

Slamming into the visceral pleasure of language: the value of disordered spaces and
its impact on contemporary vocal landscapes.

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ABSTRACT

The premise of this research is that the creation of a disordered space will have a positive effect on the stimulation of a physical response to spoken language. In a disordered space, vocal delivery is foregrounded as physical activity and has a re-patterning effect on the vocal landscapes of young actors. A disordered space co-opts elements from the vocal art forms of the popular phenomenon of the Spoken Word Movement. Disordered spaces act as an intervention on the traditional notions of western theatre voice practice.

Chapter 1: The term 'disordered spaces' is explored as an imaginative mental space, feeding off the energetic impulses created by anti-establishment notions of chaos and anarchy. The language based forms of the Spoken Word Movement invite new responses to stimuli that force a re-patterning of vocal responses in the actor, with an emphasis on the visceral quality of speech.

Chapter 2: I outline in further detail the specific vocal elements of the Spoken Word Movement that contribute to the creation of disordered spaces. The four main strands that influence this movement are Rap Music, Dub Poetry, Slam Poetry and Freestyle. Rhythmic qualities of dialect are examined as a means of re-patterning responses to text. There is an exploration of the para-linguistic elements of speech through the concept of beat-boxing. The status of the individual performer is reconsidered in terms of the ownership of material that occurs within the movement.

Chapter 3: Vocal landscapes are analysed as a socio-linguistic reality that is affected by changes in dialect. The dialect of the Spoken Word Movement is classified as non-standard dialect, which is slang based. It is concluded that it is the flexibility of a young actor's vocal landscape that leads to the success of the co-option of vocal elements from the Spoken Word Movement. I propose ways of using this material as inspiration for an intervention on the traditional notions of western theatre voice.

Slamming into the visceral pleasure of language: the value of disordered spaces and its impact on contemporary vocal landscapes.

Introduction

At the heart of my research is the premise that the creation of a disordered space is valuable in stimulating a physical response to spoken language. In a disordered space language concepts are experienced as physical impulses as well as cerebral ideas. This allows for both the imaginative and conceptual structures of thought to be explored, as well as the physical experience of shaping words. Therefore, a disordered space is a space that foregrounds vocal delivery as physical activity. Vocal delivery, according to Jacqueline Martin, is the combination of actual sound produced by an actor, interwoven with the underlying impulse that governs all expression. There is a desire to reveal ‘the dramatic texts, artistic ideas or communicative needs which have given impetus to these utterances’ through the modification of the voice (Martin 1997: 1). The underlying impulse, to which Martin refers, exists in a disordered space as a physical energy that results in the production of sound. In foregrounding vocal delivery I am suggesting the idea that the voice is the primary mode of communicating in the human being. This supports current paleo-anthropological theories that posit the notion of human beings as linguistic animals, and that ‘a defining characteristic of humanity lies in our ability to verbally articulate meaning and notions of truth in a public arena’ (Kimbrough 2002: 67).

I am putting forward the notion that creating a disordered space is an intervention, an event that opens up the potential for unexpected vocal occurrences that embrace the physicality of language. The effects of the disordered space are registered on the actor’s vocal landscape; vocal landscape being a term I am employing to denote what Cicely Berry refers to as ‘the complete mix of background, physical make-up and personality’ combined with the conscious manipulation of vocal sound that has been learned through technical study of the voice (1987: 17). If vocal delivery is the action, the vocal landscape is the entire vocal palette that supports and creates the speech act.

The description of a disordered space as an ‘intervention’ assumes the existence of a vocal environment upon which a certain amount of this disorder can be imposed, in order to influence or change it in some way. The climate of contemporary vocal practice has been historically influenced by classical rhetoric through forms of elocution, and has evolved into an exciting and varied field covering a range of vocal practices, from speech pathology to dialect coaching.

Andrew Kimbrough, in his exploration of the status of voice in performance criticism, notes that theatre voice in the twentieth century has divided into three main trends: the scientific approach to pronunciation taken by Edith Skinner, the metaphysical focus on vocal energies as seen in Lessac and the psychological approach to voice training as propogated by Cicely Berry, Patsy Rodenburg and Kristin Linklater (Kimbrough 2002: 17). This has led to a vocal practice grounded in a pedagogy characterized by the acquisition of techniques in order to fulfill a variety of objectives; to 'free' the voice (Berry, Rodenburg), to create vocal energy (Lessac) and to assist in the accuracy of speech production (Skinner). The techniques proposed by these systems of practice are products of the western voice training tradition, and exist in formal training institutions, professional theatres and private practice. An intervention calls for vocal exploration that occurs outside of this tradition, in a disordered space. Thus, a disordered space creates a space of vocal potential that draws on elements outside of traditional voice training, specifically those of the sub-cultural aesthetic of the Spoken Word Movement. It is an intervention which suggests a re-patterning of responses to vocal stimuli. The Spoken Word Movement is a contemporary performance phenomenon and will be described in greater detail through out this work.

