



**LEEDS
ARTS RESEARCH
CENTRE**

URSONATE POST-TRUTH

DR OLIVER BRAY, DIRECTOR OF ARTS

OUTPUT INFORMATION

Title:
Ursonate Post-truth

Output Type:
I – Performance

Venues:
Ursonate Post-Truth was performed at the Scuola Grande di San Marco, Venice Biennale (2019), Edinburgh Festival (2018) and for TEDx (2020).

Year of first performance:
2018

Output allocation:
Performance practice



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION STATEMENT

Speechmaking remains an extraordinarily powerful tool. However, contemporary audiences have become wise to the proliferation of media-trained oratory; and speechmaking has itself been ironically transformed into absurd noise (Attali, 1985). Responding to the contemporary global political landscape of 'fake news', this practice-as-research output addresses the research question:

How does the practical combining of the strategies of post-truth speechmaking and the sound poetry of Kurt Schwitters illuminate the verbal presentation of contemporary truth?

The methodology of this output comprised an intensive period of research including writing, rehearsal and performance, from which Bray developed and realised the project's dramaturgy, construction, direction and performance. Ursonate Post-truth, comprises a re-performance of Kurt Schwitters' seminal work of sound poetry, Ursonate - meaning "primordial sonata" or "sonata in primordial sounds". Schwitters' Ursonate plays with assumed notions of language, sound and speech. Bray's re-working interweaves quotations of contemporary political leaders through these primordial sounds. They have included the speeches/texts of Donald Trump, Theresa May, Boris Johnson and Vladimir Putin. These political texts and the poetry of Schwitters combine as layers of vocal delivery to create an intertextual monologue, which juxtaposes the potential of the perlocutionary speech act with the impenetrable beauty of the Ursonate.

Combining the absurd and noisy primordial Ursonate with the seemingly confident, earnest and vacuous delivery of our political speakers, Ursonate Post-Truth seeks to destabilise meaning and certainty in the sampled speeches. In addition to challenging current political rhetoric, Ursonate Post-Truth speaks to prevalent public distrust in speech-making as a form which has been muddled by the post-truth era.

Ursonate Post-Truth was performed at the Scuola Grande di San Marco, Venice Biennale (2019), Edinburgh Festival (2018) and for TEDx (2020).



OLIVERBRAY

Still from Dr Oliver Bray's TEDx
talk at Leeds Beckett University



Speechmaking can be an extraordinarily powerful tool, but contemporary audiences have become wise to the proliferation of media-trained oratory – and speechmaking has been transformed into absurd noise. Dr Oliver Bray will demonstrate the performance of speechmaking in a post-truth era. He introduces how the historic importance of speaking well has changed over time and now elicits cynicism in audiences, a sea-change from the actionable to the abstract. He argues how the saturation of technically appealing but ultimately vacuous speechmaking has turned it into background noise and as a result, the performative and theatrical aspects of speechmaking are thrown into sharp relief.

The talk will include a short excerpt from Oliver's performance 'Ursonate Post-truth,' a reworking of Kurt Schwitters' seminal sound poem 'The Ursonate' which will observe the problems with language, trust and (post) truth in our changing world. Oliver is the Director of Arts in the Leeds School of Arts and is well-respected for producing performance and live art work which seeks to always be genuinely innovative and edgy, while remaining unapologetically inclusive and watchable. His work has toured widely to various national and international festivals including; the Sibiu International Theatre festival in Romania, the In Between Time festival in Bristol and the National Review of Live Art in Glasgow.

His current research interests stem from his professional practice in contemporary performance and live art but are inherently interdisciplinary in nature, they include methodologies of restriction and constraint, speechmaking, and the art of rhetoric. This talk was given at a TEDx event using the TED conference format but independently organized by a local community.

TEDx talk blurb

Keywords:

Performance

Oration

Speechmaking

Kurt Schwitters

Links:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l4larwudRK8>

<https://www.onlineperformanceart.com/oliver-bray-leeds-uk-ursonate-post-truth/>

<https://www.scuolagrandesanmarco.it/docs/The-Demarco-Archive-in-Venice-2019-Art-and-Healing-Exhibition-and-Symposium.pdf>

Email:

o.bray@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

WWW.LEEDSBECKETT.AC.UK/LARC

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