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Reclaiming Singing as Art: The Trouble with Mechanics

Amanda Cole

Griffith University

> "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination—What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not."
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> — John Keats

ABSTRACT: The teaching of singing is increasingly influenced by research in the fields of health science and acoustics to the extent that teachers could be excused for thinking that they need a science or other technical degree in order to teach singing responsibly. While it is a step forward to increase the accuracy of our teaching language and the precision of the mechanical aspect of instruction, the author cautions against and draws attention to the growing risks of falling into the trap of a single-minded focus on mechanics in the voice studio. The author considers the increasing reliance on mechanical models for voice teaching, offering viewpoints from philosophy and poetry in a reminder to maintain balance in the modern voice studio.

KEYWORDS: *Classical and contemporary voice pedagogy, Voice science, Singing and psychology, Singing technique, medicalization, singing and performance, whole versus parts, art versus science, art of singing, mechanics, mechanistic teaching, the humanities, John Dewey.*

PREFACE: SCOPE AND ORIGINS

My aim in this paper is to argue against dogmatically mechanical approaches to vocal pedagogy. That these approaches currently command attention can be seen in the preponderance of mechanically focused workshops for singing teachers that were offered by my national professional association throughout 2022. At the same time, judging by contributions to recent ANATS and NATS conferences, our profession also appears to value the ideas of "holistic" teaching, but these, too, can be either limited to or strongly influenced by mechanical models. I have addressed the scope of certain definitions of "whole" and "holistic" in a previous article, in which I showed that even writers who advocate a holistic approach to voice teaching are often limited in their definitions of "whole" (Cole, 2021). Beyond this, a more recent survey of the literature highlights three main problems. First, even pedagogues who claim to include both art and science, or to address the "whole self" in vocal pedagogy, frequently limit themselves to the mechanical aspects of singing (for example, Ragan, 2020; Nelson & Blades Zeller, 2002; Miller, 1986, though he goes some way to correcting this in Miller, 1996). Second, historically, those who have claimed to address art *and* science often limit the definition of art to a mechanical one—"the art of technique" (see especially Miller, 1986; Monahan, 1978; Sagiova, 1963). Third, the importance of art or a "whole" approach to singing is acknowledged by some (e.g., Salaman, 1999; Reid, 1975; Sell, 2005), but these writers struggle to define it and/or offer limited methods of teaching or nurturing it.

To provide incontrovertible evidence that the teaching and practice of singing is going in any particular direction is beyond the scope of this article and would require a study the size of a PhD that would include a long historical dimension. It is not my aim to present it as irrefutable but rather to raise questions and awareness of its possibility. As with issues such as climate change, we cannot wait until we have definitive proof before questioning our present way of doing things. Even if there has been a recent and/or general swing of the pendulum towards whole and holistic teaching in recent years, I suggest that the mechanistic approach can be seductive: it is easy to get hooked into and hooked on, and it fits particularly with our increasingly technical world, to the exclusion of other perspectives. I describe this in more detail in this article. In previous articles (Cole, 2019a; Cole, 2021) I have addressed the extent to which even some of those who are recognized for holistic vocal pedagogy can have limited interpretations of "the whole" and may be failing to appreciate key aspects of it.

INTRODUCTION: "THE CARING PROFESSION?"

In a recent music performance masterclass broadcast internationally by a professional association, a prominent pedagogue described performers as being in "the caring profession". While the intention was to help performers move the focus away from the idea of being judged *by* others and towards the idea of doing something constructive in the world *for* others, the analogy with the medical profession raises concerns. In this article I address a related trend in the teaching of singing, even if it is not the *only* trend. I call it the medicalization of art: the art of music in general and the art of singing in particular.