Chapter 1

A disordered space allows for a co-option of specific elements drawn from the Spoken Word Movement to create spaces alive with imaginative potential, constructed both physically and mentally, feeding off energetic impulses of anti-establishment notions of chaos and anarchy. It is a vocally charged space, driven by the physical impulses that underlie the emotion and energy inherent in the work.

1.1. The value of disordered spaces

I have settled on the term 'disordered spaces' as a way of describing the condition of spaces that I have observed and created, in which an actor's physical response to sound and text has intensified due to changes of energy in the space and in themselves. There is a shift from a cerebral mode of understanding to a physical experiential one. In using the word 'disordered', I hope to distinguish the central features of this space as being other than the more formal, traditional ways of working with the voice. Geographer Owain Jones writes of disordered spaces in ways that usefully intersect with my interest in the topic (2000). Jones has written extensively on the physical disordered spaces of the geographies and landscapes of childhood as being sites of intense experience. He uses the term 'disordered spaces' to describe physical spaces that are characterized by chaos, such as a bomb site or an abandoned building. In these places, a child experiences the physical world in a chaotic way, outside of adult control, allowing for the creation of an imagined space. An example of this would be the rubble of a construction site imaginatively transforming into the surface of the moon, and the child becoming an astronaut.

The non-formalization of the disordered space allows for greater imaginative engagement in play, from which follows a greater physical involvement. Jones distinguishes between 'striated' and 'smooth' spaces as being the two extremes of controlled geographical space, with 'disordered space' as an in-between space (Jones 2000).

Striated space is space which has been defined, determined, divided, and strictly controlled by adults through the use of non-permeable boundaries, surveillance, hierarchies, and control of the materials, uses, bodies and movements which can be brought into it.

(McMahill 2005)

Smooth space on the other hand, is non-hierarchical, multi-directional, and favours free movement, movement that is unhindered by physical obstacles. Smooth space exists in and around striated space; they are in a symbiotic relationship. In Jones's work, disordered spaces

afford children the luxury of being able to create intense experiences completely outside of adult discourse, a space in which they become 'wild'.

My interest lies in non-geographical space, where the disorder is constructed imaginatively and experienced physically and vocally. Using the hypothesis that a physically disordered space engages the imagination, I intend to work off the assumption that the inverse is true: that a mentally constructed disordered space will engage the body physically. The two states cannot exist separately. The 'disordered space' of the mind that is uncontrolled by traditional notions of curriculum, becomes an imaginative playground in which the constructs of mental space have become chaotic, and the actor has the experience of becoming physically and vocally 'wild'. Instinctive and playful aspects of the actor's vocal landscape are stimulated resulting in non-habitual responses to language.

Similarly, the Spoken Word Movement exists outside of traditional notions of voice, in the disordered physical spaces of youth culture. Drawing on the energetic shifts that occur in these spaces, actors are able to manipulate their perception of space and are able to create and operate in disordered spaces. A disordered space can exist for a single moment, or last an entire session. The space becomes disordered when the line between the reality of the physical space and the imaginative space becomes blurred, necessitating the actors to engage energetically with the voice, in line with the dynamics of the disordered space. An example of this engagement occurs in a game I have devised which follows the same lines as an improvised 'freestyle battle'¹, where the actors are placed in a situation in which the only way to 'survive' (to save face/ to win/ to assert themselves) is to engage with language in an energetic and aggressive way. I have observed the voice work shifting from *an idea in the actor's head* to an *experience in the body*, which in turn affects the physicality of voice. When an actor is placed in an environment that supports principles of chaos and anarchy, the potential for vocal exploration is extended beyond the restrictions of what they believe themselves capable of.

The major influence on this energy shift has been the introduction of elements borrowed from the worlds of hip-hop² and the Spoken Word Movement. The aesthetic of hip-hop has its roots in the upliftment of the individual, as Johannesburg-based Tumi of Tumi and the Volume says:

¹ A freestyle battle is a forum that has contestants insult or attack each other using improvised rhymes and the audience decides who wins by the level of their support for a contestant. See chapter 2 for a more detailed explanation.

² A popular urban youth culture, closely associated with rap music and with the style and fashions of African-American inner-city residents. (www.dictionary.com)

'Hip-hop is a voice for the voiceless. It's a powerful medium, one of the most powerful' (Friedman 2004). What he is referring to is the liberation that comes from performing one's own work and the idea of 'being heard'. It is a powerful socio-political tool, providing a platform to express grievances, celebrate differences and create a sense of community through a common language and a communal experience. More importantly, having a 'voice' in a communal experience has physiological implications; in the performance there is an exponential increase of circular energy transferred between performer and audience, leading to greater confidence, as well as to changes in breath and in spontaneous thought. Arthur Lessac notes that physiological reactions due to the release of adrenalin can 'stimulate strong and exciting performance when its effects are perceived in conjunction with strong motivation and confidence' (1997:49).

When this shift in the body and voice occurs, it is in conjunction with changing dynamics of space. A space that invites the energetic impulses of anarchy and chaos is a space that also invites a new response to stimuli. The vocal forms of the Spoken Word Movement are language based, usually poetic forms, and therefore demand an engagement with words, forcing the actor to re-engage spontaneously with the voice. There is a re-patterning of both sound and words and the actor is made aware of the primal active force that words have, rather than limiting themselves to an habitual response to text. In the practice of voice, it is essential to acknowledge the visceral power of words, a truth that Cicely Berry argues for in much of her work. An actor needs to understand that words are both primitive and sophisticated, and are 'thoughts in action' (Berry 1987: 20).

