

Project Paper „Spoken Lyrics – Driving Words”

This paper contains the content from the project website of the Spoken Word Crossart Project “Spoken Lyrics – Driving Words” by Monika Mertens.

You can follow the Headlines one by one on this webpage and just read the English Version of the content here in this paper.

[Slider Content at the Top of the Page]

Words

Words are among the most important transmitters of our communication. Who says something? How? At what pace? What is the emphasis? In what context? Become part of a journey of discovery through language and expression as well as word and sound environments.

Perception

The sound of words and the sound that surrounds them changes our perception of what is being said.

Emotions

What we feel and sense is related to the words and our perception to those words.

[Headlines above Videos – Shows the content of the Page]

Project Description

The idea behind the project "Spoken Lyrics - Driving Words", what it's all about and what I used to realize it, you can find out here.

Project Content/Artwork

For a wild and wonderful mix of a few of the creations that are made during this project, as well as details on each piece, click here.

Background Information

Why I started this project, what challenges me and more insights about my work on the project.

[Section under the Videos]

Words straight from the Heart

In this project I work not only with my own texts and compositions, but also with texts, thoughts and lifeblood of other people. That is - beautiful. And - scary. I treat ALL artworks with love and respect - not only my own. I put a lot of thought into the transformation process. Each creation is a declaration of love: to the word, to art, to creating and to the artists who have created such great artwork.

Publish Notes

The pieces listed below can also be found on my Youtube Channel "Monika Mertens - Faces of Poetry". All other pieces of this project – and even more creative work - will be published exclusively on this Youtube Channel. Feel free to subscribe to my channel if you don't want to miss new pieces of this project and other stuff I create. On Instagram I will inform about new releases on the channel:

More about me

Um, hi - I don't even know if you know that you've landed on the homepage "Gedankenrezepte" by Monika Mertens. I am a Spoken Word Artist from Hamburg. More about me and what I offer for services.

[Project Description]

01.

What happens to a piece of art when one or more art forms are added to it or if it's reduced, and what effects does this have on the listeners and viewers? What influence does this transformation have on the words and on how we perceive them, what we feel?

02.

In my experimental cross-art project "Spoking Lyrics - Driving Words", for which I received cultural funding in 2020, I transform my own spoken word texts in music. In addition, I juxtapose this with lyrics of existing songs by other artists, which I take out of their usual musical context, make a spoken word piece out of them and at the same time put them into a new sound garment.

03.

For this I use a mix of

- hard- and software like microphone, loopstation, DAW
- my voice
- instruments
- various tools from everyday life
- (few) audio samples

04.

The project is a one-woman project (that's me) and consists of:

- administration
- research
- conception
- implementation/creation
- presentation
- marketing

Additional Art by the drawer V (@vwievieles).

[Artwork]

Artefakt 1: Everybody's free | Spoken Word meets Lyrics [Cover]

Notes on copyright

Original lyrics from: Rozalla / "Everybody's free" (check it out - it's a beautiful song)

Voice: Monika Mertens

Composition*, creation, instruments & soundarrangement: Monika Mertens

Drawing: V

*Exception: From minute 1:05 - 1:23 I recorded the beginning of the original verse melody from "Everybody's free" by Rozalla playing the piano via keyboard controller.

Additional Art

The amazing V (Instagram: @vwievieles) made drawings, which I don't want to withhold from you (see above). I put two of them together in a kind of collage for the youtube thumbnail and video. You can find them on my Youtube Channel Monika Mertens - Faces of Poetry.

Share your Thoughts

It would be great if you leave me a comment and tell me how you liked the piece and how you felt listening to it. Did anything change for you in how you perceived the words when you compare it to the original? Anything else? I'm looking forward to read what you have to say - it would be great if you leave a comment on Youtube.

Creation Time

45h

Equipment I used

Mikrophone, loopstation (as interface, looper, for input effects), keyboard controller, computer, DAW, HALion, effect plugins, 2 audio samples (swoosh-sound and one Beat), my voice.

Integrated everyday tool

In each of my pieces from the project I integrate at least one object from everyday life and use it as a sound source. For this piece, I took an empty maple syrup bottle and tapped on it quickly with my fingernails (one after the other). Then I pimped it with some effects via a microphone and the loop station. You can hear the sound – for example - between minute 4:23 and 4:25.

