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Singing the body electric

Understanding the role of embodiment in performing and composing interactive music

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Singing the body electric

Understanding the role of embodiment in
performing and composing interactive music

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

by due permission of the Malmö Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts,
Lund University, Sweden.

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Faculty opponent

Professor Dr. Sally-Jane Norman
University of Sussex, UK & Victoria University Wellington,
New Zealand

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Almost since the birth of electronic music, composers have been fascinated by the prospect of integrating the human voice with its expressiveness and complexity into electronic musical works. This thesis addresses how performing with responsive technologies in mixed works, i.e. works that combine an acoustic sound source with a digital one, is experienced by participating singers, adopting an approach of seamlessness, of zero – or invisible – interface, between singer and computer technology. It demonstrates <i>how the practice of composing and the practice of singing both are embodied activities</i>, where the many-layered <i>situation</i> in all its complexity is of great importance for a deepened understanding. The overall perspective put forward in this thesis is that of music as a sounding body to resonate with, where the <i>resonance</i>, a process of embodying, of feeling and emotion, guides the decision-making. The core of the investigation is the lived experiences through the process of composing and performing three musical works. One result emerging from this process is the suggested method of <i>calibration</i>, according to which a bodily rooted attention forms a kind of joint attention towards the work in the making. Experiences from these three musical works arrive in the formulation of an over-arching framework entailing a view of musical composition as a process of construction – and embodied mental simulation – of situations, whose dynamics unfold to engage musicians and audience through shifting <i>fields of affordances</i>, based on a <i>shared landscape of affordances</i>.</p>		
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