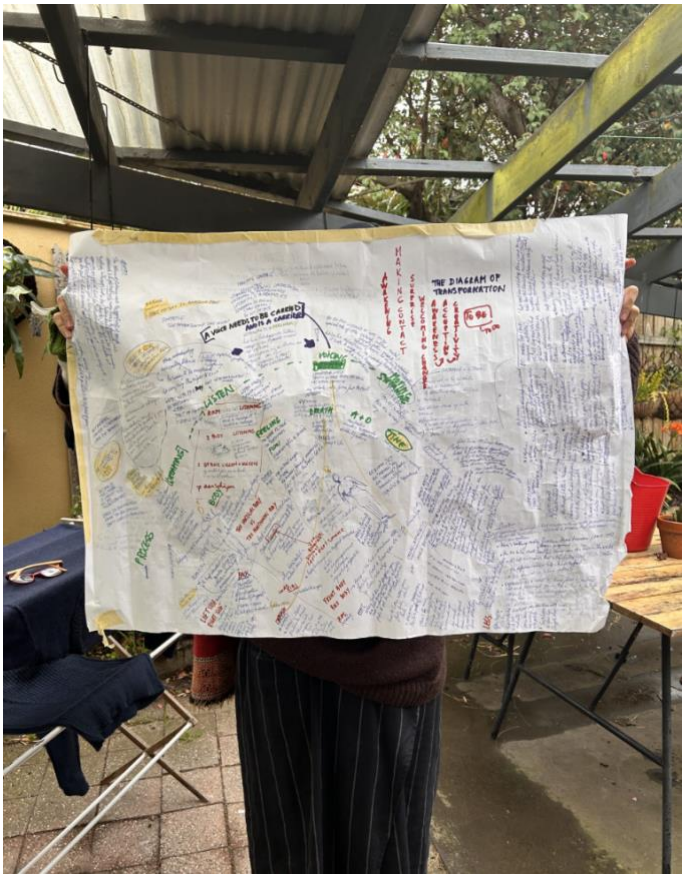


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THE WORK OF THE VOICE

Myriam Van Imschoot

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In our image-driven society, the voice is too often relegated to the margins. While the voice is more present than ever in this era—from The Voice to social media, from Auto-Tune to AI—vocal practices have remained underexposed throughout the decades. This includes those of Jean-René Toussaint, mentor and friend of Myriam Van Imschoot. With Toussaint as a guiding principle, this essay explores an alternative "sound perspective, a more ethical or utopian appeal for singularity, collectivity, and relationality."

There’s something fishy in Jean-René’s email. Even as he writes, ‘I’m ill, how are you, I hear your art is going well,’ something goes unsaid. The moment I return from Australia, I head straight to Rotterdam for a tête-à-tête with him. As I step out of the Coolhaven metro station, a familiar film begins to play, and I make my way over the bridge and back to the quay house where I spent two years studying Stemwerk (Voice Work) in the attic. It is the end of March; a cold wind bites at my face. I hurry

up the stairs, into the attic, where Jean-René waits for me on the landing. We linger longer than usual in each other's embrace, taking the barometer of our reunion.

On the couch, Jean-René calmly tells me what couldn't be written in the email: he has been diagnosed with dementia, the word now out in the room. Things are still okay for now, but—he gestures around him—he will be closing the studio and receiving clients only for private sessions at his home in The Hague, for who knows how long. Traveling for workshops, let alone making theatre, is no longer an option. As I've learned from him, I receive his words without projection, but on the train back to Brussels, the pangs of anticipation burn. Beyond the window, the landscape slides by in a blur. What does it mean to lose your memory, yourself, your language, and ultimately your voice?

When Jean-René Toussaint worked with a group of deaf people in the 1980s, he experienced how the entire vibrating, receptive, and responsive body could be both ear and voice.

