Unimagining Song

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Unimagining Song: Making Kin in the Vocal Scene

by Chris Tonelli

The task set out for us in this curated section of the *Yearbook* is, from the perspective I

present here, problematic. We are invited to consider utterances on the boundaries

between speech and song, and I cannot help thinking that this is like being asked to

consider bodies at the border between the air and Canada. Though the terms "speech" and

"song" both have numerous meanings, speech generally refers to something relatively

concrete: the use of the human voice to convey linguistic meaning. The term speech is

like the term air; it refers to something intangible but still concrete. Song, on the other

hand, is like Canada. It is a reification. How do we address the space between something

concrete and something imagined? Song's borders lie at a variety of distinct *perceived*

locations. Unlike with speech, we cannot objectively determine the line between song and

non-song.[1] Even if no one shares your sense of where the borders of song lie, no one has

the authority to claim you are wrong. Others may be correct to deem your judgment as

culturally inappropriate in a given context, but not objectively untrue. If I hear all speech

as song, you cannot prove me wrong. If you see all running as dance, I have no solid

ground to assert that it's not. We can quibble over intention and the importance of shared

cultural conceptions, but ultimately there is no objectively verifiable way to confirm an

utterance as song.

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[1] This essay does not do justice to the complexity of distinct definitions of what constitutes speech. My argument here depends on a definition of speech that takes speech to be a medium for the transmission of messages. What makes speech verifiable as speech and more than mere reification is the presence of patterns that can be verified as shared conveyors of meaning. While there may be a case to be made for the existence of speech that cannot be objectively determined as speech, this case would not overshadow the broader distinction I am trying to point to here. Speech and song would remain distinct in this regard, at least in terms of degree.

In most considerations of song and speech it is irrelevant that song is a reification; what matters is people's *perception* of the borders of song and speech, and the thoughts and feelings that arise as a result. However, I begin by pointing to this reification to make space for musicians with whom I have been working for sixteen years as a researcher and performer. These musicians participate in a tradition that I refer to as "soundsinging." I have adopted the term, which was invented by the singer and poet Paul Dutton (Dutton quoted in Sutherland 2014), to refer to voiced and unvoiced oral music-making traditions that (1) emerged in the 1950s and beyond out of the practices of sound poetry, free jazz, scat, Fluxus, and experimental performance; and (2) incorporate to a substantial degree abstract sounds that are non-pitch based.[2] My intention in this essay is not to provide a sustained analysis of the practice of soundsinging or its reception.[3] Rather, I seek to briefly introduce soundsinging as a case study that can help us to understand some of the negative consequences of our reification of "song." I hope to foster increased awareness of the possibility that all of our musical choices resonate in ways that affect how we feel connectedness across perceived borders of difference. In fact, it would be accurate to say that you have begun reading a manifesto of sorts—a manifesto that challenges us to see every choice we make as music-makers and music-describers as one that will either strengthen walls of division or reinforce a radical politics of trans-species solidarity.

Soundsingers must frequently contend with others who mark their singing as non-singing. Many singers, as a result, shy away from terms that locate their practices outside

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[2] Voiced and unvoiced oral sound are both regular components of nearly all vocal practices. Dutton (1992) makes special effort to combat the common subsuming of both of these areas under the category of vocal practice by drawing attention to non-vocal oral sounds in his discussions of soundsinging. Soundsinging often involves more sustained exploration of non-vocal oral sounds—for example, modulation of sounds produced by airflow between the cheeks and teeth—than many other vocal practices.

[3] I currently am working on a book-length history of soundsinging. The book will also expand the theoretical paths that are at the heart of this essay.

of the powerful social institutions of singing and song, even rejecting terms like soundsinging for their distancing effect. Other soundsingers, like myself, have adopted the term, finding it necessary to have a way of referring to differences between this style of singing and the much more broadly accessed traditions of pitch-focused song. My comfort in using the term here, despite others' refusal, arises from the fact that "singing" is a part of "soundsinging." Like those who refuse the term, I too insist that soundsinging is singing. And while soundsinging does not fit some culturally situated definitions of singing or song-making, I insist that the wider institution of song, created by the many diverse and contradictory uses of the term, holds too much power for soundsingers to simply accept that their work is non-singing or non-song. And so I begin with this reminder: song and singing are reifications. As institutionalized categories they can be used to Other some song as non-song and some singing as non-singing. Troubling these categorical presumptions is the core task I have set out for this essay.

