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Female vocality: sounding, hearing, and structures of feeling re-framed

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Abstract.

This study proceeds from the belief that the female voice is silent or is seemingly absent in theatre and explores the possibility of the presence of a female vocality. The term 'female vocality' is used to refer to multiple aspects of the voice(s) of women in theatre; as performers, as playwrights and as theatre makers. It refers to both the sound of the voice and the structural elements of performance and text. The term is also intentionally used to uncover the uniqueness of the female voice and of that which is specific to women and arguably less defined by logocentric or patriarchal structures. A further distinction is made with the use of the term, in a more symbolic and generic sense, to denote the public and political voice of women. It is not only the sound of the voice that is examined but also how that sound is received or heard. The voices of women have not necessarily been absent or silent but 'seemingly absent' because the receiver was not actively present, or possibly, the listener chose not to hear.

Part One: By searching the silences for the sound of the female voice, it is not only the voice that is uncovered, but features of identity and subjectivity. It traces the path of a trajectory of feminist critical theory in the late twentieth century that impacted profoundly on theatre practice and this notion of silence or absence of the female voice. In the 1980's, Sue-Ellen Case (1988) suggested that feminist critics adopt the term a 'new poetics' to describe their attempts to embrace new forms of language and dramatic structure in feminist theatre. This new form defines the re-positioning of woman as subject and calls for a re-construction of language and text to reflect the female voice more accurately. It also explores the work of performance artists and the influence of the writing of post-structuralist Hélène Cixous in their attempts to foreground themselves as subject and the body as text.

Part Two: By appropriating Raymond Williams' term 'structures of feeling' I posit a re-framing of a feminine theatrical aesthetic that expresses the lived experience of women. I am drawn to the use of the term because of its implicit understanding of the qualities of particular types of experience that are intangible or 'unspeakable' which is similar to the elusive qualities inherent in the description of female vocality. To articulate these qualities more lucidly I refer to Kristeva's 'semiotic' and Barthes 'grain of the voice.'

Part Three: I examine how the voice is at times not heard and how this aspect of selective hearing can be developed by the listener or audience. Related to this is how in the development of western thought and philosophy the voice has been separated from the speaker and relegated to insignificance. Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero terms this ‘the devocalization of logos’ (2005: 33) which is useful in understanding how women’s voices have seemingly been ignored.

I review my own practice and the challenges it presented in uncovering alternative theatrical means to foreground female vocality. I search for possible ways of re -considering the use of language and in this regard, I refer to playwrights Caryl Churchill and Sarah Kane and their respective innovative use of dramatic and dialogic structure which deconstructed the more traditional (patriarchal) forms.

Aspects of the postdramatic theatre are considered in an endeavour to propose structural and dramaturgical devices that may create new vocal landscapes which would enhance the potential of the multi-faceted aspects of female vocality in an attempt to define a ‘new poetics’ for the twenty-first century.

By mapping the possibilities inherent in female vocality for theatre the findings reveal that there are rich resources available. These concepts and examples can be used and crafted towards creating a dynamic feminine theatrical aesthetic where the voices of women can be experienced and heard.

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Female vocality in theatre: sounding, hearing, and structures of feeling re-framed

Introduction

My search for the sound of women's voices in theatre began with the premise that there was a seeming absence of authentic female vocality in theatre. Or perhaps it was the belief that what was present was a misrepresentation of a particular sounding inherent in the female voice. Is there a 'language' or vocality specifically used by women in theatre? Is it hidden or does it rather require a different kind of hearing? What I have uncovered are many significant attempts to expose, explore and reveal a female vocality which I will examine through mapping alternative notions of sounding and hearing.

The term 'female vocality,' is used here to refer to multiple aspects of the voice(s) of women in theatre; in performance, it refers to both the sound of the voice and the structural elements or morphology; and in the writing, both of and for performance, it refers to the words and structure of the text. The term is also intentionally used to uncover the uniqueness of the female voice and that which is specific to women and arguably less defined by logocentric or patriarchal structures. In searching for a female vocality within a theatrical framework, I consider Sue-Ellen Case's proposal of a 'new poetics' to encode the practice of feminist practitioners (Case, 1988: 112). Inspired by Case's findings I experimented with notions of sounding in my own theatrical practice, to deliberately foreground the female voice in a different way. This research included the investigation of elements of structure, the form of language and the embedded aspects of vocality. What became evident through my research practice was that female vocality in theatre needs to be exposed and mapped so as to realize its unique potential. Implicit in this process is the need to shift the perception of sounding toward a better reception by the listener.

The act of speaking is relational in the sense that we speak to communicate with another for a particular purpose. The use of the voice implies that there is an ear to listen or hear. Thus, this exploration involves an awareness of 'an acoustic sphere' (in Cavarero, 2005: 13), in other words, how female vocality is heard or received. The voices of women have not necessarily

been absent or silent, in fact, the struggle to be heard has been constant, but ‘seemingly absent’ because the receiver was not actively present, or possibly, the listener chose not to ‘hear.’ Thus inherent in the process is the need to explore how the sound(s) of female vocality are expressed so that they can be heard in new ways. It is this aspect of listening or hearing anew that is central to my argument.

In order to map the complex sounding implicit in female vocality, I examine notions such as Barthes’ ‘grain of the voice’ (1985) and Bakhtin’s heteroglossia (Hitchcock, 1993). I search for clues in the texts of Caryl Churchill (Churchill, 1985) and Sarah Kane (Kane, 2001) and posit examples from Lehmann’s observations of postdramatic theatre practice (Lehmann, 2006). As a South African theatre practitioner, I excavated aspects of female vocality found in the texts of playwrights such as Fatima Dike and Reza de Wet. I examine Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘structures of feeling’ (Williams, 1973) as a re-framing of female vocality to support the assertion of a theatrical aesthetic that can highlight that which is particular to women. I finally posit the possibility of identifying a new female poetics (Case, 1988) as a means whereby the innate potential of female vocality is accentuated.

I have opted for the term a female ‘vocality’ borrowing from Dunn and Jones who in turn appropriated it from Paul Zumthor, an authoritative medievalist, in his research of medieval poetics (Dunn and Jones, 1987: 2). Zumthor notes the distinction between orality and vocality, defining orality as ‘the functioning of the voice as the bearer of language’ and vocality as ‘the whole of the activities and values that belong to the voice as such, independently of language’ (cited in Cavarero, 2003: 12). Vocality suggests a wider understanding of the human voice in all its manifestations, namely in pre-linguistic utterance and non-linguistic utterance such as laughing, singing, crying, and vocal gestural language. Vocality also denotes a more performative aspect of expression that incorporates vocalization as well as the auditory aspect of being heard (Dunn and Jones, 1987: 2).

By highlighting existing evidence and searching for new forms of female vocality, I focus attention once more on the inherent power that women have in sharing an acoustic sphere in order to be present and heard.

Part One

Searching the silences for the sound(s) of female vocality.

present yet not present

My initial premise that the female voice in theatre is silent, or is seemingly absent or hidden, revealed an historical overview of the silencing of women. The struggle of women to find their right to speak in the public domain and the omission of women from the patriarchal account of history has been well documented. As Elizabeth Grosz notes:

Women in patriarchy were regarded as socially, intellectually, and physically inferior to men as a consequence of various discriminatory, sexist practices that illegitimately presumed women were unsuited for or incapable of assuming certain positions. This belief was fostered not only by oppressive external constraints but also by women's own compliance with and internalization of patriarchal stereotypes (Grosz, 1995: 50).