The voice is the domain upon which Jean-René Toussaint built his life's work as an actor, director, thinker, and therapist. A key moment he often cites occurred when he worked in France with a group of deaf people in the 1980s: there, he experienced how the entire vibrating, receptive, and responsive body could be both ear and voice. It was all the more painful that deaf people had learned to silence their rawer throat sounds and their aspirated, multi-tonal voices. The startled faces of their listeners, after all, reflected a kind of shock: that the voice of the 'deaf person' was abject, outside the norm, even reprehensible. And so it was muted.

The fundamental principles of Stemwerk are encapsulated in this experience, as if in a primal scene. Jean-René consistently emphasizes that voices are richer than the 'flattened version' we have arrived at over the course of our cultural and historical development, with ever thinner speech prosodies—an impoverishment that also affects many trained, 'polished' singers. Aware of the latent violence of socialization, he argues that everyone has a voice that deserves to be heard. We must learn to listen to the voice as an open book, in all its mysteries and subjectivities, without squeezing it into a single identity. Moreover, most vocal problems, according to Jean-René, stem from judgmental listening and control, leading to self-censorship and ultimately to self-harm.

Against the socially dominant, 'horizontal' use of voice—focused on meaning transfer, intelligibility, and social coding—he pleads for the 'vertical,' embodied, resonant voice, connected to impulse and movement. In doing so, he calls for a

more ‘primitive voice,’ not as a return to a pristine or wilder past, but as the restoration of a neglected foundation.

Antonin Artaud is never far from mind in this context. Physically, the two Frenchmen resemble each other, though Jean-René Toussaint dismissed the comparison when I once suggested it. And yet, both share a certain frailty from which intensity can flare. In faces framed by dull tufts of hair, I see children and old sages jostling side by side.

Born 40 years later than Antonin Artaud, Jean-René Toussaint (1948) also encountered the medical system at a young age—though under different circumstances. As a survivor of crushing medical malpractice, he learned to shake off the straitjackets of imposed illnesses and diagnoses, insisting instead on singularity and self-determination. In his therapeutic work, radically open listening becomes his ethic, and the voice its organising force. As with Artaud, it is above all the eschatological voice—heard in cries, shouts, panting, hissing, and groaning—that can usher in a reanimation of experience, at the very edge of language.

Voice did not have to revolve solely around performance, but could also be a way of being in relationship — of resonating, listening, vibrating together.

Jean-René’s approach also resonates with that of Alfred Wolfsohn, the German vocal thinker who emigrated to England and, deeply scarred by the war, made the scream a central axis in exploring the outer reaches of the human voice. Wolfsohn profoundly influenced Roy Hart, for whom the voice was no longer confined to song or text, but became a search for an expanded register and expressive range.

Related trajectories can be traced in the collective vocal practices of choirs, mantras, and chants; in the Living Theatre of Julian Beck and Judith Malina; in the Open Theater, where Joseph Chaikin conceived of the voice as an “organ of relationships”; and in the laboratory work of Jerzy Grotowski, whose embodied practice inseparably linked voice, presence, and transformation.

Although these references remained largely implicit in Jean-René’s teaching, his work clearly belongs to the vocal lineage of the 1960s and ’70s, in which theatre, voice, the art of living, social critique, and alternative therapy became deeply intertwined. What was at stake was not merely the production of performances, but a sustained, integrated practice that tested the boundaries between art and life. Jean-René Toussaint’s Stemwerk not only aligns with this avant-garde vocal tradition; it articulates a distinct chapter within it.

All of this flashes through my mind on the train home, alongside other questions that are harder to articulate. Why is it that the historiography of the avant-garde—particularly since the 1980s—has privileged visual and dramaturgical innovations, while the voice has gradually been marginalized in both documentation and critical discourse, if not erased altogether? Is this a form of collective amnesia? Or is it simply the fate of sound, in a spectacle-based society, to serve the image?

What does it reveal about our theatrical ecosystem that obituaries for Robert Wilson list collaborators such as Philip Glass, Isabelle Huppert, Tom Waits, and Marina Abramović, yet rarely mention Hans Peter Kuhn, who shaped Wilson's sonic worlds for decades?[i] We readily recall the striking images of Romeo Castellucci, while Claudia Guidi, responsible for the deconstructive textual practices and vocal textures of the Socìetas, remains underexposed. It is as if sound and vocal practices circulate differently: more subterranean, more diffuse. But does this mode of dissemination make them any less real, any less substantial?