While the question of liminality afforded by vocal utterances that are experienced as song-like speech or speech-like song is a productive one, I also would like us to consider a view where there is no "between" between song and speech. In one way, my rejection of this between reflects the insistence of some soundsingers that all speech is song (and thus all semantic song bears no distinction from speech). In another way, I intend this rejection as a starting point for a theoretical model that can stand alongside the between-speech-and-song model (List 1963). Offering an alternative conception that refuses to posit this betweenness helps us challenge ideological attempts to police the borders of song. My hope is that this alternative model will also help us to consider liminal states that result from encounters with voice as well as the outcomes of the

experience of those states. I will suggest that conceptions of song that Other certain songs as non-song belong to an institution that Suzanne Cusick has referred to as Song with a capital S. I will also follow Cusick in positing that an equivalent institution of Speech exists. I will stray somewhat from her example and suggest that the two categories should be conceptualized as one contiguous domain without a space between: SongSpeech. Rather than liminalities that arise from speech blurring with song, the liminalities I will consider arise from the unwillingness to hear certain song as Song or certain speech as Speech. The liminal states that I will ask us to attend to emerge when the norms of SongSpeech are perceived by listeners invested in the power of this category to have been violated.

Inspired by Donna Haraway's recent work, I offer this essay as an invitation to participate in an ambitious project. In *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Haraway asks nothing less of her readers than to help eliminate Othering altogether. While the goal of eliminating Othering may seem unrealistic or shockingly naïve, Haraway argues its plausibility given that "neither biology nor philosophy any longer supports the notion of independent organisms in environments" (2016:50). Such a goal, moreover, is essential to planetary survival. She urges us to both awaken ourselves to interconnection and to identify in ways that are "sympoietic" rather than "autopoietic." Autopoietic imaginings envision the self as part of a bounded and closed category, while sympoietic imaginings recognize that "nothing is really autopoietic" and that the imagination of oneself as belonging to a closed or exclusive category is a dangerous myth (ibid.:75). Sympoietic identifications affirm that the self is co-extensive with all other beings; the self differs from other beings but, at the same time, they cannot be understood as absolutely separate.

In Haraway's terms, this situation is described as a "worlding-with, in company" where difference is omnipresent but we are neither One with nor Other from that which we differ (ibid.:75, 110). This refusal to imagine other beings as absolutely Other, of course, is reflective of many indigenous worldviews, but at odds with the western liberal humanist lens through which many of us view our world. Haraway's work attempts to reshape that lens in a manner I find productive, both for her goal of fostering forms of identification that might aid planetary survival and for my immediate—and not unrelated—task of coming to an understanding of the relationship between song and speech.

The subtitle of Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* is *Making Kin in the Chthulucene.* Throughout the book, Haraway performs and deepens her sympoietic attachment to spiders, octopi, worms, compost, and many other real and imagined materialities and lifeforms we often position as Others. The creature, Chthulu, referenced in the title of her book might be the best example of the kinds of radical identification for which she is arguing. Chthulu, in Haraway's work, at once refers to: (1) a particular species of spider, *Pimoa Cthulhu*;[4] (2) a fictional creature with wings and an octopus-like face created by American fantasy author H.P. Lovecraft (1890–1937); and (3) *Pimoa Chthulu*, Haraway's imaginary combination of the non-fictional spider and the fictional Chthulu. By sharing the way her feelings of passion for a fictional character can help her identify more strongly with a non-fictional arachnid, she shows that the "real" and the imagined can combine to form productive trans-species identifications (ibid.:48).

