, confident and idiosyncratic rasp, sexier, brasher and more the adult figure as opposed to the nostalgic girl singing about rag dolls and puppies, hoping her charming innocence will help her catch the man. In the live version the vocal intonation and delivery of these same lyrics implies the man is already trapped and completely at her mercy, the tirade of this 'love declaration' sounding more like

an angry reproach, as if you say, 'Look what you made me do! You made me fall in love with you and now you're going to pay...'

Vocal intensity

Interestingly, Ike actually preferred Tina to 'scream'²⁹. I assume this, for him, served the purpose of adding a wild passion and emotion to the otherwise relatively bland lyrics found in most pop songs of the era³⁰. The screams and groans emitted by Tina directly reflect a primal being and, according to author Renee Cox Lorraine in an essay, *jouissance*³¹. *Jouissance*³² exists as a particular feature of songs featuring or sung by women, indicating and underlining both instability and sexuality or seduction, characteristics traditionally associated with women's music. Also indicated by these non-verbal groans, whines and murmurs is a primeval matriarchal character, which Cox Lorraine comments to be a positive aspect of women's music from a feminist perspective. Her sentiment is that the term 'piece' when talking of music likens it to an object, structured as such to suit masculine territories and intentions and that an increase of empowerment to female actors would disrupt these structures and engage an audience in a wholly different way. Furthermore, she predicts that such music "would have a flexible form, and might involve continuous repetition with variation, the cumulative growth and development of an idea... [and] would serve to deconstruct musical hierarchies... disrupt linearity and avoid definite closure. In sung music, vocalization would be relaxed and would make use of non-verbal or presymbolic sounds."³³

2.3 Captured voices

"Nun mussten die Toten nicht mehr konserviert oder als Statuen verewigt werden; die Funktion der Verkörperung von Stimmen fiel den Schriften und Texten zu."³⁴

As human existence is finite, it must also then be that the voice, a constituent of human existence, is also finite. However this finite nature becomes questionable when viewed in the context of recording technology.

Living in a time where high-profile persons such as actors and pop stars seemingly manage to stop the aging process, it is of course interesting to look upon the voice as one of the last uncharted territories of the human person in terms of manipulation through corrective surgery to create a youthful appearance or sound. Of course it is debatable as to whether age can be signified by the voice - some young people possess very old-sounding speaking voices, as also some older people possess very young sounding voices.³⁵

The voice is captured on recording in an instant, a moment of time, unrepeatably. Rainer presents us with a voice, as will be seen in the following chapter, which is a conglomerate of her many voices, voices from different stages in her life collaged as a whole. Tina Turner's voice on these recordings (particularly the live recording), however, despite being

manipulated by production and mastering technology, presents us with a singular voice, a singular moment and place in time where and when this voice was emitted. Regardless of training and practice, we can accept this voice as immediate and therefore also as frozen in time and space. Although it would be possible to re-edit or remix this voice, set it against other forms of instrumentation, the voice remains set in a certain place and era, which no amount of editing or processing can change. This is not, I find, the case with writing or printed text.

The wrong body or the wrong voice?

Aside from the effects of aging, there is another effect of the visual upon the voice, which may lend itself to artist's preferring their image not to be associated with their own voices - the mismatched voice. To illustrate what I mean by this I would like to relate an anecdote from my aunt from the 1960s, which I am quite sure, was more ubiquitous than personal.

One day, whilst sitting in a cafe, my mother and her sister heard what they described as 'the most beautiful voice' on the radio - the voice of Roy Orbison singing 'Only the Lonely'.



fig. 7 Roy Orbison

She 'fell in love' with the voice and could barely wait to see what he looked like, envisaging some 'gorgeous hunk'. Unfortunately his appearance only dismayed her when she finally saw him appearing on television and she quickly fell out of love. This supposed mismatching of voice and person is of course related to commercial expectations and publicity, and in the entertainment biz it is almost a pre-requisite that the 'star' is sexy, glamorous or attractive in a visual way. With the eve of the 'talkies', however, even a glamorous image could not save some Hollywood film stars from career death due to untrained or ugly voices.³⁶

In contrast, Tina Turner's voice seems to match her physicality - sturdy, muscular, almost masculine somehow - she even herself states that her voice was not "pretty" going on to say,

"My voice is not the voice of a woman, so to speak... I think of men. I can relate to their delivery, I'm attracted to it...I had to take a lot of my training and my patterns of singing from the guys. It wasn't about girls and beauty and femininity."³⁷

Perhaps the acceptance of being different, audible in the voice, may make it easier to accept the ageing process. Tina Turner is not exactly an example of someone ageing modestly - when she performs, she still swaggers, shows her legs, wears tight clothes and could plausibly be accused of being 'mutton dressed as lamb' though this would defy her attitude. In fact the age and experience of her voice may well be the balancing factor of her look. It is also evident from footage that she never tried to be the 'pretty' girl on stage, often snarling and grimacing throughout concerts.



fig. 8 Tina Turner, 2008



fig. 9 Tina Turner, ca. 1984

2.4 *Collective voices - audience participation and commentary*

"The essential thing is for the artist to have the sense of an audience: to feel that his voice is not echoing in an empty room"³⁸

In times of YouTube or MySpace, where distribution is immediate and audience numbers are revealed by means of a counter, this is a different story. Invisible audience members are now visible within our online world as numbers, tracked dots on google maps or blog entries. In the 1960s, however, and up until not too long ago, this was not the case. Distributors count record sales twice a year and the selling band in question receives the numbers via GEMA reports or royalties invoices sent from their record labels. The only time in the present that you as a recording musician will experience the scale of your listening audience is in a live performance scenario.

For myself, as a disjointed audience member of the Ike and Tina Turner performance in

1973, I sit in an environment of my choosing and can listen via headphones or cassette player to Turner singing River Deep - Mountain High with a feeling of being surrounded by an audience past as well as present. As I am listening to Turner I am aware of her audience - she addresses them as 'you' (i.e. "we thank you", heard towards the fade-out of the song). The tonal quality of the recording is not that of a studio but that of a live performance in a public field with a flux of energies between spectators and performer. It is, of course, impossible to say how many people are in the audience. There are cheers; there are coughs, grunts, barely audible at that. The recording is mainly directed at stage but I suppose that this trend of 'live' recordings which started in the 70s was meant to re-induce this particular excitement that one experiences during a concert. Although the post-listening environment will never be the same (live = the moment) and cannot truly be captured on tape, the listener experiences the event within a certain frame. A mono or stereo recording, mastered for adaptation to tape/disc, distortion removed, edits to cut out unwanted or too long breaks.

The detached listener

My voice as an audience member will not be audible as that of an individual. On a particular recording³⁹ of Elisabeth Cotten singing her popular and well-covered song 'Freight Train' when she was 85 years old, there is a moment when we hear a baby cry in the audience. A strange juxtaposition of ages, particularly in a live environment where the majority of the audience sits hushed in reverence for the aged performer who croaks her way through a song she wrote when she was 12 years old, finally asking the audience to assist her in singing the chorus. On this request the audience react so shyly that Cotten eggs them on to respond with louder voices, at which they react and increase the volume of their voices.



fig. 10 Elisabeth Cotten with musician in front of an audience

In Turner's live recording, the audience is also audible. As a single listener at home, one is immediately propelled into a state of community, albeit a deferred one (from the 1970s). As will be seen in the following chapter concerning Yvonne Rainer, the reader also exists as a time-displaced audience member, an observer of events in current time yet in the past. The artist's voice, therefore, acts kind of like a pivotal axis for this time machine and although we are transported back into the past, the voice remains clear and ageless, a confident ally to accompany the detached listeners.