VOCAL TURN

When I began Jean-René Toussaint's Stemwerk in 2011, I had just created the solo *Living Archive*, a performative radiophonic play built from cassette tapes spanning my youth through to my work as a professional interviewer. Like a mute puppeteer, I operated a range of vintage playback devices to release the voices of others and of myself—voices I cherished and ultimately exorcised in the play. In the opening scene, I delivered a fragmented speech, stuttering like a glitching record, becoming a kind of disturbed cantor rather than a guiding voice. This figure of the 'speaker' or 'cantor' as a displaced site echoed Derrida's critique of logocentrism: speech does not bring us home. At best, we are conduits—not the origin of meaning, but a passage through which difference, repetition, and absence make themselves heard in slippage.

In the years leading up to this, I had also encountered this idea in two books that became personal bibles—not coincidentally, both featuring a ventriloquist and his dummy on the cover: *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* and *A Voice and Nothing More*.[ii] Both address the problematic status of the voice and its uncertain origins. Steve Connor traces a deep-rooted distrust in Western culture toward disembodied voices and their entanglement with power, from Delphic oracles and ventriloquists to contemporary computer voices. Mladen Dolar, in a similar vein, conceives of the voice as an uncanny object: not an expressive window into interiority, but something that hovers between inside and outside.[iii]



© Myriam Van Imschoot, poster Living Archive, 2011

After a lecture at Extra City, Mladen and I met over a cigarette on the sidewalk, and not long after, I invited him to *Voice Day* (2009), the closing event of my residency with Kristien Vanden Brande at the Jan van Eyck Academie, where he would later return to give seminars on Lacan.

Around 2009, what was called the vocal turn in visual art and theory became increasingly tangible. During my residency at the Jan van Eyck Academie, where I curated Voice Day, several trajectories converged: encounters, collaborations, and a growing sense of urgency around the voice. Against the backdrop of the academy's greenhouse effect, I experienced this moment as a promise—an invitation to approach the voice across disciplines, as a site where questions central to our time could be brought into sharper focus. The prism was wide and acutely contemporary. Within a single exhibition, perspectives could shift from ecology to community, from legal and forensic analyses to poetic evocation.

I am thinking of the chorus trend that first sparked things in motion for me[iv], but also of Smadar Dreyfus's *Mother's Day* (2006), in which Syrian youths projected their Mother's Day messages across the occupied Golan Heights using sound systems; of the shamanic human–animal mutations in the work of Marcus Coates; and, later, of Lawrence Abu Hamdan's investigations into border control regimes based on accent recognition.

The *Voice Day* exhibition featured Katarina Zdjelar's video *Shoum*, in which a group of Serbian men sing Tears for Fears' 'Shout' with complete abandon. Set in post-war Belgrade, known for its pronounced macho culture, this rather clumsy remake of a

global hit in broken English resonates as an anthem for repressed male emotion. Who sings what, and what messages are being sent? Can a song function as a cover for political unrest and collective pain?

"As a child, I was always sensitive to sound. I had a speech impediment. I couldn't translate the intense stream of thoughts in my head to my tongue."

Clear parallels emerge in the performing arts. While Jérôme Bel, around 2000, still employed pop music in a "bare" semiotic aesthetic, a new generation of choreographers and performance artists began to harness music as affective levers with bravado and pathos. Singing sample machines united the masterful and the monstrous, like the diva in the body art drag of Ivo Dimchev (*Lili Händel* , 2004), in which every muscle tension is given voice. Trajal Harrell, Cecilia Bengolea, François Chaignaud, and Marlene Monteiro Freitas went through the roof in *Mimosa* (2011), with their flamboyant vogueing and dusted-off hits, brimming with poses of performed confession. Mimicry and mockery lay close to one another.[v]

It was no coincidence that the television format *The Voice* (2010) appeared then in primetime, with the judge sitting with their back to the candidate (ear above the eye). This phenomenon—the successor to *Idol* —also belonged to the same cultural wave in which the voice reclaimed the stage. Streaming platforms like YouTube and Spotify made the voice ubiquitous in endless circulation and personalized playlists—on - *demand* , shared, remixed, simultaneously more intimate and massive than ever. Digital effects like auto-tune, granular editing, and compression made voices sound as if they were completely malleable: adaptable to any standard of perfection or desired distortion.