Haraway writes that the

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[4] The slightly different spellings Cthulhu and Cthulu are not errors. These are separate words/referents.

decisions and transformations so urgent in our times for learning again, or for the

first time, how to become less deadly, more response-able, more attuned, more

capable of surprise, more able to practice the arts of living and dying well in

multispecies symbiosis, sympoiesis, and symanimagenesis on a damaged planet,

must be made without guarantees or the expectation of harmony with those who

are not oneself—and not safely other, either. (ibid.:110)

Here, she is asking us to regenerate our concept of ourselves such that we refuse to Other,

even while recognizing the ubiquity of difference. She asks that we do so in a way that

cultivates identification with the materialities and lifeforms we most frequently have been

encouraged to treat with disgust. At a moment of multilayered crisis—when human

beings are backsliding into social fragmentation and isolation, resurging nationalism,

rising hate-crime levels, insufficient responses to environmental crisis, and celebration of

the abnegation of social responsibility—it is urgent that we focus on Othering as a

process at the root of all these horrors. It is important that we work to see the connections

between strategies of division in our fields of study and practice, and the social divisions

that have led us into this period that Adriana Cavarero calls "the most extensive and

anomalous … chapter in the human history of destruction" (1999:2).

Reading *Staying with the Trouble*, I am reminded of many statements

soundsingers have made about their vocal practices and sonic kinships. Rather than

cultivating spaces where a limited range of vocal sounds are privileged and permitted to

sound, soundsingers frequently speak of their practices as spaces where all vocal sound is

kin. Christine Duncan is a singer/soundsinger based in Toronto, Canada. Duncan devotes

a large amount of her time to fostering a choir, called the Element Choir, that makes

space for participants to use their voice in any way that they would like. The Element

Choir is open, without cost, to anyone who wishes to join. Duncan describes how as a

participant you "can kind of do anything that your imagination will allow" (interview, 11

August 2014). This radical openness does not, of course, appear wherever soundsinging

is present. In fact, Duncan also recounts how song, in a pitch- or melody-privileging

sense of the term, gets policed in soundsinging environments. She describes how:

> even in my full-on improv gigs, I'll sing songs if it feels like the right thing to do.
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> That's pretty unusual. For a lot of people who are "sounding" people, that's kind
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> of taboo. They're not into it. But, I really, really firmly believe that if you're
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> actually in that space and it's actually happening, whatever the resource material
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> is, should be at your disposal to use. (interview, 11 August 2014)

Her descriptions reveal how spaces of soundsinging sometimes manifest Song, a force

that prohibits and Others certain vocal expressions. At the same time, she affirms the

distinct presence in that same space of an attitude of openness to all human vocal

sounds—to the notion that "whatever the resource," it "should be at your disposal."

If there exists a musical space for sympoietic identification with all vocal sound,

then soundsinging, with its devotion to openness, may be the means toward it—even if it

sometimes manifests Song. As they strive to create a space where all vocal sound is

accepted, soundsingers also seek out and embrace a wide range of sounds that others

have Othered. Like Haraway's kin-making, these encounters with difference are also

modes of self-discovery. Soundsingers discover that these sounds that others have

Othered are parts of themselves that they have been discouraged from finding. Haraway's

multispecies alliances can be thought of in the same way; sympoiesis requires us to

recognize the truth that we come into being relationally, dialectically; thus if we establish a sense of self by Othering, the Other has effectively co-produced us and cannot be understood as truly Other. The Other constitutes and is thus present in the self.

Still, the perception of soundsinging as a potentially sympoietic vocal space where no utterances are Othered stands in contrast to the spaces of public soundsinging performance; conflicts arise in these spaces when listeners police soundsingers and their sounds. The liminalities that arise in and around soundsinging contain lessons that can help us to understand and undo Othering. Refusals to hear soundsinging as singing are connected to refusals to hear the sounds of soundsinging as human. After my performances and the performances of other soundsingers, I have heard many listeners assert that the sounds produced by the soundsinger's human body belong more properly to the category of animal sound. In my essay, "Ableism and the Reception of Improvised Soundsinging" (Tonelli 2016), I detail these speech acts in ways that I will resist repeating here. For now, I ask that we accept that this form of Othering is common and move straight to considering the connections between marking soundsinging as non-singing and the refusal to hear these sounds, which are clearly emerging from a human body, as human.

