

## DEMOCRATIZING SINGING: SOMAESTHETIC REFLECTIONS ON VOCALITY, DEAF VOICES, AND LISTENING

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**ABSTRACT:** One of our basic needs as human beings is to be connected with each other. We want to be heard and understood. Our bodies are capable of producing a great variety of different vocal sounds for our communication. However, we have countless unspoken norms in our culture about who can use their voices, in what kind of situations, and in what ways. These norms are usually based on the skills and abilities of a “normal body”. They are maintained by the conventions of listening that focus on the vocal sounds and skills. This is especially the case what comes to singing. The nonnormative voices and bodies are easily left outside the realm of aesthetic expression. In this article, I discuss these issues from the somaesthetic and pragmatist point of view using a deaf popular music singer as my example.

**Keywords:** singing, voice, listening, somaesthetics, body, skill, deafness, democratization

### Introduction

Every now and then I come across a singing performance that really moves me. These performances not only seem to touch me, but they also seem to change me in some way. I found this kind of performance by chance, when I ended up watching the video “Deaf Girl Singing *Someone Like You*” on the YouTube. In this video, a deaf teenage girl sings the 2011 hit song “Someone Like You” of the British pop-singer Adele. The video was uploaded to the YouTube in 2012, and by the spring 2017 it had received over 600 000 views and 3700 comments.<sup>1</sup>

It seemed that the performance of this singer had moved not only me, but many others as well. The video had raised a lot of heated conversation and comments with attitudes varying from admiring to abusive. They were the negative comments that really made me think about the norms of singing and listening in our culture — the ways we perceive and understand different voices and how strongly these voices affect us. It felt almost inconceivable, how much hatred and disgust this

performance had raised in some of the listeners, especially when my own listening experience had been so elevating. Fortunately, most of the comments were positive. But even with many of these well-meant comments I was wondering, if there was any aesthetic appreciation behind them.

Nevertheless, one of the comments differed notably from the other ones. It caught my attention, as it seemed that the listener had found something deeply meaningful in the performance. He had been able to sense the performance from an aesthetic point of view — even if the singing did not meet the traditional aesthetic criteria of western pop-singing (e.g. singing in tune, clear articulation). Evidently, the listener had understood the expression of the singer on a deeper level:

“There's something captured here in your performance that is so beautiful that most people won't understand it. Outside of the tangible concepts of music like melody, harmony, and rhythm, there lies the things that are often forgotten, for they take a keen ear and an open heart to be realized. The color, texture, soul, emotion, the reason that the music was ever brought into existence: this is what makes it beautiful. You have opened my eyes to this intangible concept in it's purest form and I thank you.” [...] (YouTube comment of a listener)

### 1. Vocal needs

As human beings we have a need to express our emotions and thoughts vocally. This need has many dimensions from the affective bodily impulses to the need of conceptual communication. We want to be heard and understood by others in order to become valid members of our social groups. We also want to connect with our surroundings with our voices — inhabit our acoustic environments vocally. We use our voices to release the affective and emotional pressures from our bodies: we cry, scream, roar, laugh, babble, and mumble. We also use our voices to create developed and nuanced utterances of speech and singing.

There is still, however, one important reason why we are so eager to use our voices: the pure enjoyment of it. This aspect is, however, often forgotten when we talk

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<sup>1</sup> <https://youtu.be/Gb0SX9bYyTc>  
(published 17.3.2012, cited 14.2.2017)

about the vocal behaviour of our species. The bodily sensations and pleasures are particularly constitutive in singing, as it is an aesthetic realm of vocalizing. The vibrations of the tissues and cavities of one's body, the inner body movements of breathing and vocalizing, and the changing affective intensities inside the body are at the center of somaesthetic vocal experience.

In spite of all this, it should be remembered that not all of us feel comfortable using their voices, let alone enjoy it. Not all of us find vocalizing natural or necessary for them. There are people who cannot vocalize due to physical or mental conditions. There are also people who would like to use their voices but who find it difficult due to the undesirable characteristics of their voices and the common attitudes on how the voice should sound like. This last group is the one I am particularly interested in, as many of us have had some kind of difficulties to adjust their voices to the social demands and aesthetic ideals of our culture.

As vocally cultivated adults we usually monitor our voices and vocal expressions at some extent. Our vocalizations are rarely sheer outbursts of bodily impulses. Klaus R. Scherer (1994), professor of psychology, has introduced the theory of push and pull effects – the raw emotional vocalizations and the restraining effect of culture on them. Even though this kind of dichotomy may be too simplistic, it can still work as a starting point in the examination of how we culturally control our voices and how our vocal expressions come into being at the intersection of body and culture.

John Dewey (1934/2005, 65) points out that it is, indeed, the blending of the natural and the cultivated that turns the social intercourse to the works of art. He differentiates the "acts of expression" from the "mere acts of discharge". According to him, excitement is elemental for expression, but there is more to expression:

"Yet an inner agitation that is discharged at once in a laugh or cry, passes away with its utterance. To discharge is to get rid of, to dismiss; to express is to stay by, to carry forward in

development, to work out to completion. A gush of tears may bring relief, a spasm of destruction may give outlet to inward rage. But where there is no administration of objective conditions, no shaping of materials in the interest of embodying the excitement, there is no expression." (Ibid., 64)

Dewey writes about the original native tendencies of the body. The tendency of the vocal apparatus to make sounds is one of them. These tendencies don't require practicing or perfecting. Instead, they are the spontaneous ways in which the organism responds to the changes in its environment as well as makes changes itself. These tendencies are in line with the needs of the organism. For example, we impulsively withdraw our hand from the hot object in order not to burn our hand. There is no intellectual consideration needed in this act. (Ibid., 63.)

As much as we would like to control our bodily impulses and the sounds ejecting from our bodies, there will always be sounds and vocalizations that are left outside the realm of organization. There are, for example, moments of surprise and slackening when the body may release noises that are beyond our direct control. Someone spooks me in the dark and I find myself making a sharp shriek before I even notice. Or eating a delicious meal I may find myself making "mmm"-sound almost unconsciously. The sounds of grunting, groaning, giggling, screaming, crying, hiccupping, and coughing seem to be produced *by* the body rather than being produced *with* the body. They are manifestations of the "native tendencies" of our bodies.

Singing, in spite of being highly structured and skill-bound activity, still contains elements of surprise that are out of one's reach. One may have physiological difficulties with her vocal organs and therefore her voice may act unexpectedly. The voice may, for example, break down or change its pitch abruptly. But it is not only in the vocal difficulties that the body may lead the singing. It is in the best flow experiences of singing, indeed, that the voice feels to be produced by the body

itself, without constant control and manipulation of the vocal organs. It may be surprising, how easily the sound issues from the body in the experiences like this. In singing, the movements of diaphragm, intercostal muscles, vocal cords, tongue, oral cavity, and so on are the objects of cultivation, practicing, and control. But skillful singing is not only about the bodily control. It is also about letting go of the control.

