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The electronic cry: Voice and gender in electroacoustic music

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III

SINGING BODIES AND STUTTERING CYBORGS¹

The gendered voices in electroacoustic music are not only an effect of gendered production processes, but also have symbolic significance. How do they relate to other cultural phenomena? How could we interpret these voices? In this chapter, some issues are discussed that relate to the gender patterns found in Chapter II. These issues are more extensively dealt with in the following chapters. This chapter is both an illustration of some issues that lurk behind the patterns of Chapter II, and an appetizer for the next chapters. Several compositions from the three CD series serve as examples as well as other compositions (in the form of CD recordings, scores and/or performances) and films.

¹ Chapter III is a revised and extended version of the second part of: Hannah Bosma, 'Bodies of evidence, singing cyborgs and other gender issues in electrovocal music', *Organised Sound*, Volume 8(1), pp 5–17, (2003) © Cambridge University Press, reproduced with permission.

III.1 Embodied voices

Kaja Silverman (1988) found in classic Hollywood cinema a link between the female voice, the body and powerlessness, while the male voice was more frequently disembodied and powerful. The powerlessness of female film characters plays on different levels. It appears in the story, where women are often confined, shut up in small rooms or threatened with death. This weak position is coupled with the female cry, the scream of fear or death – the non-verbal expression of powerlessness. Furthermore, Silverman states that, thanks to synchronisation, the female voice in classic Hollywood film is always attached to an image of a female body.

The ‘voice-over’, a voice that speaks without having a physical persona in the film, is reserved for the male voice. The voice-over has a special status, which can be compared to the voice of God: the voice-over speaks from a superior position and knows more than the characters in the film, and is usually male. Such a male ‘voice of authority’ often also speaks in documentaries and radio and television ads.² Michel Chion (1999 [1982]) calls the bodiless voice in cinema an *acousmètre*, a powerful master who can only be heard and who often sees and knows all.

Embodiment makes the voice belong to a living, mortal, vulnerable, human being. Moreover, the visibility of the body establishes a safe distance for the listener-viewer from the elusiveness and intrusiveness of the voice by localising it.³ Women in classic cinema are closely related to the body, to a lack of power and to a lack of language: the ultimate form is the scream of death. As Chion (1999 [1982]) notes,

² In a 1991 study of ten Vancouver radio stations, the spoken male voice was overwhelmingly dominant in over 75% of the ads, while only 11.3 % of the ads consisted of a female speaking voice; the male-female voice combination occurred in 11.5 % of the ads (Truax 2001: 197).

³ As Mladen Dolar states:

[The] power of the voice stems from the fact that it is so hard to keep it at bay – it hits us from the inside, it pours directly into the interior, without protection. The ears have no lid, as Lacan never tires of repeating; they cannot be closed, one is constantly exposed, no distance from sound can be maintained. There is a stark opposition between the visible and the audible: the visible world presents relative stability, permanence, distinctiveness, and a location at a distance; the audible presents fluidity, passing, a certain inchoate, amorphous character, and a lack of distance. The voice is elusive, always changing, becoming, elapsing, with unclear contours, as opposed to the relative permanence, solidity, durability of the seen. [...] It deprives us of distance and autonomy. If we want to localize it, to establish a safety [*sic*] distance from it, we need to use the visible as the reference. The visible can establish the distance, the nature, and the source of the voice, and thus neutralize it. The acousmatic voice is so powerful because it cannot be neutralized with the framework of the visible [...]. (Dolar 2006: 79)

male personae sometimes scream too, but with an animal, territorial, structuring scream of power.

Joke Dame (1994) notes that Michel Poizat (1992 [1986]) found a similar pattern in nineteenth-century opera. According to Poizat the scream of the female character in opera is central to the *jouissance vocale* of the male opera lover. This scream, often a scream of death, is formed by the soprano's high, wordless singing. Cathérine Clément (1988) described how the female protagonists in libretti from well-known nineteenth-century operas usually die. Especially the soprano's operatic personae are victims; Clément (2000) offers a list:

Humiliated, hunted, driven mad, burnt alive, buried alive, stabbed, committing suicide – Violetta, Sieglinde, Lucia, Brünnhilde, Aida, Norma, Mélisande, Liù, Butterfly, Isolde, Lulu, and so many others... All sopranos, and all victims. (Clément 2000: 22)

Poizat shows that throughout the history of opera, women's arias have become steadily higher; and at high tones the words become unintelligible. Through melismatic singing and coloratura the word is fragmented into sound. For male operatic roles, however, there has been an increase in spoken language.⁴ 'In this evolution, the [female singer] is tending to disappear as a subject and become purely a voice, simply an *objet-voix*' (Dame 1994: 153).

Poizat argues that, for the typical opera lover,⁵ this musical cry is a vocal object:⁶ it is 'pure sound', an autonomous object detached from the body, transgressive and beyond language. In that sense, it might resemble abstract vocal sounds in computer and electroacoustic music, as in Elzbieta Sikora's *La tête d'Orphée* /

⁴ One of the examples Poizat gives is the 1985 Paris production of Konrad Boehmer's *Doktor Faustus*, where male characters perform mostly *parlando* or *Spechgesang*, and singing is mostly done by the female character Maria (Poizat 1992: 139).

⁵ In his book *The Angel's Cry*, Poizat describes his interviews with several opera lovers who stood in line a whole night (25 January 1985) to get tickets for the opera (Poizat 1992: 8-28, 209-212). The rest of the book is a theoretical and music-historical research of this fascination for the 'musical cry' and its *jouissance*.