To assess these connections effectively, in a manner that does not devolve into the kinds of human exceptionalism Haraway asks that we do away with, we can return to the conceptions of Song and Speech (after Cusick 1999). In this model, capital-S Speech and capital-S Song are associated with "entry into Law" (1999:31).[5] That is, they are modes of interpellation into vocal soundings that undergird a particular symbolic logic that bestows privilege on those who Other. To Speak or to Sing (but not speak or sing) is to

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[5] I take Cusick's reference to "Law" to signify non-formalized social norms and prohibitions.

use your voice in a way that helps to reassert the validity of a logic of division that marks certain human bodies as valuable and others as less valuable or without value. In her essay, Cusick theorizes Speech and Song almost exclusively in relation to the way we conform to the Law in terms of our gendered performance of voice. She argues that Singing "replicates acceptance of patterns that are intelligible to one's cohort in a culture" (1999:30) and gives the example of how women are encouraged in their adult Speech and Song to keep operating in the register of their prepubescent voice in order to produce a socially intelligible femininity. This, as Cusick points out, requires the rejection of other registers, other affordances of their adult vocal apparatus. The case of soundsinging extends Cusick's discussion of social expectations for gendered vocal performance to the related social requirements that we perform our humanness and our able-bodiedness vocally.

Nina Eidsheim's (2014) work helps us to understand that demands are also placed on us to perform vocally in a manner that accords with the ways our bodies have been racialized. In her essay, "Race and the Aesthetics of Vocal Timbre," she looks at western classical voice instructors as a source of this demand, examining how their "perceptions of students' ethnicities generally shape their understanding of how the students might develop as singers" (2014:341). Song and Speech can be thought of as spaces where socially scripted demands—about performance of race, gender, and humanness—are entangled, and where singers and speakers are under pressure to conform vocally to soundings that help maintain social divisions that both privilege and Other.

We can follow and extend Cusick's model by distinguishing between the human and the Human. When listeners react to soundsinging by calling human vocal sounds

animal sound, this should be understood—in most cases—as more than a mere statement of resemblance. It is often a means of chastising singers for their failure to provide sounds that articulate connections between their bodies and a privileged category of the fully Human. Unlike song, the human is more than a reification. The categorical difference between human bodies and non-human bodies is concrete. However, this distinction has nothing to do with the distinction between Human and non-Human. To be Human does not mean to be composed of the material qualities that separate the human and non-human; it is to perceive oneself as occupying a privileged category that excludes some materially human bodies in much the same way that Song does not include all song. The Human, like Song and Speech, is a symbolic space that yields identity security through symbolic processes of Othering.

Cusick provides us with a framework wherein Song and Speech seem relatively static. They represent the most dominant demands for vocal conformity and not more minoritarian versions of the same demand. For example, in one of the two case studies she provides, she discusses a specific singer's "renunciation of Song" (1999:34). This renunciation, she theorizes, is performed by singing "with a harsh, forced timbre" that "gives voice to his resolve to police the border" of his body, "exercising strict control over what gets in and what comes out" (1999:34–35). In her essay, Cusick does not consider—at least not overtly—that while this timbral choice may be subject to policing or even read as a form of negotiated opposition in certain contexts, it might also manifest as Song. That is, song manifests as Song insofar as one style of singing is acting as a norm against which other styles are policed. In other words, though I borrow the concepts of Song and Speech from Cusick, my framework for these concepts differs from hers. I

would like us to locate Song anywhere that the line between acceptable and unacceptable vocal utterance is policed in the service of a broader symbolic logic that privileges and Others. Song, in the sense I am positing here, is not tied to any particular tradition of singing, but manifests wherever forms of singing serve as "evidence" of the greater Humanness of a group that does not include all singers.

Liminality might best be understood as a state wherein we feel a lack of access to the kinds of identity security that emerge through confident imagination of ourselves as singularly belonging to an established, concrete, and valuable social category. Though liminality can signify a liberating state or an uncompromising position between two distinct but comfortably co-existing external realms, it can also signify a highly threatening encounter incongruous with a symbolic order that we have elevated to the status of truth and that we depend on for our sense of self-worth. The concept of liminality is useful for understanding why listeners go out of their way after soundsinging performances to label the sounds they heard as non-Human. We can theorize that audience members who make efforts to tell soundsingers that their human vocal sounds are not singing—that they make no sense, that they sound like dogs barking, dying cats, or copulating pigs—do so precisely because their experience of soundsinging forced them into a liminal state. The performance caused them to perceive themselves as divided between two incongruous states: a state where their own Human bodies were containers of non-Human sounds and, paradoxically, a preferred state where this would be impossible.