When sensing singing in a somaesthetic manner — with the body consciousness — it feels that the divide to “natural” and “cultural” is faded out. It is hard to say, what aspects of the singing are based on the natural tendencies of the body and what are based on the learned movements of the vocal apparatus. The bodily impulses and the habitual body movements learned through countless repetitions melt into one in the experience. This is not always the case in singing. The body/mind-divide we are accustomed to in our culture, creates experiences, where the body appears to be an instrument that is controlled by the mind. Here the divide to “natural” and “cultural” may appear quite dominant in one’s experience.

It is not only in the somaesthetic experiences but also in the somaesthetic theory that the culture and body are fundamentally intertwined. Richard Shusterman (2012, 4, 27, 31) has pointed out that culture does not only shape our bodily appearance and behaviour but the ways we experience our bodies as well. The embodied actions, in turn, keep the culture animated and alive.

When we say that some action is “cultivated” or “organized”, it does not mean that there are no impulsive bodily dimensions at play — likewise, when we say that some action is “bodily” or “natural” does not mean that it lacks organization. The philosopher David Michael Levin (Kleinberg-Levin) (1989, 98–100) has argued that the lived body has needs and potentials it strives to fulfill and organize outside the domain of language and representational thinking. Levin argues that body “in itself” is not a body of primitive drives, that is totally disorganized, chaotic and without structures and meaning. He writes:

“The tired body-self orders sleep: that is to say, it structures, needs, demands, and organizes itself for, the coming of sleep. Similarly, the hungry body-self orders food [...] These are examples of very basic, organismically organized structures, needs, and demands. But the [...] a body-self, has [...] many other kinds of needs, and many needs whose realization, recognition, or satisfaction directly bear on social and political policy.” (Ibid., 100)

I argue here, that body has a potential and need to express its affects, feelings, and sensations vocally – as well as to enjoy the proprioceptive and interoceptive experience of vocalizing.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Vocal norms

As human beings we have a great vocal potential as we are capable of producing a huge variety of different vocal sounds. Why is it then that we use only a small part of this potential in our everyday lives? Why is our everyday vocality so restricted? The complex rules of speaking (language) and singing (music) may easily overrule the bodily-vocal needs. Konstantinos Thomaidis and Ben Macpherson (2015), researchers of the voice studies, have argued that the “tyrannies of understanding” dominate the human voice in our culture by restraining the voice to the fields of language and music.

In order to be communicative and stable, language has to have certain rules. Musical styles have also the rules of their own, so that they can remain comparatively unstable. Douglas Dempster (1998 in Mithen 2005, 20-21), a philosopher of music, portray those rules as “enormous aesthetic pressures”. I think that these pressures of language and music have a significant impact on the singer’s body. For example, the clear articulation requires controlled and highly-skilled movements of tongue, lips, jaw, and other muscles of mouth and face. For some bodies, the execution of these rules comes easily, while others have major difficulties

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<sup>2</sup> With the proprioceptive and interoceptive senses one can feel the inner sensations of the body.

executing them. Some bodies are not able to fulfill these demands at all — and are usually expected to remain silent.

The singer's role in the western music is to follow the orders of a composer, to reproduce the song in an intended way. Singer is there to produce certain kinds of vocal sounds in certain order. She is there for the sake of sound — not vice versa. Nina Sun Eidsheim (2015, 698), a researcher of singing, has criticized this tradition. She argues that in this tradition singer's task is to replicate the ideal sound, and therefore she is forced to mould her body according to those sounds.

Could it be, however, that songs have originally evolved from the need to enjoy one's own voice and elevate one's feelings with voice? Could it be that song as an aesthetic object originally arose from the repetitions of the most pleasurable movements of the muscles of the vocal apparatus? If the song-form is originally rooted in the rhythms and movements of the body, it seems quite peculiar, that singer should perform a song correctly no matter how much struggle and pain it may cause to her. And if songs are made for bodies to enjoy, why is it that the bodies incapable of reproducing songs in a correct manner are told they are better when quiet?

Helen Phelan (2017, 63), a researcher of ritual singing, has articulated that we should consider changing our focus from the song to the singer. This way we could move from the inspection of the repertoire to the potentials of human body. Phelan writes: "[...] we might ask what kind of singing suits a child's voice? An elderly person's voice? What kind of singing is good for our bodies?" (Ibid.)

In Dewey's aesthetics, the elements of form are rooted in the rhythms of nature and body (Dewey 1934/2005, 153, see also Shusterman 2000, 7). Dewey seems to emphasize, however, the rhythms of the environment (nature) and doing (work) over the rhythms of the body itself. He reminds that focusing solely to the rhythms of the living body when explaining the interest in rhythm in arts is to separate the organism from its

environment. The blood circulation, movements of breathing, or movements of the legs and arms cannot be the only explanations to why we enjoy different rhythms in the arts. Dewey (1934/2005, 156-157) points out, that human being was connected to her environment long before she gave any thought or interest to her own mental states.

It may well be that modern human is more aware of her bodily and mental states than ever before. Therefore this is a perfect time to reconsider the aesthetic experience from the bodily point of view as well. Dewey alerts us not to separate the organism from its environment, but we shouldn't separate the environment from the organism either. From the somaesthetic point of view, isn't it that the rhythms of the environment and work are also the rhythms of the body, and they have an impact to our mental states as well?

When I sing, there are usually some rhythms in my environment to which I adjust my singing. They may be, for example, the rhythms of instruments, other singers, or the acoustic properties of a room. They affect the rhythms of my body, like the breathing cycle, or the speed of my articulatory movements. Therefore the rhythms of my environment become the rhythms of my body to the greatest extent. In addition, I understand these rhythms with my body. Something is "too fast" when it is hard for my articulation to keep up with it, or it is too slow when I cannot, for example, prolong my breathing according to it.

Bodily experience may well not be the only explanation to why our songs and vocal behaviour have developed the way they have, but I think it could be an important one. Maybe the roots of singing are more connected to the inhabitation of the environment and on communicating with others than they are to the sensations of the singers' bodies. But somehow I believe that the experiences of pleasure and ease — as well as the joy of conquering the bodily-vocal challenges — have guided the ways we use our voices. I think it would be justified to argue that our vocal behaviour have formed,

at least partly, according to what feels suitable and pleasurable for the human body.