⁶ Contrary to Poizat's standpoint, but within a similar Lacanian theoretical context, Mladen Dolar argues that singing turns the voice into a fetish object, and is therefore antithetic to the vocal object:

Yet singing, by focusing on the voice, actually runs the risk of losing the very thing it tries to worship and revere: it turns it into a fetish object – we could say the highest rampart, the most formidable wall against the voice. (Dolar 2006: 30)

Orpheus Head (1981, on CE13),⁷ in which a female scream merges with synthetic sounds. But for Poizat, the liveness of the musical cry is essential. ‘However advanced the technology is now or may become, what the opera lover ultimately preserves in the precious recordings of his idolized diva is a degraded residue’ (Poizat 1992 [1986]: 95).

So in opera the female voice is also related to the cry and to non-verbal vocals. Furthermore, although the high non-verbal operatic singing voice may seem detached from the body, the bodily presence of the singer is in fact very important: the ultimate disembodied voice, i.e. a recording, is not the real thing for the opera lover. The paradoxical combination of seemingly pure, abstract vocal sound and its production by a bodily present vocalist is at the core of the fascination for the operatic voice.⁸

There is a parallel between these gender patterns in film and opera and the gender pattern in electro-vocal music: in all these genres there are many embodied female voices uttering non-verbal sounds. Linking women to their bodies is a cultural stereotype. A remarkable example of an explicit use of this stereotype is Zoltan Pongracz’ *Mariphonia* (1972, on CE5), a tape composition based on the non-verbal sounds and the physical dimensions of his wife’s body.

In the narratives of opera and film, the voice and the female body are linked with powerlessness. But is therefore the live embodied singer herself powerless? Carolyn Abbate (1993) argues that singers have power *because* of their impressive bodily presence on the stage. A performer, ‘“making” music’ (or ‘“creating” a role’’) is

⁷ Elaborating on Monteverdi’s *L’Orpheo*, Carolyn Abbate suggests we consider Orpheus’ decapitated head as a prototype of electronic sound transmission:

How do you engineer musical sound detached from the body and sent away, as loud elsewhere as when it left the body? With the poetic resources of 1607, you can imply it with an echo; centuries later you can do it with a loudspeaker relay and lots of copper wire. You can also do it with literal detachment and a butcher’s knife, when you dismember Orpheus and toss his singing head into a river. (Abbate 2001: 28)

Strangely, Abbate does not invoke wireless technology, such as radio.

The sleeve notes of *Orpheus’ Head* refer to the turning of Orpheus’ head when he looks backwards to Euridice while they are ascending from the underworld. By this turn of his head, Orpheus loses Euridice again. A reference is also made to the violent death of Orpheus later on, when he is torn to pieces by the Maenads. No reference is made to Orpheus’ decapitated head, that floated down the river, still singing, to the sea and to the island Lesbos.

⁸ Mladen Dolar points out that the source of a voice can never be seen completely: the voice is produced in the bodily interior. Moreover, the voice separates itself from the body, spreads around and resonates inside and out. The voice is at the same time bodily and ephemeral, interior and exterior (Dolar 2006: 70–71).

a ‘second author’, ‘who completes the work in her (or his) own interpretation’ (234–235), and on whom the composer is dependent.⁹

Abbate (1993) spends only a few words on electronic sound technology, in a negative way: ‘operatic performances are in fact exaggeratedly pure in their liveness, since no technology (amplification) is supposed ever to interfere’ (Abbate 1993: 234).¹⁰ The star singer in Jean-Jacques Beineix’ film *Diva* (1981) impersonates a similar idea. She considers the recording of her voice a threat to its essence: ‘liveness’.

But what is the position of the female singer in live performance of electroacoustic music? What does ‘power’ mean in that situation? And how does this relate to embodiment?

⁹ See Chapter VII for further discussion of Abbate (1993) and for other issues of authorship in relation to the female voice.

¹⁰ Abbate uses the term ‘technology’ in a narrow way as ‘electronic apparatus’ or ‘high tech’. Gender and technology studies criticize such a concept of technology as excluding women, and shift the attention from high tech pieces of apparatus and their inventors to ‘women’s sphere’ technologies and to the practices of production and consumption (Wajeman 1991).

Likewise, it is possible to consider operatic singing, architecture and acoustics as technology. An important goal of these technologies of opera is amplification. Vocal amplification of the higher formant frequencies (the ‘singer’s formant’) causes the singers to be heard above the orchestra (Sundberg 1987). This requires a specific singing technique and intensive training. The operatic voice is very artificial. The necessity for opera singers to be heard in a large hall above an orchestra without electronic amplification, is in my opinion often at the expense of the ‘liveness’ of the sound: a lot of timbres and voice types cannot be used and a lot of vocal details cannot be heard.

III.2 Singer and tape

Sometimes live performances of compositions for singer and tape give the impression that the singer is confined by the rigidity of the sound track and that the singer has to work extremely hard to produce the right notes at the right time.¹¹ Some of the freedom in timing that a singer has when performing with piano or orchestra is gone: the pianist or the conductor is able to adapt to the singer, but the tape isn't.¹² In addition, the electronically created sounds may swamp the voice of the female singer.¹³

On the other hand, a female singer performing live often makes a powerful impression with the sound of her voice, her vocal virtuosity and her physical presence. She is not only performing the composer's work, but is interpreting and creating, and is responsible for the music. When performers know the tape part well, they often have developed a very precise feeling for the timing. Some performers like the predictability of the pre-recorded sound tracks.

In the performance of compositions for female singer and tape, both options are possible. Janice Jackson's performance of Jean-Claude Risset's *L'autre face* (1983) at De IJsbreker in Amsterdam on 15 December 1994 differed markedly from her earlier performance of the work at De Kikker in Utrecht on 19 October 1994. In

¹¹ See also Oskamp (2011: 40–43) about the confinement of the strict rhythmic tape part in the compositions of Jacob ter Veldhuis and others.