In a different seminar in 2022, in which master teachers modelled best practices for singing teachers, one teacher described herself as "a very mechanistic teacher." At the same event, another teacher described the presence of the audience as a problem for the student, describing the situation thus: "It doesn't help that you're working in front of a group of people."[1] These comments revealed the mechanical focus of the teacher in question and suggested a desire to remove the student from her environment, perhaps with the idea that this is a key function of the voice studio: to focus on mechanics *in isolation.*

In another recent event a renowned voice pedagogue offered "a history of vocal pedagogy," in which he outlined the salient features of "the major figures of the past." The slides of his presentation were solely concerned with points about mechanics. This suggests that it is only the mechanics of a singing pedagogy that can define it, when there are so many more aspects that can differentiate one's teaching. Since these aspects require more work to investigate, understand and articulate than mechanics (which can be succinctly described and measured) it is easy to understand why a summary of pedagogy might neglect to mention them. Their omission, however, further consolidates and appears to justify our increased focus on the mechanical. The impression of increasing reliance on mechanics was further strengthened by a fourth recent webinar, this time by a speech pathologist. In the webinar she showcased her approach to teaching singing, which centred on the tongue.

My aims in this article are threefold. First, in the interests of meeting the broader needs of our students, I outline the problems with a medicalizing trend. As I will show, by isolating students from their environment, that is, by moving the focus away from *play* and *choice* and *artistic performance* in our teaching practice, we make performance harder for our students. As we focus increasingly on the technical and functional in lessons, it will become more difficult for students to remember a creative–and therefore playful–reason for being on stage. Second, I aim to put into a broader context the trend towards an increasingly technical or mechanical focus and suggest a link between the context and the trend. The context is that of the changing role of the sciences and the humanities in Australian society and beyond. Finally, in the spirit of humanities research, I aim not to prove that vocal pedagogy has already become medicalised, but to ask such questions as: What is the endpoint of such a focus and direction, and is that what we want for our art and the teaching of it? How do we counteract such a trend in a world that is increasingly influenced by the technical and the scientific?

METHODS

The research methods used in this article are historical, qualitative and philosophical. Each is described and justified in music education research in separate paragraphs.

Two purposes of historical research relevant to this article, as enumerated by music education researcher Roger Phelps (1980), are: to study the organisation, development and influence of a performing group or professional organization; and, as Thucydides, the father of modern historical method, said, "Not to write for immediate applause but for posterity" (Phelps, 1980, pp. 122-123). The performing group(s) and professional organization(s) discussed in this article are those of singers and voice teachers.

Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings," as Denzin and Lincoln describe, "attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (2011, p. 3). Such research involves the use and collection of a variety of empirical methods, including "case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artefacts, and cultural texts and productions, along with observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts" that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4). Qualitative researchers deploy a "wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject

matter at hand" and knowing that each practice makes the world visible in a different way (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 4). One aim of this article is to put voice teaching in a broader context by using a variety of such artefacts and texts in order to suggest a trend in our field and to make it visible.

Finally, the overarching method of this article is the philosophical method. In Estelle Jorgensen's words, philosophy, among other things, "clarifies its terms, exposes and evaluates underlying assumptions, relates its parts as a systematized theory that connects with other ideas and systems of thought, and addresses questions that are characteristically philosophical" (2006, p. 176). A researcher herself, she explains that philosophy assumes a central place alongside science in music education research, since explanation in music education is understood to be multifaceted rather than monolithic: "As nonscientific ways of knowing complement scientific ways of knowing, so music education is properly studied scientifically and nonscientifically" (Jorgensen, 2006, p. 183). The philosophical method in music education research offers "challenges to the validity of extant ideas and practices" and research questions that "systematically ask whether these ideas and practices are well grounded," bypassing "the peripheral and trivial issues, going to the core of *why* things are as they seem to be and where they seem to be going" (Jorgensen, 2006, p. 187). This is the main aim of this article.

