

Runa Hestad Jensen

The voice lessons

ABSTRACT

In this text I invite you to join me in a series of voice lessons, where I shares stories from my embodied experiences as a soprano, teacher, and researcher in the Western sociocultural context of singing. If you are expecting a traditional voice lesson, of ‘How to sing, 1, 2, 3’ you might be disappointed. But, if you are interested in how *voicing* (auto)ethnographies might be one way of producing, analyzing, and representing voice, I will happily dive into the voice lessons with you. For me, writing stories has become a way of knowing as a researcher, as through my writing I was able to discover new perspectives of voice – ultimately allowing me space to re-think notions of voice. Through the voice lessons I show how I zigzag through the worlds of the material voice and theoretical-philosophical-‘academic’ voice, guided by new materialism and performative autoethnography. My voice lessons can be seen as a performative utterance, which rests on the belief in the embodiment and the materiality of the writing body, an open-ended way of (re)thinking voice. Voice lessons for singing voices *and* academic voices.

Key words: creative writing, embodiment, new materialism, performativity, performative autoethnography, stories, voice, voice studies.

AN INVITATION

Have you ever dreamt of having a unique voice? To be in control of your voice, to feel it, to know how to shape it, to master it? I certainly have. As a classical trained soprano, 'voice' was all I could think about for much of my life. I was obsessed with the voice, and honestly, in many ways I still am. I am obsessed with voice when I teach students how to sing, when I grapple with my PhD research about notions of voice (Jenssen 2021, 2022; Jenssen and Martin 2021) and when I perform on stage. Voice seems to be at the core of my being and doing. Now, as I write this invitation to you, I am curious if you have ever wanted to tell a story with your voice? Have you dreamt of doing that, but never found the opportunity or courage to try? Would you like to have a go at working with your voice now? If you are thinking 'yes, I would be willing to give it a go', or perhaps even a tentative 'maybe, I can give it a try', I invite you to join me into a series of voice lessons over the next pages. If you decide to join my lessons and are expecting my voice lessons as a formula of 'How to sing, 1, 2, 3', you might be deeply disappointed. But who knows? If you are interested in how voicing (auto) ethnographies can rethink notions of voice, and in this rethinking, there lies a possibility for transformation, I am ready to dive into the lessons with you.

But wait, before we enter the voice lessons it is important to tell you that I am not alone in grappling with notions of voice. Yes, I know, voice is such a huge topic. There is a rich knowledge and many other 'voice lessons' to dive into. Dialoguing, through reading the works of of Anette Schlichter

(2011, 2014), Elisabeth Belgrano (2016, 2020), Heidi Fast (2010, 2020), Kathrine Meizel (2011), Milla Tiainen (2007), Nina Eidsheim (2008, 2011, 2014, 2019), Nori Neumark and Virginie Magnat, amongst others, has made it possible for me to create the following voice lessons. These scholars have given me awareness of the common ways voice has been viewed in western culture, where it has been ‘divided into two camps: the symbolic and the material’ (Schlichter and Eidsheim 1), and that such a divide could be challenged by less dominant views of voice through post-human and new materialist perspectives.

Following the theoretical landscape of new materialism, I have found (and fallen in love with) Rosi Braidotti’s nomadic theory, the heart of which is movement and mobility. Braidotti’s philosophy of thought has guided me through this article, zigzagging between world(s) of voice. The central figuration of nomadic theory is that it ‘expresses a process ontology that privileges change and motion over stability’ (29). The nomad moves, settles, and resettles. Such, these voice lessons are a movement of exchange. Through dialogue, it is possible to open out toward an empowering connection to others. When you enter my voice lessons, I will not offer an analysis of each story as an ‘outcome’ of every lesson. I will let the stories flow to you, whole. After we end the voice lessons, I will offer you my experiences of doing these voice lessons.