3. Yvonne Rainer

3.1 Analysis: „Feelings Are Facts“

Finding the voice

“It’s odd how a single utterance by a particular person in one’s life can seem at certain moments to encapsulate a total sensibility.”⁴⁰

One of the hardest tasks about being a visual artist is to establish an accompanying voice that provides a verbal articulation of the imagery, objects or performance that you have created and can display in public, the prosthetic of yourself. It sounds absurd but it is precisely this voice (or even lack of voice) that can make or break an artist⁴¹. The decision to be mute and merely present the work, unembellished with theoretical countdowns and commentary is, through the very nature of being human and possessing the ability to talk, an extremely blunt statement in itself. The decision to provide the work with a verbal explanation is, perhaps, seen to be passé in the current art climate though it is still expected that the artist can account for themselves, for his or her creative actions. Many artists turn to a critic or writer to take on the role of their voice, to express the inner motivation of the work (or body of work) at hand. In the case of Yvonne Rainer this is particularly curious. An extremely articulate, highly intelligent woman who deliberately suppressed the voice, in fact, any kind of communicative contact including eye contact with her audience, in her work, who without a doubt could easily express the complexities, theory and concept behind her practice in verbal manner. An event, actually an explosion, (literally), in 2001 erupts a verbal stream in the form of her autobiography “Feelings Are Facts”. By this time her practice had morphed into that of a filmmaker, her physical presence even more removed from her audience.

At this interlude, I should state that I am not looking to conduct a formal and critical deconstruction of Rainer’s book per se⁴², nor carry out a critique of her artistic work, but rather make focused observations of her style of writing, choice of format (autobiography) and how, through this, she manages to convey her very particular kind of voice, particularly in connection to her artistic and performative practice⁴³. Content is of importance, as is the context in which I, the reader, find myself when reading the book - namely as a 34 year old artist and, currently, master student exiled from ‘home’ in Berlin.

Feelings are Facts



fig. 11 Cover of 'Feelings Are Facts'

In "Feelings Are Facts" Yvonne Rainer essentially restructures herself and her recounting voice into the form of a book, of written material. Autobiography evokes the idea of a conventional line-up of 'life stages', loves, love lost, work process, struggles and the preliminary 'conclusion' of a story or at least an era. In fact her book presents exactly these conventional elements in an extraordinarily unconventional fashion. The reader is not put in the position of voyeur, peeking into the life of a celebrity or high-achiever, but acts more as an echo chamber. Personally, I am impressed, enthralled even, by her life story, which she here sets out in a form which could be accused of being similar to a glossy woman's magazine if it weren't for the eloquent language and delivery - and form (book). During reading I become more engrossed in her life story: I am envious of her life in New York, a city for me that presents a craving, a desire, irrational and wrong, pure capitalistic hedonism, simultaneously snug and foreign - a city whose clichéd statement 'You've made it now, you're here' still resonates as true. Her difficulties, her opinions feel familiar to me, her anger and her voracious appetite for knowledge and 'furthering herself' remind me of aspects of my own character - or am I purposely 'reading' myself into her place, adopting her voice, and thus experience, as my own? As I read the book, I am reminded of personal dilemmas concerning a variety of both typical human problems and some particular to my artist's existence: moving, relocating, the drive to produce with or without credit, approval or recognition, physical incapacity which has a direct effect on the creative practice, its financial consequences and how to overcome this: the 'suffering' that goes along with the inherent instability of a typically bohemian or artist's lifestyle.

The grammatic voice

An interesting aspect of Rainer's book is the modesty with which Rainer presents herself. She makes no concessions as to readership, has a strong, articulate presence and even

dives into stories so personal that one could almost feel ashamed about reading further. At points she even seems to drift, memories fleeting past and captured almost by chance in written form - due to the actual process of remembering. Sometimes her voice seems irreverent to her own tale, somewhat reflecting the mood of the era, for example, when she describes an instance of unfaithfulness,

“The acting school gave a party in someone’s big flat. I got very drunk with a young actor I knew. We went into a back room and I went down on him.”⁴⁴

after which, on the same page and just one short paragraph later, her voice loses this cool tone and becomes reflective and mature,

“Al was somehow appeased. Without making a moralistic judgement, I can affirm unequivocally that I was never again unfaithful to anyone I lived with, or for that matter, to anyone with whom I was sexually involved.”⁴⁵

Her flippancy, factual voice denotes the voice of the moment, describes how she felt, utilises slang to induce a feeling of speed, coolness. Her more academic voice used on reflection of the event and the consequences on her lifestyle, however, shuttles Rainer immediately back into the present, reconstitutes her to her current position⁴⁶.

These kind of intimate anecdotes make up a large part of the book - her description of the failure of her own body caused by peritonitis which ended up being a chronic affliction over several years, affecting both her work and her relationships is accompanied by snippets of personal letters from the time and ‘futuristic’, imagined, reflective voices from film scripts.

Throughout the book her voice continues to switch back and forth between present and past tense, particularly in the chapter ‘Implosions’ where Rainer again describes her illness in a voice that is almost reminiscent of ‘real-time’ events in its urgency,

“Bill and I flirt and pet a bit. I love talking with him....By now I am addicted to Demerol. Every night I wake up in sheets drenched with sweat.” (during a trip to Rome in 1967)⁴⁷

concluding this episode with a return to the past tense,

“Some details of the people who came to my aid during this time are riveted in my memory,”⁴⁸

The lonely voice



fig. 12 Yvonne Rainer 1965

Rainer chooses not to be 'alone' during her book - in other words, she expresses not only her own voice but other people's voices, people who were directly linked to her, personal associates, family members, friends, of whose voices she still possesses records in the form of letters and emails, of which she quotes and reprints parts either in whole or as excerpts, choosing to reform the community and society in which she found herself at the time, in which her own voice was contextualised. This produces an interesting effect - that of resonance and 'listening'. As the well-known philosophical riddle states "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?"⁴⁹ In a sense this riddle applies also to Rainer's choice of format - as soon as the book is closed, the voice stops, is immobilised. Through these other voices Rainer is automatically providing herself with an incessant 'listening audience' within the books pages. Lest nobody else read it, the voice does not remain isolated, lonely and deserted in text form but is surrounded, nested indeed, within a community, comfortable and secure.

Through the intimacy of the voice that she presents that is **her own**, and not one shackled by a formalistic or even regimented form of writing, she manages to both sustain and dispel the distance perceivable in her dance and film work. She lays bare her feelings, the facts, in the form of diary entries, letters, photos (and image commentary). Rather than the typical subterfuge of 'how great the Sixties were' (something I personally cannot abide), Rainer presents herself 'in her time' (part of which just so happened to be the Sixties) and you participate in her process, not of self-discovery, but of reorganisation, re-ordering of events and issues, one that in fact does not contradict her previous practice in the slightest, but actually corroborates it, validates its even.

3.2 *The written (autobiographical) voice*

Embodiment of the voice



fig. 13 Yvonne Rainer performing Trio A

Just who is Yvonne Rainer: the book reveals her to be an articulate writer, an academic and an intellectual. She has hungered after and gained considerable knowledge throughout her life, evident from her writing prowess. At the same time her style is based on a strict chronology of events. She rarely darts back and forth through time and we are lead through a specific era (from the time her parents met before she and her brother were born until when she made the film 'Lives of Performers' in 1972). A 33-page epilogue at the end of the book and a mention of '9/11'⁵⁰ in the preface are the main instances of a time beyond the millennium expressed or discussed in the book. Rainer admits that 'by the late 70s long-distance telephone calls and postcards were replacing lengthy personal correspondence'⁵¹ which in turn led to a lack of documentation of that period due to convenience and speed/impatience of communication.