For a young artist searching for her own voice—literally and figuratively—these were undoubtedly fascinating times, floating in an ocean of detached voices leaking from phones, iPods, and computers. But this apparent diversity also brought with it an auditory impoverishment—think of the voice trends rammed down our throats by preference algorithms. Never before had voices sounded so skillful, exposed, and predictable. Critic Mark Fisher would call this closed circuit *capitalist realism* in his eponymous book (2009). Philosopher Paolo Virno had already warned about the pitfalls of virtuosity in *A Grammar of the Multitude* (2004). When every gesture—every sound, every expression—becomes public in advance and derives its value from visibility, the act itself risks becoming deflated. Virtuosity, he says, is performative but without an end product; it shines but consumes itself in its own brilliance. Impressive but also tiring, virtiosity is an eroding reflection of our times, an exercise without a place to rest.

In short, I felt a lack. Something was gnawing. This wasn't the sonic perspective I was looking for. I longed for a more ethical or utopian appeal to singularity, collectivity, and relationality. Voice didn't have to be just about performance, but could also be a way of relating—of resonating, listening, vibrating together.[vi] Was that why I sought out Jean-René Toussaint?

THE PATH OF LISTENING

Here it is: my large Stemwerk notebook. Its now yellowed pages hold theory lessons, exercises and my notes.

The neat, somewhat measured handwriting of the first pages reflects good intentions, but also a cautious vigilance. Apparently, I was wary of dealing with a guru. Countless are those would-be experts, waving false promises, claiming they can help you find your “true” voice. You would be amazed at the money people are willing to pay to learn overtones or to produce supposedly deep, primal sounds. A market for self-help, spiritual makeovers, and skills extraction thrives around the voice.

> “What is admirable is that Jean-René never compromises the radicality of his methods, but is also not bitter about the marginality of his position.”

The very *first lesson* is about listening. Alright. There we are, hungry for voice, eager to express ourselves vocally, ready to give it everything—and then he insists on receiving rather than producing. But that is precisely the point: listening comes first. Expression, if one can even call it that, follows.

Throughout the course, listening returns in all its forms. The phrases with which Jean-René Toussaint reinforces the importance of listening, could fill an entire book: *“The silence of listening wants the opportunity of sound.” “Listening with the body is a daring process in which you risk yourself.” “Learn to listen to a ‘no.’”* If you encounter a wall, it invites you to find another way across. Never supplement someone’s words, remain open to surprise. *“Listening is participating in a stream; you never step into it twice in the same way.”*

> "Listening comes first. Expression, if you can even call it that, is a consequence."

Listening is not altruism; it does not mean dissolving into the other. It is rather a mirror in which something appears and duplicates itself, beyond the narcissism of reflection as fetish. After all, by listening, you encounter the other ànd yourself—through breath, vibration and its return, feedback, echo, and resonance. It is a "kind of pregnancy where something can be born," says Jean-rené. You could draw connections with the *kūki* of the Japanese philosopher Kiyokazu Washida, who links listening to "reading the air." What cannot be expressed in language arises in a field of attention, in the interval or interspace of *ma*.[vii]



newpolyphonies, Myriam Van Imschoot & HYOID © Beata Szpagarowska

The first exercise of the course exemplifies this generative principle. In the YouYou Group, the vocal ensemble I've been a member of since 2014, it's become standard practice. You stand close to a wall, a window, the floor, a chair, or any other object in space and you make sounds that capture the nature of the element, both with your ears and your entire body. At first, you notice that reverberation on a hard surface is received differently than on a sound-absorbing object, like for example a mattress. With some patience, a feedback loop emerges in the acoustic situation—a relational entanglement of sounding and resounding that reveals other forms of empirical and affective information and, in turn, alters the voice.