The female voice in theatre has been mostly hidden by patriarchal accounts of histories, resulting in the belief in an absence or silence. In fact, women playwrights in Britain, only emerge in the seventeenth century (Case, 1988: 5). Feminist critics and historians who began to research and study the western classical tradition for evidence of a female presence found there was a distinction between the public (privileged) life of men and the private (invisible) life of women. In other words, the division is gender specific with the public life being the property of men, whilst women are 'relegated to the invisible private sphere' (Case, 1988: 7). Thus the representation of women on stage was fictionalized according to patriarchal values and 'the experiences, stories, feelings and fantasies of actual women' were suppressed (1988: 7). In Ancient Greece, women were denied access to the *polis* and intellectual pursuits of the soul and philosophy and confined to the domestic and maternal duties of the household and child-rearing (1988: 7). This gendered division was reflected in Greek theatre (exacerbated by male actors playing female roles) and once this assumed 'classic' status it became 'a paradigmatic element in the history of theatre, connoting the expulsion of women from the canon and the ideal' (Case, 1988:

11). In Elizabethan England the Greek experience was replicated especially with 'the revalorization of Aristotle's *Poetics* [and] the conscious imitations of the classical writing style and the assimilation of female roles by male actors' (Case, 1988: 19). Feminist historians excavated playwrights such as Hrotsvit von Gandershiem (934-1002), (the first known woman playwright), Aphra Behn (the first woman to earn a living as playwright), Susanna Centlivre, Sor Juana Inès de la Cruz and Rahel Varnhagen amongst others.

This indelible trace of absence or lack can be traced throughout the history of theatre to the latter half of the twentieth century, but it is the seldom explored, and neglected acoustic sphere that women inhabit in the domestic world to which I wish initially to draw attention. It is not to relegate women to her place in the home but rather to highlight and foreground the intimate nature of the domestic landscape. The home is the container of the personal, the family secrets and memories. It is the haven for the nurturing of children and as such it contains the echoes of the first sounds we uttered. To find and explore this (often) hidden vocality, both men and women need to return to this domestic acoustic sphere. This is the private world of the language of mother and child in the pre-linguistic stages, the sound of the mother's voice that remains imprinted throughout one's life. This pre-linguistic phase is characterized by playfulness, an experience of sensual pleasure and fun in the vocalization of sounds by both infants and parents. This domestic sphere also contains the voice of the story teller, the singer of lullabies, the 'death-crooner' who sings to the dead, and the singer of traditional songs (Mills, 2000: 17). These are the voices that need to be excavated or uncovered to explore the latent power inherent in female vocality.

Men have feared the power of the female voice and 'women have been punished for releasing their wisdom in sound' throughout the ages (Newham, 1999: 155). Odysseus was tied to the mast to resist the seductive lure of the Sirens, both of their voices and of the wisdom they sought to impart. Pericles was so distressed by the wailing of women that he forbade them to attend funerals. English women in the Middle Ages were banned from singing folk songs for fear that they were casting spells. Eve was considered sinful for tempting Adam to eat with her words and 'men have perpetuated the belief that loquacity and an outspoken tongue are a woman's vices while silence and verbal restraint are her virtues' (Newham, 1999: 155). According to Aristotle, 'silence is a woman's

glory' (Aristotle, 1998: xiii), and in Sophocles, Ajax declared, 'silence gives the proper place to women' (Sophocles, 1999: 23). Wilson, a sixteenth century writer on rhetoric cited in Karpf (2006: 156) articulates in *The Art of Rhetorique*, the thought that pervades the centuries:

What becometh a woman best and first of all: Silence. What seconde: Silence.
What third: Silence. What fourth: Silence (Wilson cited in Karpf, 2006: 156).

It is in their quest to be actively present that women have exerted their power politically and claimed their right to speak. The twentieth century saw major shifts which resulted in amending this view of silence and absence. There is a trajectory of feminist theory and practice through the last thirty years of the twentieth century that is revealing in terms of the impact it had on the notion of a female vocality in theatre. The theory and practice of feminist theatre practitioners manifested in diverse ways both gathering, and creating momentum. In the 1970's, radical-feminist collectives such as *It's All Right to be a Woman Theatre* organized women's consciousness-raising (or CR) groups whose first initiative was to give women a safe forum to discuss women's issues with other women, thereby restoring their voices and validating their position as women. These initiatives were translated into theatrical performances which were similar to group sessions but nevertheless 'produced a new dramaturgical dynamic that matched the feminist sense that the personal is political' (Case, 1988: 65). In 1970 Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* was performed giving African-American women a platform to voice their concerns about rape and identity. And in the United Kingdom, Caryl Churchill's groundbreaking *Cloud Nine* (1979) combined feminist and socialist analysis to create a new dramatic structure as well as socio-political paradigm shifts through the use of cross-gender, cross-racial and cross-generational casting. Churchill also introduced innovative dialogic structures in her use of overlapping dialogue that was influential in defining new frames for the use of interactive dramatic dialogue. Churchill's pioneering experimentation with theatrical form and structure has been profoundly instrumental in influencing successive generations of playwrights as well as contributing to the establishment of 'feminist theatre practice and scholarship on the English stage and in the theatre academy' (Aston, 2003: 18). The particular form that feminist drama took and 'the radical break it made with the theatrical 'past' was

dependent upon what kind of feminism coloured the stage picture' (2003: 9). According to Aston there were principally three feminisms:

bourgeois feminism, linked to staging realism with more roles for women; radical [cultural] feminism, looking to ways of undermining patriarchy and representing women's culture; and socialist [materialist] feminism harnessed to a Brechtian/feminist dramaturgy (Aston, 1988: 176).

As the 1970's progressed feminism became 'feminisms' including classifications such as radical/cultural, liberal, materialist, socialist, Marxist, lesbian, radical lesbian and post-structuralist. Although these positions are clearly distinguishable from one another, 'many feminists embrace a combination of them' (Case, 1988: 63). Initially, feminist theatre practitioners concerned themselves with a right to speak and focused attention on specific social problems relating to women. The performances were fuelled by the energy of post-show discussions, conscientizing and motivating a whole generation of women to break the silence. The basic premise of these performances was that the personal is political, thus authenticating personal experience (De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 4).

Playwright David Edgar refers to the 'explosion of women's theatre' in 1980's Britain (in Aston, 2003: 2) and critic, Benedict Nightingale alludes to the fact that women's theatre was 'the most positive aspect' of an 'otherwise barren decade for new drama' (2003: 2). These examples highlight the force of the trajectory of feminist theory and practice and the impression it made on theatre. It maintained its momentum until the 1990's when it was interrupted by what Susan Faludi refers to as a 'backlash to feminism' (2003: 2). Alex Sierz (2001) referred to British theatre of the 1990's as 'in- yer- face theatre' and a 'shock-fest' which was dominated primarily by discontented, angry young men and a 'few angry young women' resulting in a lack of female presence (Aston, 2003: 2). Faludi concludes *Backlash* with the following observation:

There really is no good reason why the 1990's can't be their [women's] decade. Because the demographics and the opinion polls are on women's side. Because women's hour on the stage is long, long overdue (in Aston, 2003: 2).

From the perspective of the twenty-first century the debate has undergone major shifts most notably that 'the notion of 'women's issues' in the sense of concerns that all women might share, is no longer tenable' (De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 4). In fact, the discourse focuses on the validity of the feminist movement particularly with regard to younger women of the present

generation and aims to be more inclusive of women in the third world. Aston and Harris seem to be of the opinion that in a world where not much has changed for women, it is necessary for practitioners to continue to challenge global issues and those pertaining to women within a theatrical context. (Aston and Harris, 2006: 177).

In terms of my argument however women's relationship to language has been a pivotal part of the feminist debate since its inception. Language had been perceived as a tool whereby women were objectified and represented as the desired other. This was influenced by post-Freudian, French psychoanalyst Lacan (1977) and his notion of the 'symbolic order' or 'name of the father' in which the acquisition of language and entry into the symbolic order of written language was seen as a male privilege. Lacan's theories¹ have been pivotal and provocative particularly in stimulating debate on issues of language and many feminist critical theorists reacted against this perceived exclusion or 'lack'. Thus the search for a 'woman's language' was an attempt to circumvent this problem and to explore other possibilities to create a female vocality that would embrace personal experience (De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 5).