'[T]he body declines, the mind continues to extrude language'⁵²

Disruption, disturbance and dislocation

Rainer's personal proclamation in the introduction of the book of her "chronic computer hysteria"⁵³ indicates a real struggle with the keyboard and she also thanks various friends in helping 'reorganise [her] manuscript', 'rethinking' and 'revamping' her writing under guidance of trusted associates, also indicates a process lacking in particular spontaneity, perhaps even an unsure one⁵⁴. Rainer's inclusion of diary entries is also important assuming that these have not been 'tampered' with, these excerpts provide the reader with a an authentic,

younger voice (the form 'diary' always insinuates personal, secretive writing at the time it is written, i.e. uncorrected and hidden from public view and thus a level of authenticity or personality lesser associated with academic or learned writing intended for public reading)

"I have stated what propelled me toward writing a memoir, but I am still a little uneasy about my motives...[I] must remind myself that my existence does not depend on some kind of secular redemption through self-exposure"⁵⁵ says Rainer of her decision to write "Feelings Are Facts". She points out that we live in a world saturated by talk shows and publicised confessions (often, I might add, by so-called reality TV candidates, non-achievers, Joe and Jane Bloggs...).

3.3 *The intimate voice*

The intention of writing an autobiography is not only to provide a self-surveying document of a lifetime of an 'interesting' person, but to provide oneself (i.e. the author) with an immortal recording of one's own voice. In a sense a script has been written and published to be performed by a silent protagonist (the reader), also acting as an educational and instructive discourse. 'Reading aloud' we automatically donate our own interpretive voices to a pre-written narrative; Rainer provides us with an account of part of her life and a rich description of context and characters in which to 'imagine' ourselves, whereas Turner provides us with an example of interpretation, having given her voice to a personage concocted by Spector et al: the character of a strong woman rendered defenceless by her love/adoration for a man.

The monologue 'I'

In Rainer's absence we are presented with an 'I' (Rainer) surrounded by her intimate connections. This constitutes a major difference to the type of voice we experience from Turner: here we are presented with a monologue, repeatable and ready to be interpreted. The only voice we hear is our own as we silently repeat Rainer's 'I' and though it is clear via photos and anecdotes that this is not a mirror of ourselves, the inevitable effect is that the reader is engrossed in the role, adapts themselves to speaking the voice, interpreting the voice as their own. Similarly we find the presence of 'I' in 'River Deep, Mountain High' - though here we are less able to transpose the first person presented by someone else's expressive account (Turner) as our own, also when considering that Turner adopts the written voice of someone else as an interpreter. Concerning the monologue, the author and the reader, Jesper Svenbro, the Swedish poet and classical philologist, states that the author "...bezeichnet sich selbst als abwesend, weil er die Inschrift geschrieben haben wird. Der rest ist eine Angelenheit zwischen der beschrifteten Amphore und dem Leser, die sich als 'ich' und 'du' gegenueberstehen."⁵⁶

The monologue in this sense is a powerful tool. Although there surely exist gender-specific ramifications as to whether the reader is male/female in correspondence with the gender of the writer and the thus resulting ability of the reader to 'assume' the voice scripted by the

author, the use of the first person, as pointed out by Svenbro in his essay, is instrumental in enabling personal projection of the self into the role of the other (in this case the writer), the 'losing oneself', the surrender of the self and personal history to embrace that of the writer's personal story⁵⁷. This is not purely a sympathetic form of reading: in current times we are surrounded by inanimate objects or intangible platforms which prominently feature 'I' or 'My' as part of their nominal description, through which we can make an analogy with the function of the monologue in printed text - this in part allows the consumer or user to place themselves into the body of the beast, usually one which demands a basic level of literacy for functional use, diminishing their own presence and embellishing an inanimate object with a voice,

“Der Leser fuegt dem geschriebenen Wort seine Stimme hinzu, welches fuer sich unvollstaendig ist. Die Schrift scheint das legein oder den logos zu brauchen den der Leser hinzufuegt: Ohne einen Leser bleibt sie toter Buchstabe. So wird Lesen eine Art 'epi-log' fuer das geschriebene Wort, dem eine eigene Stimme fehlt und das mithin auf den Leser angewiesen ist.”⁵⁸

When considering this, it is imaginable in the case of Rainer that the role of author in the written sense naturally follows her artistic creative role as choreographer, and later as director: the direction of an anonymous audience (keeping in mind her attitude towards her public and practice of 'not looking' at the audience, her NO manifesto, etc. arrogance towards participation? Forced ignorance or insolence?), a choreography of voices, silently chanting a structure ordered and commanded by her, personal to her, belonging to her,

“Der Leser, der >in seinem Kopf< liest, muss das geschriebene Wort nicht durch die Intervention seiner Stimme aktivieren oder reaktivieren. Das geschriebene Wort scheint zu ihm einfach zu >sprechen<. Er >hoert< einer Schrift zu.”⁵⁹

3.4 *Losing the voice*

Dislocated states

“Reading...was understood as ‘an activity which, like chant and writing, requires the participation of the whole body and the whole mind’. Thus it was that Peter the Venerable, suffering from a cold and having lost his voice, could not read, for ‘he could no longer perform his lectio’ (Leclercq 1961: 19-20) Granted then, that the writing was read in performance, and that through this it was experienced as sound, might it not better be regarded as score?”⁶⁰

A voice that breaks or disappears for a period of time (e.g. due to laryngitis) - where does it go? It either remains in the head or appears in written or printed form on paper. In extreme cases resulting in permanent loss of voice or dumbness, voices are substituted and expressed through sign language using hands or mouthed words - however I will not delve into this subject here. Chronic loss of a tool of expression can be detrimental to an artist, particularly if this happens suddenly or unexpectedly. The consequence of such an event is that ‘being’ or a sense of presence is disturbed through the loss of verbal expression of emotions and ability to transmit information and ideas.

Lack and loss

Personally speaking I have already experienced two ways of losing my voice: through illness or through ‘being a stranger’ (fremdsein). The first is rather obvious and doesn’t require lengthy explanation. The second may not be as clear. Based ‘abroad’ from my home country, I initially experienced the loss of verbal response capable to me due to a lack of language skills - this kind of vocal loss recovers as the command of the foreign language develops, though it is questionable as to whether the vocal expression I am able to give is really ‘complete’ or even representative of who I am. Thus we have on the one hand, complete absence of voice due to chronic and recurring laryngitis, at scattered periods over one the years and on the other a limitation of ability to speak due to lingual incapacity. Both forms are inflictions that are discomfoting and uncomfortable. To focus for a moment on the first form, loss of voice through illness, it should be said that loss of voice does not necessarily accompany any sort of physical pain (sore throat for example). Neither does the latter, loss of speech.

in NYC on the subway
from the plane there
was a girl (german)
speaking dutch to a
guy (australian) and he
always answered her
in english, sounded really
weird!
I can do that but it
was just lazy of one
of them
its easier to listen than
talk.
they must get dizzy
its so cruel

palmer has
writes elbow
I'll be able 2 write shorthand!
yours
im sorry about this!
But it sucks!
I can't talk.
frustrating coz I got
stuff 2 say!
cos I haven't seen u
for ages
D U H!
why? me too.
I think its gonna be
funny.
I really need your opinion

fig. 14 an excerpt from a conversation I had with a visiting friend whilst having no voice, being forced to scrawl my responses on a notepad

One is temporarily disabled of a certain function due to an 'inconvenience' that, if not properly attended to, can become a chronic affliction. This affliction can, in certain cases, also lead to existential and financial distress. Rainer, in her book, describes the temporary loss of her primary instrument, at the time her body, due to a debilitating illness situated in her gut. The illness became chronic, not only due to improper handling but doubtlessly due to her personal situation and possibly due to the kind of existential angst that develops when your tool of expression fails you. I must admit my fascination with this episode of the book as it reminded me of my own experience, and an utter dependency on an exaggerated form physical expression to continue a creative livelihood. Failure of this tool to work is frustrating, terrifying even, as one realises that the body not only enables a means of expression but also the essence of life itself. Malfunction conjures up a variety of psychological fears at a certain juncture in one's life and career: decrepitude, dysfunction, social outcasting from a scene... The voice tells people who you are; as Rainer's body was acting as her 'voice', its loss threatened to make her wholly invisible. It is interesting therefore that soon after this she removed her 'self' wholly from her own stage, at times appearing in her own films but as a photographed image or just a vocal recording. Finally she took on the form of a book: a book has a body. It possesses both an inner and outer being, if you like. Rainer embodies the content, important parts depicting her existence, are contained within - photographs, letters, diary entries, reflections, memories, instructions... Reasons.