¹² At a discussion during the Feminist Theory and Music 4 conference in Charlottesville, University of Virginia 1997, vocalist Kristin Norderval remarked that for her the greatest difficulty in performing with tape is the rigid timing.

The use of live electronics does not present this problem when the electronics are live triggered or improvised by the performer(s). Moreover, the use of computer hard disk play back of a tape part may offer a solution by dividing the tape into parts that can be triggered by the vocalist or by the technician.

Simon Emmerson is quite negative about the combination of live musician with fixed sound tracks ('tape'):

It is quite possible that mixed electroacoustic music (as it has been constituted to date) will disappear. The fixed nature of the electroacoustic part means that in many cases – unless the composer does not consider synchronization of live and tape important – the tape part is a dictatorial and perfect metronome (beating clock time). Especially when cause-effect relationships are to be 'created' through live–tape coordination such split second timing is essential. While some latitude could be built in through multiple cues, there is a feeling amongst many performers that the medium itself is inappropriate for the flexibility demanded by different acoustics, venues, audiences and other musical variables. [...] The derogation of *time* to an external and inflexible authority is a fundamental flaw in mixed music. (Emmerson 2007: 108)

¹³ As in Arthur Sauer's *Parallel cases from under the peartree* (1993) for soprano, computer and synthesizer, performed by Jannie Pranger, November 6, 1993 at De IJsbreker in Amsterdam.

Amsterdam, she gave a short introduction to her performance by explaining what the work meant for her (rather than by outlining what the composer had in mind). In this way she positioned herself as a subject, a discursive and creative authority. She called the piece a sound sculpture and compared it to a river that always changes colour; whereas composer Risset indicated in the programme notes that this composition is lyrical and expressive. Jackson's performance impressed me as introverted and concentrated, with varying timbre, often soft, as it were a sound painting. The tape part seemed to function as a source of inspiration for the interpretation and performance of the vocalist. However, the earlier performance by Janice Jackson of the same composition sounded to me more like a vocalise, 'a lot of notes', with the tape as a confining structure.¹⁴

Landy (2007) distinguishes between 'note-based' and 'sound-based' music. 'Note' stands for the use of a grid of discrete pitches (whether tonal, atonal or modal) and of time durations (beat/rhythm) as symbolized by traditional Western music notation; this is called 'lattice-based music' by Trevor Wishart (1985: 5–20). 'Sound' refers to different (uses of) sounds, with a focus on timbre. '[T]he term *sound-based music* typically designates the art form in which the sound, that is, not the musical note, is its basic unit.' (Landy 2007: 17) These terms seem to designate characteristics of musical works, of composer's products, in the first place. However, the different performances of *L'autre face* suggest that the classification of note- vs. sound-based music may relate to the interpretative work of performers as well. The score and the tape part of *L'autre face*¹⁵ have features of both note-based and sound-based music. The score does contain a lot of notes, but also many instructions for vocal timbres such as *quasi parlando*, inhaled sounds, multiphonics and harmonic singing, as well as instructions for continuous, subtle changes of pitch or timbre, thus against the lattice of the 12-tone grid. (See ex. III–1; score *L'autre face* p. 1.) As electroacoustic music, the tape part can be considered sound-based music. The importance of timbre affirms this. However, the tape part contains many clearly recognisable pitches and

¹⁴ Released on CD are recordings of *L'autre face* performed by Irène Jarsky (on CMC7) and by Maria Tegzes (on ELECTRO ACOUSTIC MUSIC 1, Neuma CD450-73, 1990).

¹⁵ I thank Jean-Claude Risset for sending me the score and tape part of *L'autre face* and of other compositions. For the composition *L'autre face*, Jean-Claude Risset selected the poem 'L'autre face' from the book of poetry *Le Silencieux* by Roger Kowalski, Editions Guy Chambelland, Paris 1961.

separate sounds, some clearly related to Western classical instrumental sounds. Whether *L'autre face* is considered note- or sound-based may depend on the interpretation of the performer as well as of the listener.

Another example of a composition for soprano and tape is Milton Babbitt's *Phonemena* (1969–70).¹⁶ It is a virtuosic piece: dazzlingly fast, rhythmically complex and with large intervals; but it sounds playful. Judith Bettina calls it a 'bubbly' piece and compares her interaction with the tape to playing a game. However, studying the piece was an incredible amount of work: she started by doing it at half speed and it took her hours to get one measure synchronized (Packer 1986: 112–4). Thus, on the one hand the tape is a constraint; on the other hand it sustains the singer with some unison pitches and rhythms. Also, with the tape the composer seems to give something to the singer and to inspire her: '... I felt like we were throwing sounds at each other. The tape was throwing a sound at me, and I was throwing a sound back, and then we'd collide...' (Judith Bettina quoted in Packer 1986: 113). In the score, the tape part is notated as a piano part; originally, this was for study purposes only, but later it was considered as a separate version.¹⁷ When comparing the recorded performances of the versions for soprano and tape and for soprano and piano by soprano Lynne Webber (New World Records 80466-2), the version with piano is performed slower and with a heavier, more 'operatic' singing voice. Apparently, by its fixed speed, preciseness and clear timbres, the influence of the tape part is to make the vocalising faster and lighter, like a play of sounds, a game, an exercise of intelligence and skill, far removed from the dramatic expression of painful feelings and transcending bodily constraints.