Shusterman (2008, 26, 80) has articulated that different bodily techniques and manners in our culture are based on different somaesthetics. There are representational, performative, and experiential somaesthetics to be found in the bodily practices of our culture, like sports, yoga, dancing, and singing. The representational somaesthetics refers to the techniques and manners that concentrate on the body's external appearance. The performative somaesthetics is focused on building bodily power and performance, as well as developing skills. The experiential somaesthetics is focused on the somatic experience itself. (Ibid.)

The somaesthetics of representation dominates our culture. In the social sciences it has been argued, likewise, that we are living in a culture of appearances (Liimakka 2013). The culture of appearances affects our vocal behaviour as well. We have adopted performance- and appearance-oriented attitudes. We reach for the vocal ideals established by pedagogies and vocal role models (singers, actors, and so on). The main focus is often on producing a "good", "beautiful", and "clear" voice that can tolerate long-term strain. We have a tendency to focus on vocal sounds as heard – consequently, the bodily experience and the pleasure of vocalizing as such are far too often disregarded. This kind of sound-centered approach is characteristic to the western music traditions (cf Eiseheim 2015, McKerrell 2012).

Vocal norms do not only stand for the articulate communication and aesthetically pleasing sounds. They also embody the broader cultural conceptions of health and normality. When using voice, we do not only communicate the conceptual meanings and musical forms – we also communicate the state of our bodies. Medicalization of voice differentiates the "healthy" and "hygienic" voices from the "disordered" ones. The definitions of organization and disorganization of the voice are vehicles of power relations as well.

As a vocal pedagogue myself, I don't intend to diminish the benefits that the vocal pedagogies and therapies offer us. Instead, I want to raise some thoughts on the fact that the objectives of these trades are not only determined from the wellbeing of the body, but there are also implicit cultural power relations that are reflected to these practices – for example, the need to control and organize the body in certain ways, and emphasize the normalcy of the body.

What we hear in our everyday lives, are mainly normative voices – voices that we are used to hear, voices that stand for health and normality, voices that carry the communicative messages and aesthetic contents in an efficient way. Luckily, the vocal norms are not set in stone. They change in our cultural and bodily practices all the time. The ways we vocally inhabit our world – what kind of vocal sounds we make in our daily lives – is not insignificant. With our vocal utterances we can maintain, challenge, or even change the vocal norms of our culture. With the nonnormative vocal sounds we can keep our vocal culture "animated and alive".

Speaking with a creaky voice was not a norm until recently, when it has become fashionable among young women (Yuasa 2010). These voices irritated many of us at the beginning, but now we seem to be more or less adapted to them. The thing in getting used to hear only certain kind of voices is that we easily cringe when we hear voices that don't fit the norms. From these bodily sensations of abrupt unexpectedness it is easy to fall into judgmental attitudes towards their cause.

The journalist Charlie Swinbourne writes in his Guardian-magazine article about deaf voices in our culture. According to him, the hearing people rarely hear deaf voices in their everyday lives, and therefore those voices feel alien to them. This "alienness" does not mean that the deaf voices were somehow less natural – they are just as natural as the voices of the hearing. Swinbourne himself is used to deaf voices since his mother is deaf – therefore the fact that other hearing find these voices alien seems quite odd from his perspective.

In the Deaf culture, vocality is a two-sided question. On the one hand, for many Deaf the Sign Language is the native language, and there is no need for vocality. On the other hand, in order to use their voices, Deaf are expected to adjust to the vocal norms of the hearing culture. The hearing aids are strongly imposed in order to make their listening more auditive, and speech therapy is provided in order to mould their voices to meet the communicative demands of the hearing culture.

I was quite shocked when one of the informants of my ongoing research, a Deaf woman, told me how the deaf are forbid to use their voices. From the early stages of their lives, all the vocal and bodily sounds are restrained. When I first met her, she told me that “she never uses her voice”. Later on she recalled a memory from 10 years ago, when she attended a drama class where everyone were supposed to shout out loud. She found it extremely hard, almost impossible to do.

The cultural and social norms are inscribed deep into our bodies. In many nonnormative vocal situations the mere willpower is not enough to get over the fear and anxiety that these situations may cause. Shusterman (2012, 32) gives an example of a secretary who tries to raise her voice to her superior, and she ends up crying. As we can see, the cultivation of the voice — as necessary as it is — has its challenges. I think there should be more open discussion on the vocal norms and how they affect our bodily-vocal wellbeing, as well as the freedom to express ourselves.

### 3. Listening

In many of the YouTube comments on the deaf girl’s singing, there were evaluations made whether she is a “good” or a “bad” singer. People seemed to be so hasty making this judgement that they probably missed the singer’s performance more or less entirely. Some of the people were plain furious, because the performance did not meet their conceptions of singing at all.

Normative listening strives to evaluate and categorize first, and only after that it aims to understand another human being on a deeper level. In this kind of listening the will to understand evolves only if the vocal performance has fulfilled the criteria of “normal voice” or “good singing”. With normative listening, we try to evaluate whether the singer is worth listening to. Most of us are not willing to make the effort to listen to a person who cannot deliver the singing in a “proper” way.

In the disability studies it has been brought forth that people tend to look at or stare at the people with disabilities in certain ways. These modes of staring consist of pity, amazement, horror, and awe. (Howe et al. 2016, 7, see also Garland-Thomson 2009) I think these modes could be applicable to listening as well. These kinds of attitudes of listening can be found in the YouTube comments of my research material. Here are some examples:

Pity: “she would be really good if she wasn't deaf I can hear it. I feel bad”

Amazement: “How did you learn how to sing to tune?? O: This is absolutely amazing. And no people, even though she doesn't sing like Adele doesn't mean it isn't amazing how she can carry a tune and know how it goes. That is remarkable....”

Horror: “MY LUNGS ITS LITERALLY SO HORRIBLE”

Awe: “She's an inspiration. I admire her she [is] great[.]”

(YouTube comments of the listeners)

Dewey (1934/2005, 54-55) differentiates perception from recognition. He writes: “The difference between the two is immense. Recognition is perception arrested before it has a change to develop freely.” (Ibid. 54) In recognition, we use stereotypes, previously formed schemes, and bare identification. It cannot “arouse vivid consciousness”. In perception, instead, “consciousness becomes fresh and alive”. (Ibid. 54-55)

People may look at, recognize, and name the works of art, but if they don’t continuously interact with the objects, they cannot perceive them aesthetically. In other words, listener has to create her own experience, recreate the object in her own experience. Dewey makes



a good statement here: “The one who is too lazy, idle, or indurated in convention to perform this work will not see or hear.” He continues that even if there were admiration in this kind of act, it would be bound by the norms of conventionality. (Ibid. 56)

It seems to me that many of the YouTube comments are conventional by their nature. It feels like the phrases of “amazing”, “wonderful”, or “awful” was repeated almost mechanically. There are no signs of continuous interaction with the singer’s performance, or any nuanced aesthetic appreciation.