'Lost voices' also signify stress and could be used as a metaphor to describe forms of oppression. Whilst living in Vienna and as I lost my voice for the third time in a row within 6 months I was sent by my doctor to see a specialist physician. She had warned me that he was a little 'old fashioned'.

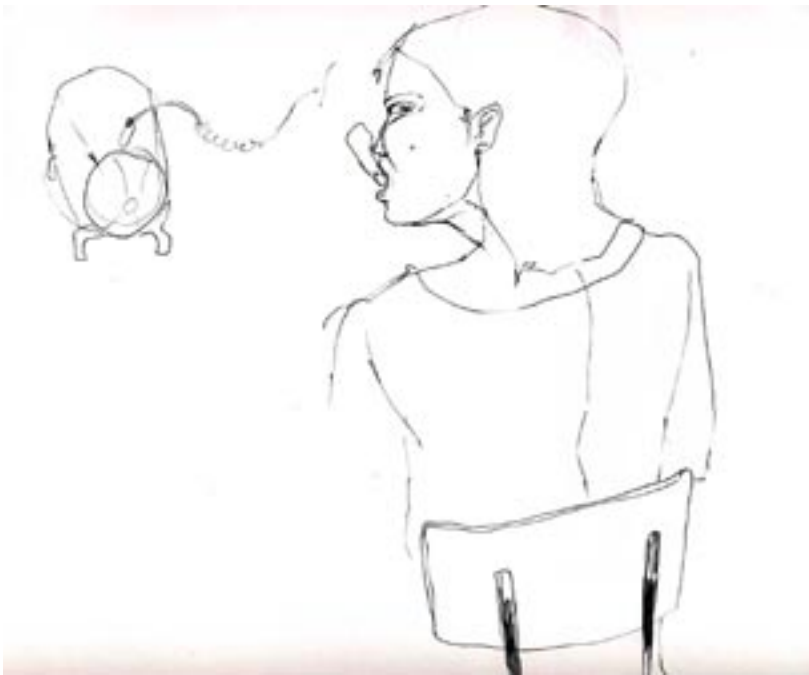


fig. 15 A visit to the HNO doctor, Vienna 2001 (Drawing, Catriona Shaw)

The doctor was rather old and, true, very antiquated in his methods. His practice contained dusty, framed images of fully clad doctors rescuing naked women from the clutches of death (depicted as a skeleton) and there was a steady stream of pensioners coming to get their nostrils cleaned using horrendous looking Victorian apparatus. I spent about a month going in and out of the place for treatment which involved a Hoover-like machine that spurted out salted steam water for me to inhale at a little desk and also a large and intimidating machine that emitted ultra-sound rays with bat like arms placed on my neck. The doctor also told me that I would have to desist my practice of singing 'Rrrrock' music - he didn't however offer me an alternative suggestion of financial gain.

4. Evaluation

4.1 *The voice as material*

“If we sit and talk in a dark room, words suddenly acquire new meanings and different textures. They become richer, even, than architecture, which Le Corbusier rightly says can best be felt at night. All those gestural qualities that the printed page strips from language come back in the dark...”⁶¹

To view and/or employ the ‘voice’ as a form of material, it seems to me that it must first be trained in some way and then captured using a second media. At least this is the process I have followed during the last years. Having taught myself how to use certain editing programmes on the computer and vocal effects, I have learnt how to manipulate my voice, how to remove or change certain frequencies in order to give it a harsher or softer edge. I have taught myself how to make use of a microphone and picked up tips about how to distort the voice by cupping the top of the mic with my hand or how to deliberately fade out my voice in a live situation by slowly moving it away from my mouth. I have frustratedly witnessed the difficulties some speakers at conferences seem to have in using microphones, particularly concerning their posture when a microphone is placed in front of them and I have given advice in workshop scenarios about vocal projection. As a typist I can write quickly and succinctly, with a relatively high rate of W.P.M. (words per minute). I can touch type, meaning I don’t have to look at the keyboard to make sure I’m hitting the right keys. For all these technical abilities I am not, however, sure that I have heard or read any one particular instance where my voice is present in its material form that I am satisfied with. It is intimidating and distracting to hear a song I have recorded on the radio or in a public place and I often feel, if not slightly ashamed, that it doesn’t really represent me. I find it almost impossible to listen to, let alone watch, live recordings of myself singing or in concert, my level of self-criticism becoming inordinate. I cannot be sure if I could attribute this dissatisfaction to shyness or to discomfort at hearing myself removed from my person.

The permanence of the voice in its material form is somewhat unnerving - it loses its ephemeral quality, its fleeting nature. Mistakes, atonal outbursts or small unintentional gasps or burps, not removed during production, are finally etched into the final publication and sent out into the world for ever to remain in this form. This could be compared to the immediacy of clicking the send button when sending an email and afterwards realising there is a typing mistake or some other error, possibly resulting in a chain of confusion or upset. Captured and processed vocal information is material, meaning it can be re-used, re-formatted, re-edited, re-mastered. Conversation or a live show experienced in the moment, for example, exists only as an echo or memory immediately following its occurrence.

4.2 Copied voices

Recognisability, means of success - voices as structure

“Der Stimme wird erst allmählich ein eigener, unverwechselbarer Körper verliehen, der mit dem Körper des Sprechenden assoziiert werden kann. Volumen, Dynamik, Rhythmus und Klangfarbe zeichnen die individualisierte Stimme aus, machen sie wiedererkennbar und nachahmbar; so kann die Stimme zum Medium der Befehle, Belehrungen und Überzeugungen geformt werden.”⁶²

During song, the voice extrudes words in lyrical structure, recognisable signifiers in a specific language or dialect sung in sequence. The British social anthropologist Tim Ingold states in his book ‘Lines: A brief history’⁶³ that we have come to regard music as such only in its ‘instrumental’ form and not as something related to the voice (i.e. song). The origins of song are, verbal, and purely based on vocal expression. One original intention of song was to relate religious tales, to sing the word of god, or to relate an event. Chanting is another form of song, or vocal music. Recording ‘technology’ for such songs was, up until the invention of the gramophone, non-existent - in fact they were only ‘recorded’ or captured by humans and reiterated as oral hand-me-downs. In the instance of the voice being recorded as a permanent form, as discussed above, this means that it’s form can also be imitated, copied by others. This kind of imitation is not unusual these days - vocal imitation has been used in cabaret, comedy and entertainment for years. What is interesting however is that the apparent outburst or interpretation of a song can emboss and deeply ingrain in the listeners ears ‘how that song should be sung’, regardless of formal musical score/partitur. This can create difficulties for performers when singing live - ‘blockbuster’ stars such as Madonna or Kylie Minogue often have their own recorded voice playing lightly in the ‘background’, almost but not completely inaudible to the audience - this acts as a kind of safety net in case of mistakes and prompt whilst concentrating on the live performance. A ghost of oneself to keep one on the right track. The original recording artists are then (according to contract and commercial expectation) placed in an unusual position of having to copy *themselves*. Conservative fans expecting an embodiment of the recording they have purchased and agents who are expecting financial turnout through continued satisfaction often frown upon improvisations.