Liminal states are brought to the fore of listeners' consciousnesses when the materiality that listeners associate with their own privileged side of a symbolic divide

(e.g., Human–Animal) becomes entangled with the materiality they associate with Others. In most cases, it is likely the soundsinger's body that displays qualities that prompt identification for these listeners. They see the singer's body and they imagine it and their own body as belonging to the same exclusive category: Human. When the singer sounds, however, a dissonance arises. Sounds emerging from a body perceived as Human fail to reproduce the symbolic hierarchy that sustains the presence of the category of Human. Given the intersubjective nature of reception, articulation of sounds perceived as Other with a vocalizing body perceived as Human—the categorical equivalent of the listener's body—symbolically entangles those sounds with the body and being of the listener. Through these imaginings, the listener is thrust into a liminal state between the incongruous spaces of Human and Other. This liminality is experienced by some as enlivening and by others as threatening (and by others as both simultaneously, to varying degrees). The labour of publicly asserting that these vocalizations belong more properly to animals can be theorized as an attempt to repair the symbolic division that the performance violated and to dissipate the space of liminality these listeners found themselves thrust into and threatened by. By defining those sounds as Other, the listener begins to alleviate the crisis state by reinstating the symbolic divisions the performance unravelled.

The same kind of enlivening/threatening liminality can arise in processes where Speech is invoked and then violated by a perceived transition out of Speech and into a domain that may or may not be perceived as song. Dutch poet and (sound)singer Jaap Blonk's performances of his poems "Der Minister I" and "Der Minister II" (from his *Flux de Bouche*) might well be experienced in this way by certain listeners. In these

performances, Blonk begins by speaking the German phrase "*der minister bedauert derartige äusserungen*" (the minister regretted such utterances). Performances of "Der Minister I" repeat the phrase three times, then continue repeating the phrase but with the successive omissions of one, two, or three vowels, or successive vowel sets, from the end of the phrase with each repetition so that the fourth repetition yields "*der minister bedauert derartige äusser ng n*," the fifth "*der minister bedauert derartige ss r ng n*," and so on (Blonk 1992a). Performances of "Der Minister II" repeat the phrase three times and then continue repeating the phrase but with the successive omissions of two, three, or four consonants, or successive consonant sets, with each repetition from the start of the phrase so that the fourth repetition of the phrase is "*e minister bedauert deartige äusserungen*," the fifth is "*e i ister bedauert deartige äusserungen*," and so on (Blonk 1992b).

The poem begins in a way that listeners are likely to experience as Speech or, at least, speech, and it proceeds into vocal utterances that lose semantic qualities and resemble abstract soundsinging. Regardless of precisely how the transition is experienced, here is an example of a stream of vocal utterance capable of invoking the kinds of liminality I am theorizing, through what might be perceived as a space between speech and song. In the comments on Blonk's YouTube videos, for example, one listener attempts to devalue his performance through policing gestures; these gestures are suggestive of a liminal state that arose through the listener's experience of the performance as a transition from Speech to song or Speech to non-speech.[6]

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[6] YouTube user BlondiChampi Volca responded to a recorded performance of "Der Minister II" with the comment "*Bref un mec qui a une crise de folie devant un micro c'est tout!!!*," which can be translated as "In short, a guy who has a fit of madness in front a microphone, that's it!!!" (Blonk 1992b). Alongside animals, listeners often respond to soundsinging by invoking states in which one has lost control of one's

The chain of events and actions that yield these liminal states begins with investment in Song, Speech, and/or the Human. It begins by connecting certain vocal utterances with meaning and positioning others as less valuable. It begins with the presence of bodies perceived, pre-utterance, as "fully-Human" and with the expectations listeners have for SongSpeech in the moment before the soundsinger sounds or sounds again. To Sing is to sing in a manner that provides identity security to listeners who identify by imagining a self/Other divide that validates the self and devalues the Other. Applied to these processes, Donna Haraway's work encourages us to recognize this form of identification as autopoietic. That is, as forming a sense of identity security from creating bounded, unequal categories of being, rather than through a sympoietic identity that gains security from a sense of interconnectedness and equality across categories of difference.