Is that all? You might ask. Should you just encounter my voice lessons? No analysis, no questioning? Well, my voice lessons are personal. But, should you just expect to meet and engage with the personal? Leading question, you might answer. I agree. Diving into my voice lessons is about encounte-

ring the self, but the self is always situated in a context, in a world, with the Other. I anchor my stories in the methodology of performative autoethnography (Spry 2011, 2016), in which the embodied knowledge is the researcher's home, performed in a self/other/we construction, with no I, but a performative we. If performative autoethnography is not about the self, but a dialogue with Others, my voice lessons is made from the intra-action (Barad 2003) of things which include both the material and the symbolic/philosophic 'worlds' of voice. This is where my personal experiences emerge with yours, the readers world(s). Let us visit my voice studio, together.

In my voice studio I have a full body length mirror with a thick black frame, leaning towards the wall. Actually, it looks a bit shaky where it is, perched on top of a chair. I have not found the time to hang it up and I was not sure exactly where to place it – or even if I wanted to keep the mirror there at all. In my experience, voice teachers often use mirrors when teaching, and so it is sort of expected I have one, since I am a voice teacher. Working with the voice, the body is often perceived as 'the instrument', and the mirror can be used to see, adapt, and 'correct' how the body moves when producing sound. But lately I have been thinking about what do we actually see in that mirror? If voice is unique, why do we try to adapt and adjust what we see in the mirror? Is it that the frame of the mirror holds a norm for what to see and how to act? I know, so many questions – and the voice lesson has not even started yet.

The voice lessons you are about to enter will take you on a journey through my experiences of working on an autoethnographic study about voice change. I guess you have

heard about voice change. We all experience voice change. The most ‘famous’ one is the one that happens during puberty, especially for males – although females also undergo voice change. Again, voice is divided into two ‘camps’, but there are many voices in between these, and there are many forms of voice change, emerging from transformation in life. Writing these voice lessons for you, I show how I bridge the worlds of the material voice and theoretical-philosophical-‘academic’ voices, guided by new materialism and performative autoethnography, to seek new perspective(s) of voice. To be able to rethink voice. In the voice lessons I stitch together how I produce, analyze, and represent autoethnographic data through voicing. I do this by sharing stories, drawn from my embodied knowledge as a soprano, a teacher, and as a researcher, in the Western sociocultural context of singing. The stories shared from my experience as a soprano come specifically from the context of Western classical singing – a culture well-known for its rigid criteria for technically and aesthetically acceptable vocal expressions and behaviour (Jenssen 2021; Vesterlid Strøm). Many others have dug into this context as well, and I have found those who see it through theories of gender and performativity (see, for example, Borgström Källen 2012, 2014; Borgström Källén and Sandström; Cusic; Green; Hentschel; Schlichter 2011; Schei 2007) particularly interesting. Some of the voice lessons share just one story; others share multiple stories. Common for all the stories shared. Writing out these stories, has become a way of knowing as a researcher, as through my writing I was able to discover new perspectives of voice – ultimately allowing me space to rethink notions of voice.

Will you like the lessons? Well, that I can’t promise.

Maybe you will. But you could hate it. Singers (and teachers and researchers) do the craziest things to sound our 'best'. In my voice lessons I am curious about what you and I see in the mirror placed on the chair in my studio – not so much if we see the same thing, but if we see something different from each other. Through that way of seeing in the mirror, we might even imagine new perspectives of voice.

To welcome you to your first lesson I want you to imagine me, singing height of fame 80's Madonna. I always liked to sing along with her. Her music made me sing loudly and out of control. Oh – and what to wear? That's totally up to you. Dress up like Madonna if you like. I am going to wear a long dress, with matching gloves, for sure – and maybe a large black and impractical Chanel hat, because why not?