Stemwerk offers many variations on that principle. You can interact with an object or with someone; sometimes you voice alone, other times with others. It can become physical, with touch ranging from gentle stroking to more vigorous agitation and

shaking. Sometimes we press our lips to the body to propel sounds into it, which I further developed in my own work into *bone-blowing* , where you play the bones of the body like a foghorn.

Leafing through the notebook, themes like horizontality and verticality, emotion, sexuality, communication, and so on flip past. We learn about the body's morphology, the front and back, the left and right sides, each associated with different emotional states. We train to walk more forward on the balls of the feet, because they are more sensitive and receptive than the heels. With our hands or mouths, we explore the shoulders, ribs, and hips. The back, in particular, is a fascinating plane of resonance. Because it escapes the control of a frontal communication culture, it is a storehouse of memories and emotions. It is also an ideal place to awaken forgotten voices.

A whole body of knowledge is passed on to us month after month. Delivered in small increments, the instruction never becomes pedantic or ostentatious, but instead opens up a way of thinking. It takes us to evolutionary and cognitive research, cultural anthropology, EMDR, the click languages of Africa, the forging of bronze bells, and the acoustic spaces for community experience and worship, such as the caves of Spain or the Romanesque abbeys of southern France where the chants of monks rise from the lower space and mingle with the vaults above. There's also a lengthy discussion of Artaud and alchemy, perhaps because Jean-René had also created a piece about *alchemical theatre* at the Frear Ensemble Theater in Philadelphia around that time.

As the course progresses, I slip more into the flow of the exercises. Trust grows among the participants, and we become better at mirroring one another. A new sensory experience begins to take shape, along with new communication skills. I sometimes liken our voices to a vibrating vocal plasma rolling between us in space, like a snake flicking its tongue, tasting, binding, and rhyming particles in search of traces. I find myself thinking, "Octavia Butler would have loved this."

It is admirable that Jean-René never compromises on the radical nature of his methods and harbors no bitterness about the marginal position he occupies. Most innovative ideas, he notes, begin on the fringes before finding their way into the mainstream. He does not view this process as recuperation or appropriation, but as an organic circulation of information—something humanity needs. Outsiders, he insists, have a role to play.



newpolyphonies, Myriam Van Imschoot & HYOID © Beata Szpagarowska

In retrospect, I see that the view of humanity underpinning *Stemwerk* is ultimately more political than therapeutic. The aim is transformation rather than healing. As human beings we are all constantly balancing between health and illness; yet instead of focusing on the ailment, the work insists that we are more than a problem to be solved. It invites us to dare to begin again—again and again—or to reframe the narrative from other perspectives. To live as a question. To hear the “sur” in survival not as holding on, but as living *more*. And to carry that toward future generations. Here the real lesson begins: the world is not changed through grand utopian designs, but through grassroots effort, beginning with oneself. *Stemwerk*.

A side-thought: Jean-René could easily have been an ally of the then-emerging care movement, had he not deliberately removed the word from his vocabulary. He believes that providing care too often reproduces asymmetrical relations of dependency. What he seeks instead is to awaken a more impulsive life instinct, one that activates reflexes of “taking and being taken.” To take support rather than seek help. This, perhaps, has been the hardest lesson for me.

"These days, vocal coaches are more in demand than dramaturges to prepare performers for ingenious interpretations. But they take the skills, not the philosophy."

The lesson I cherish most is about authenticity. He has reservations about the idea of a true “I,” and is wary of fixed identities that no longer move. He does not believe in the defeatism of “there is no alternative,” because we can always make choices. But do we?