To clarify further, arguing for the value of a 'disordered space' is essentially an argument which recognises the vocal potential of a disordered space. It recognises that events that occur in spaces that are beyond formal control are experienced at a more intense level and have deeper physiological effects on the body and voice, beyond the habitual mode of responding. It is also an argument for the acceptance of popular cultural forms as being alternative knowledge systems, operating on their own terms and offering an aesthetic that can be co-opted into a curriculum, practice or rehearsal space. The value of a disordered space lies in its marginality, and its resistance to formalization, so that the socio-political basis of hip-hop and the Spoken Word Movement is directly in opposition to an established, central mode of discourse. Performers pride themselves on being indefinable, of being revolutionary and reactionary. Maggie Estep, a performance poet made popular through MTV (Music Television) appearances, refuses to acknowledge that her work is poetic, calling it prose. John S. Hall, who is part of the Spoken Word group King Missile says that Spoken Word is such a broad term, that he actually

enjoys the ambiguity that occurs in trying to define the genre. It is as if, by defying definition the Spoken Word Movement becomes an even more powerful tool of protest against what are perceived as the traditional, for example, the 'rather boring ideas of what poetry is' and by extension, approved vocal responses to text (Miazga 1998: online). By constantly redefining itself, the art form remains alive with energy and potential.

However, it is not the artistic merits of particular Spoken Word performances, nor the political views expressed that become relevant in my investigation of this form, but rather the inspirational energy that ignites the performances. The definition of inspiration is both to inhale and to 'fill with the urge or ability to do or feel something' (South African Oxford Dictionary 2004). Due to the heightened energy and the permission granted by the disordered space to be 'other', both the inspiration (breath) and the inspiration (animation of thought) are affected. Physiologically the breath becomes deeper and more passionate, while wild mental associations that result in interesting linguistic patterns are encouraged and praised. The individual is pushed into an active mode, where the breath and thought are energized.

Chapter 2

The Spoken Word Movement resists formal definition, which is one of the reasons it has such appeal as a subculture. Essentially, the Spoken Word Movement is name given to the phenomenon of the performance of poems or verse by musicians, actors or poets, in a diverse range of venues, from large concert stadiums to small cramped coffee shops. In all aspects of the Spoken Word Movement there is a focus on the relationship between performer and audience. The performer may be using a character or persona, but is still in a direct mode of communicating; s/he is more concerned with speaking to an audience than acting in front of them (Miazga 1998). The concert stadiums or nightclubs in which these events take place, are physical spaces characterized by their own disorder. A disordered event characterized by a sense of seriousness, coupled with intense rowdiness and anarchy, which creates a wild space that is based on certain rules and techniques. These rules are based in language, dictating both dialect and rhythmic structures. It is an art form which relies on the strong desire to communicate, by emphasizing the power of language through the visceral quality of words, and it has an aesthetic of clarity and muscularity.

In this Chapter, I will investigate the ways in which the energetic impulses of the Spoken Word Movement influence the creation of disordered spaces, both physically and mentally. Through examining specific vocal elements of the Spoken Word Movement I will outline concepts of re-patterning responses to language in terms of the rhythmic qualities of dialect. Thereafter follows an examination of the physical formation of sounds, using beat-boxing as an example of the para-linguistic element of language. Lastly I will outline how the gaining of status affects the ownership of performance material, and how it impacts on the vocal landscape of the actor.

2.1 The inspiration of The Spoken Word Movement

One fall night...poetry did something it hadn't done for decades.
It rose off the page and wafted into the lungs of its passionate
creators. It jumped up on the bar...and it screamed, it whispered.
It pranced and it danced. It cried and laughed. Most importantly
it engaged the audience, entertained it and deeply affected it.
And it hasn't stopped since.

(Smith 2004: xiii)

The above quote is Marc Smith's description of what happened at the first poetry slam event ever held at the 'Get Me High Jazz Club' in Chicago, 1984. In his poetic way, he describes

poetry as a living entity capable of movement and speech. Since this is a physical impossibility, the logical conclusion that can be drawn is that it is the poet's voice which has allowed the poetry to 'come alive' in this manner. The energetic impulses generated by this performance style have affected a change upon the poet's vocal landscape, compelling the voice to engage with the text.

The Spoken Word Movement operates on a social and cultural level, and does not claim to have an agenda beyond establishing performance poetry as a popular form of entertainment. The bulk of my research has been highlighting techniques and structures operating in the Spoken Word Movement that feed the creation of disordered spaces. These techniques and structures demand an engagement with language, and a useful way of describing this engagement is through the use of the word 'slam'. To 'slam' into the visceral pleasure of language, is to experience delight in the act of speaking an idea or thought as a physical impulse. It implies an enjoyment in the speech act, coupled with the physical action of 'slamming', a term borrowed directly from the Spoken Word Movement. A Slam poem is one which is performed at a Slam event; a poetry contest, played as a game, where poets are allowed three minutes to impress judges selected randomly from the audience. In this context the disordered space is described by rules of contest and the pleasure of playing to a crowd. The situation demands a heightened physical response to poetic text, and an engagement with the physicality of language, a 'slamming' into language.

