

I am voice. I am technology.

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Abstract: Performance with voice and live electronics. The performance is exploring the identity/identities of the vocal performer when the sound of the voice does not come directly from the body anymore. How does the nature of voice sound, when recognized as different levels of meaning, influence our experience of technology, as performers or listeners ?

Keywords: Mediation, identity, body and technology, presence, liveness, voice as meaning, the role of technology in human expression.

Introduction

I am voice

I am the sound of my voice

I am also not the sound of my voice

I am, and I am not, the strange, twisted sound of my voice

I am not the machine

I can control the machine

I can even be surprised by the machine

I play with the machine, and the machine plays with me.

I am technology

Me and the machine

I am voice. I am technology.

My voice, when recorded, can be experienced as artistic or musical 'material'. It can speak to me in different ways - literally, poetically, or as abstract sound in many shapes. The voice is mine, and not mine at the same time. I can have a dialogue with the history of my own voice. With traces of my own voice. I could never do that without this combination of technology. Me: the larynx, the lungs, the diaphragm, the vocal chords, the resonating spaces in my body. The microphone, the loudspeakers, the computer, the DAW, the plugins. My hands, the sliders, the pads, the knobs, the sensors. There is so much complexity in these processes. So many calculations. I do not think about these calculations. Not about how messages are being sent from my brain when thinking about a tone, and how my whole muscular system is working to produce that exact frequency, that exact resonance, that exact volume. Not about how MIDI signals are produced and sent from controller to computer. Not how sound is analyzed and processed through filters and patches. I do not think about those things when I play. It would be something like thinking about how my tongue moves

while talking. We are technology, and we expand our expression through technology. But even though the experience of seamless and tensionless connection between performer and technology might be an ideal, it is not necessarily true or possible at all times- neither for the performer or for the audience. Or even wanted. There are several issues to be considered in our discussions around technology and flow, embodiment and tacit knowledge. Besides skills, experiences and interfaces, it is also interesting to look at the material in use. The experience of "naturalness" and "meaning", has been pointed out as important parameters in experiencing voice in acousmatic music (Bergsland 2010) , and thus in the musical play with voice and live electronics. (Åse 2012). How does these qualities in musical material affect the dialogue between body and technology in a live performance? How and why do we experience differently, as an example, the live performance with a keyboardist playing the synthesizer, the live performance of (non- vocal) noise sounds, and the live performance of the vocalist using live electronics with processed and recorded voice as material? If we do experience them differently: could this difference be connected to our experience of 'meaning' in musical material ? Does the quality of 'meaning' make performers and listeners more aware of the tension between performer/body and machine technology? Could one reason for this be that a machine cannot produce human meaning by itself ? And is this tension also experienced by the performer in the act of performance, or can the machine technology producing 'meaning' still be experienced as a part of the performers' musical identity ? And if so, is the performers identity experienced as 'one', or as multiple identities ?

Several performers are continuously investigating these questions through their artistic practice. Pioneer Pamela Z (San Fransisco), Alex Nowitz, (Berlin), Franziska Baumann, (Bern), Maja Ratkje, (Oslo) to mention some of them. These are all composer- performer- improvisors working with voice and technology, within the scene of experimental vocal performance art. They have been involved in creating or customizing different setups and devices that makes it possible for them to use voice sound solely as artistic material though sampling and processing in unique ways. In a bigger perspective, it is easy to recognise their performative practices as constituting a personal musical and artistic identity through their implemented use of technology. Still, from my experience, their live performances also play with multiple identities.

Instrumental setup

The idea behind my setup is to have the many possibilities of a DAW and Max, and at the same time have visual oversight and physical access on one level, to avoid looking to much at the computer screen. I use a tactile set of controllers (faders, pads and knobs, supplemented by simple gestural controllers through the Wave ring and the infrared function on the Roland sampler.) The setup makes it possible to improvise with both pre-sampled and live-sampled sounds, and process the voice in real-time. It is physically rigid and conventional compared to using gestural controllers only, but has proven to be effective for me, also in order to be used for different musical projects (solo, duo, theatre music, band etc.) :

- MacBook Pro with Ableton Max for Live 10 and GRM tools
- Fireface UC
- Novation RemoteZero SL
- iControl S
- Korg Nanopad 2
- Korg Nanokontrol
- Genki instruments Wave midi ring
- Roland SP 555 sampler

References

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