Final lesson: we learn to adapt Jean-René's existing exercises or create new ones. His lessons aren't for a school of followers to replicate. Stand on your own feet. The experiment never ends. There are no ready-made formulas. Anyway, you keep listening no matter what. And then, it's over. Unlike *Deep Listening* by Pauline Oliveros and BMC (*Body-Mind Centering*) by *somatic researcher* Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, you won't receive a certificate upon completion. You won't be part of a community or an institution with a title and discounts on new publications. You'll be going out into the world.

THE OTHER SIDE OF IMITATION

When I did the Stemwerk training, I couldn't have predicted how deeply this journey would shape me. Jean-René never saw my work. I only once asked him advice, about Cathy Berberian’s *Stripsody*, a playful vocal piece based on a graphic score composed of comic-strip onomatopoeia. In her dyad with composer Luciano Berio, Berberian was a muse, co-creator, and interpreter of many of his works, such as the iconic *Sequenza III* , which was tailor-made for her. Her theatrical instinct, unconstrained multi-style, and humor could make the expansion of the vocal vocabulary in new music credible, and in a sense, she was the precursor of the more performative turn of the 1960s and '70s, in which the performers' bodies themselves became the score.[viii] .

I came to Jean-René with the idea of creating a graphic score in dialogue with compositional practices that work across image and sound. This time, it would draw on comic-style images of the Tarzan cry, mixed with other “wild” cries from popular film and literature. Through these images, the West stages the wild and silences it — first through colonial violence, then again through stereotype.The piece would also shift to a different use of the voice, more akin to the work of Stemwerk. As the founder of “primitive voice,” Jean-René seemed the perfect interpreter, wouldn’t he? He shook his head and muttered something about superficial imitations. I understood. It was clever, a postcolonial disruption of notions such as the “barbaric” and *le sauvage*, a semiotic play of signifiers, but yes, art could go deeper.

> “Jean-René, your lessons are worth gold, and the greatest gift would be if you could give them back to yourself.”

At that time, imitation was still a survival strategy for me. I could break free from the solfège of music by using the sounds of the world around me as notes. As a child with a speech impediment, I was always sensitive to sound. I couldn't translate the intense stream of thoughts in my head to my tongue, but I gradually learned to communicate and speak more clearly by listening.

My first group piece, *What Nature Says* (2015), is a play with five performers as foley artists imitating just about everything: the highways around Kortrijk, African savannas, deforestation of tropical rainforests. We ask what it means to listen to biotopes in crisis and their cries for help. Do we deflect them, or do we feel them deeply by allowing them to reverberate deep within us?[ix]

But with *newpolyphonies* (2021), I step through the mimetic mirror. With the four singers of HYOID—Fabienne Seveillac, Andreas Halling, Gunther Vandeven, and Els Mondelaers—I further develop my sonic language with world sounds from the simplest, smallest cells, letting them grow into the building blocks of an auditory cosmology. It's still inspired by insects and machines, crickets and bones, bumble bees and airplanes, but the humming shifts into less purposeful tremolos, vibratos, rumbling, and thundering beyond specific references.

On tour, we invite fifteen local participants—no musical experience required!—to learn this vibratory language in several workshops and then perform with us as a swarm. At the beginning of the performance, we rise from the auditorium, one by one, becoming a collective sound body that takes over the space.

One of my favorite moments is the swan song in the final scene, where Jean-René's influence is palpable. A performer, with a perche microphone, carefully (walk not from heels!) tiptoes among a group of *bone-blowers* (lips playing body parts like flutes!).



Newpolyphonies, Meakusma, 2024

She captures their sounds and amplifies them on the room's surround sound system. With the microphone close, she magnifies a detail in the mix; further away, the whole comes together much more. The audience becomes one with her ear and hears an orchestra of foghorns, the hum of a beehive, or even the rotting of meat. Until it spins in a whirlwind where something else sings along.

In *newpolyphonies,* sound is polyphonic not only because of the multiple voices in the mass, but also by working on a multiple "perception." I call it "sympathetic consonance." Sounds, like the buzzing of a fly, become portal sounds and open a door to yet another meaning, an engine, a drone... And so it continues until we break out of the circle of identity. This is dizzying, but also comforting: in this entangled resonance system, even the smallest gesture can become a quantum leap.