Maybe the listeners felt disappointed, even angry, that they were not able to get an aesthetic experience out of what they were listening to. Here we can ask, however: should they be disappointed for the singer, who was not able to offer them the proper elements for the experience or should they be disappointed for themselves, as they were not able to recreate the aesthetic experience out of the elements offered to them?

Shusterman (Shusterman 2000, 16-17) has pointed out that Dewey’s argument against classificatory distinctions is valuable, as it shows us how those classifications affect our thinking and perception. They become fixed, standardized, and limited thus diminishing the richness and creativity of our experiences. Dewey (1934/2005, 235) writes: “There are obstructions enough in any case in the way of genuine expression. The rules that attend classification add one more handicap.”

In the context of this article, the Dewey’s choice of word “handicap” is quite apt, as I am trying to articulate that the normative listening itself can be considered as being “disabled” in its own way. If the normative listening is something that prevents us from hearing another human being — I mean really to hear her — then this kind of listening can be considered as being “limited” or “disabled”.

In our interaction with other people, instead of labelling the other being “disabled”, “inept”, or “bad”, should we, instead, try to consider our own limitations first? What are the things in me that prevent me from

hearing and understanding that other person? And could I get over them?

Levin (1989) has written about *hearkening* or preconceptual listening. It is a listening without preoccupations, normalizations, or an instrumental, or manipulative relationship to things. It is a listening that involves the whole body, “listening attuned through feeling”. (Ibid. 21-22, 25, 48) When we give up the need to understand another person on the conceptual level, we can find a deeper understanding. Just like in the YouTube comment earlier, where the listener had understood the singer’s expression by listening it “with an open heart”.

Phelan (2017, 9) has articulated that communication and belonging in singing is not necessarily happening on the cognitive or rational level. She writes: “The communicative power of singing is strongest at a physiological and emotive level. The ability to communicate beneath cognitive and rational structures is proposed as one of the key ways in which song facilitates belonging.” (Ibid) From this point of view, listening to singing through the judgmental and rational categorizations not only seems to ignore another human being, but is also an inadequate way of listening to singing from the point of view of communication and belonging.

McKerrell (2012, 88) reminds us that in the field of ethnomusicology, the bodily and holistic ways of approaching musical sounds go far back in the history. He writes that “a pragmatic somaesthetic approach to musical aesthetics is a good starting point for understanding the rich meanings constructed in hearing music.” (Ibid) He states that understanding musical sounds is not referential but proprioceptive. Sounds embody the somatically understood aesthetic categories of a culture. This way the sounds can create bonds between the listeners and the performers — and these bonds go beyond the sonic. McKerrell points out that in this kind of approach the body’s focus is turned from the meanings and power relations to the perception of the other. (Ibid) The somaesthetic approach in listening can really lead us to encounter others.

#### 4. Belonging

As human beings, it is important for us to become heard, understood, and accepted the way we are. Our vocality is deeply connected with our basic need for communion. It is an essential part of belonging to the humankind. It is not only important for us to experience our emotions, but also to show them to others with our bodies and vocal expressions (Frank 1988 in Mithen 2005, 88).

The aesthetic experiences help us to maintain the aliveness and fullness of our lives. It makes the life more meaningful and tolerable. (Dewey 1934/2005, 138, 199; Shusterman 2000, 10) Being so, doesn't it seem only fair that all of us had the opportunity to express ourselves in an aesthetic manner? It should not be a privilege of only a certain kind of bodies.

Shusterman (2000, 10) has pointed out, that the aesthetic experiences are not only limited to the aesthetic acts themselves, but they also have an impact to the life more extensively. He writes about the work-songs: "The work-song sung in the harvest fields not only provides the harvesters with a satisfying aesthetic experience, but its zest carries over into their work, invigorating and enhancing it and instilling a spirit of solidarity that lingers long after the song and work are finished." (Ibid)

In our culture, however, there are no work-singing anymore. The singing, like other tasks in our lives as well, are quite differentiated from each other — we have separate times for working and singing. It is also characteristic for our culture, that our bodies are specialized to conduct only certain actions. While most of us don't sing in our everyday lives, we do have the professional singers who sing "for us" — sometimes to the point that they wear out their vocal organs and lose their voices. At the same time many of us work long hours behind the office desks and ruin our backs with all the sitting.

The specializing of the bodies makes our lives more repetitive and monotonous, and narrows our experiences as well. We can ask, is this really the price

we want to pay in order to get the most highly skilled bodies to perform the tasks for us that we feel not competent enough to do ourselves? Why do we separate the singing bodies (singers) from the listening bodies (audiences) in our culture? This obviously has something to do with the market economy: there have to be producers as well as consumers. Songs and singing voices have become commodities. No record company would make any profit, if everyone would just sing for each other in their everyday lives, fulfilling their vocal-aesthetic needs by singing, not by buying records.

The somaesthetics criticizes the bodily practices that fragment, measure, alienate, commodify, and reduce the body to an object or instrument. It resists the normative standards of beauty. Instead, it understands "the body's subject-role as the living locus of beautiful, personal experience". (Shusterman 2000, 274) From this point of view, vocal somaesthetics<sup>3</sup> should resist the vocal ideologies and practices that, for example, commodify singing, instrumentalize the body, and seek to maintain the conventional norms of beauty of the singing voice. Instead, it emphasizes the value of diverse voices as well as the value of body as the locus of diverse vocal experiences.

It is often heard that people who "cannot sing" are advised "to sing only in the shower", by themselves. One may ask, why everyone should be allowed to sing in public, is it not enough to enjoy one's own voice in privacy? Phelan's accounts on *belonging* should answer this question.

Phelan (2017) approaches singing as cultural and ritual activity. She writes a "theory of sung belonging" that includes resonance, somatics, performance, temporality, and tacitness as the key elements that connect us to each other when we sing. Through performance, human voice does not only have a special

<sup>3</sup> Vocal somaesthetics is an approach I have been developing lately on the basis on somaesthetics, ethnomusicology, and voice studies. It is focused on the somaesthetics of our vocal behaviour: vocalizing and listening to other peoples' vocalizations. (Tarvainen 2016; 2018, upcoming)



relationship to physiological body but also to social body. All kind of sonic communication is more or less performative, but in singing this performativity is at the heart of it. This creates shared experiences as well as a sense of togetherness and belonging. (Ibid. 9)

Phelan makes an excellent point when stating that body is not only a passive representor of the cultural values. Instead, it is active agent in generating them. One of the values that body can produce with its vocality and kinesthesia is the value of belonging. (Ibid. 79) These arguments support the fact that with different voices and diverse public vocal performances we can, in fact, have an impact on the vocal norms of our culture.