The most influential contributions to this debate were those of French post-structuralists, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Irigaray and Cixous, in particular, offered varying attempts to explore *l'écriture féminine* or feminine writing

[and to] deconstruct the assumptions of symbolic language - not least its reification of gender differences – through a variety of strategies including the use of gaps and silences, word-play and puns, confusion, multivalency,

¹Auslander provides a very good account of Lacan's complex theory concerning the 'symbolic order.' Lacan's theory of child development can be understood in three stages; the 'Imaginary', the 'Real' and the 'Symbolic'. The 'Imaginary' is the pre-linguistic stage of mother and child which is interrupted by the intervention of the father. 'The child becomes a subject within the symbolic order, the father is identified with that order which constitutes and governs subjectivity' (Auslander, 2008: 119). It is at the point that language is being formed that the child experiences the separation from the mother /imaginary and enters into the symbolic/ language. As the child becomes a subject within the symbolic order, the father is identified with that order which constitutes and governs subjectivity. 'For this reason, Lacan sometimes called the symbolic order *le Nom du Père* ("the name of the father") which in French is pronounced the same as *le Non-du-Père* ("the no of the father"), thus signifying God-like authority and prohibition. Thus the child is *subjected* in both senses of the word: subjected to the law of the symbolic order (identified with patriarchal law/no of the father), and constituted as subject acting in the world' (Auslander, 2008: 119). Thus the bond between mother and child is broken 'causing an experience of 'lack' or absence, whilst the bond between father and language is seemingly "unbreakable" (Blyth, Sellars 2004: 21). This 'lack' is signified by the phallus, which for Lacan, '[signifies] both women's and men's lack, dependence and subjective vulnerability within the symbolic order.' (Auslander 2008: 120)

and meaninglessness and a resistance of binary oppositions to champion the spaces 'in between'(De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 5).

Kristeva explored her own interpretation of the symbolic through her notion of the 'semiotic' and all three women contributed to the debate by providing a variety of strategies that 'deconstruct[ed] the assumptions of symbolic language' and made the voices of women irrevocably present (2003: 5). This will be discussed in more detail later. For the moment, I wish to focus on a proposal that posits a system for understanding, classifying and appreciating dramatic discourse from a feminist perspective.

a feminist poetics

Sue-Ellen Case, writing in 1988, in *Feminism and Theatre* suggested that feminist critics adopt the term a '*new poetics*' (with specific reference to Aristotle's *Poetics*) to describe feminist theatre practice, shape audience response and provide a framework to embrace new forms of language and dramatic structure. It would

construct new critical models and methodologies for the drama that would accommodate the presence of women in the art, support their liberation from the cultural fictions of the female gender and deconstruct the valorization of the male gender (Case, 1988: 114).

Case's proposal needs to be viewed in relation to 'new discoveries about gender and culture from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology and political science' (1988: 115). Feminist dramatic theory would borrow new ways of reading text from the fields of English studies, semiotics and film theory. Most importantly, it would reject previously held patriarchal forms and 'deconstruct the traditional systems of representation and perception of women and posit women in the position of subject' (1998: 115). The 'subject' needs to be understood as a 'cultural construction [with] a 'semiotic' function...an intersection of cultural codes and practices' (1998: 115).

What is of particular interest to me and what attracted me to a 'new poetics', is Case's notion of a feminine form or 'morphology'. She asks if the re-positioning of women as subject would require a different approach to the inherited linear and patriarchal structures used in theatre and whether a re-construction of language or text would reflect the female voice more accurately. Case refers to the term 'contiguity' used by theorists to define morphology and describes it as a useful 'organizational device.' She cites Luce Irigaray's definition of a form

'constantly in the process of weaving itself ... embracing words and yet casting them off' and Cixous' description of 'working the in-between' (in Case, 1988: 129). It is worth defining this in more detail:

[It is a form] that can be elliptical rather than illustrative, fragmentary rather than whole, ambiguous rather than clear, and interrupted rather than complete. This contiguity exists within the text and at its borders: the feminine form seems to be without a sense of formal closure – in fact, it operates as an anti – closure (Case, 1988: 129).

This form of 'anti-closure' resists the linear Aristotelian form and 'hierarchical organizing – principles of traditional form that served to elide women from discourse' (1998: 129). There has been much debate concerning this idea of a feminine form; some regarded it as essentialist whilst others adopted the stance of materialist feminists, who 'emphasize the economic and historical advantages of gender inscription in the patriarchy' (1988: 130) and argue 'that the notion of a feminine form merely [reified] the traditional gender constructions of masculine and feminine.' Nevertheless, Case insists that the term, a 'new poetics,' is useful as a 'dramaturgical device' (1998: 128) and in closing her argument she states:

The feminist in theatre can create a laboratory in which the single most affective mode of repression - gender - can be exposed, dismantled and removed. The same laboratory may produce the representation of a subject who is liberated from the repressions of the patriarchal and capable of signaling a new age of both women and men (Case, 1998: 132).

From the standpoint of the late 1980's and feminist theory, Case's proposal was provocative and necessary in demarcating new and hitherto unmapped territory inhabited by women in theatre. In terms of my own argument, which does not exclusively align itself with feminist theory, the prospect of once again employing the use of a poetics to support more recent developments towards structuring devices and highlighting female vocalicity in theatre is appealing.

My understanding of a poetics is of a guiding set of principles that reflect on the act of theatre making and various underpinning theories of drama that assist our perception and reception of the dramatic impulse. According to Ferguson in his introduction to Butcher's translation of the *Poetics*, Aristotle did not intend the *Poetics* to be 'an exact science or even a textbook with strict laws' but rather, 'an aid to reflection' (in Butcher, 1961: 3). Our comprehension of the

principles is often distorted by the 'rules of the unities of time, place and action introduced by the Renaissance humanists'. Ferguson concludes that the *Poetics* 'is more like a cookbook than it is like a textbook in elementary engineering' (1961: 3). But in order to understand alternative ways of viewing dramatic action, I need to re-visit the multi-layered meanings of Aristotelian action (*praxis*). Ferguson describes *praxis* as 'a movement of the psyche toward what seems good at the moment – a "movement of the spirit", as Dante calls it' (Ferguson, 1961: 8).

Aristotle, in his study of human conduct, refers to three different forms of this 'movement of the spirit' or *energeia* which are broken down further into:

Praxis (to do something) *Poiesis* (to make something) and *theoria* (to grasp and understand some truth or to contemplate) (Ferguson in Butcher, 1961: 10).

Ferguson explains:

When Aristotle says, "life consists in action and its end is a mode of action," (VI.9) he means *theoria*. He felt that "all men wish to know," and that the human spirit lives most fully and intensely in the perception of truth (in Butcher, 1961: 10).

Ferguson extrapolates further:

One must be clear first of all, that action (*praxis*) does not mean deeds, events, or physical activity: it means rather the motivation from which deeds spring (Ferguson in Butcher, 1961: 8).

Aristotle's theory of a 'movement of the spirit' or *energeia* is useful in articulating the more female, interior world or sub-conscious movement of the psyche that informs female vocalicity and assists in an understanding of a 'feminising' of the action. *Praxis* and *theoria* relate to what Raymond Williams refers to as 'structures of feeling' which reflect intangible elements of experience of a particular cultural group or generation communicated through theatrical form and meaning (Williams, 1973: 10).

Aristotle takes up thought and diction together as both are aspects of language. By diction he means 'the art of delivery' or the way in which the actor speaks but he has little to say about it. Thought (*dianoia*) refers to 'a very wide range of activities, from abstract reasoning to the perception and formulation of emotion' (Ferguson in Butcher, 1961: 27). Thought relates to

what the characters do as well as what they say hence, the link to language and also interestingly, in relation to 'structures of feeling', what they feel and experience.