The vocal performances of *L'autre face* and *Phonemena* show that it is possible to go beyond the antipodes of the rigidly fixed constraining tape part versus the powerful, impressive, indulgent live performance of the vocalist. The tape part may not only constrain but also inspire, influence and sustain the vocalist, depending on how the vocalist interprets the tape part and its interplay with the vocal part.

¹⁶ Score and stereo tape part are published by Edition Peters (New York, London, Frankfurt).

¹⁷ Liner notes of the CD MILTON BABBITT, New World Records 80466-2.

III.3 The power of the vocalist

The abundance of live singing female vocalists versus the lack of male singers in electroacoustic music is a gender pattern that both male and female composers adhere to. Singers are performing artists, and as such have less cultural status and power than composers.¹⁸ However, as performers, they are actually presenting and manipulating the music, and they can draw the attention to their vocal art and interpretation. A performer always adds musical aspects to the composition and completes the work. Many composers have worked closely together with a vocalist, and have often also used their voice on the tape part.¹⁹ The voice, skills and artistic conceptions of the singer often influence a composition to a large extent. There might be another reason for the large number of compositions for female singer and tape/electronics: the presence of some very qualified and active women vocalists, interested in new music, who initiate or commission new compositions.

The tension between the different forms of power and powerlessness of vocalists relates to a tension in the notion of power itself. Power is ‘omnipresent but hard to define’ (Ter Borg & Van Henten 2010: 4).²⁰ Power may not be only explicit or formal (formal hierarchy, law) but also implicit or informal (who influences whom, reputation).²¹ A common notion of power is that it is exerted by someone over someone else. But power may also refer to control over the environment. Other forms of power may consist of control over oneself, or the possession of excellent skills, or the power to impress others; these are related to musical performance. Compositional skills and

¹⁸ See chapter VII. For example, compare the real, financial, but also symbolic difference between the well-established author’s (composer’s) rights and the relatively new and less encompassing neighbouring (performer’s and producer’s) rights. Also, the word ‘to perform’ (in Dutch ‘uitvoeren’), the act of the performer, suggests a lower hierarchical status than ‘to create’, the act of the composer: the composer determines, the performer executes. However, as Abbate (1993) noticed, this difference in status is not uncontested.

¹⁹ For example in *Il Nome* (1987, recordings on CE4 and CMC7), composed by Richard Karpen, with the voice of Judith Bettina; in *Vocal Chords* (1988) composed by Neil B. Rolnick, with performance and recorded voice of Kathleen Myers (on CDCM7); the voice of Joan La Barbara in Jon Christopher Nelson’s *They wash their ambassadors in citrus and fennel* (1994, on CE9p); the voice of Irène Jarsky on the tape of Jean-Claude Risset’s *Invisible* (1996, on CE11m).

²⁰ Power is a complex notion and it is beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on all aspects extensively.

²¹ See Ter Borg & Van Henten (2010: 5). They consider religion as quite similar to power in relation to such aspects.

control over musical structure or musical material are related to musical composition. But skills and self-control not only give power; these are also a result of a submission to discipline.

A composer, as author of the composition, exerts power over the performing artist by the prescriptions in the score and even beyond the score (if the author is still alive). Thus, a performing vocalist cannot do just ‘anything’ with a composition; this may not be tolerated culturally-socially and may be prohibited by the author. However, a composer is dependent on musicians, concert programmers, technicians, etc. for the performance of the compositions. In that sense, the vocalist has power over the composer, by (not) performing a composition, or through the quality of the performance. On the other hand, one could say that a composer enables a performer by providing a composition. There is a tension in relation to the audience: who is the most important for the audience, the composer or the (star) singer? Moreover, the audience exerts power over the composer and/or vocalist, by the size of the audience (and the consequent amount or lack of success, income and opportunities) and by the behaviour of the audience during a concert (the interaction between audience and performers during the performance). But the audience can also empower a musician: popular success may give a musician opportunities and influence. A successful performer may transfer success to an unsuccessful composer by performing the composer’s work. A performer can commission a work from a composer. Or a successful composer may help a beginning performer to gain success by asking the performer to perform the composer’s work.

Some performers openly acknowledge a submissive position towards the composer or to the composition: they intend to serve the musical intentions of the composer, or strive to follow the instructions in the score as precisely as possible, by for example preferring to work with a click track. For these performers, interpretative freedom is employed as little as possible, or unconsciously (since it is impossible to fix all musical details in a score, there is always some interpretative freedom, conscious or unconscious). A performer who does take significant interpretative liberties, may do so while intending to serve the true intentions of the (dead) composer. Both are forms of *Werktreue*. On the other hand, a performer may consider the music as an inspiring force, independent of the composer (as I think was the case in the performance by Janice Jackson of *L’autre face* in Amsterdam, 15 December 1994, discussed above.) Paradoxically, a submissive stance towards a (dead) composer may increase the power

of the performing musician, as if the power of the composer is borrowed, appropriated or taken over by the performer.²²

One could argue that the roles of composer and vocalist are deliberately chosen. However, the social-musical structure of composer, performer, score, concert, stage, etc., is an already existent situation to which aspiring musicians must adhere to a large extent in order to become successful or to exist as a musician at all. Power is not only exercised by someone over others; power may also be considered as a structure: ‘The persons who are supposed to be in power are not the ones who actually exercise that power; rather, the structures, networks, or vocabularies in which these persons are involved exercise power over them.’ (Ter Borg & Van Henten 2010: 6). Moreover, musical knowledge and skills are partly unconscious and acquired from a very young age. Music, as style, system or discipline, already exists before one’s birth and is unconsciously incorporated. Musical work, as performer or composer, can be considered as a submission or surrender to music; but a musician also has to be in control, in order to express, transfer, use or manipulate music’s power.