Disordered space thrives on opposition. There is a relationship between playfulness and keen competition, the spirit of which fuels the concept of freedom. There is a sense of freedom present in the act of standing in front of a group of people and speaking or rapping a verse. As Mark Elevad writes 'to hear a poem is to experience its momentary escape from the prison cell of the page, where silence is enforced, to a freedom dependant only on the ability to open the mouth- that most democratic of instruments- and speak' (2003: 3). Freedom in a chaotic space is the primal energetic fuel which manifests in the seemingly non-free creation of strict rhythm and rhyme structures. The freedom to take on other ways of being leads to the definition of a vocal persona as a means of exploring alternative linguistic realities. The playfulness of the language, combined with competitiveness results in linguistic games expressed with aggression and attack. This duality is ever-present in disordered spaces, and is one of their defining features due the movement of energy implied in the action of the swing between two opposites.

My research into the Spoken Word Movement covers the four major trends influencing the development of this phenomenon. The Spoken Word Movement is located within the arena of

Hip-hop culture and comprises a number of different performance styles, namely Rap Music, Dub poetry, the Poetry Slam and Freestyle. Rap Music is a medium of expression that borrows aspects of Spoken Word, as well as inspiring new developments in Spoken Word performance styles. Dub poetry is a very particular style of performance that refers almost exclusively to the Rastafarian Community. Slam poetry is the most competitive aspect of the Spoken Word Movement, and Freestyle is the name given to improvised poetry performances. The relevant aspects of each of these forms will be discussed in relation to the vocal elements that assist in the creation of disordered spaces.

2.2 Energetic Impulses: Dub and the energy of protest

All the forms that make up the Spoken Word Movement are characterized by an inspirational energy that drives the desire to communicate. Dub Poetry is a form of poetry that is set to a reggae beat that uses a combination of Jamaican patois, African Dialects and English. It has origins in the British and African Rastafarian communities, and the content is often political, exploring issues of poverty and social exclusion. In the United Kingdom, where there is a large community of immigrants from Jamaica and the Caribbean, poets such as Linton Kwesi Johnson, John Agard and Benjamin Zephaniah use Dub Poetry as a powerful tool for the assertion of identity. In Dub Poetry, the energetic impulses that give rise to the poetry stem from feelings of loss of identity and alienation. The root of these feelings is a rage at being marginalised and stigmatised. This anger permeates the performance of Dub poetry, allowing access to the heightened emotional states that stem from opposition to perceived figures of authority. The emotional disordered space created using this rebellious energy, is a space of celebration and anger, in which the actor responds vocally to the energetic swing between these opposites. In the following extract from Linton Kwesi Johnson's poem: It Dread inna Ingran, issues of identity in a multi-ethnic, multilingual Britain are raised.

Maggi Tatcha on di go
wid a racist show
but a she haffi go
kaw, rite now,
African, Asian, West Indian an' Black British
stan firm inna Ingran
inna disya time yah.... (British council 2003)

The combination of the rhythm of the patois, coupled with the strong language of protest makes Dub poetry a powerful tool in the immediate accessing of energetic impulses fuelled by dissention.

Rap Music³ is also driven by themes of alienation, but on a more personal rather than political level. The language of gangster rap is known mostly for its controversial stance on women, homosexuals, and gangster life. Shelby Steele, author of the book A Dream Deferred and cited in Anthony Bozza's biography of Eminem, maintains that the culture of individualism that is perpetuated through gangster rap, is due to the mistrust in relationships caused by the alienation of individuals in a highly technological world. It is also due to the 'fracturing of the black family' causing emotional defensiveness, which ultimately results in very harsh and angry language (Bozza 2004: 171). Thus themes of alienation have become the basis of a commercially successful form of music, and are perpetuating the feeling of urban exclusion spoken about by many artists.

According to Russell Simmons, the creator of the Def Poetry Jam and a commercially successful hip-hop entrepreneur, the rebellious nature of the language is what appeals to the youth. 'Kids of all colors (sic), all over the world, instinctively seek to change the world...so kids can find a way into hip-hop by staying true to their instinct toward rebellion and change.' (Bozza 2004: 229). Rap does not seek to redress the cultural and economic division between rich and poor and the language reflects this, and is in most instances popular *because* of this. There is no desire to redress the political imbalances, but rather to celebrate them. Thus, there is a more celebratory use of physicality, which is useful when creating a disordered space characterized by a sense of fun.

The energy in a Rap performance is created through the interaction between performer and audience. There is a call and response mode of communicating between audience and performer, and the audience is incited to action, such as in the classic Rap lines: 'Put your hands in the air, and wave them like you just don't care' and 'Everybody say Hey! (Hey!) Ho! (Ho!)' (These lines have become part of general hip-hop vocabulary and belong to no one author.) This energy is not as focused as the strong energy of protest however, and can dissipate as easily as it is created.