It would appear that Aristotle was defending theatre and the arts, particularly from Plato's condemnation. But in his application of rational principles did he not, as Lagaay suggests, deal a 'final blow' to the pre-existing Dionysian model of theatre (2001: 2-3)? In other words, theatre was uprooted from its ritual origins inspired by the community and relegated to a more 'conscious craft' and literary form with inherent rules that were regulated by expert professionals who were predominantly readers (Lagaay, 2001: 72-3). This institutionalizing of a form that was meant to address the spirit, residing as it did in religious practice, became instead, a set of criteria for analysis, residing in the domain of the intellect, reason and logos. The various interpretations of the *Poetics* have dominated Western theatre tradition until the mid- twentieth century.

the thirst for words

Searching through the silence for the sound of female vocality, the writing of Hélène Cixous is pivotal in the development of alternative female voicing. Cixous (1937-) was born in Algeria of a Spanish/ French/ Jewish father and German/Jewish mother. She was thus fluent in French and German but was exposed to Spanish and Arabic as well (Sellars, 1994: xxvi). Cixous claims she 'was raised on the milk of words' (Cixous, 1991: 20), explaining how as a child she would only eat if her ears had something to listen to. Thus, according to Cixoux language is made for the ear 'that from infancy "thirsts" for words in which sounds, and not concepts vibrate' (Cavarero, 2005: 143). This thirst for words is satisfied by the mother's utterances as she nourishes the infant. She refers to a time of pleasure shared by mother and child that is full of vocal cadences mixed with the sweetness of 'the language-milk' (*languelait*) (Cavarero, 2005: 140). Cixous' intention is not to create a feminine writing but to permit in writing what had hitherto been prohibited; to allow the female voice to emerge. This voice is humorous but it is also a 'celebration of life in the face of death' encompassing the darker aspects of the female psyche, as Cixous puts it: 'feminine writing is the art of "singing the abyss"' (in Sellars, 1994: 59). These multiple female vocal traits originate from rhythm and song and the world of the imaginary that reside in the maternal body. It is this voice that has been silenced by the rigidity of the logocentric tradition of metaphysics, 'the very song that since Plato, metaphysics has tried to oppress' (Cavarero, 2005: 142).

The Voice sings from a time before law, before the Symbolic took one's breath away and re-appropriated it into language under its authority of separation (Cixous, 1986: 97).

Cixous, referencing Lacan's 'symbolic order' claims that when the child is separated from the mother, 'the law of the father' and the structures of language and logic are activated and thus some of the pleasurable aspects of the sonic qualities and playful aspects of language are subverted. It is this playfulness and relationship to the sound of words, the 'thirst for words' (Cavarero, 2005: 143) that Cixous believes the female writer needs to remember, rediscover and practice. This voice remembers the rhythmic flow and lack of semantic restraint and is thus able to freely associate in a feminine stream of consciousness: 'The language that women speak when there is no one there to correct them' (Cixous, 1991: 21). Cixous' input is profound and pivotal to the exploration of female vocality, inasmuch as she alludes to voice and breath in visceral terms and invites the reader to engage in a practical and inspired way.

Her work has been criticized by some as being essentialist because her writing engages the female body thus 'implying a causal relationship between biological make-up and language – use' (De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 5). However one views her contribution, she was instrumental in drawing attention to the theory and practice of women's writing and accentuating the power of female vocality. She rescued women from the stranglehold of patriarchy and the symbolic 'law of the father.' What Cixous was proposing was a playful form which might become a 'tool for anyone wishing to challenge the status quo' (De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 5). De Gay and Goodman contend that this form might still have relevance for approaches to vocality which 'seek to recognize cultural diversity and to resist universalizing conceptions of womanhood' (2003: 5). It is Cixous' poetic writing and philosophic observations, the free flow of language with its awareness of fluidity and sonic interplay, its ability to create morphology and subvert existing structures that are significant to this argument and have resonances with Case's poetics.

writing the body

Besides her own theatrical writing, predominantly in collaboration with Ariane Mnouchkine and *Théâtre du Soleil*, it was through Cixous' call for women to reclaim their bodies which had been assimilated 'by the patriarchal system of desire and representation' (Case, 1998: 128) that her influence was profoundly felt in theatre. This was illustrated in the work of performance artists

in the late 1960's and early 1970's. In asserting their subjectivity and by narrating autobiographical experience, performance artists such as Carolee Schneeman and Karen Finley, amongst others, took up Cixous' call to 'write the body.' Lehmann, in his account of performance art notes that it is 'conspicuous that body- and person-centered performance is very often a 'woman's domain' and that it was female performance artists who took the initiative' (Lehmann, 2006: 139). It was their need to explore notions of subjectivity that spurred them on. And their voices were heard. But it is the body that 'writes itself', that speaks, that is visible and therefore remembered. In Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1992), Tania Modleski is cited in reference to her theory regarding 'the speaking body' and 'the mute body.' Modleski argues that feminist critical writing 'works toward a time when the traditionally mute body, 'the mother' will be given access to the names - 'language and speech' - that men have enjoyed' (Phelan, 1992: 150). The reference is useful inasmuch as it refers to the speaking body that the performance artists celebrated. Phelan elaborates on this argument by stating that in performance (as opposed to writing) the opposition is between 'the body in pleasure' and the 'body in pain,' invoking the title of Scarry's *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985). Phelan refers to the movement from the 'grammar of words' to the 'grammar of the body' as a movement from metaphor to metonymy. Thus the performance artist's body becomes 'metonymic of self, of character, of voice and of presence.' But because the body is so visible, 'the performer actually disappears and represents something else - dance, movement, character, sound, art' (Phelan, 1992: 150). Thus, although successful in achieving a body that speaks, the performer, or in terms of my argument 'the voice', disappears or is not present.

PART TWO

Re-framing of existing forms and further frames of reference

structures of feeling

Raymond Williams first used the term 'structures of feeling' in his analysis of dramatic genre (1973). It is useful to this argument as a framing device to deepen the understanding of female vocality. Not only is the notion of structure implicit in the term but it also refers back to the more metaphorical connotation of Aristotle's 'movement of the spirit' which for me pervades the sounding of female vocality. As Williams states:

the structure of feeling has to do above all with the fact that it is a structure: not an uninformed flux of new responses, interests and perceptions but a formation of these into a new way of seeing ourselves and our world (Williams, 1973: 11).

The root of the term is embedded in drama but Williams broadened the scope of his understanding of 'structures of feeling' to encompass 'the lived experience of a people or a generation of people within particular cultural contexts ... [and which] imbues a people with a specific "sense of life" and experience of community' (Auslander, 2008: 162). Williams alludes to the work of an artist who is working on his own and possibly against 'what is felt to be the grain of the time' yet nevertheless it emerges that he is speaking for a particular group because he is speaking for himself (Williams, 1973: 11). 'This cultural feeling is not typically expressed in any verbal, rational mode of discourse, though it can often be located in literary texts which reveal it only indirectly' (Auslander, 2008: 162). It is useful as a 'critical term', Williams insists

[because it] directs our attention, in practical ways, to a kind of analysis which is at once concerned with particular forms and the elements of general forms.... This structure, always is an experience, to which we can directly respond. But it is also an experience communicated in a particular form, through particular conventions (Williams, 1973: 11-12).

As Auslander notes:

Cultural analysis of the structure of feeling aims at uncovering how these shared feelings and values operate to help people make sense of their lives and

the different situations in which the structures of feeling arises (Auslander, 2008: 162).

It is this aspect of a shared but unspoken understanding of an experience as well as an appreciation of form and structure that reinforces my belief in the need to re-frame certain constructs of a feminine aesthetic or representation of lived experience. I am drawn to the use of the term 'structures of feeling' because of its implicit understanding of the qualities of experience; qualities of particular types of experience that are intangible or 'unspeakable' which is similar to the elusive qualities inherent in the description of female vocality. I am appropriating Williams' term deliberately to define elements of this feminine aesthetic. Inherent in 'structures of feeling' as a re-framing concept for female vocality, both female and male energies are present in the Jungian sense of *animus* and *anima* (Jung, 1965: 186) or in the eastern notion of yin and yang. I agree with Jungian analyst, Marion Woodman's understanding that there are 'two energies within our bodies just as there are two energies controlling nature ... a very active, analytical logical energy symbolized by the sun and a synthesizing, relating energy symbolized by the moon' (online interview with Marion Woodman, 2005). Woodman sees these energies not only in the individual but in society as a whole and describes them as:

"presence"- being able to live right here, in the here and now; "paradox"- being able to accept what appears to be contradictory as two parts of the same thing; "process"- valuing process as opposed to putting all the value on the product; "receptivity" and "resonance" in the body.... The masculine - to contrast it with the feminine images ... tends to leap ahead to the future, to some idealized future. It tends to make things into black and white; it tends to look at life as an either/or situation instead of being able to hold a paradox (Woodman, 2005: 2).