If there's one work I would have liked to show Jean-René, it would be this one: in this work, I learned *to compose* —repeating what threatens to fall apart. The performance was conceived and premiered in the midst of COVID. While breath became a hazard, twenty performers stood in the Bijloke, blowing, hissing, and squealing. The mask became a membrane. Especially in a time of fear and distance, we clung to the imaginaries of the collective.

EN ATTENDANT UNE NOUVELLE (VAGUE)

It’s May, and I ask Jean-René if I can see him again for an interview for *Etcetera*. Between the lines, he’ll understand that I’m trying to hold on to something, now that the black hole is pulling at him. But my mentor’s growing confusion makes meeting difficult. It shows in the conflicting messages I receive — via WhatsApp, Messenger, text, and eventually emails not meant for me.

June and summer are approaching. Pressing for a response seems inappropriate. I start listening to the recordings of his lessons, which I received from the dancer Michel Yang, who took the course after me, shortly before she passed away in 2020.[x] It is, in a sense, her legacy to me. And every time her voice is briefly audible during Jean-René's presentations, the afterlife flashes with a wink.

I'm drawing a map with quotes and key concepts. These listening sessions are like a second chance. A relearning. As the map grows like a spider, I feel less sad now. Especially when I think of that last moment on the couch in his Rotterdam studio, when he pulled out his phone to show me photos of the allotment garden where he and his partner love to spend time. Trees stand in a riot of tender green, flowers line the aisles, and there she is, a ginger cat with a tail like a question mark. That's how my visit ended; leafing through a photo album with a cat jumping from photo to photo.

En attendant, I begin writing this text. I just keep writing. *Until it happens*. Until I can no longer meet because I'm leaving on tour to Australia, Japan, and Korea. Until seas and continents separate us. Until the *Etcetera* deadline arrives. Until we run out of characters. And until ultimatums become irrelevant. This exchange will take on a different form.

I'd like to ask him so many questions. For example, what's his attitude toward virtuosity? These days, vocal coaches are more sought after than dramaturges to prepare performers for ingenious performances. But they bring in the skills, not the philosophy. Beneath the stage, a swamp slurps, draining away meaningful gestures because nothing solidifies in a collective field moment. We are interchangeable showpieces on the treadmill of intelligent entertainment.

Did he continue to believe in theater? Artaud never experienced what he advocated for. It remained a prophetic *art to come.* Like the alchemists, he worked on it a lifetime with no guarantee of results. Does Jean-René also believe, like Artaud, that something must first decompose (the so-called symbolic death) before it can ascend to a higher element?

Jean-René: "A question is ten times more important than an answer." "Live as a question." I have so many questions. I wonder how the disease is changing him now and whether he will end his life before the end? "Dying only occurs when we lose our ability to move," the recording says.

Jean-René, your lessons are priceless, and the greatest gift would be if you could give them back to yourself. You talked about "taking support," but you seem like a loner. Those snapshots of the ginger cat are telling. She looks at you, unfazed by the pact of chance and affection. She brushes against your legs. She walks into another flowerbed. She's gone.

For me, community is the answer. I know it's a buzzword, but it really exists. The temporary *sonic communities* of *Nocturnes for a Society* , the YouYou Group's

practicing community. Opening a space on Manchester Street as a *commoning* of practices around voice, sound, and listening for anyone who wants it. That was just the beginning, Jean-René. I promise. I swear.

I love wolves more than cats. In their nightly gatherings, they howl, each on its own frequency, heartbreaking. Communities like sound clusters. Where was it again in France, that example you gave of monks in a chamber beneath the floor, letting their voices rise up to the vaults of the church, as if the song were from the heavens, *but it came from below*. We will be earthly or not. It really does exist, receiving messages back on the wave of frequencies, if only we listen. I'm listening!

What's that cat's name? Mini? Mouche? Momo?
Kitty, it's your turn now. Meow at your owner and give him a headbutt.