MEDICALISATION AND MECHANISATION

Let me say at the outset that I do not mean to suggest that our field should be uninformed by science, or that medical and pathological knowledge and research should not form a part of our training as voice pedagogues. Clearly it should, and there is much to be gained by sharing knowledge between fields and making our practice a multidisciplinary one. Anatomical and physiological inaccuracy (and, in many cases, imaginary or fanciful anatomy) on the part of some of my teachers in the past caused me a great deal of confusion and frustration. Rectifying this inaccuracy, by growing our understanding of physical and physiological function, is vital. As voice teachers, however, we should not give away our power and imagination as artists and performers to health professionals or try to become (or mimic) health professionals ourselves. Perhaps even more importantly, I caution against the assumption that all answers to performing—or indeed even to the mechanical creation of effective sound—can come from scientists who may not have our experience in the vocal, musical and dramatic arts as a singer. Sometimes it is the latter, who has thought through, experienced and/or learned from others about the dynamics of singing and performing as whole activities, who can provide a quicker route to success, precisely through the wholeness of the approach. The tendency to look toward medicine and other health sciences comes with the danger of dissecting the whole into parts and forgetting—or running out of time—to recompose and understand the whole act from a musical, dramatic or performing point of view. I am also cautioning against making vocal pedagogy solely about mechanics. Parts may include individual body parts, such as the jaw, which I discussed in a previous article (2019a), or they may include isolated aspects of singing and performing, such as that of simply making sound, which I discussed in depth in another article (2021).

The problems with a mechanical-only model, and with valuing only those methods that have been backed by "evidence," are several. First, mechanics is only one aspect of singing and is therefore a compartmentalised approach. It is solely concerned with making sound. It also represents an exponentially growing challenge to voice teachers who may think that they must incorporate and keep up with the constant advances, thus leading to overwhelm and an ineffective pedagogy. Second, under a mechanical model, singing teachers can be replaced by health scientists and/or acousticians, because they are not teaching so much as treating and training. And third, as I will show, focussing exclusively on mechanics can be a major contributing factor to what is increasingly known in the field as "MPA" (music performance anxiety), a phrase coined by psychologist Dianna Kenny (2011). This is because mechanical approaches miss art and play as defining features of the whole of our practice. I will outline these under subheadings below.

Mechanics: Our obsession with parts

The *Cambridge English Dictionary* describes "mechanistic" as "thinking of living things as if they were machines," while the *American Heritage Dictionary* describes it as "tending to explain phenomena only by reference to physical or biological causes; automatic and impersonal; mechanical." In other words, teaching "mechanistically" involves a kind of separation or compartmentalization of the human being. As

American philosopher John Dewey described almost a century ago,

> Compartmentalization of occupations and interests brings about separation of that mode of activity commonly called 'practice' from insight, of imagination from executive doing, of significant purpose from work, of emotion from thought and doing. Each of these has, too, its own place in which it must abide. Those who write the anatomy of experience then suppose that these divisions inhere in the very constitution of human nature. (1934/2005, p. 21)

Dewey suggests that theories which separate matter and form are cases of what he calls a "fundamental fallacy," because "they rest upon separation of the live creature from the environment in which it lives" (p. 136). In voice teaching, we have not been immune to this kind of separation.

As Jean Callaghan's research shows, teachers have been suspicious of adopting physiology and acoustics in the voice studio, but the reasons still reflect a less-than-whole approach to pedagogy (2000). Referring to research she first published in 1998, Callaghan wrote that most of the teachers she interviewed for her project thought that while vocal physiology and acoustics might be of use to singing teachers, "they were concerned that such information might interfere with the hearing and feeling aspects of the art and with helping their students to experience singing as an holistic *sensory* activity" (1998; 2000, p. 113, my italics). Reading between the lines, it seems that these teachers were suspicious of a scientific or overly technical approach, one that neglected at best, and interfered with at worst, the "hearing and feeling" aspects of singing. And yet, these teachers seem still to be focussed on teaching and singing in the physical realm (hearing, feeling and sensation). That is, the ideal to which they refer is limited to the world of the singer, rather than the relationships that are inherent in vocal performance: of the singer with others, with musical and textual meaning, and with communication and representation. They do say that they value artistry and individual expression, and "knowing how" over "knowing that," explains Callaghan (2000, p. 114). But the ideal of learning, in their eyes, is still expressed as "experiential," "holistic" and "sense-based" (Callaghan, 2000, p. 114), and they are focussed only on the instrument, rather than the whole. That is, as Dewey (1934/2005) puts it, they try to separate the live creature from its environment. Elegantly describing art and communication, Dewey reminds us: "Language exists only when it is listened to as well as spoken. The hearer is an indispensable partner. The work of art is complete only as it works in the experience of others than the one who created it" (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 110).

