

# Practising Voice on Stage, from Training to Vocal Performance

International Symposium coordinated Ana Wegner, Chloé Larmet, and Marcus Borja

Paris

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# Call for Papers

## Abstract

This international symposium aims at promoting a meeting between artists, researchers and professors which will deal with the issues of vocal teaching and vocal performance in the performing arts. We will combine theoretical approaches and practical experiences so that practice and theory be lived as the same process. Based on contemporary creation, we will focus our thoughts and experiences on three lines: actors' vocal training; the use of new sound technologies on stage; and the aesthetics of staging where voices represent theatrical material that initiates research on how a performance is perceived. During this event, several researchers invited by the scientific committee and selected according to intercultural and multidisciplinary aspects will give presentations, and round-table conferences between practitioners and theorists as well as workshops will be open to the public.

## Main Lines of Research

### 1 – Shaping one's voice: techniques, training, transmission

Do vocal techniques frame a singular aesthetic? This will be our central question to analyse how vocal techniques and research affect the actors from the first stage of the daily training of their own vocal instrument to the creation of a performance or a company's aesthetic. Shaping the voice includes working on the actor's physiology, the vocal translation of a written text, and the exploration of its resonance. Voice is in itself a duality, being at once a complex physiological process aimed at the production of a sound, and the sonorous result of such a process.

In the vocal output, the whole body is considered a vocal apparatus, but in a specific way: the organs that allow a sound to be produced are diverted from their original functions, which are eating and breathing. Resonators shape within the body empty spaces that the airy sound can set into vibrations. New output techniques multiply those resonators and create a new subjective and sensitive body in contradiction with its actual physiological and biological identity – Grotowski imagined a mouth on top of the head for instance. Our purpose here will be to question the relationships between body and voice, sometimes with the integration of speech such as Cicely Berry's approach.

One could adopt multiple points of view for this first line of research: the actor's, the vocal trainer's or the stage director's. Let us remind also the importance of a multi disciplinarian approach: whatever vocal technique is at stake, inspirations from outside the theatre arts are to be found – most of the time speech therapy and music interact into the vocal training, but nowadays training techniques regularly call upon other fields such as the somatics (Feldenkrais method, Body-Mind Centering...), yoga, relaxation therapy, or sound poetry.

Is there a causality relationship between a specific vocal technique and its aesthetic and sonorous result? How does the actor's work adapt itself or create itself with regard to the contemporary aesthetic challenges, such as the new technologies on stage?

## **2 – Voices and new technologies: amplifying, digitizing, synthesizing**

Thanks to the new virtual technologies, it is possible to create and alter – during the performance itself – voices spreading on stage or in the audience space, so that virtual voices would sometimes 'act' in the absence of any physical or visible body. What kind of space is then created by those virtual voices, and, to a larger scale, how does the development of such technologies question the very notions of presence and subjectivity on stage?

Experiences like performances in complete obscurity or broadcast theatre manage to create a sound scape and a sound drama from the absence of the actor, not their presence. How then does the actor have to reinvent his own relationship with voice – being virtual or not? What is at stake concerning the spectator and its perception of the performance? Do the contemporary vocal trainings for actors include such consideration for the new technologies or do the actors have to train themselves on the job? We realized that those questions are too rarely addressed by the dramatic research, in spite of their major importance. This symposium will be an opportunity to question for instance the techniques for an actor to master the use of microphone on stage, or to address on a more philosophical ground the strangeness associated with hearing one's voice outside of one's body.

In this line will also be approached the impact of new medical technologies and their consequences to the understanding of physiological data at stake in the actor's work. Being able to visualize the inside of one's vocal apparatus and to understand with precision its mechanic changes something for the actor, and those changes for instance need to be analysed.

## **3 – The voice on stage: aesthetics, creations, experiences**

Multi disciplinarian vocal techniques and new sound technologies strengthen the contemporary stage in its ability to create, along with the classical spoken language, new body-like shapes and spaces thanks to the voice. Romeo Castellucci starts his *Julius Caesar* with the visual performance of an isolated larynx dancing on stage – a microphone being inserted inside the throat of the actor, his speech shapes itself into a body occupying the whole space. A space devoted to voice that is to be found, under a different appearance, in the recent creation by French stage director Daniel Jeanneteau version of Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blinds*. The audience is surrounded by a thick white fog, noises and sounds are broadcast from different loudspeakers along with the actual voices of the actors who mingle with the audience. A sound scape is created. Those two performances reveal the ability of the voice on stage to create a singular space, to create a kind of presence in spite of the physicality of a visible actor. And here we might approach the core of voice as a theatrical material: what kind of presence can a voice separated from its physical structure and its very visibility build?

Thus, Flemish director Guy Cassiers uses a sound amplified voice paired up with the filmed image of an actor to “rise above [his] physicalness”. The voice echoes something from the intimacy, something that can't be said with the spoken language, a secret. To use Henri Meschonnic's words, the voice is a “vocal portrait”, meaning it can build as many identities as the actor or the director's imagination can find. Then it's up to the spectator to widen and sharpen his hearing: there is not only a meaningful speech to hear but, behind or beyond it, the silent voice of an intimacy such as the one that Claude Regy's work resonates with.

With this line of research, we wish to question the voice on stage relying on the performances themselves considered in the singularities of their experiences, rather than on their creative process. Analysing specific performances will be the opportunity to address the problematic notions of presence, character and perception in those explorations of the voice

on stage. Similarly, one could question the relationship between a specific vocal technique – Vassiliev’s accentuation, Regy’s slow down of diction, or the constant switch between singing and spoken voice with Marthaler’s shows – and the construction of a theatrical meaning. What is at stake for the theatre in the reality of its performance with this growing interest for the voice on stage?

Please submit an abstract of under 500 words and a curriculum vitae to [colloque.voix@gmail.com](mailto:colloque.voix@gmail.com) by **July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015**. The selected participants will be contacted by email during the last week of July.

Further informations:

<http://www.pratiquesdelavoixsurscene.labex-arts-h2h.fr/en>

<http://www.labex-arts-h2h.fr/en/practicing-voice-on-stage-802.html>

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