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[i] "Of all his collaborators, Kuhn has exercised the most significant influence on Wilson, and the two have radically altered the relationship between sound and image in theater. (…) I want to wake up people who spend their lives sleepwalking in a perceptual fog. Sound is a miracle." Quote comes from an interview with Arthur Holmberg in Holmberg, A. (1996). *The Theater of Robert Wilson*. Cambridge University Press, 176.

[ii] The image on the covers is of the doll 'Erich von Stroheim' (sometimes also called Erich) and the actor Michael Redgrave from the film *Dead of Night* (1945), a British horror anthology directed by Alberto Cavalcanti, among others.

[iii] A performing arts example that resonated strongly with Connor and Dolar's literature was Gisèle Vienne's *Jerk* (2008), featuring Jonathan Capdevielle as the ventriloquist. The puppets in this piece represent the serial killer and his accomplices. The performance underscored how ventriloquism, as in Connor and Dolar's work, becomes a metaphor for power and manipulation.

[iv] Specifically, with Artur Żmijewski's *The Singing Lesson* 2 (2001), in which a group of deaf people sing Bach. Many artists create choirs; it's an ongoing trope and trend. Perhaps the best-known initiative is the *Complaint Choirs* (from 2005) by Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen, in which citizens translate their complaints into song.

[v] *Mimosa (Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning at The Judson Church (M))* (2011) is part of Harrell's dance series *Twenty Looks or Paris is Burning at The Judson Church*, in which he depicts a fictional encounter between the Harlem vogueing scene (*Paris Is Burning*) and the postmodern dance of the Judson Dance Theater who assembled in the Judson Church (New York, 1960s). Other examples of "performances-as-concerts" deserve a mention, but fall outside the scope of this article. However, I would like to include this one: Sanja Mitrović in Nicole Beutler's *1: Songs* (2009) (with arrangements by Gary Shepherd) presents a series of tragic female figures from theatrical history in a stunning vocal medley.

[vi] Adriana Cavarero belongs here with *A più voci. Filosofia dell'espressione vocale* (Feltrinelli, 2003) / *For More than One Voice*. *Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Stanford University Press, 2005). Her relational conception of the voice focuses on the unique singularity of the speaker, but always in relation to another who listens. Voice is not an instrument of representation, but an event of exposure—an ethical, vulnerable form of relating.

[vii] The connection is not made by Jean-René, but by me.There are differences with Washida's more moralistic interpretation of "reading the air" and the pressures that "reading cultural subtexts" may bring. Still, the idea that one can read the "air in between," as well as what is sensed but not articulated, is a powerful one, and runs through many Japanese aesthetic, philosophical, and cultural practices.Toussaint's practice is grounded in the body, and the "air" is literally audible and tangible — a carrier of the unsaid, a field of proximity and vibration.

[viii] In *Composing under the Skin: The Music-making Body at the Composer's Desk* (2014, Leuven University Press), Paul Craenen examines how composers in contemporary music integrate not only

sound but also the performative, visible, and physical dimensions of music-making into the compositional material. The body is no longer a neutral medium, but a vehicle for expression, resistance, and meaning, where the boundaries between composing, performing, and perceiving blur.

[ix] Documention of the performance at Kaaitheater, 2015, is available on this project website. Gratitude goes to Fabrice Moinet (sound engineer) and Jean-Baptiste Veyret-Logerias, Caroline Daish, Anne-Laure Pigache, Jakob Ampe, Mat Pogo (performers), a dream team. Video https://vimeo.com/125443402.

[x] Dancer, choreographer, and vocal artist Michel Yang (1973-2020) was part of Oracle, along with Caroline Daish and Justine Maxelon, a collective that links vocal research to performative practices. Oracle developed an eyes-closed vocal improvisation practice that "reads" spaces—from the interior of the body to public places such as parks, train stations, or museums—and explores the boundaries between individual expression and shared space through voice and minimal movement. Blowing sounds directly into the body entered their practice. Here, too, the ideas of Jean-René Toussaint live on.