Callaghan (2000) advocates a new model of professional education for singing teachers which takes into account both "craft knowledge" and "voice knowledge." The former refers to what these teachers already value and use in skill teaching, while the latter refers to that which has accumulated through experimental and qualitative research. She points out the importance of accuracy in the realm of physical function and vocal acoustics and the benefits of adopting voice science. More than twenty years later, the amount of information has grown exponentially. The sheer volume of scientific information and the constant evolution of new knowledge, which, as Callaghan explains, can be difficult to interpret and apply, can seem like pressure enough to drop all else in the voice studio and focus on mastering the mechanical detail. Teachers may well run out of time—or simply forget, due to the dominance of the scientific in our world—to refine their methods of addressing the *whole* of their craft, or the skills of integrating, coordinating and balancing.

Art, on the other hand, does not need to keep adding to its database of facts or contributing masses of new information to the field in order to remain fresh and new. By its very nature, art grows and renews the practitioner. It connects us to our environment with its eternal "why" and our own individual and personal reasons for singing. It connects us to our audience, and yet, it remains the individual practice of the practitioner. In an age of information overload and overwhelm, artistic practice, then, can also be an important anchor to keep us on track and to keep us whole. Art acts as a coordinator of our whole selves and of our whole practice. But because it does not clamour as loudly as science with its facts, figures and evidence, we may need reminders of its place and its value in the voice studio.

As Dewey says, "Art is the living and concrete proof that man is capable of restoring consciously, and thus on the plane of meaning, the union of sense, need, impulse and action characteristic of the live creature" (1934/2005, p. 26).

The appropriation of a field?

In discussing the place of the humanities in what he calls an increasingly "scientistic" society, contributing editor for *The Atlantic* Leon Wieseltier declares:

> The level of scientific literacy [in the US] is deplorable and that needs to be corrected. But it

> doesn't need to be corrected so as to usurp or displace the humanities…We have to make ourselves intellectually competent in all the realms in which we live, but the fundamental principle has to be that no single realm has the right to usurp any other realm… (Wieseltier in Wieseltier & Faust, 2016, 40'12")

To drive his point home, he concludes: "One has to be ferocious and vigilant in defence of the humanities because essential capacities will be lost" (Wieseltier in Wieseltier & Faust, 40'48").

As singers and voice teachers, we must be careful of what Wieseltier describes as usurpation or displacement of the humanities by the sciences. If we are not aware of this trend, or the possibility of it, the field of voice and voice teaching will eventually lose its identity and be subsumed under health sciences. Note that already, where once our field was referred to as "singing," it is increasingly referred to as "voice studies" or similar, focusing, once again, on the instrument, where the older term summons a broader context, which includes performance. Even the scholarship in our field shows signs of this. In many journals on music and education, the style of referencing has been borrowed from the health sciences, where once a humanities-oriented style might have been—and in some journals is still—used. The adoption of a health-sciences referencing style further suggests a wish to align with the health sciences and, perhaps, to gain the esteem they enjoy.

Removing *play* and *choice* from singing, and feeding anxiety

When we give our students directions to follow (e.g. exercises to sing, and mechanical fixes to problems), we take away, on one hand, their agency and their ability to choose for themselves and to self-direct and, on the other, their playfulness, curiosity and creativity. As I explain below, by removing these things from students, we make performance more difficult, and singers are likely to respond to this difficulty with what psychologists call music performance anxiety, or MPA (Kenny, 2011). Choice and play are closely linked and a full discussion of their roles in singing and singing tuition merits a separate article. Below, I will give a brief overview of each.