Voice lesson one: Material girl

As a child I loved to listen to music and to sing. I used my hairbrush as a microphone and played tapes at full volume on the cassette player that I got as a present from my grandfather because my parents could not afford one. I listened to a wide range of genres. Opera – high coloratura arias were the best and Kiri Te Kanawa was my favourite singer. The high notes in Porgy Amour gave me goosebumps and I imagined I was performing on an opera stage. I loved to watch the European song contest with my mother (I can hear Sandra Kim's 'J'aime, j'aime la vie! in my head now). I recall the feeling of singing with the hairbrush in my hands, it was as if I became another person. A sort of freedom, an openness, a transformation – as if my body opened and was released in a

way. 'Cause we are living in a material world, and I am a material girl - You know that we are living in a material world, and I am a material girl'. I am singing loud in my office writing this now. Smiling. Wondering. Madonna was SO right. If voice IS something – it certainly is material.

Voice lesson two: Relief, but still shame

'Hello, Runa. How are you doing? I can hear celebration in the background'. 'Well, fine, thank you, Professor. I am celebrating my exam with my friends and family. We all passed and are so proud of each other! You know, we have worked with each other on everything for the last four years.!', I say, with pride in my voice. But as I spoke, I wondered why this teacher, an authority in the vocal field, was calling me late in the evening. She had never called me before. 'Yes...' She answers – I hear in her voice that she is about to share something not so pleasant. 'I just wanted you to know that we were really surprised that you were the one getting an A on the final exam in vocal performance. Don't misunderstand me, you have a nice voice, you did a fine concert with a little unknown and demanding repertoire, really different... but... you do not deserve an A in our opinion'. I have no idea how to answer. Why is she telling me this? 'Our' opinion? Who is 'our'? We had an examiner from another university, from another country - had that examiner changed her mind? My thoughts are interrupted: 'My student, though, should not have a B. My student, was a clear A. She did perform what we expect of an A. I just wanted to tell you that. Have a nice evening and celebration'. 'Thank you' I answer.

I wander back to my friends. 'Are you ok, Runa? What was that all about?' they ask. 'Nothing', I answer. Two months later I receive my Diploma in a Master's of vocal performance in the mail. I open it nervously. An 'A'. I feel relief, and shame.

Voice lesson three: Give it to me

I am not good at shouting. I do not feel good when people are shouting – at me or at others. I do not perform better or behave better when someone shouts at me. It makes me feel small. I want to hide. I guess such feelings are not especially unusual, but this dislike for shouting is not a good 'skill' to have as a performer. In my experience, directors often shout. Especially this one. He seemed to believe shouting was the way of making anyone on stage give more, that little extra. I am sixteen years old. I have a role in the local theatre group. I am *dying* to stand on stage. To sing, to tell a story to the audience, to put on a costume. I was late in puberty. I prayed to God that I would have breasts. Something happened to my body this year. I was changing. My voice changed. My soprano was cracking, but I found ways of coping with my cracking and changing voice. I hid my hoarse voice by finding another sound and way to sing. It was painful, I sometimes had no voice after a rehearsal, but my new way of producing sound made me sing. I am struggling with my voice this evening. Trying to sing my part as well as I can. My favourite part from *West Side Story* – 'There's a place for us'. I start, trying to control the crack about to arrive in my voice. 'I have never seen someone with less charisma on stage than you!' he shouts to me. 'I am not sure if you should be on this scene',

he continues, still with the loud voice. 'Ok, Runa – try again. Give it to me. Show me your skills!'. 'Give what?' I wonder.

Voice lesson four: I am sure you understand

It is 5am, pretty much the middle of the night, and I cannot sleep. I am getting up. I *must* rehearse. Someone has called in sick, and I have been asked to audition for a role in an opera I have never sung. Why on earth did I say yes? They said they had heard I was a fast learner. Well, I feel the opposite. I learn slowly, but I do spend time learning. Not only is this part new, but it is also a 'big' role demanding a 'richer' voice that I have. Certainly not the kind of role I was categorized to do in the Music Academy. But I am older now, more experienced. My voice has changed from a lighter voice into a more mature sound. I feel safer. So, I said yes to audition for the role. Why should I not?