Challenge for me during creation

I spent a lot of time tinkering with the transitions between sections. I also played the udu and piano without editing the midi files - because at that point I didn't have a clue that it was possible (yep, I'm a beginner). First I played one instrument, then the other - playing precisely and stay in rhythm drove me a little ... nuts.

Why "Everybody's free"?

When I thought about which songs would be suitable for realization within the project, I quickly guessed of "Everybody's free" by Rozalla. I am a child of the 90s and loved this song already back then. When I spoke the words out loud slowly for the first time without any melody or music, tears came to my eyes because they straight got to me. Maybe it is the time we are living in, the events of the last months. Either way, these are words that, if you let them get to you, move you and reach you in diverse life situations. They are like a big hug that I would like to spread.

Artefakt 2: Speech No.3 - Hate | Spoken Word meets Music [Original]

Notes on copyright

Lyrics & Voice: Monika Mertens

Composition*, Creation, Instruments & Soundarrangement: Monika Mertens

Drawing: V

*Exception: The sentence "I see witches still burning" is taken from the song "Cowboys and Indians" by Lily Holbrook, I felt inspired by. A really beautiful song, by the way – just check it out. The phrase appears at the very beginning and is later marked as a quote within the artwork ("I once heard Lily Holebrook sing ...").

Additional Art

The amazing V (Instagram: @vwievieles) made drawings. I just added some color (see above) and used them for the Youtube thumbnail and video. You can see the result on my Youtube channel Monika Mertens - Faces of Poetry.

Share your Thoughts

It would be great if you leave me a comment and tell me how you liked the piece and how you felt listening to it. Can you imagine it as a pure spoken word piece (without any music)? What would be different for you? How do you feel about the music as accompaniment to the words? What did the words trigger in you? Anything else? I'm looking forward to read what you have to say - it would be great if you leave a comment on Youtube.

Creation Time

86h (not considering the hours I need to write the text)

Equipment I used

Mikrophone, loopstation (as interface, looper, for input effects), keyboard controller, computer, DAW, HALion, effect plugins, 5 audio samples (for beats), my voice.

Integrated everyday tool

In each of my pieces from the project I integrate at least one object from everyday life and use it as a sound source. For this piece I used a) a lighter and b) a bottle of lemonade, shook it properly and recorded the release of the carbon dioxide. I added effects to both. You can listen to it at the very beginning and at the very end of the artwork.

Challenge for me during creation

First: It's a lot of text. It's almost impossible to record it in one shot in a way you're happy with every part. Second: I played a lot of instruments myself with the keyboard controller - which required a lot of research for suitable instruments and a lot of trial and error. The individual sections within the piece are different and all need a different drive/accent. For me it was like entering different rooms within the piece. Figuring that out was a beautiful but challenging task.

Why "Speech No.3 - Hate"?

Hate - in all its facets, in big and in small deeds as well as words. Its essence, its effects. What I see in it, how I feel about it and how present hate is. This is what my text "Speech No.3 - Hate", which I wrote in 2019, is about. For me, it was first a pure Spoken Word piece. The idea of combining this text in particular with music and sound came to me only when I started my project "Spoken Lyrics - Driving Words".

The topic of hate is present in everyday life of so many people. From bullying and shitstorming to xenophobia, transphobia, homophobia and disgusting, degrading behavior towards women. It can be found even in small, seemingly insignificant everyday situations. It's important to me to give this topic space in such a project and to create an expanded access for the listeners via the musical level.

A little anecdote

I have listened to all the pieces very often during mastering phase, checking sound, volume, effects and text passages. I also did that, when I was "on the road". Once, I was standing in line at the checkout at Budni and all of a sudden I hear - as if from the off - a creepy voice with a spooky sound. Got me really scared. As it turned out, I had forgotten to turn off the player and got in my pocket to the play button at a time when I had unplugged the headphones. What could be heard then - in the middle of Budni - was the beginning of the track with "I feel witches still burning" and the (as I call it) the "spooky-wah" sound.

When I told one of my best friends about it, she said she had a similar incident with this track when she was in her kitchen.