³ Rapper's Delight was released in 1979 and became the first commercially successful Rap song, spawning groups such as Run-DMC, who recorded the first gold Rap album in 1984. In the mid-nineties, Rap Music began to cross-over into Rock Metal, a genre of music affiliated with white youth, spawning a new form of music: RapCore (Berger 2001). It began when Ice-T (a prominent black rapper) performed at the Lollapalooza Metal Festival in 1991, in front of a predominantly white audience.

In Slam Poetry⁴ and Freestyle⁵, the inspirational energy is located in the competitive nature of the events. The poets/performers have a desire to win and it is the vocal delivery that plays a huge part in the 'success' of a poem. Marc Smith is a performance poet and is widely acknowledged as the 'father' of Slam poetry, having hosted the first official Slam Poetry event at the Green Mill Tavern in Chicago, during the mid-eighties. This is how he describes Slam Poetry:

Slam Poetry is a word circus, a school, a town meeting, a playground, a sports arena, a temple, a burlesque show, a revelation, a mass guffaw, holy ground and possibly all of these at once. Slam poetry is performance poetry, the marriage of text and the artful presentation of spoken words onstage to an audience that has permission to talk back and let the poet performer know whether he or she is communicating effectively.

(Smith 2004:8-9)

There is an element of ritual in Smith's description of Slam poetry, a duality of seriousness and hilarity. In Freestyle, there is also a desire to 'win', but the rules of the game operate at a slightly more serious level. The body and voice are reacting to a highly charged situation, and both become more energised. The improvisatory nature of this style introduces a greater chance of failure, the fear of which drives the creation of clever linguistic constructs. The energetic impulses are located in real emotion, the duality of desire and fear.

2.3 Re-patterning of responses to voice: Sinking into the beats of Rap

Naturally, listening to repetitive music is not entirely internal. Beats don't just appear repeatedly but in specific forms of repetition, in patterns that at the same time become known in a particular sound design. Listeners don't just internally recognize beats in reference to the last beat...Rather as a rule, they recognize patterns and connect with them, if not exactly with meanings in the strict sense, then certainly with actual experiences- sound patterns combine themselves with these meanings as symbols do with specific meanings.

Diederichsen
(Davila 2003: 36)

⁴ Slam Poetry is poetry that is performed at a Slam event where poets are allocated three-minute slots in which to perform their poems without the aid of props or instruments, for an audience of judges. The judges are chosen at random from the audience, and points are awarded on a scale of one to ten (Anon, 2000: online).

⁵ An example of Freestyling is offered in the film 8 Mile, starring Eminem. His character has a chance to perform at a Rap Battle, which is a forum where two contestants have a minute in which to verbally abuse each other in rap-like style. The contestants are gradually eliminated in a series of rounds, until two finalists are left and the winner becomes the champion for that week.

Rhythm forms the structural framework in which to contextualize the elements of the Spoken Word Movement. The most obvious form of re-patterning occurs in the rhythm of language of Rap. The repetitive beat of a Rap song sustains the lyrics and houses the meaning in a recognisable and comforting format. Chambers maintains that the 'combination of different rhythmic layers, overlapping and intersecting, and the vertical cluster of notes they carry, direct our attention to the interior, the 'inside' of the musical experience' (1985: 11). This concurs with Diederichsen's notion of connecting with sound patterns as being significant in terms of experiencing meaning in the beat. The beat forms the basis of a structural framework in which to house language. In Rap, words and beat combine together to create multiple rhythmic layers and as Ranciere observes: 'It is the contradictory union between speech, stripped of sense based form, and the art of sounds, stripped of meaning' (Davila 2003: 27).

Rap Music insists on a strict adherence to a polyrhythmic beat as a structure to house the voice of personal experience. Actors working in Rap forms can begin to understand intricacies of rhythm through the experience of the beat in a Rapped verse. They can listen out for and experience the effect that 'time suspension' (in the form of discordant beats) has on the rhythm and musicality of language within a performance text. Rap music provides an opportunity to experience a text as a rhythmic whole, and offers an awareness of multiple layers of rhythm and beats. In a commercial rap song the structure of the language is often extremely simple, or else very repetitive in order for it to 'stick' in the audience's heads. Jay-Z, a popular hip-hop artist, uses a 'simple four-rhyme structure in which the last line offers a linguistic, thematic or aural twist' which has become a widely copied style (Neate 2004: 35).

Stop dreamin, I leave your body steamin
Niggaz is fiendin, what's the meanin?
I'm leanin on any nigga intervenin
with the sound of my money machine-in { *brrrr* }

Jay- Z Can't knock the hustle
(Reasonable Doubt 1996)

As Kenyatta (an underground hip-hop emcee) says: 'It's crazy, but you've gotta give people some kind of hook' (Neate 2004: 35). The disorder and anarchy in the language is contained within a tight repetitive rhyming structure that allows greater ease of access through a 'hook', something that catches the audience's attention and then holds it.