Phelan (2017, 14) points out that there are different kinds of belongings that can be created through singing. Some of them are based on hatred, elitism, and exclusion. Others are based on openness, inclusivity, and belonging. Needless to say, that the latter ones further the democracy in singing, while the former ones may well prevent it from happening.

In Dewey's thinking, there is also an emphasis on the social dimension of the aesthetic experiences. Heightened experiences are memorable usually because they are shared. (Shusterman 2000, 28) There is a strong emphasis on togetherness in Dewey's conception of democracy as well. He sees democracy, not only as a form of government, but most of all a way of living together and communicate experience. It is to share the interests and to take into account other people's actions in one's own actions. It is a way of communication that breaks the barriers of race, class, and national territories. (Dewey 1916/1997, 87)

It is a common conception that the YouTube and other channels of social media advance democracy in our culture. They do, indeed, make it possible for a huge number of people to share their performances and opinions in public. But do they solely enhance democracy between individuals?

When I think about the video on the YouTube, the deaf girl's performance itself really questions the vocal norms of our culture and therefore creates new

experiences that can, for their part, revise the vocal values of our culture. Thanks to this performance, 600 000 people, who otherwise may not have heard deaf singing, heard it. Some of the listeners may have even learned to listen to a deaf voice in an appreciative manner. In the comments there were, however, a lot of undemocratizing elements as well. Some of the comments replicated the modes of watching and listening that are common when people encounter disabilities. And of course, the plain hatred expressed in some of the comments tells us a lot about how much there is still to be done before people can communicate in a democratic way.

Dewey (1939/1998, 341) emphasizes that democracy is not an external ideology or a given way of thinking. It is a way of life, and the responsibility of democracy is on the individuals. Our attitudes towards other people in our everyday lives define how well the democracy comes true. Getting over our prejudices is a key factor here. (Ibid) It is also a crucial part of democracy that every one of us has a change to develop in their skills.

According to Dewey, intolerance, suspicion, abuse, fear, hatred, and calling of names because of differences destroy the democratic way of life even more effectively than open coercion and totalitarianism. (Ibid. 342) This kind of behaviour sets up communication barriers and divides us from each other. For Dewey "the task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and to which all contribute." (Ibid.,343)

## **5. Encountering different bodies**

In the disability studies, Tobin Siebers (2010) has discussed the body's essential role in the aesthetic experience. He refers to the thinking of Alexander Baumgarten when he writes: "Aesthetics tracks the sensations that some bodies feel in the presence of other bodies" (Ibid. 1). Human body's affective relation to other bodies — the ability to transform emotions, and the ability to express human vitality — is at the center

here. Siebers reminds us that not all bodies are alike or equal in respect to aesthetic experiences. Some bodies may feel more pleasing to us than others. He writes: "Taste and disgust are volatile reactions that reveal the ease or disease with which one body might incorporate another." (Ibid) According to him, the bodily reactions create the basis for the aesthetic effects — for example, what can be felt as beautiful and what cannot. (Ibid)

Shusterman (2012, 29) has pointed out that bodies unite us, we all have a human body that ties us to the human kind. At the same time, bodies divide us through their physical differences and according to how those differences are socio-culturally interpreted. We are divided, for instance, into different genders, races, and ethnicities. (Ibid)

Shusterman (2012, 29-30) argues that the prejudices we have towards others are rooted deep into our somatic experience. He writes: "Most ethnic and racial hostility is the product not of rational thought but of deep prejudices that are somatically marked in terms of vague uncomfortable feelings aroused by alien bodies, feelings that are experienced implicitly and thus engrained beneath the level of explicit consciousness." (Ibid) (Shusterman 2012, 29-30) This is why the arguments for tolerance made in the rational level do not usually have an impact. In addition, we are often in denial, what comes to recognizing and admitting these kinds of feelings. This "deep visceral quality" of intolerance is also connected to the concepts of integrity and purity of the body in a given culture. (Shusterman 2008, 127-128; 2012, 30; 2014, 9-10) (Shusterman 2012, 30; Shusterman 2014, 9-10; Shusterman 2008, 127-128.)

Siebers (2010, 2) has articulated that the feelings of pleasure and disgust are intertwined with the political feelings of acceptance and rejection. Therefore, I think that it is not indifferent what kind of bodily attitudes of watching and listening we maintain in our lives. The bodily attitudes and reactions have an influence on how tolerant our culture is in its essence.

Shusterman (2012, 29) suggests that the prejudices could be overcome by developing the somatic

awareness. By becoming aware of our uncomfortable bodily feelings towards other bodies it could be possible to free one-self from those feelings. (Ibid) Shusterman (2014, 10) argues that these feelings are not innate. They are the products of learning and habit, and therefore they also can be reformed by learning.

The ideals of purity and uniformity of the body are often behind these judgmental feelings and reactions. By facing the impurity and mixed nature of one's own body it will be possible to overcome the confused feelings towards other bodies. (Shusterman 2008, 131-132; see also Dobrowolski 2014, 129-131). Maybe facing the disabilities and imperfections in other people may help us to face and accept them in ourselves as well — after all, we all have unique bodies that are never completely "perfect" or "pure". Our bodies are always vulnerable, prone to sickness and injuries.

Robin Dobrowolski, is on the same page with Shusterman here. He writes about encountering the Other from the somaesthetic point of view. He deliberates the bodily challenges at the encounters between different bodies — and how the somaesthetics could answer to these challenges.

Dobrowolski (2014, 129) argues that it is not enough to understand the Other at the level of language. It may even require concrete touching to develop aesthetic sympathy towards the Other. He writes: "The meaning of declarations, even those made in good faith, may take very long to really sink in and nestle in our innards, or may even fail to do so at all. Empty words always miss physical fulfillment." (Ibid)

When we communicate through our voices, it is usually not the words that disturb us, but rather "the unique, sensual, material way in which they are uttered." (Ibid.) (Dobrowolski 2014, 129) The comments on the YouTube video that I have discussed here, is a great example of this. It is not the song or the lyrics that were attacked to, but the unique way they were vocalized.

Siebers (2010) has developed a concept of *disability aesthetics*. He argues that disabled bodies and minds

have had an important role in the modern aesthetics, and this is what he wants to highlight. The influence of disability to modern art has been so obvious that it has stayed almost unnoticed. Disability aesthetics does not only deal with disabled artists or certain themes in art, in addition, it is more extensive view on the aesthetic values of art. Siebers writes: “Disability aesthetics refuses to recognize the representation of the healthy body — and its definition of harmony, integrity, and beauty — as the sole determination of the aesthetic. Rather, disability aesthetics embraces beauty that seems by traditional standards to be broken, and yet it is not less beautiful, but more so, as a result.” (Ibid. 2-3) (Siebers 2010, 2-3.)