Judith Butler emphasizes that power as structure is paradoxical. On the one hand, power is an external force that subordinates people. On the other hand, power is inextricably intertwined with the formation of the subject to become a social being. The subject is formed by the power of subjection. Thus, the subordination of the subject to social rules and roles is what makes the subject, or one’s social existence, possible in the first place.

As a form of power, subjection is paradoxical. To be dominated by power external to oneself is a familiar and agonizing form power takes. To find, however, that what ‘one’ is, one’s very formation as a subject, is in some sense dependent upon that very power is quite another. We are used to thinking of power as what presses on the subject from the outside, as what subordinates, sets underneath, and relegates to a lower order. This is surely a fair description of part of what power does. But if, following Foucault, we understand power as *forming* the subject as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are. (Butler 1997: 1–2)

Power not only *acts on* a subject but, in a transitive sense, *enacts* the subject into being. (Butler 1997: 13)

²² See also Goehr (2007: xli): ‘Consider the idea of *Werktreue* and how it demands submission to the work just as it displaces authority onto those (conductors and performers) who claim to be most submissive.’

Butler's notion of power is an extension of both Michel Foucault's account of power and the Lacanian notion of the entry in the symbolic order. However, Butler stresses the possibility of agency, both notwithstanding and because of subjection.

Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency. (Butler 1997: 2)

If subordination is the condition of possibility for agency, how might agency be thought in opposition to the forces of subordination? (Butler 1997: 10)

Thus, a subject has a double bind or ambivalence towards the power of the existing social structure: subjection to a social-linguistic power structure is a prerequisite for agency, but this already existing structure may also be considered oppressive.

[S]ubjection is the paradoxical effect of a regime of power in which the very 'conditions of existence', the possibility of continuing as a recognizable social being, requires the formation and maintenance of the subject in subordination. (Butler 1997: 27)

However, the agency that comes forth from this structure, may be able to incite changes to this structure. The power exerted on the subject by its formation is taken over by the subject and may be used for resistance.

A power *exerted on* a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power *assumed by* the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject's becoming. (Butler 1997: 11)

Assuming power is not a straightforward task of taking power from one place, transferring it intact, and then and there making it one's own; the act of appropriation may involve an alteration of power such that the power assumed or appropriated works against the power that made that assumption possible. Where conditions of subordination make possible the assumption of power, the power assumed may at once retain and resist that subordination. (Butler 1997: 13)

[W]hat is enacted by the subject is enabled but not finally constrained by the prior working of power. Agency exceeds the power by which it is enabled. (Butler 1997: 15)

For this notion of agency and resistance, Butler's notion of performativity is essential. Performance in Butler's sense is not a one-time original event, but repetitive and constrained by norms and conventions.

Performativity is thus not a singular 'act', for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. (Butler 1993: xxi)

However, by the repetition of performance, there are also possibilities for change.

The paradox of subjectivation (*assujettissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms. Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power. (Butler 1993: xxiii)

It is more productive to rework conventions (and stereotypes) than to deny these.

Thus, inspired by Butler, one may state that (female) vocalists have power because of their subordination to social-musical conventions; not only to the conventions of a musical ‘language’ and of a composition, but also to gendered conventions such as singing works of the Western classical music canon in which women are represented as powerless, and assuming a professional role of submission to the composer. Without submission to the intensive discipline of vocal-musical study and training, a vocalist does not exist as such. However, the repetition of performance in general, and of musical performance and practice in particular, provides possibilities for change. The better a composition is known by the vocalist, the more a composition is incorporated, made her own, the more flexible and free the performance seems; the December performance of *L’autre face* by Janice Jackson may have been more ‘free flowing’ than the September performance because she knew the piece better. Trained, constrained, as well as enabled and inspired by musical practices and compositions, vocalists may come with their own interpretations. Some vocalists go even further: departing from a traditional musical background they change musical-vocal practices and conventions, resulting in new vocal styles, new performance practices and even in the dissolving of the boundaries between vocalist and composer or the combination of both roles. Electronic music technology may add new possibilities and frames of reference (see section III.5 and Chapter VII and VIII).

III.4 Stereotypes revisited

Ellipsis (1989-93) is a composition for female vocalist and tape by the Canadian composer Wende Bartley.²³ Often, as on the CD, it is performed by Fides Krucker, but it may also be performed by others. For this version of the composition,²⁴ Wende Bartley worked together with Fides Krucker and also used her own experiences of studying voice with Richard Armstrong, who was part of the Roy Hart Theatre in the late 1960s and 1970s. At an earlier stage, the composer was influenced by the vocal performance art of Meredith Monk, among others, and by written accounts of ritual singing by women during birth and death rituals. She developed the composition in a series of stages with various singers, as well as through her own vocal improvisations.²⁵ The singing style of *Ellipsis* is not a traditional bel canto approach, but rather an ‘embodied’ style. For Wende Bartley, this embodiment refers to a sound that resonates deeply in various areas of the body, and a play with sound colour instead of pitch contour or structure.²⁶

The vocal part of *Ellipsis* does not have any text and consists of extended vocal techniques such as a rapid repetitive series of glottal attacks, multiphonics and vocal fry, with much chest voice. The vocal phrases and the voice sounds are closely related to the breathing of the singer and contain glissandos, long sustained pitches and repetitions of pitches and melodic motives, with changing timbre. The tape does not seem to be a coercive structure and the singing appears to come from within the

²³ A recording with vocalist Fides Krucker is on the CD CLAIRES-VOIES, Empreintes Digitales IMED-9414-CD. I thank Wende Bartley for giving me the score.