Dub poetry offers alternative ways of investigating rhythms of dialect. The language choices rely heavily on a sense of exclusion in order to assert the themes of identity, thus becoming a

powerful political tool to unite a marginalised community. The actor is forced to engage with an alternative dialect as part of this heightened emotional state, highlighting different ways of re-patterning rhythms of emotion in text. The rhythms of the vocal landscape are re-patterned again through the competitive nature of Freestyle and Slam Poetry. It is the audience, not the actor that determines the vocal delivery of the text through their responses. If the audience is non-responsive or derisive, the actor is forced to change tactics, to find different ways of engaging with the text until the audience is satisfied.

In Slam Poetry, music is far less foregrounded than in Rap, but the language is still influenced by the rhythmic potential offered through polyphonic beats. As Tumi reflects: 'Rap and poetry are the same thing, only hip-hop has a rhythm that catches people's attention. You don't have to drum the message into anyone's head, you just hope they'll catch some of it while they're feeling the beat' (Friedman 2003). One of the most common rhythmic features of Slam Poetry is the repetition of parallel constructions, which serves as a framework in which to create alternative stress patterns in order to break the written construction of the line. This replicates the idea of a 'hook' – in this particular instance it is a rhythmic hook that catches the listener's attention. An example of this is:

Throw the briefcase in the back seat
loosen the tie,
roll down the window;
pull on the shades,
pull on the racing gloves,
push some tunes into the tape deck
...
I don't have time to be a Sunday driver;
I don't have time to be cruising flowers,
I don't have time to be sight-seeing

From '*Motor Red, Motor white, Motor Blue*'
by Phil West (Smith 2004: 52)

'Hip-hop flow' is an extension of rhythmic understanding, and is the term used when an artist seems completely at ease while rapping or speaking a poem and s/he has found a rhythm that integrates meaning with performance. It is a fusion between the beat and the lyrics, 'sinking into the beat' as Eminem puts it (Bozza 2004: 91). In theatre voice terms it can be ascribed to 'rooting the voice', the merging of intention with breath support and clarity. Rhythm is created through the three elements of weight, space and time, or in vocal terms: stress, pause and pace. A student actor with the confidence to become proficient in the art of manipulating time has greater

skill in the creation of an aural image. Time is the most commonly manipulated feature of the Spoken Word Movement, and one of its characteristics is 'time suspension via rhythmic breaks' or the pause (Rose 1994: 67). Time is one of the most basic features of the speech act. Meaning is constructed through the creation of sounds over time, in a linear fashion. Aural images cannot be experienced 'all at once' like visual images, they require time.

2.4 The physical construction of language: Beat-Boxing and the muscularity of sound

...being to fill your ears with Nutritious Sound/Meaning constructs
Space Shots into Consciousness
Known hereafter as Poems, and not to provide a Last Toehold
For Dying Free Enterprise F@#*'em
For a Buck'em Capitalism'

Bob Holman's Disclaimer
(Smith 2004:35)

In conjunction with the meaning revealed through language, it is 'the sounds and rhythms and cadence of the language' that affect the listener (Berry 2001:30). The paralinguistic element of the Spoken Word Movement exists in certain concepts that are key to the hip-hop style, one of these being beat boxing, which reduces the monophonic characteristic of ordinary speech by introducing the notion of multi-rhythmic sounds that do not have any resemblance to language and do not seek to create meaning over and above the musicality of the sound. The soundscape of beat boxing needs to be carefully structured and conscientized, but it is not language based, therefore the actor does not become weighted down in emotional or intellectual interpretation. An awareness of the physical construction of sound in language becomes foregrounded.

Beat-boxing is common to all forms of the Spoken Word Movement, and is the name given to the variety of sounds created by the impact of lips, tongue and soft palate that imitate electronic beats and musical instruments. In Freestyle, a group of people might all be creating a background beat using only their voices and articulatory muscles while a performer creates a rhyme that either flows with, or juxtaposes the beat. The type of sounds that are created can be divided into two main categories, unvoiced and voiced sounds. Unvoiced sounds are created by the impact of two articulators when they are forced apart and there is no vocal tone in the sound. These sounds imitate instruments such as the snare drum as well as the electronic pops and crackles that are created when working with speakers and microphones. The extended 'p' sound is made by pressing both lips together and forcing air through them, the sibilant 'ts' formed by the tip of the tongue and the alveolar ridge and the extended 'k' created by the soft palate and the blade of the

tongue. Voiced sounds imitate a larger range of musical elements, from a 'thumping' bass drum made in the back of the throat, to the high pitched whine of a record being 'scratched'.

An important element of hip-hop music is the focus on the reconstruction of electronic elements and sampling⁶. Prominent hip-hop theorist Tricia Rose asserts that hip-hop culture 'replicates and re-imagines the experiences of urban life and symbolically appropriates Urban Spaces' (Rose 1994: 22). By creating these electronic sounds as vocal sound, the performer is possibly reconstructing the urban environment into something that has a definite form and is therefore less chaotic and alienating. An aesthetic of all the Spoken Word Movement forms is clarity of speech, thus beat boxing is also a means of strengthening the articulatory muscles, due to the exercise it provides for the tongue, lips and soft-palate. This physical impact on the articulators introduces more energy into this speech act, allowing actors to revel in the physical pleasure of forming sounds and eventually, words. The visceral and textural qualities of words are foregrounded, along with a heightened sense of clarity and accuracy.