Anyway, I did it. I got the part. I was thrilled and I was thrown into the middle of the rehearsal period, only two weeks until the premiere. After four days of rehearsing, another soloist in the ensemble and I are called to sing on the 'mainstage'. 'Why?' I ask. I am trying to rest my voice as much as I can between all the rehearsing. 'We just want to listen how your voice resonates in the big room'. 'Ok', I answer. The other girl in the ensemble sings before me. Oh. She sounds brilliant. Her voice fills the whole room. I give her a thumbs up from side stage. Then it's my turn. I walk out and try to 'own' the room. There are only two people listening. The director – sitting on the very back row of the stalls, and the conductor for the orchestra – sitting in the front row. These

two guys have been in the profession for years. I can feel my voice shivering. I am losing my core. My breathing is bad, and every phrase is cut up into pieces – losing any sort of beautiful line in the music. I am losing it. I try to pull myself together and I finish a little bit better than I started. ‘Ok.... Thank you. Let’s have a chat outside, Runa’. The singer before me is gone. They did not need to chat with her too? The two men sit in front of me. ‘You are such a beautiful girl, Runa. We love having you in the ensemble. You bring such a nice atmosphere into our group’, he starts. ‘Thank you’, I answer, feeling there is more to come. ‘However, we are having concerns that your voice is not big enough. It lacks a quality. I am sure you understand. Let’s give it a couple of days and if you can’t make it, that’s fine. We have someone to call. See you at tonight’s rehearsal!’. The two men leave the room.

Voice lesson five: Bodyless

The body has always played a central role in my vocal performances. At least for the directors. I once played the role of Pamina in *The magic flute*. A role I had been dying to sing. It was something very playful with the music in that opera that appealed to me, the peculiar characters, and the fairy-tale-like story, which made it easy to act and sing. Besides, I was often categorized as a ‘Mozart soprano’, which I was told involved a having a purity and flexibility in my voice. I had high expectations to myself doing this part. I was still a master’s student at the Music Academy. I was told I was really privileged to have this role. The director wanted me to act the role as ‘a barbie doll’, and I was given a ‘doll-like’ look, in a

dress I was uncomfortable in. Not so strange, I had just given birth to two children. There was nothing that could be done about that. 'It's not personal', he said. (The dress was beautiful though. Long, white and innocent, with small flowers around the neck). Luckily, I loved singing the part of Pamina. After the premiere, the opera received great reviews, but I could only see my breasts all over the front page of the newspaper. A LOT of body, all over the front page, but still feeling bodyless.

Only breasts, no voice, no core.

I felt 'bodyless'.

Voice lesson six: So natural

'Thank you', I answer – feeling blood in my mouth. I have just been told that I sound so natural after singing on a master class at the summer academy. That special summer academy I applied to and got in as I was one of the few chosen ones. 'You sound so natural when you sing this repertoire. It suits you perfectly. The register, the lightness and pure sound – it makes your personality come through. So good. So natural.' She continues. I waited forever to sing with this teacher, and all I can think of is pain. Blood. I taste blood in my mouth. 'Thank you'. I answer. And I repeat the whole aria again.

Voice lesson seven: Waiting for the moment

Studying the art of vocal performance at the Music Academy, I was often reminded that I started to sing 'late'. How

could that be I often wondered - I was one of those children who sang before they could talk. However, my young and innocent look, sound and behavior suited the norms and expectations at the academy well, and it seemed that being a 24-year-old woman when going to School of Music was not so bad, after all. I had almost no formal voice training before I started, but I had hours of listening to music, of being on stage with the local theatre group, of singing solo in the church, of visiting art galleries and diving into art literature with my father, of being the captain on the handball team, and years at university studying Music appreciation, the philosophy of science, drama, and theatre... Well, ok, I decided to go to music school 'late'. It was not until my father said: 'Is there no other way?' and my answer was clearly 'no', that I applied and got in. Being in the School of Music was wonderful. I loved every minute of it. One day I was even accepted to visit 'THE' voice teacher. It was like going to meet the Queen. I waited outside her studio, in the line with others. Through the porous and old walls, I could hear a fantastic coloratura soprano easily reaching high notes. I could feel my heart rate rise. Soon it was my turn. I had been waiting for the moment for so long, to be included as one of her vocal students. My name was called. I jumped up from my chair and danced into the voice studio in my long green floral dress. 'Hello, I'm Runa. I am so very happy to be here. Thank you for having me!', I phrased with excitement. 'OK. So, let's try that again' she replied. 'You can go out back in the hallway and have another go'. I froze. I had not sung a note, and I had already failed (was she literally kicking me out?!). I did not question her but went back to the chair I had been sitting on. On my second try, feeling tears in my eyes, I had