In his book *Do Hard Things* (2022), runner, coach and author Steve Magness articulates the importance of choice when training performers, and points out that traditional training (in various fields) tends to have been defined by the direction and control of the coach. He points to new research that indicates the shortcomings of this kind of coaching and teaching, observing that "efficiency and control have replaced ingenuity and empowerment" (Magness, 2022, p. 100). He explains that putting students in a position to choose, in an autonomy-supportive environment, actually "switches on" and trains their prefrontal cortex, leading to higher levels of mental toughness and better performances. In the realm of play, interpreting, and creating, the choices open to students in the voice studio are almost limitless. If we remove this important feature of singing lessons, we neglect a powerful method of empowering students. Incidentally, the insight for exploring this phenomenon came not from science, but from philosophy, as Magness points out (Denison & Mills, 2014, p. 281; Magness, 2022, p. 102). Even before Foucault, however, whose philosophical work inspired *these* researchers, F.M. Alexander (founder of the Alexander Technique) had discovered the vital element of choice in mastering the coordination of his voice (Cole, 2022, pp. 54, 97, 200).

Closely related to choice is the element of play. Performing arts educator Catherine Madden (2013) describes a very different approach from a pedagogy of giving instructions, that of "deep play," a term she borrowed from Diane Ackerman (1999):

> Deep play describes my preference for creating a learning situation that calls on the desire to learn, inviting curiosity to lead the enquiry. Deep play is full of trial and error, full of finding out that one thing accomplishes desire better than another. The teacher provides the learning environment, the feedback, the information, the model, etc., and the emphasis of deep play is on the joy of discovering the new, more skilled way to do what you intend. (Madden, 2013, n.p.)

I have provided examples elsewhere of how this kind of play helped me to make revelatory discoveries about how my own voice works and how meaning and movement affect the singer's instrument and the use of it (Cole, 2020). One example is that while experimenting in a performance class with Madden, playing with my intentions towards the music, words, meaning and audience, and by moving—as part of the experiment in expression—in ways that would normally not be part of an oratorio performance, I was able to sing a phrase exactly as I had intended it, something I had never achieved in the practice room or voice studio (and this was confirmed by a recording of the class). This is an example of how *playing* in the context of the *whole*—including voice, music, text, drama and performance—not only deepened and developed understanding of all

these, but also contributed to technical advances by indirect means.

By focussing only on mechanics, or instructions, in the voice studio, and omitting the vital and coordinating aspects of play and communication and performance, we contribute to the phenomenon of what is often referred to as MPA (music performance anxiety). Much of what is described as MPA is actually simply a lack of clarity about what one is doing on the stage. This can stem from confusion about one's role in the larger scheme of things (i.e. the performance, which includes an audience) or a lack of information about how to create broad, meaningful and constructive goals. The term "music performance anxiety" and its acronym were popularised by psychologist Dianna Kenny, whose 2011 monograph bears the same name. By approaching performance as a psychologist, however, she repeatedly and wilfully misses the point (or points) of performance. She neither defines performance nor questions/explores her understanding of performance before delving into its pathology. Despite the lack of clarification and exploration of the thing itself (performance), its pathology now even lays claim to its own entry in the DSM (the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Disorders*) (APA, 2022). While dissecting and anatomising MPA, Kenny completely overlooks what performance is and how it can be play and experimentation and communication and art (and see also Cole, 2019b, for a discussion and disambiguation of the term "performance"). We will do the same if we focus increasingly on mechanics in the voice studio and by doing so will do our students a disservice by increasing levels of anxiety and confusion about their goals in performance. Such goals must aim for more than simply to control the mechanism on the night.

ARTS, HUMANITIES AND THE PROFESSION OF VOICE TEACHING

I return now to the original comment that partly inspired this article: that musicians should think of themselves as being part of "the caring profession." To care for one's audience is an admirable goal. There are certainly times when music plays an important role as solace, therapy, or even healing. But to circumscribe the job of performers in this way is significantly to restrict its scope and role in the world. Reducing the act and role of performance to a single—health sciences—focus such as this is an example of what I hypothesize below as a correlation between the rise of the sciences, the decline in humanities and the attention of the voice teaching profession to turn increasingly toward science and away from art. With this trend, we are also moving away from education in music and towards treatment and training. Here I also enlist the work of American philosopher John Dewey, whose work overlapped with that of F.M. Alexander, particularly in the realm of understanding the role of parts versus the whole. In discussing the separation of matter and form in *Art as Experience*, Dewey wrote:

> Only the being who is ordinarily apathetic finds merely transient excitement in a work of art; only one who is depressed, unable to face the situations about him, goes to it merely for medicinal solace through values he cannot find in his world. But art itself is more than a stir of energy in the doldrums of the dispirited, or a calm in the storms of the troubled." (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 133)

Scientific research and its application to singing is, in a sense, easier than artistic, humanistic or creative research because it is measurable, more straightforward and simpler than seeking, creating, defining and "measuring" meaning in poetry, music and art (if the latter were even possible, which, of course, it is not). It is also a lazier way of teaching simply to give students instructions and physical exercises than it is to entice them to think for themselves and to elicit their creativity by integrating technical know-how with imagination and interpretation. It is easier to show "evidence" of learning from mechanical exercises because they are countable and easily circumscribed, and statistics can be gathered about technical improvements. It requires a relatively low level of judgement to hear whether a student's range or volume has increased, or whether a particular technical feat was more co-ordinated or more accurate. It is far more difficult to assess and measure growth in artistic subtlety, maturity and creativity. In a world that increasingly demands "evidence-based techniques" for practice, it can be easy to forget to integrate artistic and creative concerns into the mechanical. For these reasons it is understandable that we increasingly turn towards applying scientific and mechanical practices, especially when we have to justify our teaching or provide evidence of our "success."

Below I expand this discussion of the correlation—whether causal or not—between the apparent trend in voice teaching away from art and towards science on one hand, and the broader context of what is increasingly valued in our modern (Western) society alongside the decline of the humanities. I examine what is meant by "the humanities" and the problem that arises as increasing proportions of public funds are allocated

to scientific research and only those humanities projects that seek to establish empirical or quantitative findings and establish evidence-based practices. I then introduce the ideas of American philosopher John Dewey in order to reinforce my argument about the importance of art and about embracing the whole of what we do as singers and voice teachers.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines the humanities as:

> Those branches of knowledge that concern themselves with human beings and their culture or with analytic and critical methods of inquiry derived from an appreciation of human values and of the unique ability of the human spirit to express itself. As a group of educational disciplines, the humanities are distinguished in content and method from the physical and biological sciences and, somewhat less decisively, from the social sciences. (2022)

The National Humanities Centre (an independent, non-profit organization dedicated exclusively to advanced study in all areas of the humanities, based in North Carolina) offers a broader definition, which extends to our field: "From an academic standpoint, the humanities include the study of history, philosophy and religion, modern and ancient languages and literatures, fine and performing arts, media and cultural studies, and other fields" (2022).

There is a general devaluing of, and an increasing avoidance of, the humanities. A scientific article is not required to convince anyone that young people read books less than they used to, although Twenge et al. (2019) provide evidence for this. As Twenge (2018) points out:

> Being able to read long-form text is crucial for understanding complex issues and developing critical thinking skills. Democracies need informed voters and involved citizens who can think through issues, and that might be more difficult for people of all ages now that online information is the norm. (n.p.)

It is certainly the case that the humanities cannot be understood or studied without the ability to read such texts. This worrying trend points to the cultural decline of which I write.

As History Professor Stephen Mintz at the University of Texas (Austin) asserts, "The challenges facing the liberal arts are well-known" (2017). One reason he gives is that there has been "a retreat from the notion that a solid grounding in the liberal arts is essential if one is to attain what Aristotle called 'eudaimonia'—the human flourishing that can only come from intensive exposure to the arts, culture, philosophy, theology, and history" (Mintz, 2017, n.p.).

Leon Wieseltier (mentioned above), in conversation with Drew Gilpin Faust (President of Harvard University), describes the fate of the humanities as "a dour subject: declining enrolments, declining budgets, declining cultural prestige" (Wieseltier in Wieseltier & Faust, 2016). He describes the declining prestige of the humanities in the United States as "really nothing less than a cultural crisis" (2016). Faust says in the interview that humanities enrolments at Harvard have dropped from about 25% in 2007 to 14% in 2016. Similarly, she observes a "huge increase" in science majors, which also reflects a move away from the social sciences to science. Minors in humanities have increased, but the enrolments in humanities subjects have shown a consistent overall decline.