Copy and cover

Bands or singers who ‘cover’ other people’s songs, already released, may also find themselves in a somewhat limited disposition: aside from the regulations concerning arrangement and release of covered tracks, either they find it difficult to escape from the vocal structure set out by the original artist or they can find themselves trying too hard to make it different.⁶⁴ I am not in a position to declare anything concerning writing and literature as I have lesser experience in that field although I would hazard a guess that similar issues can arise here, not in the sense of ‘covering’ stories, though this does exist in the oral tradition of relating folk tales, but in a sense where ‘plagiarism’ of style or writing is at hand - this is, however, another issue entirely. One could of course posit that in the process of mediated writing,

i.e. via a typewriter or computer keyboard, even, perhaps, the process of handwriting using a mass-produced writing implement, writers are subjected to certain 'limiting' structures which most definitely affect both the process and the outcome. In the film 'Sleuth' Laurence Olivier plays the role of an author who we see dictating his next novel into a tape recorder in the middle of a garden maze, to be typed by his secretary once completed. He stutters and makes mistakes, retraces sentences, seemingly expecting his typist to recognise and correct this - she will essentially act as his subconscious, his prosthetic writing hand. The technique and technicality of writing is, when it comes to type and print, almost impossible to detach from one another.

Finally I would like to mention the increasing and rather dismaying tendency I see within the western pop industry of emulating types of voices for purely commercial gain. Here I think about recording artists such as Amy Winehouse or Anastacia, white female artists who have, in my opinion, improbably black-sounding, feign-soulful voices⁶⁵ resembling well-known recording artists from the 60s such as Aretha Franklin or Diana Ross as well as the Michael Jackson-esque vocal technique of Justin Timberlake. This may be a misconception on my part or perhaps even an already worn-out polemic, but due to the accessibility and continuous play of songs, recordings etc. from the past 40 years it is somehow not surprising that so-called pop academies (from which artists like Winehouse or Timberlake appear) are producing these cleanly-cut, sellable items in the form of young singers with old sounding voices overloaded with vibrato, melisma, emotional wailing and grunts. This mimesis of style and experience basically turns these vocalists into synthesizers.



fig. 16 Beyoncé Knowles and Tina Turner during a duet at the Grammy Awards 2008

4.3 The residual voice

“Why do you write? Can’t you remember?”⁶⁶

The recording of technique (in this case Turners ‘instrument’ and expression, and Rainer’s ideas and relation of formative instances and events) are important factors of their creative processes/results which can be learnt from, imitated, for example to aid educatory processes, and subsequently adapted to suit personal goals. This is the primary reason for ‘recording’ in my opinion, be it art, music or literature: regardless of the method (and methods have changed constantly throughout history), unrecorded oral transmission is perhaps a lesser egotistical means of transmission, but it is a limited one - limited in the sense of its transitory nature, its temporality⁶⁷.

Needless to say, not everyone will have a chance to record their own voices at whim, though we are supplied ample opportunities to do so: blank diaries to divulge one’s innermost, hidden secrets are readily available as are relatively cheap Dictaphones, not to mention blogs in the Internet and the craze of Myspace, a user-friendly and simple way to spread your own voice, if seen to be fit. Questions of ‘quality’ or training are no longer valid in a speedy, neo-liberal world where everybody apparently can publicly have a say about anything and everything. What will happen to this residue of voices once made available? As preferred (and sometimes the only means available) forms of publishing and distribution become digital and situated in cyberspace, how will these voices remain heard long after their ‘owners’ deposited them?

Echo

The issue of echo of the voice is one I have not yet approached in this research, but it might be appropriate to mention now. As opposed to a ‘natural’ echo, for example in a cave or large room, repeated reading or listening enables a kind of self-inflicted echo, a fabricated one. Fabricated in the sense that the echo in this instance is not temporal as it would be normally, but permanent - according to who owns or digests the object or media in which the voice is contained and how often they listen to/read this voice.

I have listened to Tina Turner’s rendition(s) of Rhythm Deep Mountain High countless times. Each time I am presented with a moment in time, regardless of processing, the voice she had at that instance. I have no way of knowing how many songs she had sung in the concert prior to this one, nor after, nor could I know how many concerts she had performed immediately before this one (which can have a great effect on both the sound of the voice and her performative capabilities/adrenaline). An excited voice twitches, might even get lost at points. Turner’s voice is skilled, and she is practiced enough to know how to gain an excited reaction from her audience. Her spoken vocals are short and snappy - ‘Thankye’veri’much-ah’ - and rehearsed. Her singing voice seems more her own. In I, Tina it comes to light that Ike had them practicing over and over for days and hours before a tour. With this kind of regimented rehearsal routine and apparently extreme and violent pressure of Ike’s control, it’s no wonder that Turner displays a kind of disciplined instinct. This voice, this performance, belongs somewhat to me. I have sung along and, essentially, imitated her

performance, her voice, in private.

On the other hand it is more difficult to constantly repeat reading Rainer's autobiography, the medium itself being less convenient and demanding more time, concentration and effort than listening to a tape. Although the medium represents the fact and is essentially the conveyor of the message, I don't necessarily agree with media theorist Marshall McLuhan's often suspicious opinion as set out in his book 'Understanding Media'; the idea that technology increasingly replaces human intervention or acts as a prosthetic for human physicality and activity is clear, however in the case of Rainer, Turner and countless others, recording technologies also act as a means of *furthered* and *amplified* communication and transmission, a simple but effective distribution of events that may (or may not) have educatory benefit for some people. The egotistical nature of this act of amplification and successive disembodiment can be argued but I don't find this particularly relevant here. Accessibility also plays a large role - I am not necessarily endorsing or even approve of tools such as the Internet and it's potential as an informative conveyor of seemingly infinite proportions is questionable (and, of course, controversial) - however easy and relatively cheap accessibility via Internet and (some) libraries are surely an invaluable means of distribution for artists such as Rainer and Turner.

Vocal traces

As analogue formats increasingly disappear to make way for on-screen, flat existences, we will be left with a residue of voices contained in three-dimensional object bodies. Thus one could consider Rainer's and Turner's voices not to be disembodied as such, but projected and intentionally re-embodied in physical formats that, although by no means indestructible, are not subject to the same, relatively short life-span we humans are. My cassette tape can break, can be scrambled up by a defective cassette recorder, the plastic casing might melt, a book can be burnt or ripped to pieces - these new bodies are not infallible, are not immortal. But they do exist in large quantities; they can be copied and multiplied, starting from their dub-plate or original manuscript, to become mass-produced items. Cloned versions of the re-embodied artist's voice spread around the globe, far and wide, making them difficult to obliterate but also, in some cases, difficult to find.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 *Furnishing the voice, re-establishing a body*

“A solid rhythm section provides an anchor for the often fluid vocal lines.”⁶⁸

Structures form the backbone to these disembodied voices I have researched, be they the spine of a book or a musical arrangement. Turner’s comment on ‘carving furniture’, along with McLuhan’s account of the ‘Talking Machine’⁶⁹, spurred me on to think about a physical, table-like structure that might be employed as an amplifier, distributor and functional object to support and sustain the voice of any individual willing to use it. A table is an object that also supports the writer’s voice: a desk, at which one can sit and let flow the voice through the fingers to the page or screen. The structure should embody all the characteristics of a disembodied voice: material quality, recording or amplifying technology, finite nature and imbalance and fragility.