problems talking. I only whispered. When I got into the studio, she pulled me in front of a mirror. ‘We shall now train your voice to be an expression of what you see in that mirror’.

Voice lesson eight: The breath of my writing – and singing?

I like to plan. I am organized. I am not very good in improvising. I blame my classical training as a soprano, completely grounded in Western music traditions, where I learnt to reproduce music chosen for me – music that someone else has made, usually dead white men who lived in on another century, to put it bluntly. Diving into the book ‘Nomadic theory’ by Rosi Braidotti, I was captivated. It was something about her voice in the text that spoke to me. I quickly saw that the idea of nomadism, movement, could be seen as a valuable knowledge for my work. That situated knowledge – human and non-human mattered. The processes. The language. I just loved Braidotti’s writing. The book became my best friend.

I was so enthusiastic about the ideas that I went to a summer school with Rosi Braidotti and friends – over Zoom, of course, since I am living in a pandemic world. But in this summer school, the literature and the language made me feel like an outsider. Although I was so passionate about the topics discussed – I did not have the ‘right’ language. But I did have the required book, ‘Post-human glossary’ (Braidotti and Hlavajova), (a really thick book!), and it sat on my shaky desk. But I was too slow to look every new word up, and these words and expressions came at high speed, I tell you. I felt I was standing outside, watching a really hip group of people I desperately wanted to know and be friends with, but

I did not have the ‘right’ language to be accepted. It reminded me of when I was 9 years old and I moved from Abelvær (a very small Norwegian island with just 12 students in the whole school, and my cousin and I were the only students in our class), to a bigger city on the mainland, Verdal. I still remember the feeling when I arrived at my new school with 350 students. I thought every child in Norway was gathered in that schoolyard. I felt lonely. I was a shy child, but social. I desperately wanted friends. Since we had moved to a farming district, I imagined the children were interested in horses. So, I lied and said I had a horse – that I was ‘a horse girl’. The truth is that I have always been scared to death of horses. But I had read a lot of young adult fiction about girls and horses – and it seemed to me that ‘horse girls’ were super cool. Although I found my lie about owning a horse convincing, my lie was of course discovered, although it took a while. It turned out that the friends I was trying to impress did not care so much about horses. Also, they did not judge me for my lie. They had heard me sing when I was bicycling to school. They found my ‘singing when bicycling’ a bit peculiar and fascinating. I had long legs, long hair, and a small bicycle (I learned how to bicycle late. I was a careful child. Really afraid to lose control and hurt myself, so I needed a small bike to handle my fear and I comforted myself by singing). They listened to me sing – and they became my friends – some of them are still my best friends today.

What does this story have to do with my creative writing, you might ask? And even more importantly – what have all these stories to do with my voice lessons? Well, I think I’m pretty good at imagining, or at least, I find it fun and easy. It gives me a connection to Others I want to learn from, to

know. For me, imagining does not present ‘a truth’ – I have never believed in the truth with a capital T. But, imagining does create a perspective, a connection, to start a new phrase – when speaking, singing, and writing.