Artefakt 3: In my Mind | Spoken Word meets Lyrics [Cover]

Notes on copyright

Original Lyrics from: Amanda Palmer / "In my Mind" (check it out - it's such a beautiful song and also a great video)

Voice: Monika Mertens

Composition, Creation, Instruments & Soundarrangement: Monika Mertens

Drawing: V

*Exception: The sentence "I see witches still burning" is taken from the song "Cowboys and Indians" by Lily Holbrook, I felt inspired by. A really beautiful song, by the way – just check it out. The phrase appears at the very beginning and is later marked as a quote within the artwork ("I once heard Lily Holebrook sing ...").

Additional Art

The amazing V (Instagram: @vwievieles) made drawings. I just added some more color to the middle one (see above) and used them for the Youtube thumbnail and video. You can see the result on my Youtube channel Monika Mertens - Faces of Poetry.

Share your Thoughts

It would be great if you leave me a comment and tell me how you liked the piece and how you felt listening to it. Did anything change for you in how you perceived the words when you compare it to the original? How does the new sound arrangement make you feel? Anything else? I'm looking forward to read what you have to say - it would be great if you leave a comment on Youtube.

Creation Time

70h

Equipment I used

Mikrophone, interface, loopstation (as looper, for input effects during recording the everyday tool), keyboard controller, computer, DAW, HALion, effect plugins, 2 audio samples (one beat, one melody), my voice.

Integrated everyday tool

In each of my pieces from the project I integrate at least one object from everyday life and use it as a sound source. For this piece, I took a fully packed handkerchief package and rhythmically moved its plastic wrapper back and forth between my thumb and fingers very fast. The recording was done via a loop station with input effects. Afterwards I added further effects to the sound in my DAW. You can listen to it between minute 4:55 and 4:58.

Challenge for me during creation

Actually, I first wanted to make a more "happy version" than it eventually became. I had something like reggae style in mind. I tried a lot of things and then I had to realize that for me the feeling is most relatable when it becomes a quiet number - something in the direction of storytelling.

The next acceptance process was that the transformation felt so much more spartan/simple when compared with the other two pieces. For me to internalize that sometimes less is more and get away from thinking "Oh my god - it's too little ... too little for such great lyrics" was really hard.

I had done very very very many voice recordings. I had anywhere from 7 to 25 recordings of each verse. To reduce that to what felt best to me, to get the essence of the lyrics across in their new context, that was temporarily killing me.

And last but not least: it's Amanda fucking Palmer! The thought that she might hate what I made out of her song was and still is really not easy to take.

Why "In my Mind"?

Amanda Palmer is simply a kick-ass POINT Artist FULLSTOP Through and through PERIOD A human being who inspires me, reaches me and moves me on different levels.

So, she was at the top of my list when it came to finding songs for my project. However, I first thought of her song "Drowning in the Sound". Until I read the lyrics to "In my mind". Not "listened to", because I had already listen the song dozens of times. And when the Ukulele was no longer present and I just spoke out loud the lyrics to myself, I got even more goose bumps all over. I still had no idea how I was going to realize that, but it was clear to me: I have to.

Who am I? Will I ever be where I want to be? Will I ever become who I want to be? Will I ever achieve what is important to me? What is it, that I want to achieve? Do I really want what I think I want? If I think my future and live in the past - how can I ever be in the present? We all judge our lives and our dreams. Condemn ourselves for the self-imposed ideals that we fail to achieve. The lyrics of the song reflect so many (life) stories of people and at the same time give them a loving home.

Background Information

How did the project come about?

"Spoken Lyrics - Driving Words" is a genuine project of the heart. On the one hand, it was born out of my conviction that different art forms enrich each other when they are brought together (in this case: spoken word and music) - and out of the resulting curiosity. Also, I am passionate about creating new things and also develop as an artist.

Languages in which artwork will be published within the project

I publish stuff in German as well as in English. However, I will always use the language in which the piece was originally written. And there will be no translation. The first three pieces of the project are all in English.

What this project is about (to me)

With this project I want to create an expanded access to words for listeners. Who, how, what and in which context something is said changes what we perceive and how we feel about it. Engaging different senses intensifies the experience.