Human variation and differences are at the core of the disability aesthetics. This kind of aesthetics broadens our view of art as well as humanity. (Ibid. 3) (Siebers 2010, 3) It questions our traditional aesthetic values and presuppositions. It is a critical way of exploring how “some bodies make other bodies feel.” (Ibid. 20) (Siebers, 2010, 20) In the disability aesthetics the diversity and variety of bodies is seen as an asset.

Dewey (1916/1997, 87) has pointed out that participating in activities with different people makes these encounters more varied. There is “a greater diversity of stimuli to which an individual has to respond” and this makes our own actions more varied as well. (Ibid) In other words, encountering different bodies adds variety to our lives and therefore enriches our being.

Surbaugh (2009, 421) has brought out the concern, that lack of varied stimulations from the environment may be a real somatic thread to the people with disabilities. I think this thread is undeniably acute to the people with disabilities, especially if they are excluded from the aesthetic practices of our culture. But I think this is also a thread to all of us, if our daily encounters happen only with the familiar normative bodies and normative actions. This may actually monotonize the movements and vocal sounds of our bodies — and the whole way we are in the contact with our environment

and with other people. When our communication is one-sidedly concentrated on the conceptual contents and correct forms of our utterances we may lose the vitality, empathy and the ability of being present in our encounters.

For Dewey (1934/2005, 26), aesthetic experiences are something that enriches and broadens our lives. I think we all need aesthetic experiences that are not highly controlled, repetitive, mechanical, technical, similar, orthodox, or “good” in a traditional sense. Encountering different kinds of bodies and varied bodily expressions in the aesthetic realm is probably one of the best ways to expand our experience — to learn to watch and listen with open eyes and ears without conventional categorizations and judgements.

The aesthetic potential of the body and voice is culturally constructed on the basis of spontaneously learned bodily reactions as well as more conscious somaesthetic cultivation. What kind of bodies and voices can be understood as being aesthetic is based on cultural values carved deep in the reactions and manners of our bodies.

## **6. Skill**

Shusterman (2012, 32) writes that the concepts of freedom and unfreedom are essentially linked to the body. Our ability or inability to move our bodies the way we want to, is the basis for the more abstract understandings of freedom and unfreedom. In this light, learning new bodily skills may be seen as an attempt to gain more freedom — more possibilities to move the way we want to. Shusterman reminds us, however, that body also constraints us — it fails and limits our actions. (Ibid.)

Bodily skills are a medium of power. Body is shaped by power, and with the body we maintain power. Norms of health, beauty, and skill reflect the social forces. (Shusterman 2000, 272) These norms are put into practice in our bodies — in the movements and vocal utterances we make. To use one’s body skillfully is to

gain power. Therefore it is important to use one's voice skillfully, because with skillful vocalizing we get more positive attention, and people are more willing to listen to us.

Some of us gain power and admiration by perfecting one individual skill to its extreme. Some of us develop their own personal and more varied skillsets. For most of us, learning a new skill is to enrich one's life and gain more feelings of freedom in our actions. Therefore, I want to emphasize that I am not against developing new skills per se. Instead, I would like us to re-evaluate the concept of skill. When skill becomes something that differentiates, judges, and excludes, we should check our conceptions.

Surbaugh (2009, 417) illuminates, how learning is linked with pleasure. According to him, pleasure is as important in learning as is the effort. The surrounding world is more open to us when our actions are enjoyable and our senses are receptive. He points out, that people with disabilities face more often obstacles of pleasure in their environments, and this appears to be a significant educational question.

In my opinion, one of the major obstacles for one's pleasure is the exclusion from the aesthetic realm of one's culture. If one is not allowed to participate in the aesthetic expressions of her culture, she will miss a lot. The essential question to ask here is: what kind of obstacles we have in our culture that prevents some of the people from enjoying the aesthetic pleasure of their own voices?

Among the other YouTube comments, there is a comment from the deaf singer herself. I want to share it here, as the ideal of skill — ability and inability — is so central in her writing:

"To many of you who discriminated me as a person who could not sing or my speech or my disabilities. Yes, it is very harsh when people discriminate someone's abilities. Yes, I am deaf but it does not mean that I thought that was a "Good Singer" then. I was expressing the words and facing the reality that people would judge. Deaf just define me who I am. I love and listen to

music all my life knowing that people will not accept who I am and always correcting my words. [...] Please choose your words wisely. People who have tough life or struggle with their any kind of disabilities are not always open and express their feelings because we all feel in denial. During that time I was going through hard time and getting out of my comfort zone. I was doing it for myself. [...] I am very proud of myself that I put it out for the world to see that I am nowhere near perfect. If I had a stutter speech I would have sing anyways. To the people who generously support me with positive statements, I want to say thank you so much. You gave the light in my heart. So many goose bumps from head to toe. I am so touched. Please don't Judge others. Encourage them to make their lives better. <3" (YouTube comment of the singer)

She phrases it well, when she writes about the hardship that people with disabilities meet when trying to express their feelings. The judgmental attitudes and exclusion are, indeed, the kind of obstacles that are on the way of the aesthetic enjoyment of disabled. The aesthetic pressures and rigid vocal norms may well be an obstacle for one to enjoy her own voice aesthetically and share her voicings with others.

The old myth of creativity as a feature of an individual genius is still quite common. Inspiration, autonomy and technique are at the core of this myth. (Siebers 2010, 19) An individual, in order to be worth of our aesthetic attention, should possess notable skills — or at least she should be somehow "extraordinary".

In the popular music singing, the ideal bodies offering the aesthetic experiences for us should be young, thin, beautiful, and talented — and preferably they should possess something unique in their voice. If some of these attributes are lacking in a high profile singer, it will not stay unnoticed. For example, just look at all the column space that Adele's body (weight) and her vocal problems ("lack of technique") have received.

If the aesthetically performing body is disabled, it should have somehow got over the disability thus reclaiming his/her value. A good example of this is the America's Got Talent -singer Mandy Harvey, whose deafness is not hearable in her voice by any means. It is no doubt admirable, how she has recovered her voice

after losing her hearing. She has really deserved all the success and recognition she is enjoying now. From the point of view of a hearing, there is nothing wrong with this kind of success story. From the point of view of a deaf, the state of affairs may be different.

Ocean, a Deaf American blogger, has written about the mixed feelings that Harvey's success has raised in her. On the one hand, she is genuinely happy for her, on the other hand, she wonders, if this is the only way for a deaf person to succeed — to overcome her deafness and fulfill the expectations of the hearing world. She writes:

“Actually, that becomes the question – just what kind of message does this story send out?