So, back to my encounter with post-human philosophy. I started to imagine. I created an inner dialogue with Braidotti, and I started to dialogue with her. First loud in my office, then on the screen, writing. I felt Braidotti had the upper hand, so I invited another person to join us. A person I had always admired, listened to, and watched, who seemed strong but vulnerable at the same time. This person was a diva, the famous soprano Maria Callas. She passed away in 1977, so there was no way she could join us for a conversation in ‘real life’ anyway. I started to imagine that the three of us were friends, and that we met up in a café in Paris, eating brunch, drinking coffee and wine. Over this brunch, we discuss voice and how I could push some of the boundaries I had experienced in the sociocultural context of singing. We discuss for hours the Nomadic theory that I was struggling to understand in connection to our lives.

I submitted the article and quickly got it back: ‘So much power... Do you need all this jargon? Trust the story! Show don’t tell. Do *not* be analytical at *any costs!* Do *not* explain the reader your text. Do *not* be analytical. Do *not* hide behind the jargon of social theory. Make your academic references to a minimum.’ What the fuck?? (and I very seldom swear!). I must admit I was in a state of being shocked, surprised, and fascinated by the words from one of my reviewers. A lot of ‘not’s!’ Should I throw out ‘everything’ I had learned on my PhD courses – of doing ‘proper’ research – showing the reader that I have the academic skills, that I know the concepts

and the jargon of my chosen theoretical framework, and that I certainly know how to do research with rigor and transparency!

Was I seeking power? Was this why I invited Rosi Braidotti into my conversation? Was I desperate to be 'friends' with her? If I could just 'own' her words as the way she did, would make my research glow and be heard? Was I silencing my own voice by bringing Braidotti into the conversation? Maybe I just had to trust my own voice as 'power enough' – just trust my story through my writing. Because the voices of my 'friends' Maria and Braidotti were my own thoughts – it was my imagination having this conversation, after all. Does writing stories from my embodied experience come without 'restrictions'? When writing my conversation with Braidotti and Maria, could I go 'all in' and write what came into my writing body? To a certain extent, yes. It does not mean that it was without resistance and disruptions – experiences I feel are needed and valuable when writing. But, within all that creative space there were still rules and expectations. I edited ruthlessly and I saw my text becoming more refined, clearer, and more naked with every comment I got from the reviewers. Still, did I lose something? Of course. I lost the printed word on the paper that told the reader about my choices of methodology and theory. Of course, I understood that it was still 'there'. But I could not tell the reader explicitly *why* I wanted to write like this, and *how* I had found support in others (the Other) scholars grappling with the same issues. I had to trust the reader. Ok. Trust the reader. But, by removing all these academic references, did I give 'credit' to the shoulders I stood on? Or, was it only me, feeling I had to let go of the 'academic jargon' I spent hours obtaining? I

discovered there were ‘other ways’, but those ways seemed foreshadowed by more ‘dominant’ ways of writing by using ‘academic jargon’. The dominant way was, after all, how I was ‘trained’ to write, or maybe this is what I saw in my training? I have no clear answer. I very often just have many more questions.

Did it work? Well, I wrote the conversation as an article, and it has been accepted to be published in a peer reviewed journal (Jenssen 2022). Does that mean that it worked? It ‘moved’ my work and way of writing as a scholar. It was hard and fun. I got to know the ‘characters’ better. I found my own way of understanding theory better because I found a way of expressing how I understood the theory in connection with my own experiences, in the sociocultural context of singing. I found a language that felt genuine but vulnerable. I felt I could hear my voice in my text. I created an academic monster out of the philosopher I had an academic crush on (that was certainly not my intention... or was it?). Did I ‘plan’ how to write the article in the way it ended up? No way, although I tried very hard. As I mentioned before, I like to plan, but imagination became a space where I could lose control. Anchored in my embodied knowledge as the ‘researcher’s home’, I found the ‘breath’ in my writing.