It is these elements of presence, paradox, process and receptivity and resonance in the body that I see as fundamental to my understanding of re-framed 'structures of feeling' providing a 'psycho-emotional landscape' of a feminine aesthetic or world (Matchett, 2005: 8). I have chosen to describe the aesthetic as 'feminine' (as opposed to 'female') to incorporate the existence of both the *animus* and *anima* of the human spirit. Thus a re-framing of 'structures of feeling' serves to embrace not only the cultural context of a lived experience of women, but alludes to a more all encompassing perspective that is not exclusively female but a balance of both male and female energies.

In terms of language, the appropriation of the term 'structures of feeling' also serves as a metaphor to refer to alternative ways to highlight the particular sounding of the voice. Christiane Makward has summed up the findings imagined by theatre practitioners and theorists by suggesting that a language used by women to shape theatre is:

Open, non-linear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, polysemic, attempting to speak the body i.e. the unconscious, involving silence, incorporating the simultaneity of life as opposed to or clearly different from pre-conceived, orientated, masterly or didactic language (in De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 69).

These qualities encompass a range of possibilities that present practical means of exploring female vocality within a re-framed understanding of 'structures of feeling.'

the grain of the voice

However, it is not only the contours and qualities of structuring but also the particular sound of the voice and how it is heard that needs more definition. Roland Barthes (1985), in referring to the 'grain' of the voice, points to the way in which the voice 'through the pleasure of sonorous emission, works in language' (Kottman in Cavarero, 2005: 15). It is the physicality of vocality that is seductive. In other words,

[it is]the manner ... in which the voice rubs itself, so to speak, against the shape of the vowels and consonants of the language in which it sings that creates the feeling of ecstasy in the listener (Lagaay, 2001: 57).

Barthes' attention is focused on the throat and larynx, 'the oral cavity, the quintessential erotic locus' (Kottman in Cavarero, 2005: 15). Barthes explains:

I don't think [the grain] can be defined scientifically because it implies a certain erotic relationship between the voice and the listener. One can therefore describe the grain of the voice but only through metaphors (Barthes, 1985: 184).

Although Barthes refers to the singing voice, 'the grain' he refers to could equally refer to the speaking voice. Barthes borrows from Kristeva (1984) and speaks of 'pheno-song' and 'geno-song'. The former relates to the emotions, the drama and an idea of soul which is linked to breath and breathing techniques (Lagaay, 2001: 57). But what excites Barthes more is the voice of the 'geno-song,' which relates to the grain of the individual's voice and the physicality which is influenced by 'the materiality of language' (2001: 57).

We rarely listen to a voice *en soi*, in itself, we listen to what it says. The voice has the very status of language, an object thought to be graspable only through what it transmits, however, just as we are now learning, thanks to the notion of 'text,' to read the linguistic material itself, we must in the same way learn to listen to the voice's text, its meaning, everything in the voice which overflows meaning (Barthes, 1985: 183-4).

To try to deepen the understanding of this aspect of female vocality and to use the terminology of Kristeva, the voice can be heard in terms of its 'pheno-text' (its verbal or cultural context) and its 'geno-text' (the purely sonorous bodily element of vocal utterance) (Dunn and Jones, 1987: 2). The latter refers to what Kristeva (1984) calls the 'semiotic.' Although Kristeva's exploration lies within the field of semiotics (*la sémiotique*) or general science of signs, her concern is with 'a more specific domain that she calls *le sémiotique* ('the semiotic')... [which is] seen as one of the two components of the signifying process the other being 'the symbolic'" (Roudiez in Kristeva, 1984: 4). The 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic' are

inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved; in other words, so-called 'natural' language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic (Kristeva, 1984: 24).

In psychoanalytic terms, 'the semiotic or *chora* is associated with the pre-linguistic phase and the mother's body.' (Auslander, 2008: 113). To clarify this in more detail:

Without the symbolic, all signification would be babble or delirium. But, without the semiotic, all signification would be empty and have no importance in our lives. Ultimately, signification requires both the semiotic and symbolic; there is no signification without the combination of both (Oliver, 1998: 1-2).

Although Kristeva has written much on the status of women in society, she resists a feminist standpoint, considering sexual difference to be biological as opposed to being socially constructed (Auslander, 2008: 114). What Kristeva recommends is

that women should employ a double discourse which reflects the state of identity which must always be fluid and at the same time both masculine and feminine, both inside and outside the boundaries of the symbolic (Hauke, 2003: 138).

This 'double discourse' relates to the inherent male and female energies of female vocality that re-frame my understanding of 'structures of feeling'.

Like Cixous and Kristeva, Luce Irigaray suggests possible symbolic ways that women can speak. Irigaray uses the term *parler -femme* (speaking (as) woman). Although this has been interpreted as 'a regression to the pre-Oedipal moment, hysterical, incoherent and irrational' (Gilson –Ellis in De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 162) what Irigaray seems to be positing is a different female symbolic order where women can be listened to. As Whitford suggests:

We might understand the idea of a woman's language as the articulation of the unconscious which cannot speak about itself but which nonetheless can make itself heard if the listener is attentive enough. (Whitford, 1991: 39 cited in De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 163)

It is this possibility of a different way of hearing that has become central to my exploration of female vocality. I have found through my theatrical practice that what appeared to be obvious to my ears was not being heard by the audience.

PART THREE

Towards a potential sounding and hearing

the eye is eating the ear or listening with the third ear

It is this auditory aspect that I wish to explore in terms of hearing the complexity of female vocality. In order to do this the sensory awareness of what is ‘audible rather than purely visible in critical language and thought’ needs attention (Salvaggio cited in De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 156). Salvaggio cites Murray Schafer who explores the ambiance of ‘soundscapes’ and explains how the

advent of writing especially print in the West elevated vision over sound resulting in our increasing lack of sensitivity, not only to sounds that surround us, but our very abilities to know the world through listening to its sounds as voices (in De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 157).

In this scenario ‘print replaces orality, steals its particular charge [and] femininity is associated with the immersion of sound and masculinity with the distance of vision’ (2003: 157). This is symptomatic of a broader problem inherited from a ‘worldview’ inherited from Greek philosophy, an implicit ‘reduction to vision’ which was at the core of ancient Greek philosophy’s ‘experience of reality’ (Ihde, 1976: 6-8). Thus vision was the preferred sense for evaluating knowledge and stems from a relationship between sight and objects, becoming an ‘objective’ sense. Ihde points to an inattentiveness to many areas of experience, in particular listening, for which ‘visualism’ can be held accountable and concludes ‘it is to the invisible that listening may attend’ (1976: 13-14).

The voice is an acoustic vibration that can be measured like all other sounds but in its humanness it is unique; ‘this means that uniqueness resounds in the human voice: or in the human voice uniqueness makes itself sound’ (Cavarero, 2005: 177). It becomes like a thumbprint, a unique means of recognition which the ear is able to recognize, as Cavarero claims, ‘the voice is *for* the ear’ (2005: 178 original italics). Marian Hampton in *The Vocal Vision*, refers to an occasion when voice practitioner, Kristin Linklater, in accepting a Lifetime Achievement Award, spoke of how in our technological age, ‘the eye is eating the ear’ and pointed to the fact that the ear has many more receptors thus allowing for a

richer interpretation of events than mere visual perception (Hampton and Acker, 1997: 259). Hampton urges us to realize the importance of the need to rescue declining verbal skills implying that a loss of language and a loss of consciousness are connected. Her call is passionate:

And we theatre folk have the necessity of honoring the spoken word ... for the loss of our language and our effective use of language will presage the loss of our very world (Hampton and Acker, 1997: 260).