This autopoietic–sympoietic distinction helps us to extend the framework posited thus far. Rather than thinking through the liminal spaces between song and speech, I have been considering the liminality present beyond the borders of SongSpeech. But liminality is not about outsides; it is about between-states of being. If the liminality I am theorizing here is just out of reach of processes that secure identity through Othering, then what we imagine to lie on the other side of this betweenness should be processes that secure identity through a refusal to Other. Haraway (2016) argues that difference does not require opposition; recognition of the distinct is not identical to recognition of Otherness.

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body. Bodies out of control, paradoxically, are also positioned as not fully Human. Invoking epileptics and the mentally ill simultaneously deHumanizes these groups and polices soundsinging. The same user also commented on a separate YouTube page on "Der Minister I," saying: "*On dirait un mec qui fait une crise d'épilepsie*," which can be translated as "It sounds like a guy having an epileptic seizure," invoking, again, a loss of control to explain Blonk's intentional, highly controlled delivery. See Blonk (1992a, 1992b).

As such, securing identity in a field where we never posit absolute difference, even as we acknowledge the ubiquity of difference, should be imaginable and achievable.

How do our perceptions of song and speech reinforce divides between human and Human? As musicians and musicologists, how can we counter these processes of Othering? I believe that reception-centred study of soundsinging points us in a productive direction. The kind of vocal performances that prompt audience members to police the voice are vocal performances that we should make special efforts to embrace as kin, at least until the point that Othering responses aren't prevalent among audiences. Jacques Rancière (2010) helps us to understand that acts of policing are the only measure of the political in art. He argues that only when audiences act to police art, to remove it from the domain of the doable and sayable, can we recognize that art as political. The forms of policing to which soundsingers have been subjected are measures of the political efficacy of their soundings. We can recognize the presence of these policing gestures as proof that the sounds of soundsinging are doing work that is political in Rancière's sense of the term; these gestures are evidence that a self-privileging and Other-diminishing symbolic order has been disrupted to some degree. This sounds rather arrogant coming from a practitioner, but I do not intend this statement to confer some kind of universal value on the work of soundsingers. The status of the work as capable of political effects is contingent on the environment in which it is placed. So it is not the music itself that has been efficacious, but the combination of the music with listeners who perceived its sounds in a manner that spurred them to police the performer.

A second caveat is necessary here: not all policing of music is a reaction to the symbolic implications of the music. There exist forms of policing related to actual

physical harm caused directly or indirectly by music. Still, as music-makers and

musicologists, we should concern ourselves whenever listeners make attempts to prevent

music they have heard from re-entering the domain of the audible. When listeners refer to

soundsingers' vocalizations as animal sound—that is, when their speech acts mark

soundsinging as non-Human—their policing is intended, in most cases, to convince

soundsingers that their sounds lack value and therefore should be abandoned in favour of

fully Human forms of vocal performance. These comments rarely, if ever, manifest as

celebrations of the value of animal sound; rather, they appear as corrective strategies for

upholding fantasies of division.

Haraway's (2016) work reminds us that, in our age of multilayered crisis, our

survival depends on our ability to persistently envision interconnectedness. Too often in

music communities, our vision of interconnectedness is blindly celebratory; we proudly

celebrate the ways music brings people together while rarely pausing to consider the

ways music excludes. I think that we benefit from a model that reminds us that music is

often a tool of division and harm—a model that prompts us to understand Song as a

domain that prevents the kinds of kin-making that Haraway regards as essential to our

survival.

The liminality that we are thrust into when we encounter certain sounds may be

unpleasant or uncomfortable, but we need to recognize that feeling of discomfort as a

sign that we have arrived at a space in which we can think our way to a more sustainable

and less "horroristic" future (Cavarero 1999).[7] When we arrive in these spaces where we

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[7] Cavarero's 1999 book *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence* coins the neologism horrorism as a
tool to refocus our attention from the ends of violent acts to their means. Doing so, she argues, deprivileges
the perspectives of those who enact violence, replacing them with the perspectives of victims of violence.
The future Haraway seeks to avoid might be best understood as horroristic.

desire to remove certain sounds from the realm of the audible, we can examine the symbolic processes behind those impulses. We can ask ourselves whether we are offended because some actual physical harm results from the presence of the sounds, or if the sounds merely offend our sense of who and what we find valuable. Further, we can ask ourselves if we can alter our relationship with those sounds. Can we enter into a sympoietic relation where we become champions of the offending sounds for the sake of our own survival and survival at large? Championing the vocal sounds that others have Othered and that we ourselves may have once Othered means helping these sounds to find audibility and presence in spaces they otherwise would not occupy; but it also means more than that. Making kin is not merely supporting others. It is identifying with them: coming to understand that there is no you without them and that a Song that refuses them refuses part of you and part of everyone—even those who work to uphold Song as Song and the Human as the Human.