“Deaf is okay, but being hearing is better” ???

That if you have a hearing loss – whether mild or profound, you should make every effort to “normalize” yourself to the extent possible: to speak, to lipread...

...to sing?

That the more you are able to “overcome your disability” and do these extraordinary things that one wouldn't normally expect from an individual with a hearing loss, the more successful you will be? The more you will be applauded?

I have a problem with that.”

(Ocean 2017, blog post<sup>4</sup>)

When we think of a body, we usually think of a normative and abled body. Bowman et al. (2007, 13-14) remind us that bodies are, however, always specific and situated. Bodies differ from each other, for example, in their genders, races, and ages. Bodies are also variously abled. (Ibid.)

There is also not only one kind of deaf body, but as many kinds as there are deaf people. There are varied states of deafness from stone deaf to partially deaf. There are also different ways that the deaf relate to using one's voice: one feel no need to vocalize at all and other, instead, wants to speak and sing. There is also not only one kind of “deaf voice” just like there is not only one kind of “hearing voice”.

The philosopher Adriana Cavarero (2005, 11) has stated, that in the history of philosophy the voice has been understood as the “voice of everyone” — as an ideal voice which ends up being the “voice of no one”. Voices, like bodies, are always specific. If we write about voice without seeing the diversities and the connections of voice with the body and the power relations of our culture, we may end up writing something that is irrelevant or even incorrect in the case of the real life voices.

Vocal skills are usually defined from the point of view of a “normal” voice and body. The proper technical skill in singing is something that comes naturally enough for the normal body, but at the same time requires certain trained features, so that the body could be said to be a singer's body in difference from the non-singers.

But as our bodies are different in their physical and habitual features, how can we ever define skill as being something similar for all the bodies? And as our bodies are variously abled, how can we judge the skills of another body without knowing how much work those skills have required from that specific body?

Can I ever, as this kind of body, entirely understand another person's bodily experience and her skills? What does a singing skill mean, for example, for a deaf singer? Should I judge her skill by comparing the vocal sounds she makes to the vocal sounds the hearing bodies make? Or should I, instead, appreciate her performance as a skillful and emotionally expressive vocalization of her unique body at this given moment?

## **7. Aesthetic experience of singing and listening**

Dewey (1934/2005, 45-52, 53-58) underlines that in aesthetic experience the balance between doing and undergoing is essential. In singing, just like in any other aesthetic activity, the connection between doing (producing vocal sounds) and undergoing (the awareness of one's own body and voice) is important. Different pitches and timbres not only sound different, but they also feel different in the body. The bodily sensations vary

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<sup>4</sup> <https://deafpagancrossroads.com/2017/06/08/mandy-harvey-tried-and-succeeded-and-yet/> (posted 8.6.2017, viewed 29.10.2017)

when producing different sounds, and learning to recognize this connection is important in singing.

When we think about the singer's aesthetic experience, it is not only the auditive aspects of her performance that counts, the proprioceptive and interoceptive sensations are essential as well. Phelan (2017, 9) has articulated that to act as an agent of belonging through singing requires relationship between sound and body, as well as between "involuntary motor-sensory activity and conscious, cognitive manipulation".

Almost every singer has had to face the fact that the inner experience of one's own voice and the voice as heard from the outside may differ from each other significantly. The voice may sound different what the singer intended, or the singer may find that the feelings he/she went through while singing have not been transmitted to the voice. This is most obviously when one hears her own voice on recording.

No matter how hard we try to control our voices, there is always some kind of gap between the inner and the outer. We can never perceive ourselves the way others perceive us. In deaf singing this fact is even more prominent. Without any auditive feedback of one's own voice, one has to rely more on the inner body sensations of singing.

I want to ask, is this some kind of thread in our culture of appearances? As our culture prefers the external impressions, the fact that one can never entirely control those impressions may be frustrating. Listening to a deaf voice may be a painful reminder for this. It may also remind us of our fear of being left alone in our own inner world with no contact to others. I think this is probably how hearing people perceive deafness, even if this is probably quite far from the experiences of the deaf.

What kind of experiences of singing and listening are considered as aesthetic may vary from culture to another. Vocal norms not only determine how we should use our voices, but also what kind of vocal experiences we should have.

In Dewey's aesthetics, the aesthetic experience has been portrayed in many characterizations. It is memorable, satisfying, fulfilling, integrated, intensified, heightened, active, dynamic, and immediate. There are qualities of harmony, unity, cumulation, tension, conservation, anticipation, development, and completion in the aesthetic experiences. Aesthetic experience is "shaped through obstacles and resistance" (Shusterman 2000, 55). In the aesthetic experience the "means and ends, subject and object, doing and undergoing, are integrated into a unity" (Ibid. 55-56), and the qualities of the experience are appreciated "for their own sake" (Ibid. 27). (Dewey 1934/2005, 41-42, 48, 64; Ryder 2014, 69; Shusterman 2000, 27, 55-56.)

A non-aesthetic experience may be, for its part, for example drifting, yielding, compromising, slack, discursive, rigid, tight, dissipated, humdrum, loose ended, coerced, and incoherent. It has no particular beginning or end, no initiations or conclusions, and it is not unified. Its parts are connected to each other only mechanically, and it "lacks elements of balance and proportion" (Dewey 1934/2005, 51). (Ibid. 41-42, 48, 64; Ryder 2014, 69; Shusterman 2000, 27, 55-56.)

It seems quite obvious that many of the YouTube comments reflect the fact that listeners were not able to reach the scope of aesthetic experience while listening to the deaf girl singing. Reflecting the YouTube comment on the introduction, as well as my own experience, I believe, however, that there is an evident aesthetic potential in the singer's performance. This potential may lay outside of the "melody, harmony, and rhythm", like the commentator describes it. He locates the aesthetic potential to the "color, texture, soul, emotion" instead. I am pretty much on the same page with him.

I think there are aspects in her singing that courage the listener to undergo the feelings of, for example, anticipation, intensification, tension, satisfaction, and fulfilment. The experience is definitely memorable. The experience is also emotional, but not in the discharging way. The emotion is, instead, prolonged, intensified, and varied through the performance. I think that here is the



secret of her singing: there is a strong and skillful emotional and expressive charge in her performance. And she carries this emotional intensity from the beginning to the end with her voice and her whole appearance.

In the western popular music singing, the genre-normative execution of songs (doing) as well as “being present” (undergoing) are valued. But it is the former that overrules when it comes to judgements made on singers’ performances. If you fail to carry out the song in a correct manner, no matter how present you are, you will not be listened to. Even worse, if you sing “poorly” and still express heightened presence in your performance and emotions, you are an easy target for mocking and humiliation — a concept so well presented in the television song contests like *Idols*.