Wieseltier and Faust discuss the problem of vocationalism and its relation to the phenomenon of the loss of interest in the humanities. Wieseltier offers the insight that the US is becoming more of a transactional and instrumental society than it has ever been. To illustrate, he says,

> The smartest question you could ask about anything in this country right now is not 'Is it true or false, or good or evil, or ugly or beautiful, but how does it work?' Everything is about technique and technicality. This has something to do with the ascendance of technology, obviously, and the mentality that it subliminally teaches. But I think that what we need to do is to recognize the limitations of that mentality and to recognize that even though the job prospects for humanities students may be good or bad…, the purpose of the humanities is not utilitarian. It is not to get a job. (Wieseltier in Wieseltier & Faust, 2016)

He goes on to lament the fact that many advocates of the humanities often choose utilitarian reasons to defend them, when in fact, the purpose of the humanities is to cultivate the individual and the citizen "for intrinsic reasons." "For intrinsic reasons," he repeats. The same is true for singing. We need to educate our students as individuals, citizens and artists, not just as technicians. And not just because it will make them better at singing or help them get jobs. But also because of the intrinsic value of art.

In Australia, the landscape is not much different from that described by Faust and Wieseltier in the US. The success rate of humanities research projects with the Australian Research Council in recent years shows negligible uptake of humanities projects in the Centre of Excellence (Linkage) rounds and significantly declining uptake

in the Discovery rounds, and this from an already fragile basis compared with other areas of the academy. Centre of Excellence projects are almost exclusively the preserve of the technical and physical sciences (Australian Research Council, 2022). Here I am excluding the social sciences and education, as per the definition above by Britannica, since these fields still fare relatively well.

Note that in the Australian Curriculum the new umbrella term "HASS" (humanities and social sciences), currently merges history, geography, civics and citizenship, and economics and business. The arts and languages are not classified as humanist and are in "learning areas" all of their own. This subtly influences the thinking of our young people, first, making them think that economics and business can be a humanities subject, and second, that arts and languages are somehow not. Mislabelling and compartmentalising of humanities subjects further contributes to the lack of clarity about what humanities are and therefore about their role in society.

In Australia, arts and humanities degrees now cost more than vocational or "practical" degrees. In 2020 the federal government of Australia announced a plan to increase university fees for humanities subjects to more than twice what they were previously, at the same time reducing them for science subjects. The Education Minister at the time, Dan Tehan, rationalised this decision, saying that the government wanted "students to think about choosing university subjects that would boost their employment prospects" (Patty, 2020, n.p.).

This precipitate move of the previous government towards utilitarianism in education could be disastrous for our field. Wieseltier lamented the trend of justifying the humanities with utilitarian arguments (Wieseltier & Faust, 2016, n.p.), as described above. It is a growing phenomenon in the field of voice and music. Articles and research abound to show such findings as how music makes you smarter (Collins, 2014), or how singing in choirs increases health and/or happiness (Bungay & Vella-Burrows, 2013; Stacy et al., 2022). Anita Collins, whose research has been popularised by the ABC, consistently rationalises the study of music for "improvements in memory, language acquisition, executive function, and brain plasticity" and advocates for evidence-based arguments in favour of "music education for every child" (2014, p. 4). In an edited volume devoted to "arts-based methods" in singing tuition (Antonacopoulou & Taylor, 2019), almost every chapter gives a utilitarian *raison d'être*: arts-based methods to uncover the future, arts-based methods to improve social cohesion, or arts-based methods to develop leader character, for example (Antonacopoulou & Taylor, 2019).