It is this dominance of a visual culture in the twenty first century, the power of the gaze to interfere with the sensitivity of the ear that increases an auditory deficiency, a 'deafness.' The sense of sight presupposes a selectivity. One can choose to look at a particular object or face and one can increase or decrease the depth of field by choosing to focus on specifics within that object or face. Sound, on the other hand, is multi-directional and all pervasive. Although one might adapt by learning to exclude certain sounds, the ear has not the ability to select sounds; it is the (unwitting) receptor of all sounds. There is also an aspect of spatial awareness that contrasts sight and sound. Sight is used to locate things spatially, in 'terms of the distance between things contained in it' (Lagaay, 2007: 67). Hearing is less inclined to establish a sense of distance. In fact, the very act of hearing implies a closeness, 'an absence of distance' and an engagement (often) of the most intimate nature. Sounds penetrate the ear of the listener. To hear something implies that one is involved and requires that the listener become engaged with the sound (2007: 67). This perception of space implies an objective stance, for as Cavarero states:

The visible world is not a world that interrupts, interferes, or surprises everywhere with its sounds; it is rather, a stable, immobile, objective world that lies in front of us. This guarantees the reality of being and thus the status of truth as presence. (Cavarero, 2005: 37)

Thus, in theatrical terms, vocality demands that the audience hears. Given that the sound of female vocality invites the listener to hear that which has been contained (or hidden) in private more intimate worlds, it is not surprising that some simply shut down all potential sound, thus missing the subtleties and uniqueness of female vocality. It is this notion of how women's voices are heard, or how female vocality falls on deaf ears, which is central to my argument of seeming absence or silence.

the de-vocalisation of logos

This inability to hear certain sounds is perhaps indicative of a broader more insidious phenomenon linked to the history of metaphysics and what Kottman, in his introduction to Cavarero's *For more than one Voice*, refers to as 'the vices of logocentrism' (in Cavarero, 2005: 13). For if we accept that vocality is more than speech, it seems to imply that there is a sonority that exists beyond speech, 'an excess' or residue. It is how this is interpreted that constitutes 'a vice' (meaninglessness) or virtue (meaning). As Kottman explains:

This vice transforms the excess of the voice into a lack. Indeed speech becomes more than an essential destination for the voice; it becomes a divider that produces the drastic alternative between an ancillary role for the voice as vocalization of mental signifieds and the notion of the voice as an extraverbal realm of meaningless emissions that are dangerously bodily, if not seductive or quasi-animal. In other words, logocentrism radically denies to the voice a meaning of its own that is not always destined to speech (Kottman in Cavarero, 2005: 13).

Cavarero refers to 'the devocalisation of logos' (2005: 33). The etymological derivation of logos is the verb *legein* which 'means both "speaking" and "gathering," "binding," "joining."' Because the one who speaks joins words one to another, one after the other, gathering them in discourse' (2005: 33). Thus philosophy focuses on this joining together and logocentrism focuses on language as a system of signification. Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, refers to logos as signifying voice (Cavarero, 2005: 34). Having logos differentiates man from animals. Aristotle does not dispute that animals have a voice but this voice is mere 'sign' (*semeion*). Therefore the animal voice is 'an *a-logic* or *a-semantic* phonation' (Cavarero, 2005: 34). The discourse is involved and complex, but the importance in terms of my argument, is that philosophy discounts the non-rational, 'it refuses to concede to the vocal any value that would be independent of the semantic' (Cavarero, 2005: 35). It thus negates any possibility of vocality that is not verbal or that does not have semantic content. As Lagaay suggests:

Where [voice] was seen to transgress its function as the medium for semantic content and sober consciousness, where it lapsed into emotion and noise...where it spoke of and to the emotion, out of and to the sub-conscious, in its capacity to mumble, stutter, scream, howl and wail, voice was regarded with the utmost suspicion and associated with madness, the devil and all that is dangerously 'other' (Lagaay, 2007: 63).

Thus the voice pertaining to philosophy was deemed to contain reason and meaning, but that which was construed as 'dangerously other' was lacking in meaning. This relates to my argument of seeming deafness alluded to above, inasmuch as it negates the possibility of vocal gestural language and nonverbal utterance that emanates from the interior world of the subconscious. It is not that it alludes to an absence of vocality but rather that the presence of any excess of sound is excluded.

The sounding voice, as exhalation of voiced breath transmits the interiority of the speaker to that of the listener creating a very intimate sharing of an acoustic sphere (Labelle, 2006: 111). Walter Ong in his exploration of oral and print culture refers to a 'sound world' in which the voice holds a special position. Ong 'privileges orality over print, sound as opposed to visuality by underscoring how the sound world involves us in each other's lives through immediacy and continual presence' (in Labelle, 2006: 111). As Ong states:

To consider the work of literature in its primary oral and aural existence we must enter more profoundly into the world of sound as such, the I-thou world where through the mysterious interior resonance which sounds best of all provide, persons commune with persons, reaching one another's interiors in a way in which one can never reach the interior of an 'object' (Ong cited in Labelle, 2006: 111).

Ong's work¹ highlights the voice as subjective and communal which correlates to the sound of female vocality, the way in which women (often) communicate and it augments the argument of the power of the interior voice to penetrate the body of the listener. The ability to hear this interior voice or voice of the unconscious has been explored and developed in psychoanalysis to deepen the understanding of a patient's narrative. It presents possibilities for extending the potential of listening to that which is unspeakable or seemingly inaudible.

Freud first acknowledged that the psychoanalyst would need to develop ways of listening to the interior voice or sub-text of the patient in order to decipher the actual meaning and intention of what was being narrated, as well as isolating the analyst's own inferred interpretation. Freud referred to this ability as a 'floating attention' (1940-52). Theodor Reik, a pupil of Freud, elaborated on this idea and described it (borrowing from Nietzsche)

¹ Walter Ong has significantly contributed to the orality – literacy debate and has foregrounded the importance of sounding through the spoken word. See Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (2002).

as listening with the ‘third ear’ (Lagaay, 2007: 40). It focuses less on what is being said but rather interprets the sub-textual or hidden agenda that is beneath the spoken word by means of listening to the modulations of the speaking voice thus revealing unconscious intention.

the sound of many voices

In my quest to define and unearth a female vocality, I have found the interrelated concepts of ‘heteroglossia,’ ‘polyphony’ and ‘dialogism,’ put forward by Russian formalist thinker, Bakhtin, to be useful in defining aspects of text. Bakhtin’s primary focus is the novel however I am using ‘text’ to refer to the dramatic text and performance text. Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism ‘conceives of all discourse, in literature and in speech, as dialogical, that is, an intersection of many voices’ (Auslander, 2008: 41). It is worth explaining this in more detail:

When someone speaks or writes, her words are not simply streaming forth from within herself as sole author and source. Rather her discourse, like her identity, is essentially a merger of the many voices and languages that constitute her as subject. Every subject is made up of multiple voices, past and present, being a space of dialogue (Auslander, 2008: 41).

Dialogism emphasizes not only language but also process, ‘a “living” language that takes place between interlocutors’ (Hitchcock, 1993: 3). This language refers not only to the speaker but also to the listener or ‘addressee’ whose response in turn, is affected by the voice of other speakers thus creating a heteroglossia. This relationship between speaker and listener is important as it reinforces the social aspect of language. Bakhtin insists that language cannot be reduced to the ‘monologic’

for it is always the ever-changing result of an amalgamation of different social, familial and regional connotations - including different timbres and overtones which are themselves already polyphonic (Lagaay, 2001: 34).

This multiple voicing does not create harmony, according to Bakhtin, but dissonance. Hitchcock extrapolates further, ‘to track the sociality of language is to analyze social struggle’ which becomes pertinent when referring to gender, class and race (1993: 9). As Hitchcock asserts:

Attention to dialogics therefore connects with many other forms of analysis - psychological, feminist, postcolonialist, Marxist, and many of the rhizomes of poststructuralism (1993: 9).

To turn to examples in dramatic texts, this is well illustrated in South African playwright, Fatima Dike's, *So What's New?* (1991 revised 1994). Written on the eve of Nelson Mandela's release, Dike portrays the lives of three middle-aged women and a school girl who are all obsessed with the television soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The women discuss their lives, their men, their hopes and fears, against a world that is exploding with political turmoil and resistance. The play is slight, the structure conventional but what distinguishes it from other works is its satirical tone and its invitation to inhabit a female world and the opinions of women who had hitherto been silenced and not heard. The sound of these voices creates a polyphonic cacophony of sound that had hitherto not been captured in theatre and displays aspects of Bakhtin's dialogism. As Henderson notes, it reveals not 'only a relationship with other(s), but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of the self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity' (Henderson, 1990: 118).