From the point of view of Dewey’s aesthetics this all makes kind of sense — in order to produce an aesthetic experience, the ability to consciously live through the experience as well as the bodily skills are required. But when I return to thinking about the deaf girl’s YouTube performance, I cannot help but feeling confused. Is this performance then aesthetic at all, as it lacks some of the basic skills traditionally required from a singer (like singing in tune)? And if the performance is not aesthetic, how come my experience felt to be an aesthetic experience in its greatest extent? These kinds of aesthetic experiences that don’t fit the conventional frames can help us to challenge the conventional aesthetic values.

If different bodies have different skills in their aesthetic actions, so do bodies differ in the way they experience aesthetically. Dewey gives us quite specific coordinates to aesthetic experience. However, all the bodies are not capable of producing experiences that are, for example, “unified” or “harmonious”. Does this mean that some of us are just not capable of aesthetic experiences? I think this cannot be true. Maybe we should see the diversity of experiences and bodies here as well. Maybe we should broaden the understanding of what the aesthetic experience could be, and see all the

various ways human body can produce aesthetic experiences.

The disability aesthetic could guide us here by offering insights into diversities. There would be no need to estimate the experience according to the experiences of “normal body”. Joseph N. Straus (2011), a music theorist in the field of disability studies, has written that there are different “ways in which people with disabilities listen to music [...]” He is interested in “the ways in which the experience of inhabiting an extraordinary body can inflect the perception and cognition of music” (Ibid., 158). Straus discusses the autistic hearing, blind hearing, mobility–inflected, and deaf hearing — in this way he seeks more nuanced understanding of what it means to hear (music). (See also McKay 2013, 124)

Many of the features that Dewey counts as being part of the aesthetic experience, like memorable, satisfying, or heightened, seem to be the kind of properties that are within reach for almost all of us. Some of the features, like harmony and unity, in turn, may be out of reach for some of us.

Shusterman (2014, 15) has considered the value of harmony more deeply. He writes that harmony in itself is a good political, ethical, and aesthetic value. However, he raises the concern that if harmony is raised to be an overdriving value, it may suppress and neutralize differences. Shusterman writes: “Sometimes a dose of dissonance can usefully add a tonic note of freedom, openness, and change that is both aesthetically and politically positive and promising.” (Ibid)

Shusterman (2014, 16) is also critical to Dewey’s celebration of unity, which he sees being “too one-sided and not sufficiently nuanced”. Shusterman concludes: “Amidst our aesthetic appreciation of social and political harmonies, we should always be sensitive to discordant voices that are being muffled or excluded from expression.” (Ibid)

## 8. Democratizing singing

How could we democratize singing so that it would be a potential form of aesthetics expression for all kinds of bodies and voices — not only for those who “can sing”, who are “good singers”, or who are “talented”?

(1) I think that developing our ways of listening is a good place to start. We should become more aware of what we are focused on when we listen to another person. No doubt, there are situations when it is adequate to listen to the faults of another person’s voice. But most of the times we should, instead, concentrate appreciating his/her expression. We should also understand that different bodies listen to differently. Listening is also always “disabled” in some extent — one can never listen universally. This means that one can never capture all the potential sensory dimensions of listening. Instead of trying to judge what is correct listening and what is not, we all could gain a lot from the new understandings of what listening can potentially be — what are the diverse ways in which human bodies are capable of sensing voice. Encountering different bodies consciously with our own bodies could be at the heart of our new modes of somaesthetic listening.

(2) We can also start democratizing singing by valuing the belonging, expanding, and diversity over the skill, rigid aesthetic judgements, and conventional vocal norms. In the aesthetic interaction we should not only be concerned of our own belonging — that we become heard, understood, and accepted. Instead, we should seek to further the belonging of others as well. The critical and judgmental atmosphere serves no one, as it only makes everyone worried of their own vocal performances. Instead, more gentle attitudes could open us to the communication that is not focused on accomplishments, but rather on encountering the other human beings. Dewey has described the characteristics of ideal communication aptly:

“For communication is not announcing things, even if they are said with the emphasis of great sonority. Communication is the process of creating participation, of making common what had been isolated and singular; and part of the miracle it achieves is that, in being communicated, the conveyance of meaning gives body and definiteness to the experience of the one who utters as well as to that of those who listen.” (Dewey 1934/2005, 253)

(3) Appreciating the somaesthetic experience of singing and listening has also an important role in democratizing singing. The proprioceptive, interoceptive and kinesthetic dimensions of vocalizing and listening should be understood as containing as much aesthetic potential as the organized sounds. The singing may have a great proprioceptive and aesthetic value for the singer him/herself, regardless of the vocal skills or musicality in the traditional sense.

The pragmatist aesthetics and somaesthetics provide an interesting theoretical framework for the examination of singing as aesthetic activity. They help us to change the focus from singing as producing sound, executing songs, and performing skill to singing as bodily-aesthetic experience.

As a researcher of singing, what can I do to democratize singing? I can, for example: (1) Recognize and understand the value of singing from its own starting points. (2) Re-define the value of singing without comparing it to the conventional vocal norms (good singing, healthy voice etc.). (3) Avoid discussing singing only as disabled, unable, or problematic. (4) Avoid discussing singing only in the frameworks of teaching, healing, or rehabilitation. These aspects are, without doubt, important to consider, but it is also important to study vocality without them — without the need to change the singing to something different or “better” than what it is. (5) Try not to bring forth only the ways in which singing is marginalized and suppressed but also to show the potentials and values of the singing. (6) Analyze the singing performances by showing the value of singing, for example, by asking: where lies the aesthetic meaning of this singing, to whom it is meaningful and in what ways?

What comes to singing and belonging, one may ask: What are the factors that open up the shared social space between the singer and the listener? How the cultural meanings and aesthetic experiences become shared in this encounter? What are, then, the elements that may prevent this encounter? What kind of obstacles there are in the way of shared aesthetic experiences and social meanings?

Let's go back to Straus's idea of different modes of disabled listening and "inhabiting an extraordinary body". This idea lead us to question and reconsider the traditional presumptions of listening, like: What it means to listen? What is listening? What could be considered as listening? Is there listening without hearing? In the same way we can ask: what it means to sing? What is singing? What could be considered as singing? Is there singing without melody? Is there singing without sound?<sup>5</sup> Instead of evaluating what is good singing and what is not — it could be considered in what ways singing is manifested in this body? What kind of singing this unique body produces?

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<sup>5</sup> Obviously, there is singing without sound as it is possible to sign songs with the Sign Language.

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