Perhaps without reference to the utilitarian rationale for singing, we fear that research in the humanities will be neither taken seriously nor funded. This fear may be well grounded in facts and statistics, and I have provided some of these. But it becomes a problem if, in order to survive at all, the field of singing must sell its soul to another field. It is a problem if it has come to the point that we cannot advocate for—or practise—an art such as singing by emphasizing the intrinsic value of art. In order to be taken seriously and/or receive funding for research projects, are we to forget, ignore, or simply hide the humanising effect, or the magic, the ineffable aesthetic value of the human voice expressing music and poetry? And if so, why? In a world overtaken by technology, we will need these things even more, not less, than we used to.

To summarise, I suggest that the rise of science and the decline in the humanities may correlate with the increasing focus on the health sciences in voice teaching, and may even be driving it. In the same way that I urge teachers to connect singers with their environment and the wider act of singing in order to create better singers and performers, I urge teachers to take note of their environment and pay attention to the decline in humanities and the rise in sciences that surround and threaten our field. That is, I appeal to teachers to *teach whole* in a multitude of ways.

If one is aware of a trend in which one is operating, it is possible to adjust and take compensatory action. I am suggesting this on two levels. The first level is the macro, that we think about our location in the space of a broader trend, and whether we swim with the tide or attempt to turn the ship and swim against it, in defence of art. Several presentations at the recent ANATS and NATS conferences certainly suggest a sign of the latter. The second level is the micro, as in the day to day. That is, that we remember to integrate the detailed and "smaller" tasks in the voice studio with the larger, whole, task of singing and performing.

CONCLUSION: INTEGRATION AND THE WHOLE

One of the most difficult elements of teaching singing is the need to keep in balance all the different hats we have to wear and to integrate all the facets of our knowledge and experience. Uniting knowledge of the mechanical and the

physiological with art and communication is one of the major challenges of teaching singing. Keeping art front and centre while surrounded by the exponential advancement of science is another. With the explosion of scientific information and the pressure to acquire prestige through science, these two aspects of teaching singing will become increasingly challenging. If we can achieve them, they are also the very thing that will make our role impossible for the sciences to usurp. Science can never replace the human heart, individual interpretation and, perhaps most importantly, the stamp of our individual personalities and human experience, but we must value these if they are to survive and thrive as a hallmark of our field. Future research could examine how well we are succeeding in this balancing act and how we can do it better, rather than focussing increasingly on individual facets—one at a time and in isolation—such as the mechanical. Other examples of non-compartmentalised research topics are those that focus on play and art and how to teach it, and how they can influence, guide and inform vocal pedagogy in a whole and co-ordinated way.

NOTES

[1] Describing the situation as "working in front of a large group of people" was a missed opportunity to connect the student with her environment and to help her experiment with this connection, including, for example, working with performance intentions and experiencing the magic of a real, live audience with whom to communicate *while learning to sing*. It could also have been a chance for the student to experiment with and observe how her instrument (her whole self, body and mind) worked under the conditions of a performance. This kind of work, in which students are connected with their environment and encouraged to work with reality in constructive ways, can be revelatory not only for singers, but for performers of all kinds, as my research shows (Cole, 2019b).

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BIOGRAPHY

Amanda Cole is an Australian performer, researcher and music educator, currently Research Fellow at Griffith University and International Baccalaureate Teacher at IES College in Brisbane. She has lectured and taught in Victoria, Queensland, New Zealand and Germany. She has won numerous awards for creative projects, research projects and professional development, including a Churchill Fellowship for music and language study in Europe, a Chamber Music New Zealand grant and an artist in residency in Seattle, Washington. The development and translation into German of her original script for a musical play about Hildegard von Bingen in Germany in 2022 is being supported by Arts Queensland.

Amanda Cole has a doctorate in performing arts pedagogy from Griffith University, a Master's of Music Performance from the VCA (University of Melbourne) and an Honours degree in medical research from Monash University (BMedSci). Her articles on constructive pedagogy, performance and the importance of the whole have appeared in peer-reviewed journals such as the *Australian Journal of Music Education*, *Australian Voice*, and the US *Journal of Singing*. Her book on a major pioneer in arts pedagogy was recently published by Palgrave Macmillan, *Marjorie Barstow and the Alexander Technique: Critical Thinking in Performing Arts Pedagogy* (2022).