A voice which cannot be ignored when excavating the South African theatrical landscape is that of Reza de Wet. Although she writes predominantly in Afrikaans, her influence, especially with regard to the female psyche is indisputable. As Hauptfleisch acknowledges:

(...) few have realized the real extent to which Reza de Wet has contributed to breaking down barriers within the theatrical system in South Africa (1999: 56).

What is of interest to my argument for the recognition of a female vocality is De Wet's understanding and portrayal of the female (Afrikaner) psyche. The fantastical, often gothic, worlds she creates in her plays are populated by female characters that yearn to escape from unacceptable and oppressive conditions. This yearning and its often ecstatic realization echoes Barthes' 'grain' of the voice.

Although not overtly political her plays need to be viewed against the backdrop of Afrikaner nationalism and Calvinistic repression. Neither can the plays be categorized as feminist, but in unearthing a female psyche that explores the unconscious and repressed sexuality, she creates a female vocality that is at once unique and universal. Influenced by the psychology of Freud and Lacan, the women in De Wet's plays enact out their need for inner liberation in response to the patriarchal authority that is at times overt or hidden within the sub-conscious. Or in the absence of the father, a matriarchal world is created as in the *Trits* (1993) trilogy, where the head of the household assumes the masculine role of the patriarch.

De Wet does not see herself as a ‘female’ dramatist but rather adopts the Jungian concept of maintaining a balance between the *animus* and *anima* (Van der Wal, 2005: 24). She refrains from categorizing people claiming that this merely enforces patriarchal divisions. This imbalance of the male/female energies can be seen in *Diepe Grond* (1986) in the incestuous role-play of Soekie and Frikkie in their quest for freedom from an oppressive past. What is of interest here, is De Wet’s use of multiple voices in the character of Soekie, where the young girl’s voice reveals a naïveté and spontaneity, whilst the adult voice is authoritarian and full of foreboding (Van der Wal, 2005: 33).

De Wet explores story-telling devices that create intertextual frames of reference. Her dramatic oeuvre highlights the power of a female vocality. The world she creates for her characters to inhabit, embodying Jungian aspects of the *animus* and *anima* encapsulates the feminine ‘structures of feeling’ of a female vocality that reflect aspects of the Afrikaner psyche and mythology.

There is no other female playwright whose voice resonates like that of Reza de Wet in the South African theatre tradition. And yet women have been pivotal in shaping the theatrical terrain. This influence has mostly been prevalent in the work of female directors who have shaped and crafted both text-based and devised theatre. It is their contribution to the aesthetic of the *mise-en-scène*, another re-framing of the ‘structures of feeling’ and the ‘feminizing’ of the action in which their influence is most felt. For example, Clare Stopford’s¹ direction of Mike van Graan’s, *Green Man Flashing*² (2004-5) highlights the interior female world of the two central female characters against the harsh background of political bartering. Lara Foot-Newton’s seminal work *Tshepang: The Third Testament*,³ (2003) depicts the female protagonist as voiceless, yet her silence is a cry of the spirit that demands to be heard.

unmaking and remaking language

There are certain postmodern techniques which have been useful for performances structured both by women and for women and which are particularly relevant to the creation of female

¹ Clare Stopford is a theatre practitioner and was Resident Director of the Market Theatre from 1988 -1999

² *Green Man Flashing* was first performed at the Market and Baxter Theatres in 2004- 5

³ *Tshepang: The Third Testament* was first performed at the Tropentheatre in Amsterdam in June 2003. It subsequently played at the Market and Baxter Theatres and toured internationally.

vocality by 'unmaking and remaking language to elicit new meanings' (De Gay and Goodman, 2003: 7). Examples are to be found in Bryony Lavery's *Ophelia* (1996) and Jane Prendergast's *I, Hamlet* (1996 -7). These practitioners have deconstructed and re-shaped Shakespeare's language, characters and plays and 'reclaim[ed] the power of the heroines inherent in [the] original plays' (2003:7). Others have experimented with form and structure and the use of technology. Jools Gilson - Ellis' work is inspiring in her use of 'textual delivery as a physical process' in *Mouth Ghosts: The Taste of the Os – Text* (2003:9,153). Although some critics have argued that the postmodernist notion of the de-centred self is 'inimical to feminist arguments of subjectivity and self-determination' others have argued that the use of irony and the postmodern approach of favouring multiple perspectives 'support difference and facilitate deconstruction of traditional notions' (2003: 7).

I am inspired by Lehmann's use of the term 'language surfaces' (borrowing from Elfriede Jelinek) (2006: 18) and 'textscapes' in his description of 'postdramatic theatre language' (Lehmann, 2006: 148). These terms have allowed for the possibility of creating text that is similar to a 'stream of consciousness' but inclusive of multiple sounds, a heteroglossia of vocality and intertextuality. To elaborate on the term, 'language surfaces' (2006: 18), it would seem that with the tendency to move away from well- delineated character development, the playwright or theatre-maker is compelled to approach language and dialogue in a different way. Moreover, the shift away from character does not necessarily infer that there is a lack of interest in the human being but, Lehmann suggests, that possibly we need to change 'our perspective on human subjectivity' and its representation (Lehmann, 2006: 19). Furthermore, the deconstructed text offers the possibility for the creation of a sonic space that is similar to a soundscape, hence Lehmann adopts the term 'textscape.' The aim would be for us not to hear one voice but a multiplicity, or 'dissemination of voices' (2006: 148). This would require, Lehmann suggests, the use of 'chora-graphy' (borrowing from Kristeva) (2006: 145). Thus the space created with the use of 'language surfaces' is poetic, 'the deconstruction of a discourse oriented towards meaning and the invention of a space that eludes the laws of telos and unity' (2006: 146). With the move away from character delineation and encompassing Barthes' notion of the 'death of the author' (Barthes, 1977: 145), a space is revealed for expanding to areas more accommodating for a female vocality. If, as Lehmann suggests, we adopt a more 'chora'-graphic approach to text, it enables a creation of 'surfaces of language' that correlate more to the way women speak when

'there is no-one there to correct them' (Cixous, 1991: 21). The use of chora has the immediate connotations of the maternal sound and Kristeva's 'semiotic,' the language that was first explored between mother and child and interrupted, in Lacanian terms, by the 'law of the father'. Kristeva borrows the term chora from Plato's *Timaeus* and describes it as

indifferent to language, enigmatical and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax (Kristeva, 1984: 29).

It is useful to my excavation of the sound of a female vocality, in that it encompasses the vocal gestural sounds that exist outside of language. Lehmann's terminology is equally useful in that it provides language and structuring devices that can be applied to the re-framing of 'structures of feeling' for a female vocality.

evidence of female vocality in text-based theatre

the legacy of Caryl Churchill

In searching for evidence of female vocality within a dramatic text, the plays of Caryl Churchill offer significant models. Her stance, as a socialist and feminist, informs her plays and her 'critique of the injustices and inequalities produced by late twentieth century capitalism and patriarchy' provides the content for her earlier plays from the 1970's and 1980's (Aston, 2003: 18). Churchill's social critique, as well as her experimentation with dramatic form and structure challenged the dominant patriarchal hegemony. For, she did, in fact, explore a 'new poetics'. Rejecting the patriarchal form of the Aristotelian convention, her plays offer 'fragmentation instead of wholeness, many voices instead of one, demand for social change instead of character development, and continuing contradiction instead of resolution' (Howe Kritzer, 1991: 3). Churchill's use of the overlapping text provides the characters with a possibility of presenting opposing viewpoints simultaneously, creating equal representation. This enables the audience to resist an empathetic response or judgment of character, viewpoints and situation. It also has a distinctly female quality, a 'cluttering' or layering of experience and expression. As Howe Kritzer states:

By using these techniques to set up an interchange in which audiences contribute imaginative energy to the dramatic process, rather than merely receiving the imaginative product of the playwright, the Churchill play

creates a potential space for what Teresa De Lauretis has, in her study of feminist cinema, termed, 'addressing its spectator as a woman, regardless of the gender of the viewers.' (Howe Kritzer, 1991: 197).