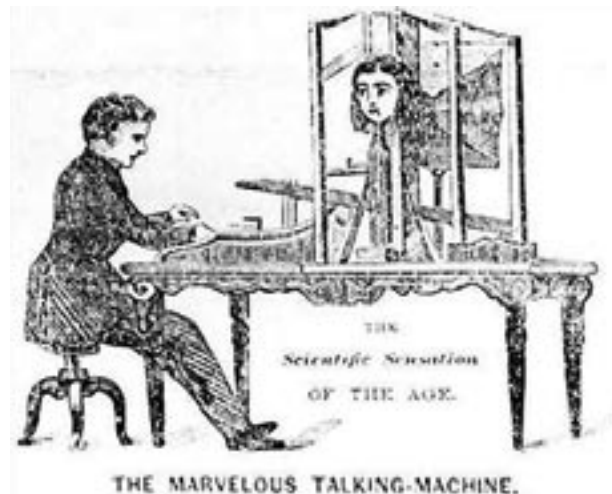
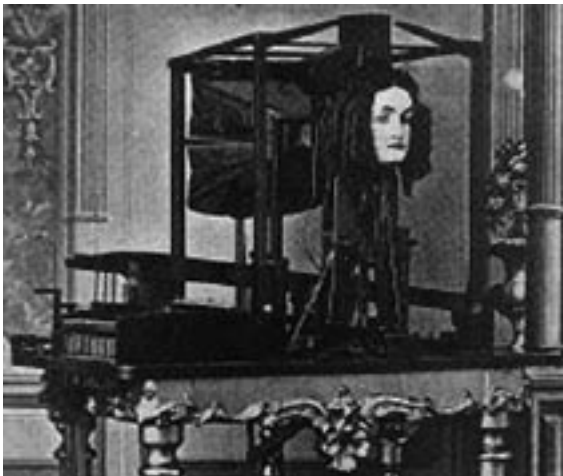


figs. 15 & 16 Images of Freud’s Teufelsrad at the Oktoberfest, Munich

Instead of creating an artistic work dedicated to or as an homage to the voices I have researched (Tina Turner and Yvonne Rainer) I wanted to disseminate what I have learnt into creating a widely accessible object, at once absurd but also with a clear function. One morning I thought of ‘Friedl’s Teufelsrad’, a *stamm*-fairground attraction at the Oktoberfest in Munich, one of my first great tests in understanding the strong ‘Bairisch’ dialect and responding in the appropriate manner (to a rather stressful situation). The rotating disc reminded me of loops, of a record player. A seemingly disembodied voice comments on your, the participant’s, progress during the ride which consists of nasty remarks, ridiculous moderation, swinging and menacing obstacles in the form of balls and ropes to attempt to waylay your concentration and pull you off the disc, and all this in a public field. In a sense the participant of this game is rendered a feeble and incapable body, with only your strength of spirit and willpower keeping you on the disc. I made a link with this lack of physicality and recorded voices. The vocalist Bobby McFerin, known for songs such as

'Don't Worry, Be Happy' which are purely made up of vocal sections to create rhythm and melodic structure beneath the lyrical part, states that one of the fundamental elements of improvisation is motion.⁷⁰ The spinning disc also sustains the participant or user of the table in a constant state of (dizzying) motion, which could allow for spontaneity, outburst, momentary utterances.

The talking machine, a furniture-like construction designed by Edison in the late 19th century, also fascinated me. The piece is adorned with a mask-like face, I presume in order to provide the disembodied voice emitted from its speaker with a recognisable, human physiognomy (probably to protect the nerves of the users of the machines - voices without their bodies were at that time still associated with ghostliness). The machine itself doesn't only display a clear function but it is also a beautiful piece of *Objet d'Art*. The machine, at which one can sit and communicate with the transmitted voice, evokes thoughts of the writer's table, a place where one can expect a certain private, contemplative intimacy and closeness. A place for writing, an interview, an interrogation, the table might function as a place to relieve yourself of your thoughts, in a secure and steady position.



figs. 17 & 18 The Talking Machine

My mother owns an old gramophone, as well as an antiquated but still functioning record player from the 1970s, which demanded extreme attention and care when put to use. Both these functional items now remain unused but 'on view' in my parent's house, relics of a time, their purpose now rendered one of an ornamental and nostalgic item of furniture.

The projection and dislocation of a voice via a piece of furniture, designed and constructed for exactly that use, could be employed in a variety of contexts. It contains a participatory quality as well as being an aesthetic curiosity, could be used for demonstrations of ways of 'how' to disembody (and subsequently transmit/contain) your voice, its effect on an audience as well as the 'user'.

5.2 Conclusive voice

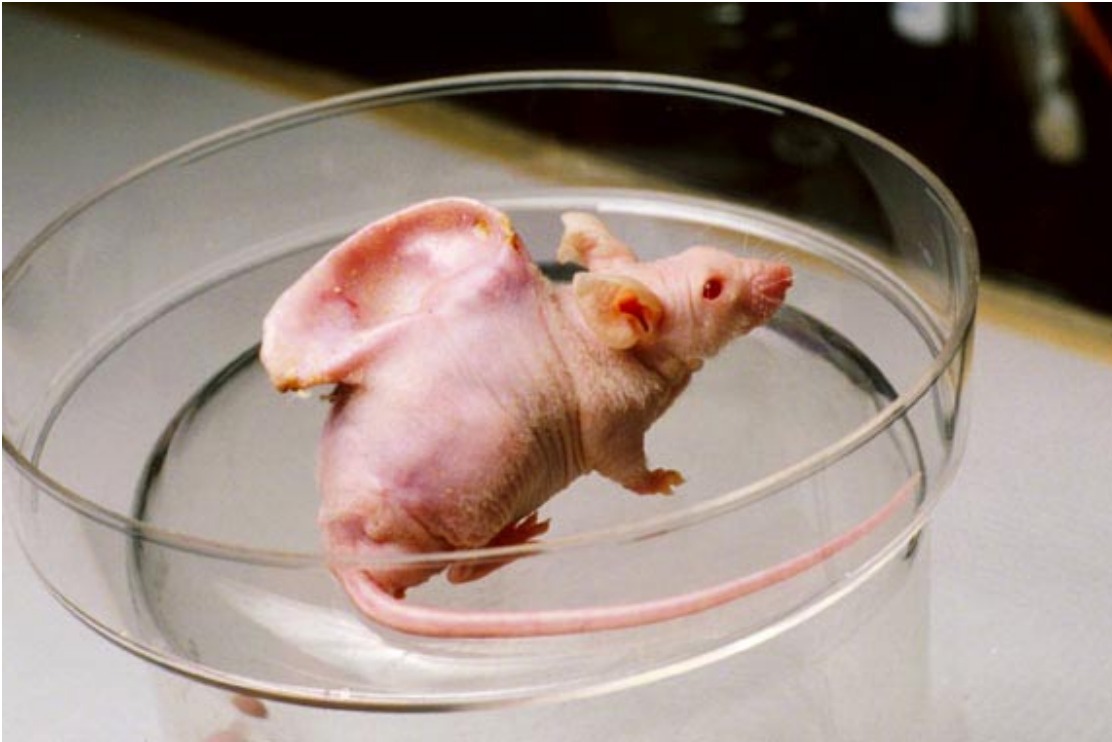


fig. 19 Mouse with human ear grafted onto its back

As stated at the outset, in the context of my visual art I have continued to implement the voice, and will continue to do so. A table for voices is basically my poetic interpretation of a functional amplification machine that would accompany, place and house a voice that has been disassociated from its bodily origin. I suppose a recurring theme throughout this research is loneliness - 'speaking to oneself' is a characteristic often attributed to lonely and isolated people. Recording your voice is another form of isolation but one that demands adaptation and courage: a choice to isolate a distinct part of you, a part that is capable of describing oneself in a physical manner: gender, age, in some way also image (or at least an image one would appease) but also a projection of the metaphysical self: opinion, attitude, expression, personality, experience. By breaking the body down and being left with only a voice, some might hope to be rendered immortal, more so than by preserving any other body parts. The voice gives material form to thought and manner can exist as a template for further use. A photo of a person is not enough to conclude anything concrete about the character - speculations can, of course, be made but will always be unfounded, that is unless there is an accompanying voice. Is then perhaps this the reason that I am interested in providing my drawings with a soundtrack, both via written commentary and vocal recordings?