2.5 Elevated Status: Freestyle and the owning of material

The Spoken Word Movement is a language- based phenomenon, and it is through the proficiency of the language that acceptance into this subculture can occur. The more proficient an individual is at using the language in surprising and skilful ways, the higher their status within the movement. This status becomes translated into 'subcultural capital' which is an 'ideological resource through which to accrue 'hip' or 'cool' status - obtained through being 'in the know' about what is in or out on the subcultural scene' (Muggleton 2003:9). The artists working within these Spoken Word forms are accorded the title of poet, a title with its own connotations of importance. The poet owns the text that s/he creates by writing it, and by performing it. The performer becomes part of the poem; the text and performance are integrated.

This is most obviously seen in the form of Freestyle. In Freestyle, poets have almost no time at all in which to prepare their material; instead they use a combination of stock phrases and quick wit, all set to a rhythmic beat. The improvisatory nature of the contest means that the competitors must be able to think on their feet in order to construct impressive linguistic rhymes that will defeat the opposition. It is usually in the form of a 'diss' or an insult, and the cleverer or more

⁶The art of splicing together songs from completely different genres into a rap song in order to create a new meaning.

unexpected the rhyme is, the greater the skill. The writing of the poem happens during the performance, and the success of it is based on the audience response.

In a disordered space run along the lines of a Freestyle battle, the actor is empowered through the creation and ownership of the material they have constructed, and gain confidence through the heightened status. There is a physiological reaction that occurs through the gaining of confidence; nervous tension in the body is reduced and the actor is spurred on to vocal heights they have not believed themselves capable of.

Overall all these elements will disturb the actor's vocal landscape in a positive way by inviting energy into the body and voice. This will affect how the actor views the creative possibilities present in their own vocal landscape.

Chapter 3

I have defined the term ‘vocal landscape’ as being the genetic, social and physical factors that contribute to how an individual will sound, combined with the conscious manipulation of the voice that has been learned as a result of vocal training. An actor’s vocal landscape is comprised of both the social-reality of the language in which they operate, as well as the conscious manipulation of the linguistic and para-linguistic elements of language. It is rooted in the linguistic-reality in which they operate, and by exploring a different way of operating vocally, an actor can experience a new way of speaking, being, and knowing. I have worked predominantly with young actors, in schools, university or other training institutions, who have been exposed to western voice training methods. The intervention of the disordered space impacts on this vocal training through what can be referred to as, the non-standard dialect of the Spoken Word Movement, which houses all the vocal elements I have examined in Chapter 2. In this Chapter I shall examine the ways in which language creates a linguistic reality and how a non-standard dialect impacts on vocal landscapes. Thereafter I offer practical ways of incorporating this work in to a voice curriculum.

3.1 The Vocal landscapes of the young actor- how language becomes a coding system for linguistic realities.

So then the question becomes, what role does hip-hop play in the future of language? Or rather, what role does the future of language play in hip-hop? There does seem to have been a lyrical evolution in hip-hop...

Williams, Saul
(Elevad 2003:60)

Linguistic theory states that it is predominantly through language that individual reality is constructed and reconstructed throughout a lifetime. Coleman, a socio-linguist, maintains that language is instrumental in facilitating life-cycle transitions, thus reaffirming notions of identity and self-concept (Kessel 1998: 323). In adolescence and young adulthood this often manifests in forms of slang, and language modifications appear at the level of grammar, word choice and topic selection. In a similar vein, Goodwin, speaking in a lecture series entitled The Infinite Mind: Language and Popular Culture (Anon 2000), proposes that language is the medium we use to identify ourselves and place ourselves socially in a community. The implications of this are that language is the unifying factor among groups of people, and gives rise to a series of codes by which we contextualize our lives and our sense of community. A code may be defined ‘as a

systematic pattern of tendencies in the selection of meanings to be exchanged under specified conditions' (Halliday 1978: 181). Codes of language are incorporated into everyday speech, with the purpose of socialization into a specific social-reality.

A young actor is operating in a socio-linguistic reality that is defined partly through age. Erikson, a psychoanalyst who specializes in developmental psychology, describes adolescence as being the period of 'identity vs. confusion' (Atkinson 1996: 105-106). An adolescent is striving to formulate a coherent sense of self and direction in life, while remaining a part of a peer group. The sense of individualism arises out of a move away from the family structure into a peer group structure, which is often made manifest by a change in vocabulary and greater use of slang. Thus, the linguistic realities in which they operate have much more flexibility at this time and are more receptive to influences of non-standard dialects.