²⁴ There is an earlier version for electric string quartet, tape and female voice (Bartley 1989).

²⁵ In 1992, Wende Bartley met Richard Armstrong, who taught her the specific practices of the Roy Hart method. She used this experience for part 2 of *Ellipsis*. An earlier version was composed in 1988–1989, and was later reworked on the basis of the Roy Hart approach. Part 2 was co-composed with Fides Krucker, who had introduced Wende Bartley to Richard Armstrong. Part 1 and 3 were primarily composed before this experience, in 1988–1989. According to the composer, the vocal approach of part 1 and 3 was influenced by the work of composer-performer Meredith Monk, by the composition *Eight Songs for a Mad King* by Peter Maxwell Davies, and by the work of Luciano Berio. *Eight Songs for a Mad King* was originally written for Roy Hart, but Wende Bartley was not aware of this at that time. I received this information from Wende Bartley personally, per email 2 June 2013. Remarkably, Fides Krucker is not acknowledged as co-composer elsewhere.

²⁶ This paragraph is based on personal e-mail correspondence between Wende Bartley and Hannah Bosma, 18 December 2002 and 8 March 2003.

singer herself. (This may be due to the composition, to characteristics like freedom of timing, ‘natural’ vocal lines, room for improvisation; and/or to the involvement of Fides Krucker in the composition process; or because Fides Krucker knew the piece very well and incorporated the composition as it were, see III.2.) On stage, Fides Krucker performs the piece without a score, in a simple theatrical way with a strong bodily presence (Montreal 1995). Because she is accompanied by pre-recorded sound tracks (‘tape’) instead of piano or orchestra, the singer has more room to move and an opportunity for a more theatrical performance. Fides Krucker vocalizes as an embodied subject.

How does the embodiment of *Ellipsis* differ from the embodiment to which female characters are doomed in classic cinema?²⁷ Embodiment in film means in the first place: visual display. But the embodiment of *Ellipsis* is more an inner embodiment: it relates to the body as felt by the singer. Moreover, this embodiment refers both to the performing vocalist and to the composer, since in composing *Ellipsis* the composer used her embodied experience and knowledge acquired by studying the specific vocal practice of the Roy Hart Theatre. This embodiment is active, not passive. This specific bodily practice forms the composition and the performance. Therefore, both Fides Krucker and Wende Bartley act as embodied subjects.

Whereas one could argue that all singing and all vocalising is done by and with the body, Bartley refers to a specific form of embodiment, that is – as it were – more embodied than Western classical singing. What is the difference? This can be considered from various angles: in relation to the vocalist/vocalising, to the composer/composition process, to the score, and to the performance (from the standpoint of an audience member). One is tempted to consider Western classical singing as less embodied than alternative vocal practices, but I prefer to consider it as a different kind of embodiment. To practice singing means to pay much attention to breath, posture, mouth, vocal tract, etc. Moreover, alternative vocal practices did influence classical music training. The difference may be the more analytical approach of classical singing, focussing on specific functional parts of the body, versus a more holistic approach of alternative practices; and a focus with classical

²⁷ As discussed by Silverman (1986), see III.1.

singing on results that have to conform to certain norms and standards versus a focus on bodily processes that produce other kinds of vocal sound in alternative practices.

Yet, *Ellipsis* does have a score, which prescribes specific pitches, durations, timbre and vocal techniques. To perform this score, these vocal techniques, the vocalising must as it were come from the body, while at the same time adhering to the score. A similar paradox is seen in the score: while the focus of the composition is on timbre, pitches are notated in the score and clearly there is a compositional structure.²⁸ Vocal timbres are mainly notated as (combinations of) speech sounds (phonemes) and through some descriptions of vocal technique (and also determined by pitch, mainly notated as notes but also as lines for glissandi).²⁹ (See ex. III–2; score *Ellipsis* p. 2 and 3.) Phonemes are standard descriptive units of speech analysis (phonetics), and do not directly relate to alternative singing practices. As usual with score reading, the performer has to make an interpretative ‘leap’, based on knowledge of the composer’s intentions, other performances or recordings, and the specific vocal practice. In general, many aspects of vocal music are not notated in the score, but implied, relying on knowledge of the specific vocal practice. In this respect, *Ellipsis* does not rely on the Western classical vocal tradition; the composer told me that a classically trained singer had problems, while an actor did very well when rehearsing this piece.³⁰

In a classical concert performance, the vocalist normally stands still and has a conventionally feminine visual appearance (evening dress, high heel pumps, etc.). By contrast the performance of *Ellipsis* (Montreal 1995) is slightly theatrical, the vocalist’s movements are integrated with her singing, she moves freely around the stage, without exaggerated conventional feminine display; or, no high heels.

Last but not least, the composer also has a bodily relationship to the vocal part. Bartley (1989) does not elaborate on her own bodily involvement, but instead deals with the composition of vocal timbre in an analytical, formal and technical way

²⁸ Bartley (1989) elaborately explains the compositional structure of the earlier version with regard to both timbre and pitch, which were both composed systematically.

²⁹ This refers to the score of the version for female voice and tape that I received from the composer.