Back to my seat at the table in the café: my stranded voice continues to resonate, not only via the loudspeaker but also in my memory, long after the event itself. A trapped encounter with myself: my disembodied 'limb', recorded in a relatively intimate atmosphere, reset on a musical backbone and now amplified in a public context. I'm reminded of the image of the mouse with a human ear grafted onto its back, isolated in its wretched, hairless state in a Petri dish - in this moment I see this as a nightmare-ish visual allegory for a being eternally subjected to the sound of their own voice via the ear of another - a crazed form of self-consciousness in loop.

Footnotes

¹ Kid Congo Powers, American musician, erstwhile member of the Cramps and Gun Club amongst other projects.

² River Deep - Mountain High, studio version recorded in 1966, live version in 1973

³ Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*, (MIT Press, 2006) (autobiography)

⁴ Both subjects are performers and recording artists.

⁵ Taken from an online interview with Helmut Ploebst, *Meeting Yvonne Rainer* (undated: http://www.corpusweb.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=397&Itemid=34)

⁶ This decision to have a recorded rather than live voice results simply from practicalities and typicalities of exhibition structures - often I cannot be present to recite or sing for the duration of the show. On a few occasions I have 'sung' or provided my visual art with an accompanied vocal soundtrack, live - these times the work was only to be seen for a short period.

⁷ This includes a video work featuring me singing Sol le Witt's manifesto about contemporary art to the tune of 'Like a Virgin' (Madonna) bearing my own name in the title of the piece - I had very little control or influence over the production however, though I feature prominently my physical image and voice become objectified in the film. I was not happy with the production, my choice of clothes, nor my singing, as I was extremely fatigued from the travel (the video was shot in Lisbon) and felt slightly uncomfortable in the Gesellschaft which of course affected my performance. Also the actual recording situation was quite terrible - the headphones didn't function properly - the song, spanning 2 octaves and 12 minutes long, was difficult for me to sing (I am not a trained singer) and the artist requested me to sing it around 10 times in loop. Since then the work has been shown in a number of prominent art institutions internationally. One review noted " In the third video »Catriona Shaw sings "Baldessari sings Lewitt" re-edit, "Like a Virgin"« 2003, a passable vocalist interprets Madonna's famous song Like a Virgin" (ArtForum, Feb, 2004 by Juan Vicente Aliaga), another as 'an improbable dialogue between a classic of contemporary art history and a modern pop counterpart.' (<http://evento2009.org/site/en/category/participants/artistes/joao-onofre/>).

⁸ On some occasions this happens, as already described in the preface - the band I fronted, Queen of Japan, had a small 'hit' which was subsequently featured on a popular dj compilation. This compilation in turn was often played in café's and bars and I often found myself 'interrupted' by the presence of my own voice through the sound system. This results in a rather uncomfortable situation - for example, if you are presently in conversation with somebody, your voice is doubled. In the past I would receive emails from old friends in Scotland who would tell me they had 'heard me the other night at a party'.

⁹ In German this is termed 'fernmundlichkeit', literally 'distant speech' or 'distant mouths', in particular describing voices independent of body and directed via media technology such as mobile telephony. Sybille Krämer, *Die Rehabilitierung der Stimme* p. 272: *Stimme - Annäherung an ein Phänomen*, Doris Kolesch (Hrsg.), Sybille Krämer (Hrsg.), (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 2006)

¹⁰ „Gerade an Beispiel der Stimme, die nicht nur in unserem Alltagsverständnis gerne als „unmittelbarer“ und „unverfälschter Ausdruck“ einer Person aufgefasst wird, sondern auch in Philosophie und Ästhetik häufig für Zwecke subjektiven Ausdrucks oder intersubjektiver Verständigung vereinnahmt wird, lässt sich die Einschreibung von Techniken und von technischen Medien in den Körper, also die Verkoppelung von Körper und Technologie, besonders gut erforschen.“ *ibid*, p. 50

¹¹ Paul Virilio speaks of the "premature death of any living language" and attributes this not to a standardisation of language (standard 'pseudo-English' as he puts it) but to the fact that people have to write, think and speak to one another all at once. Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb*, (London: Verso 2004) p.71

¹² Tina Turner with Kurt Loder, *I, Tina*, (UK: Penguin, 1986) p. 122

¹³ In a video interview, Barry states that they had 'always had Tina in mind' as a singer, indicating it had been written specifically for her to sing.

¹⁴ Concert venue and location is unnamed, recording is from 1973

¹⁵ 'Nice n Rough - the later greater hits of Ike and Tina Turner & the Ikettes', (*Liberty Records* 1984)

¹⁶ The 'Wall of Sound' technique involved large reverberation, complex and heavily layered instrumentation to make the sound 'huge'.

¹⁷ Nik Cohn, *Awopbopaloobop Awopbamboom: The Golden Age of Rock*, (USA: Grove Press, 2001) p.122

¹⁸ *I, Tina* was published in 1986 and in 1993, the film 'What's Love Got To Do With It?' directed by Brian Gibson and starring Angela Bassett as Tina Turner (miming over Tina's original voice) was released.

¹⁹ Tina Turner with Kurt Loder, *I, Tina*, (UK: Penguin, 1986) p.122

²⁰ *ibid* p.123

²¹ *ibid* p.131

²² *ibid* p. 121

²³ Renee Cox Lorraine, *Recovering Jouissance: Feminist aesthetics and music* (p.12): *Women & music: a history* Karin Pendle (Hg.) (Indiana University Press, 2001)

²⁴ Again Cox Lorraine comments on this "What we hear is not the direct experience of sexually liberated women; rather, it is at least partly the conception of a young white male expressed through the voices of young women who were dominated both professionally and personally. Yet it is unfair to these women to suggest that they had no musical voices of their own, and it seems quite likely that their voices reflected their experiences as women (and as African-American women). (*ibid*) p.13

²⁵ Spector "reportedly offered \$25,000 for the use of Tina's voice," a considerable sum during that time. Tina Turner with Kurt Loder, *I, Tina*, (UK: Penguin, 1986) p.120

²⁶ As a side note, I believe that the list of thanks sometimes found on albums actually aids the notion of physicality linked to the musician as the listing of personalities (names, dedications etc.) heavily implies the notion of society, family and existence.

²⁷ Tina Turner states "It was too black for the pop stations, too pop for the black stations." *ibid*. p. 126

²⁸ Tina and the Ikettes always performed often startling and impressive choreographed dances during the performances, versions of popular, vernacular jazz dances such as 'The Bird'.

²⁹ On the subject of 'screaming', Poizat comments „Nichts ist teuflischer als der Schrei, in dem sich die treibhafte Dimension der Stimme den staerksten Ausdruck verschafft. Der Schrei, der wahre Moerder des Signifikanten, aber auch dessen primitives vokales Fundament, der Schrei am Ursprung des Lebens des Subjekts, hoert auf, Schrei zu sein, und wird zu einem Verlangne, durch welches der Andere, der ihm einen Sinn gibt, ihn in die symbolische Ordnung einfuehrt.“ Michel Poizat, *Teuflisch oder Goettlich? Der Lyrische Genuss* (pp. 229-230): *Rauschen und Offenbarung* Friedrich Kittler, Thomas Macho, Sybille Weigel (Hg.) (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH 2002)

³⁰ "Ike would always have me screaming and shouting on his songs - selling them, you know? Because there wasn't really much to them: I'd always have to improvise and ad-lib." Tina Turner with Kurt Loder, *I, Tina*, (UK: Penguin, 1986) p.122

³¹ Renee Cox Lorraine, *Recovering Jouissance: Feminist aesthetics and music; Women & music: a history* Karin Pendle (Hg.) (Indiana University Press, 2001)

³² Jouissance is a term connoting sexual pleasure and enjoyment, coined by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan.