De Lauretis' observation is interesting as it refers to how a text is 'heard' by the audience. Is the audience member able to forgo their own subjective stance and receive the information objectively? This is compounded by Churchill's challenge to our perceptions of race and gender by the use of cross-casting. This conscious manipulation of form has an alienating effect forcing the audience to engage objectively with their own pre-conceived notions of 'patriarchal subjectivity and racial prejudice' (Howe Kritzer, 1991: 9).

It is possible that Churchill's collaborative workshop style of working with actors from theatre companies such as Monstrous Regiment and Joint Stock enabled her to find these multiple voices, cadences and rhythms of dialect, class and gender that are inherent in the written text. In her later plays, Churchill worked with choreographer, Ian Spink and company Second Stride on *The Skriker* (1994) and *Hotel* (1997), creating a fusion of dance, music and text where she would 'choreograph' the text (Aston, 2003: 27). Churchill has influenced a younger generation of playwrights and, as Martin Crimp notes, Churchill 'has never lost sight of the playfulness of form' whilst maintaining her socio-political stance (Aston, 2003: 19).

speaking the unspeakable - the writing of Sarah Kane

Timberlake Wertenbaker in an interview with the Guardian's Michael Billington in 1999, states;

I don't think women have ever been a welcome voice. You sense a relief that we can shut those women up and get back to what really matters, which is what men are saying.... We talk about women dramatists, but it's significant that 'woman' becomes the compound whereas 'male' is the noun. (in Aston, 2003: 149).

Wertenbaker's remarks are relevant to the apparent absence of the female voice in the 1990's in the United Kingdom, dominated as it was by the stable of (predominantly) male playwrights, including Patrick Marber, Mark Ravenhill and Ben Elton, the new wave of angry young men of the 'in-yer-face' theatre (Sierz, 2001). Aston refers to them as the 'boys in trouble' and hints at their reclaiming centre stage and their masculinity, as a reaction to feminism (2003: 3). Often included in this group, and given 'honorary male' status by theatre critics, is playwright, Sarah Kane. She exploded onto the world stage, amidst much controversy, with *Blasted* in 1995. Her canon of work characterizes the violence and brutality of the 1990's. The decade culminates in

her suicide in 1999 and *Psychosis 4.48*, which documents her depression and subsequent breakdown, was produced posthumously. It was possibly useful for critics to include her in this group of angry young men, in terms of the violence of the imagery, language and content of her plays. But she was neither one of the boys, nor a feminist, nor a 'woman writer' and refused to be categorized by any socially defined group. Attention is most often given to the shock value of her plays and her despairingly bleak vision of humanity, but it is the unique quality of her voice and her experimentation with structure and form that I would like to consider. David Greig, in his introduction to Kane's plays, observes that 'to read her plays, for all their pain, as raw, is to overlook the complex artfulness of their construction' (in Kane, 2001: xv). Kane's experimentation with structure in *Crave* and *Psychosis 4.48* define postdramatic landscapes that provide the director and performers with new interpretative possibilities. The four 'voices' in *Crave* inhabit the world of the characters without interacting with one another. The effect of the four voices, when spoken, is 'rather like a string quartet in the hypnotic play of different voices and themes' (Kane, 2001: xiv). Borrowing Churchill's device of overlapping text, Kane is precise in her author's note to all the plays that her punctuation is used to inform delivery 'not to conform to the rules of grammar' (Kane, 2001: 2) and it is clear that she heard the sound of the text when writing.

However, there are few indications as to how to conceptualize the imaginary, nightmarish worlds of her plays, instead she provides the director and actors with, what Lehmann refers to as 'textscapes' containing 'language surfaces' to experiment with (Lehmann, 2006: 18,148). Character is abandoned completely in *Psychosis 4.48* and the language is even more abstracted and fragmented as the landscape of the psychotic mind is revealed. Greig states that it is ironic that 'those trapped in this condition are rendered voiceless' (in Kane, 2001: xvii) and yet it is Kane's authorial voice that is empowered here, giving us a rare and poignant insight into suicide. Kane's sardonic wit and cries of despair, at times reminiscent of Artaud (Saunders, 2003: 107), leave an indelible imprint of a voice that speaks 'the unspeakable' and yet demands to be heard.

Kane's voice is significant as it explores aspects of a more postdramatic approach to theatre. It is these aspects of the postdramatic aesthetic that present potential markers for the imminent development of a 'new poetics' (Case, 1988) in the twenty-first century.

reviewing my practice

Unearthing existing examples of texts that met my requirements for a female vocality articulated in this study was challenging. The texts I was searching for were reminiscent of Joyce's Molly in *Ulysses* or close to a Beckettian aesthetic, but not quite; it is interesting therefore to reflect on the array of texts that I finally did appropriate for the research practice. In my minor project, *Suddenly (her) life confronts you* performed in April 2008, in the Playroom at the University of Cape Town's Drama Department, I included texts by novelist, Genevieve Serreau, post-structuralist, Helene Cixous and playwrights, Yazmina Reza and Jon Fosse. The play, performed by three actors, explored mother-daughter relationships in three generations of women by revealing the interior domestic voice, the maternal voice, the choral voice and a pre-lingual genotext. At times it assumed a poetic and heightened vocality to create the sense of chora. It nevertheless remained inaccessible or inaudible to 'the ear' of some.

My continued exploration uncovered new territories in the medium project, *Scratched Surfaces*, performed in November 2008 by five actors in the backstage area of Hiddingh Hall at the University of Cape Town; 'language surfaces' were created to articulate the unspeakable or (less rational) utterances that women use in a more sub-textual terrain. Once more the post-performance debate centered on how the vocality was not heard. This only re-enforces my basic premise that the voices of women have not necessarily been 'absent' or silent but that the ear of the listener needs to adapt to a different acoustic sphere in order to hear in a different way. Both projects experimented with structure and played with aspects of a curvilinear, contiguous form. They appropriated the more metaphorical 'movement of the spirit' and ways of perceiving 'structures of feeling' in a contemporary and female world. If as Fuchs (1983) suggests, we were to re-arrange Aristotle's elements of action, diction, music, thought, plot, spectacle and character, then it is possible to envisage the re-mapping for a 'new poetics' for the 21st century and specifically for women that is unhindered by more hegemonic systems of order and regularities.

Conclusion

This study began with the premise that female vocality in theatre was silent or seemingly absent. However the evidence uncovered has revealed that there are examples to be found that are not always readily available to the eye let alone the ear but are nevertheless present. The impact of feminist theory in theatre challenged the existing boundaries of patriarchy to create new

structural devices that resisted the accepted linear construction and offered a more contiguous, curvilinear form appropriate to a female aesthetic. Case's notion of a 'new poetics' provided terminology and ways of receiving performance and text that proved valuable and provocative in shifting traditional representations of women and offered a potential morphology to reflect the voices used by women. Empowered by this trajectory, playwrights and theatre practitioners have been experimenting with shaping languages of theatre to foreground female vocality. Churchill and Kane created groundbreaking dramatic texts that challenge hegemonic forms and offer new structures that have shifted both the style and aesthetic of theatrical dramaturgy irrevocably. These examples have eradicated the perceived absence or silence. I have argued that aspects of hearing need to be addressed to engage the listener in ways that surprise the ear and render the inaudible articulate. Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva provide philosophical frames of reference to support the notion that the potential for female vocality exists in the 'in-between.' This enhances my belief that to re-frame female vocality towards an understanding of a contemporary feminine structure of feeling is both viable and necessary. A post- postmodern and (post) feminist world seems to signal the need to once more re-visit the notion of creating a new poetics. I propose that there are many more possibilities, as yet unexplored (or unheard) that promise to be forceful and challenging in their application to performance. It presents me with the prospect of creating a theatre practice that encapsulates the rich and diverse female vocality in the shared acoustic sphere of both women and men.

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