For me, what emerges during the creation process does not have to be "beautiful" in the first place. It is an invitation to a new, in the best case inspiring, interesting and emotional experience. And that not least of Spoken Word outside its comfort zone "Poetry Slam".

Also, it would be really nice to trigger an exchange of opinions with people. Which is also the reason why I chose Youtube as my main publishing channel (Monika Mertens - Faces of Poetry).

What is your experience? What do you feel when listening to the pieces? Does the changed level of the original art form help to convey the content and how you process the words and what you feel? Do you like the pieces? I am curious to hear what you have to say!

Last but not least, I see this project - like any kind of cross-art project - as an opportunity to support and inspire each other as artists.

Why completely new compositions to existing lyrics?

The spoken word experience of a previously known song should - and in my opinion must - be different. If I had simply created a cover of the "old" composition, the listeners would always have had the original in mind. Which I imagine would be very irritating in this project context. Thus, one would not be open to a new perception. In addition, you can't just repeat lyrics (texts written to be sung) in the original tempo of the original melody or beat ... OK, you can, but the result might not be one that really resonates with you. Spoken Word (lyrics that were written to be spoken) simply work very differently than lyrics. To reach the audience with Spoken Lyrics - Driving Words, this transformation is very important.

Creation Time for the whole Project

In total: 350h

Realization 3 pieces: 200h

Postproduction pieces: 25h

Concept project design: 10h

Concept and design Youtube channel: 32h

Texts Youtube channel (German and English): 8h

Concept, design and realization Youtube videos: 35h

Concept, design and realization Instagram teaser: 11,5h (above, at the top of the page, you can see 3 of the different teasers)

Concept, design and implementation of project page content (website): 26h

Additional admin hours: 3h

Underlying challenges within the project

First of all: I underestimated the project in terms of the time it'll take. Doing everything on my own, apart from the drawings that V (Instagram: @vwievieles), that was - besides incredible joy and inspiration - so much work. Administration, sound research, conception, creation & realization, besides getting the website and project page done and running. Designing and implementing the Youtube channel, thumbnail concept, concept of the release for Instagram, teaser creation - and "on the side" I'm also working on other things.

Technology & Instruments

I am a greenhorn. I hadn't worked much with my DAW before. And I hadn't dealt that much with all the equipment. I had also never done anything with a loop station before. I'm not a musician. I don't actually play any instruments, in the sense of: I'm "speaking" instruments just rudimentarily.

Perfectionism

It was (and still is) a "learning by doing" process. From piece to piece I learned new things, watched more tutorials, tried more. And gained knowledge about what I did wrong or less good before. Letting go and not going back to the last piece in a panic to fix everything, but seeing yourself in your creation as part of a natural development process and accepting and loving that, was a bit hard for me at the beginning.

Allowing oneself to be - not only - not perfect at the beginning (of a process/activity), but also in general not be perfect, increases the joy of creating and discovering and also the quality of life in general.

Understanding that the idea of perfectionism is nothing but a concept based on deception and, moreover, complete ignorance of the nature of one's own, of being a human being - this is an important step. And a complicated sentence. Who internalizes (both of) this 100% - chapeau, you are pure wisdom!

Working with artwork of other artists

To treat the art of other artists respectfully is important (to me). I know that this can be a sensitive matter for artists. Always having in mind, how I want other people to treat my art, that helps. Giving other people/artists space for creation and inspiration, but also being appreciated and recognized for what you have created yourself, should be a given.

THANK YOU

I am so grateful that I was able to implement this project in such a way – and this is because of the cultural funding "Kunst kennt keinen Shutdown" organized by the Hamburgische Kulturstiftung. The funding is based on donations from people, companies and institutions who, among other things, think that art is an important and beautiful part of our world and worthy of support. A big !thank you! to all those who make it possible for people like me to do their job (especially but not only in times like these), to continue to be paid for their work and thus, last but not least, to be able to pay their bills - and, not to forget, to do what is important and close to an artist heart.

Thanks also to the V (Instagram: @vwievieles). who I spontaneously surprised with the question if she would like to make drawings for the pieces of the project. I am so happy to have all the beautiful drawings.