Haraway reminds us repeatedly in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) that who and what we think with matters. If our frameworks make matters of urgency unthinkable, we need to find better frameworks—new partners for thinking. While the between-speech-and-song framework can help us to understand the ways that many receptions of voice unfold, it does not leave space for consideration of soundsinging and for the perceptions that the practice affords. The kinds of liminality that I have theorized here often do arise when vocal performances are perceived as simultaneously song-like and speech-like to varying degrees. The kinds of song that might activate Song may need to perform distance from the qualities of speech as a domain to which nearly every human has access. While there frequently exists a reified and perceived space between song and

speech, I propose that there is no between when it comes to Song and Speech. They are

both dimensions of an undifferentiated Law that, itself, is defined by the way it divides

us. The liminal spaces just outside of SongSpeech are a middle space between that

monolith and something we might refer to as "symsong"—a space where we hear and

sing ourselves into *being-with* with sounds that are different but never Other. We have a

choice as musicians, listeners, and researchers: Which side of the SongSpeech–symsong

divide do we want to cultivate with our labour? Can we learn to hear and to think the

presence of musical harm? Can we learn to hear the interconnections of sounds

(de)valued as (un)musical and rising nationalism, widening inequality, environmental

inaction, emboldened hate groups, diminishing corporate accountability? Can we can take

notice of the moments when our own desires to police sounds arise and flip these

impulses into opportunities to make kin?

Cultivating awareness of our categorical imaginings and how we might unimagine

them might help us with these tasks. To this end, I close this reflection by recounting one

soundsinger's long journey into eliminating the space between speech and music. In his

essay "The Speech–Music Continuum" (2012), Paul Dutton recounts an encounter he had

in 1982 with a vocal quartet called the Extended Vocal Techniques Ensemble (EVTE),

comprising the singers Phil Larson, Deborah Kavasch, Ed Harkins, and Linda

Vickerman. EVTE was performing at the same festival as Dutton and his quartet The

Four Horsemen, a group of poets who collaborated to stage ensemble performance poetry

that frequently was completely abstract and improvised. Dutton describes how EVTE

"were uttering sounds similar to and identical with" those made by The Four Horsemen

and he asked himself "what it was that qualified *them* as musicians" and The Four

Horsemen "as poets" (2012:124). He came to the conclusion that "when one of them whistled, it was a note, but when [he] whistled, it was a syllable." This continued to be how he perceived the divide for years following the encounter (ibid.). However, about a decade later, around the same time that he innovated the term soundsinging, Dutton began to understand the division that he had previously essentialized as "a pointless exercise in pedantry" (ibid.:125). He came to believe that the division was merely "a matter of weighting things in one direction or another" and he realized that, as a listener, he could "listen with delight to a crowd of people talking all at once … as the collective creation of a large free-improvisational orchestra" (ibid.). Dutton abandoned his author-centred sense of essentialized divisions for a listener-centred recognition that speech could be attended to as music. Not merely certain kinds of heightened speech that also bore resemblance to the commonplace definitions of song, but also "the pitch variation and phonetic durations of everyday speech" (ibid.).

As we contemplate the spaces between speech and song, we can keep both Dutton's early essentialism and his later de-essentialized listening in mind. For some listeners, there is no "between" to be perceived between speech and song. For others there is. Sometimes these perceptions are benign and other times they serve symbolic processes that lead to horror. We need a better understanding of these symbolic processes and a resolve to contribute to both fostering and staging sympoietic identifications within musical settings. When we stage sympoietic kinship across perceived symbolic divides, we create opportunities for listeners to unimagine those divides. If these listeners feel included and respected in the constructions we offer, they may well abandon imaginings of alterity in favour of new modes of identification across difference. All of us can pause

and reconsider our reactions when sounds compel us to register them as Others. All of us

can take action to help unimagine Song.

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