³⁰ For an earlier version of the piece, the score states that ‘The performer required for the voice part should [...] have experience with both jazz and non-Western music. The singer should not use vibrato, avoiding the expressive operatic style and concentrating on creating a pure tone.’ (Bartley 1988: score p.1)

based on phonetics and the science of (musical) sound as was then state of the art. However, for the new version she used her own experiences of studying bodily vocal practices. (And she continued along this line, composing many more vocal pieces and also tape music with her own voice. Her voice is used in all compositions of her CD SOUND DREAMING (2012); Wendalyn Bartley is credited there as composer, ‘primary vocals’ and producer. She also became certified in SoulVoice practice and offers workshops.³¹)

Ellipsis is, according to the programme notes, based on lunar mythology, with ‘the unfolding of the lunar cycle, with its three stages of waxing, full and waning moon, traditionally [...] associated with three images of woman: virgin, mother, and crone. *Ellipsis* [...] creates another three-fold story of woman, [...] the spiritual and psychological empowerment of woman's collective consciousness as it evolved through time: The Age of Darkness, Creating a New Space, and The Age of Resonance’. These three sections can be recognized in the way the vocal part evolves throughout the piece: descending vocal lines in the beginning, becoming more and more varied, articulated and energetic in the middle, and ending with long resonating tones, full of overtones. Thus, meaning is ascribed to the non-verbal vocalising.

Singing, non-verbal vocalising, embodiment and lunar mythology are features associated with femininity. However, this is not a conventional femininity. The singing in this composition differs from the conventions of the Western classical singing style. And the embodiment is not a visual display (as in the films discussed by Kaja Silverman), but the resonance of the vocal sound in the body and a singing style/technique/practice. As for the vocal part, I would relate this composition to the feminism of ‘difference’ that revalues and elaborates on femininity.³² However, many of Wende Bartley’s compositions also involve electronics. In her programme notes she does not elaborate on that aspect. But in my view, this makes her a cyber-feminine

³¹ See <http://www.wendalyn.com> and <http://www.awakeningyourvoice.com> (last accessed 6 June 2013).

³² This contrasts with female composers who deny that gender has anything to do with music and subscribe to the liberal feminism of ‘equality’ that is mainly concerned with equal rights and opportunities and the avoidance of discrimination. Femininity-centred feminism is also called cultural feminism and is related to eco-feminism; theorists are Susan Griffin, Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich, among others; it has been accused of essentialism. See Chapter I.2.

composer, combining explicitly feminine themes with the masculine domain of electronic music, and combining body with technology.³³

³³ For discussions on the three kinds of feminist approaches, see Chapter I.2 and Wajcman (1991), Buikema and Smelik (1993), Braidotti (1994), Gill and Grint (1995), and others.

III.5 Cyborg voices

When comparing the gender pattern of the use of live female voice in electroacoustic music with the use of electronically pre-recorded or synthesized voices, this last category of ‘cyborg voices’ is much more varied with respect to gender and voice types. The hybrid combination of voice and music technology stimulates the use of more divergent vocal identities than the classic concert situation.³⁴ Still, gender patterns are inscribed in these electronic voices, as shown in II.6.

Since there are so few compositions for live male singer and tape/electronics, the difference between live and pre-recorded voices in electroacoustic music is the most remarkable for male voices. Is the prevalence of pre-recorded male voices (compared to the few live singing male voices) related to the prevalence of powerful disembodied male voices in film? The ‘voice of authority’, the voice of a composer, poet, artist or politician, indeed occurs in electroacoustic music, but often with a twist: distorted or ironic. The explicit, marked use of music technology causes a distantiation of the vocal delivery that leads to a critical recontextualisation of the sound bites of politicians,³⁵ or to a mysterious, cryptic concealment of an authoritative voice within the distorted sound.³⁶ This distantiation also gives room for a male scream³⁷ and for male singing voices, albeit mostly from other cultures.³⁸ There is a remarkable amount of pre-recorded male(-like) voices that dwell in the continuum between language and sound. Often, such pre-recorded male voices, and the texts they voice, suggest a sense of loss, disempowerment or melancholia. Chapter VI elaborates more on these voices.

In Stanley Kubrick’s film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Computer HAL 9000 is an *acousmêtre*, who sees and knows all (Chion 1999 [1982]); his all-too-

³⁴ For more on pre-recorded male and female voices, see Chapter VI.

³⁵ Like in *Andere die Welt, Sie braucht es* by Wilhelm Zobl (CE6m).

³⁶ For example, the voices of Pauline Oliveros, Jerry Hunt, Morton Subotnick and David Tudor in Larry Austin’s *SoundPoemSet* (CDCM16), and the voice of Salvador Dali in Jonas Broberg’s *Conversation in Cadaqué* (CE11p).

³⁷ The ‘animalistic’ scream in José Halac’s *The breaking of the scream* (CE14).

³⁸ See Chapter II.6.

gentle, effeminate voice and often-invisible eyes are everywhere. He takes over the power in the spaceship and murders the human crew. The last astronaut in the spaceship goes into the computer and shuts it down by taking out the memory modules. The computer knows what the astronaut is planning to do, and wants to prevent this: HAL tries to appeal emotionally and empathically. When the astronaut takes out the modules one by one, HAL repeats: ‘I am afraid’ and ‘my mind is going, I feel it’; and we hear the computer slowly ‘die’, its voice becoming lower and slower like a failing tape recorder. Regressing to his ‘youth’ while dying, the computer starts to sing a song he learned from his maker: a reference to Max Mathews’ computer-synthesized version of *Bicycle Built for Two*.³⁹ At first, HAL is a disembodied, all-seeing, all-knowing voice. When the astronaut goes into the computer and takes out the memory modules, the body of the computer is brought into view. With this embodiment, HAL becomes vulnerable and dies. HAL’s singing is related to embodiment, regression and dying, but also to the artificiality of this cyborg male voice, its freakish, transgendered, dangerous and unpredictable nature.⁴⁰

Music technology also offers the possibility for a different kind of hybrid: the extended and recorded voice of the composer-vocalist.⁴¹ With the use of sound technology, some vocalists have also become composers and vice versa. Composer-performers like Diamanda Galás extend and multiply their voice on stage and on recordings; Joan La Barbara made *Sound Paintings*⁴² with recorded layers of her extended singing. Composer Wende Bartley used her own voice as the basis for her eight-track composition *Dreamspin* (1999).⁴³ Whereas the line of approach of these

³⁹ Released on CMC13, see II.6. Note that the song in the film is a reference and not identical to Mathews’ version. HAL’s song is actually sung by a human actor (Roads 1996: 267). Apparently this recording is modified but still sounds less artificial than Mathews’ version. These two versions are quite different: Mathews’ version sounds mechanical and more up-tempo and higher than the version in the film, which is very low and slow and without accompaniment.