³³ *ibid* p. 11

³⁴ Thomas Macho *Stimmen ohne Körper, Anmerkungen zur Technikgeschichte der Stimme* (p.133): *Stimme - Annäherung an ein Phänomen*, Doris Kolesch (Hrsg.), Sybille Krämer (Hrsg.), (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 2006)

³⁵ An interesting example of this is Pierre Huyghe's video work, 'Blanche Neige (Lucie)' (1997) where we are confronted with the original voice of the French dubbed version of Walt Disney's Snow White. The owner of the voice is aged, the voice however is unmistakable and seemingly unchanged.

³⁶ Kenneth Anger rather fiendishly describes some stars as having had "voice trouble" in the book *Hollywood Babylon* (Dell, 1975) p 21 and films such as *Singing in the Rain* and *The Man with Two Brains* feature scenarios of 'conventionally beautiful' or sexy people (women) with ugly voices.

³⁷ Tina Turner with Kurt Loder *I, Tina* (UK: Penguin, 1986) p. 202

³⁸ Herbert Read, *To Hell with Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1963) p.93

³⁹ Elizabeth Cotten *Live!* (Arhoolie Records, 1984)

⁴⁰ Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*, (MIT Press, 2006) p. 233

⁴¹ In *To Hell with Culture*, Herbert Read explains one factor of the secret of success of the artist to possess 'charm...[and] an ability to establish easy relationships with his fellow artists, with dealers and collectors, museum directors and critics." I would interpret this to master the so-called 'gift of the gab'. (London: Routledge, 1963) pp.105-106

⁴² Though at risk of contradicting myself, I would like to describe the book itself: a luxurious and weighty hardback edition, broken up into 18 chapters over 466 pages, containing a number of chronologically ordered photos (with exception of the first photograph accompanying the prologue taken in 2006), all in black and white. Also of importance is the typeface used throughout the book and the particular style of layout - large margins embrace a terse amount of text on a page, different fonts (Times and Arial) are employed to 'express' the different voices of Rainer, that of her diary entries (past, quoted voice) and that of her present, reflective voice (descriptive, anecdotal and deconstructing). Letters are given generous space on the page, images are economically used and interspersed at various points throughout the book to illustrate particular characters, events or stories, not gathered together over a few pages, as often is found in autobiographies.

⁴³ For example, Rainer's choreography 'Trio A', (1967) featured a complex array of motions, lack of emotion,

seemingly incoordinate but fluid, on initial viewing it could be perceived an associative series of steps and moves, spatial exploration, in actual fact it was a carefully conceived ,‘game plan‘ - with Rainer’s somewhat clumsy, conventional clad but feminine figure plotting the path.

⁴⁴ Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*, (MIT Press, 2006) p. 146

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 146-147

⁴⁶ Susan Sontag’s essay ‘The artist as exemplary sufferer’ takes a look at Cesare Pavese’s post-humously published memoirs. She states that “[h]e does not describe himself, but addresses himself. He is the ironic, exhortatory, reproachful spectator of himself.” I would posit that Rainer also spectates and evaluates herself in a similar manner, not over-judgementally but with a degree of mature distance, commenting on her past actions like a moderator. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage Books, 2001) p. 43

⁴⁷ Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*, (MIT Press, 2006), pp 282-285

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 286

⁴⁹ attributed to George Berkeley, Irish philosopher who promoted a theory of immaterialism.

⁵⁰ The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre, New York on the 11th of September 2001. Rainer was based in New York at the time of the event.

⁵¹ Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings Are Facts*, (MIT Press 2006) pp. 433-436

⁵² *ibid.* p.466

⁵³ *ibid.* p.ix

⁵⁴ In her essay ‘The artist as exemplary sufferer’, Susan Sontag talks about a ‘cautious subjectivity of the narrator’ (specifically concerning Pavese) which I think would be a quite appropriate way to describe Rainer’s approach here. Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage Books, 2001) p.39

⁵⁵ Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts*, (MIT Press, 2006) p xv

⁵⁶ Jesper Svenbro ,*Stilles Leben und die Internalisierung der Stimme im alten Griechenland*‘, p. 65; *Rauschen und Offenbarung* Friedrich Kittler, Thomas Macho, Sybille Weigel (Hg.) (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH 2002)

⁵⁷ Again Svenbro comments on this: “...der Schreiber rechnet mit einem Leser, der einwilligt, dem Zwang der alphabetischen Sequenz zu folgen. Lesen heisst somit, seine eigene Stimme dem geschriebenen Wort (letzlich der Schreiber) zur Verfuegung zu stellen. Es heisst, die eigene Stimme preiszugeben, wenn auch nur duer den Akt des Lesens. Und diese Stimme wird unmittelbar vom geschriebenen Wort vereinnahmt, was bedeutet, dass die Stimme dem Leser beim Akt des Lesens nicht gehoert. Er hat sie aufgegeben...Gelesen werden heisst infolgedessen, ueber den Koerper des Lesers Macht ausueben, sogar aus grossem raeumlichen und zeitlichen Abstand heraus. Der Schreiben, dem es gelingt, gelesen zu werden, herrscht ueber den Stimmapparat eines jeden der ihm als instrumentum vocale dient, d.h. eines jeden, der in seinem Dienst steht oder gar sein Sklave ist.” *ibid.* p. 63

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 61

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 69

⁶⁰ Tim Ingold, *Lines a brief history*, (London: Routledge 2008) p. 17

⁶¹ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (UK: Abacus,1974) p.323

⁶² Thomas Macho, *Stimmen ohne Körper - Anmerkungen zur Technikgeschichte der Stimme* pp 132; *Stimme - Annäherung an ein Phänomen*, Doris Kolesch (Hrsg.), Sybille Krämer (Hrsg.), (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp Verlag 2006)

⁶³ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A brief history* (London: Routledge 2007) p.9

⁶⁴ This is not a general problem of course, there are plenty of cover versions that some people would even consider ‘better than the original’ although I would be tempted to say that this is again due to distribution and commercial issues, i.e. amount of listeners, radio play etc.

⁶⁵ Also known as ‘blue-eyed soul’

⁶⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, (UK: Abacus,1974) p.325

⁶⁷ „Die Metaphysik seit Plato betrachtet die Schrift als ein Medium, jedoch nicht die Stimme, weil die Stimme die absolute Gegenwart darstelle und keinen Riss von Gedanke und Ausdruck kenne“, Thomas Thrummer, *Voice and Void*, (Innsbruck: Galerie am Taxispalais, 2007) p. 24

⁶⁸ On ,Soul Music‘: S. Kay Hoke, *American Popular Music* p.406; *Women & music: a history* Karin Pendle (Hg.) (Indiana University Press, 2001)

⁶⁹ “The idea of it [phonograph], as a talking machine was extremely popular. Edison ... [considered] it first as a ‘telephone repeater’; that is a storehouse of data from the telephone, enabling the telephone to ‘provide invaluable records, instead of being the recipient of momentary and fleeting communication’.” Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, (UK: Abacus,1974) p. 294

⁷⁰ This can be found online in a filmed excerpt of a workshop <http://www.youtube.com/user/margitazalite#p/a/f/O/7yqPtoZ0kcQ>

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