Voice lesson nine: Behind the mirror

Did any of the stories in the voice lessons resonate with you? Although you might not be a singer, maybe you may have experiences yourself that you thought of as you read my stories? Maybe the feeling of recalling a specific memory of

learning? Of your body? Of a relationship with someone? Or a feeling of holding an object, as an instrument, a book, a pencil, a ball, or a costume in your hands? I guess what I am trying to say, is did you feel how these stories might allow for an entrance to write from, to research from, to voice from, to find meaning in the world from? I must admit that I am in the process of discovering this myself – finding meaning in listening to, writing and sharing stories. Before writing my last voice lesson for you, I prepared myself by reading an article by Betsy Hearne. She writes, ‘My self-knowledge evolved through stories. I came to believe in them—not necessarily believe stories, of course, but believe *in* stories. What is a story? What is the relationship of stories to self-knowledge, and what does any of this have to do with what the arts teach us about research methodology?’ (154).

I was stunned. It made me think of why I always keep writing stories – and why I love to *listen* to stories. I believe *in* stories! Stories are the core of my voice, as a soprano, teacher, and researcher. The love of stories is the heart of it, and then there is the communication, which is *voiced* through everyone’s unique voice. When the voice from my voice lessons, from the ‘material’ world and the symbolic/philosophic world meet, intra-act, – then my stories are no longer ‘just’ personal stories. Stories that are embodied and embedded in the local speak, share and point with critique into the global – as feminists aim to do (Braidotti), and as performative autoethnography aims to do (Spry 2011, 2016). Voicing stories through performative autoethnography and new materialism can be one way of bridging ‘worlds’ of voices. In between categories of voice many shades of voice exist. With mobility and change as heart of our thinking, we

might even move the oppressive and normative understandings of gender that constructed my singing body. Like the nomad, we can resettle and transform. Through voicing dialogues. Voice is not static. You are not given 'a' voice. Voice is constantly changing. Changing with life. Writing this article is my way of seeing the possibility of producing, analyzing, and representing ethnographic data – through voicing stories from the mirror in my voice studio.

Ok, so let us 'wrap up' our voice lessons. What happened. How did you experience them? What did you see in the mirror during the lessons? What did you pay attention to, and maybe more importantly – what did you not see or hear when looking in the mirror? Maybe it is the stories that have not yet come, that are the ones we are looking for, desperately seeking for. But what is the 'result' of these voice lessons? As your voice teacher, I can only hope they resonated with you in some way. What I strive for by offering these lessons is to allow the reader feel that what I share in my stories can be applied beyond my personal story. So, what did I see in the mirror, you might ask? I see a soprano seeking and struggling for voice in a highly rigid, disciplined, and normative culture. I see a female voice seeking for an academic voice with hope, confusion, insight, and liberation. Confusion, because the same rigidity and hierarchy also exists in this culture. Insight and liberation, because writing the stories, thinking them through the material body (the physical and philosophical), allows for a perspective of the I that is open, transformative and a part of a larger whole. Singing voices *and* academic voices.

Writing this article I see the interrelationship between voice, culture, and life, in flux, particularly as potential bor-

ders between ‘categories’ are crossed. The sound of the voice from my material body, performed through the singing voice or the phrase of my writing on the screen, cross borders and resonate with different cultural and social conditions as people engage with, making meaning of and, perhaps, have feelings connected with the performance of their voices. The performance of voice – *voicing* – has the possibility to *do* something in the world: ‘in their capacity to be both actions and generate consequences, performative utterances enact real effects in the world’ (Bolt 133). I believe in the performative moment and movement in between borders when singing, teaching, and researching the voice. The slippery alleyways between the norms, where slithers of something different, something unique could emerge. My belief in such movement between borders is because I see that singing and writing can demonstrate the open materiality of culturally embedded bodies (Braidotti). Performing bodies are ‘open’, and through that openness, constantly changing and becoming.

Now, after these lessons with you, I am not sure I will call the caretaker at the university to get my mirror placed on the wall in my office. Maybe I will do it myself (strictly against university rules and I used to be so good in following rules) and bring a hammer to work and put the mirror up on the wall. I will put it where I want. I think I will do that. Long after these nine voice lessons I have offered here, I hope that you keep working on your voice. To feel it, to nurture it, to master it with finding the body, breath and let your sound flow, into your unique voice – maybe by looking behind the mirror, moving the mirror, or even throwing the mirror away.