⁴⁰ For another account of HAL’s voice, see Auner (2003). Both Auner’s article and mine were published in the same year; we didn’t know this beforehand. I thank Joseph Auner for contacting me and referring to his article. See also Chapter VI.

⁴¹ See also Chapter VII.

⁴² Lovely Music CD 3001.

⁴³ Personal e-mail correspondence between Wende Bartley and Hannah Bosma, 18 December 2002, and previous contact.

women is from the direction of vocal performance art and singing, men like Jaap Blonk and Trevor Wishart tend to come from the traditions of sound poetry or music technology.⁴⁴ But they all combine voice and electronics, performing and composing.

The star singer in the film *Diva* tried to prevent the recording of her voice with all her might. But it turned out that what she had to fear was not so much the recording technology itself or the loss of the essence of her voice, but the men in charge of the music industry. In the final scene, the star singer discovers that sound recording technology makes it possible to hear herself in a different way and to get a different perspective on her own voice: ‘But I’ve never heard myself sing,’ she utters in amazement.⁴⁵ And her lover-fan, who ‘stole’ her voice, gives his secret recording back to her, tenderly.

⁴⁴ See Theda Weber-Lucks (2003) and Bosma (1997).

⁴⁵ Composer-performer Pauline Oliveros makes a similar point on hearing back oneself through recording technology:

Human musicians may compare performances, improvisations of their own, and of all manner of musical repertoire to enhance their abilities, techniques, and understanding through this technology. When you play back a recording of your own playing you listen to what you thought you heard and you begin to perceive what you did not hear consciously; thus, there is interactivity, stimulation of memory, and consciousness. (Oliveros 2004)

III.6 Conclusion, and beyond

Female composers of electroacoustic music are a minority in comparison to their male colleagues. On the other hand, there are many female vocalists in this genre and few male singers. In the classic concert situation this pattern is most extreme, with many compositions for live soprano and electronics, singing mainly in a modern Western classical singing style with many high-pitched and non-verbal elements, and very few compositions for live singing male vocalists and electronics. The use of pre-recorded and synthesized voices in this genre is much more varied, but here too the work of female vocalists has a prominent place. This gender pattern can serve as a frame of reference for interpreting individual compositions and opens questions about the role of the vocalist, about embodiment, about language, about the use and subversion of gender stereotypes and about authorship. These issues are discussed further in the subsequent chapters.

By focusing on voices and vocalists in electroacoustic music, more female influences can be discerned in this genre than when focusing only on composers. The importance of the authorship of the composer has been contested in musicology, to give more room to (female) listeners, performers and other interpreters (Citron 1993, Dame 1994). Gender and technology studies, instead of focusing exclusively on the (often male) inventor, pay more attention to workers and users as producers of technological practices (Wajcman 1991, Cockburn and Omrod 1993); in doing so, more female participants and female influences are perceived. Authorship may not seem to be a gender issue at first sight; but it is, when considering the large number of male composers versus the large number of female vocalists in electroacoustic music. The issue of authorship is discussed in chapter VII. The gender pattern of the (female) voice versus the (male) author plays not only at the level of production but also at the level of interpretative listening. Instead of the focus on the abstract ‘composer’s voice’ of Edward T. Cone (1974), I propose in Chapter IV to listen for the abstract ‘vocalist’s voice’ and to focus on vocal personae. Chapter V also deals with a change of interpretative focus from the composer to the vocalist.

The prevalence of male composers of electroacoustic music combined with singing female vocalists, is a manifestation of a hierarchical dualism: masculinity is connected to composing, the work of the mind, authority, language, reason and

innovation, and opposed to femininity, performing, the body, non-verbal vocal sound, emotion and tradition. Many feminist studies argue that such a Cartesian dualism is pervasive in our Western culture. Masculinity is stereotypically seen as active and superior and related to the mind and to subjects who are ‘doing’ or ‘having’; while femininity is considered passive and inferior, ‘matter’, ‘being’, an object of desire.

There are three kinds of feminist responses to this stereotypical dualism:

- (i) to strive for women to obtain masculine rights and opportunities;
- (ii) to revalue femininity;
- (iii) to deconstruct and challenge this dualism altogether, paying attention to both the construction of femininity and masculinity.

These three approaches often go together, for example when composer Wende Bartley works with electronic technology (i); makes the revaluation of femininity an important theme in her compositions (ii); and by working with femininity in a masculine domain and by using her own singing voice in her electronic compositions, upsets the gendered dualism (iii). Yet another example of the confusion of gendered boundaries is the work of female and male composer-performers, who use their bodies as well as technology.

Sound recording technology gave the female star singer in the film *Diva* a different perspective on her own voice, after she overcame her initial resistance dressed in essentialist arguments (the loss of the essence of her voice, liveness). By appropriating sound technology female composers and vocalists find new opportunities, with regard not only to their music, but also to the conventional gendered roles of musical life (see Chapter VII and VIII). Regarding the use of male voices by male composers, the creative use of sound technology may be employed to twist masculinity.