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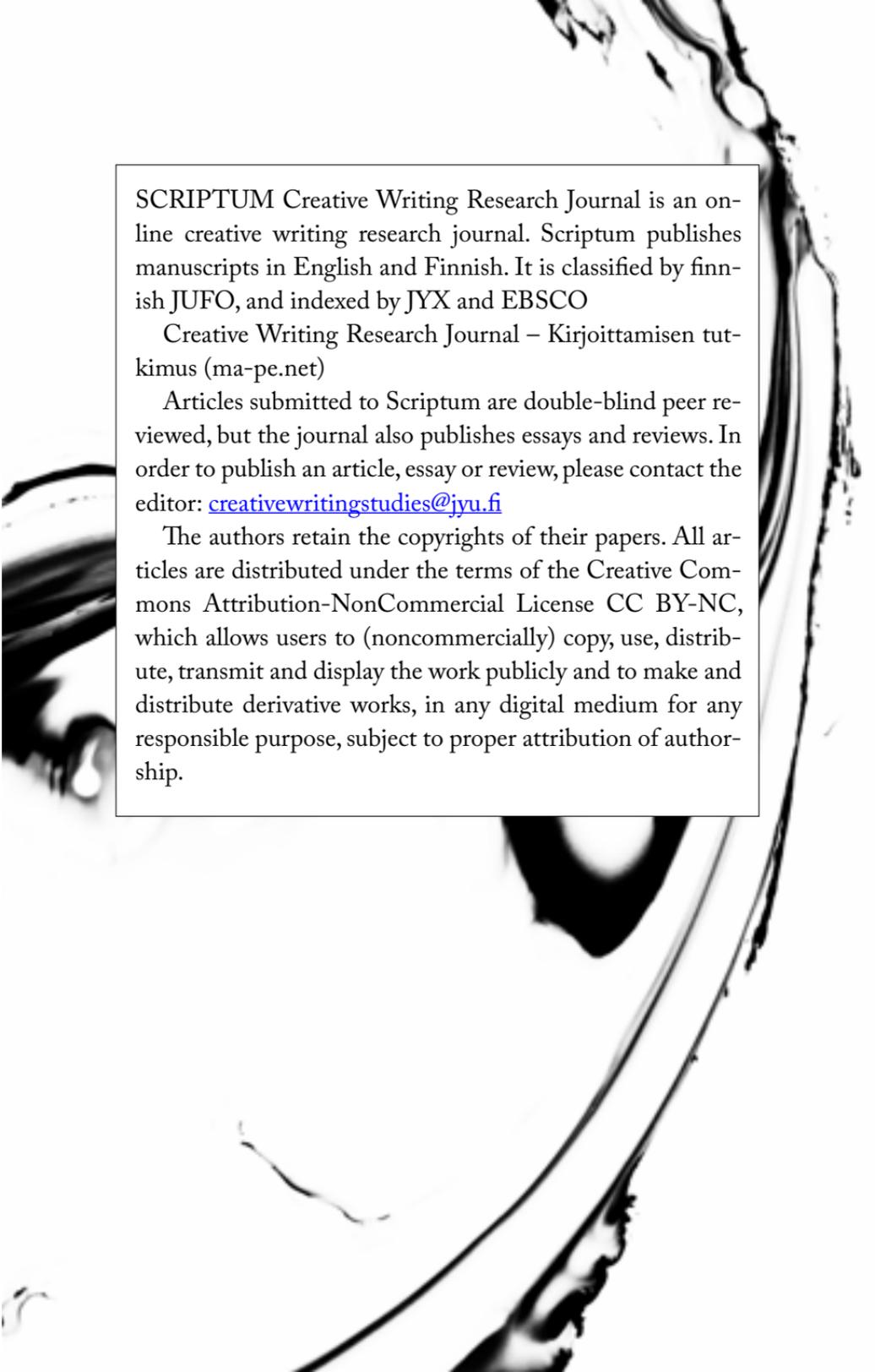
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