3.2 The Intervention of dialect

Halliday proposes the notion that society is hierarchical, and that this hierarchy is constructed through dialect (1978). He makes a distinction between standard and non-standard dialects:

The distinction between standard and non-standard dialects is one of language versus antilanguage, although taking a relatively benign and moderate form. Popular usage opposes dialect, as '*anti-*', to (*standard*) *language*, as the established norm. A non-standard dialect that is consciously used for strategic purposes, defensively to maintain a particular social reality or offensively for resistance and protest, lies further in the direction of an antilanguage: this is what we know as 'ghetto language'. (Halliday 1978: 178)

Non-standard dialects tend towards being languages of protest and opposition, where issues of oppression and class-consciousness come to the fore. Halliday maintains that a characteristic of oppressed languages is that their speakers tend to excel at verbal contest and verbal display, which is evident in examples of Spoken Word performances. Therefore, the dialect of the Spoken Word Movement serves both to unite a community and to heighten the level of linguistic dexterity.

The non-standard dialect is easily incorporated into the linguistic reality of a young actor through the linguistic notion of 'language crossing' (Mesthrie 2001: 322). In a social context, this term describes how a group of speakers assimilate dialects that are of a different ethnic background to their own. Rampton argues that when speakers use language variations different from their own

ethnic linguistic reality, they are more likely to attract comment and even condemnation (Mesthrie 2001: 322). Adolescents often try and attract this condemnation as a statement of rebellion by constructing an anti-establishment reality for themselves, and borrowing aspects of other ethnic realities. The codes of language are borrowed, not generated, and can therefore be adopted to suit their own purpose. A young actor is immersed in the business of adopting realities other to their own as part of characterization training. What the dialect of the Spoken Word offers is a 'slamming' into a different linguistic reality through the visceral quality of the language.

3.3 Putting play into practice: The co-option of the Spoken Word Movement

Intervention: To involve oneself in a situation so as to alter or hinder an action or development: the act or fact of interfering with a condition to modify it or with a process to change its course (www.dictionary.com).

The vocal forms of the Spoken Word offer ways of interfering, and thus modifying, a more traditional voice practice through the creation of disordered spaces. I would like to emphasize that an intervention is not an absorption into a curriculum. Disordered spaces need to create vocal environments that disturb the actor's vocal landscape in order to achieve the heightened states of energy I have described. Working outside of traditional notions of voice will assist in the re-patterning of vocal responses. It is important to be inspired by the material, but the specific outcomes rely on how the material is used, not in the material itself⁷.

In a physical learning space, disordered spaces can operate at various levels and intensities. A disordered space can be created for a few moments, or for an entire session. In a school curriculum, the notion of disorder can be introduced as a way of energising and inspiring the students around a voice task. In a tertiary institution, the student actor introduces analysis and awareness into the task, and can investigate disorder in a conscious way. It can manifest in a game, or in the construction of a fantastical situation in which the student's suspension of disbelief is essential. As a supervisor in these spaces, it is essential to know how to allow the work to unfold along unexpected lines without redirecting it. The outcome might not be the one

⁷ The examples of ways in which the Spoken Word elements can act as an intervention stem from the research conducted as part of my poetry production at the University of Cape Town entitled It takes a Word in April 2004, as well as a rehearsed workshop around the text of Hamletmachine by Heiner Müller later that same year. Other games and techniques have come out of my voice classes and workshops at UCT, the Waterfront Theatre School, City Varsity and Camps Bay High School.

that was planned any event that has impact on the actor's vocal landscape will have repercussions in their attitude to voice.

3.3.1 The tangible quality of words: sounds good enough to eat.

In my poetry production, It Takes a Word, the performers were encouraged to fully engage with their own issues and identities in order to express what is important to them in poems of their own creation. Thus I was following the example of the Slam poetry form, but without the competitive aspect. The objective of the production was to integrate all the aspects of the vocal landscape in order to serve the text in the most expressive way possible, as well experience the language on a more visceral level.

I encouraged the students to engage creatively with the energetic impulses that created the texts to explore the physical effects on the articulators. They explored the quality of sounds, and what physiological reactions they provoked in the student. One of the ways this was achieved is with an exercise is called The Fruit Rant (see insert). It is about connecting a tangible object, something evocative like fruit, to a sensory quality in the words that describe it. It is divided into 2 parts, the first part being where the student familiarises themselves with the vocabulary surrounding fruit and in the second part they begin to construct the words into small rhymes, retaining the sensory vocal textures they have discovered. This is a gentle foray into the art of Freestyling and helps the

The Fruit Rant

Part one:

Working by yourself, take your favourite fruit and imagine the smell/ taste/ feel/ texture / weight/ shape, whether it is sharp/ sweet or sour. Begin to say the fruit name getting as much of that information into that word. Repeat the word, evoking as much of the *fruitiness* in the name as possible. Once your fruit name is infused with sensory meaning, begin to describe the fruit, relishing in the description.

Part two:

Get into groups of about four people each and decide on a group fruit. The group visualises the fruit, and speaks about it all at once, generating as much vocabulary as possible around that fruit. Then, one at a time, speak about the fruit, while the rest of the group encourages and supports through nodding or verbal agreement. No-one is allowed to interrupt and only when there is an opening, can you take the floor. The next task is to begin to structure your 'fruity' rant and offer the next person to speak an open-ended rhyme to take up and run with. It helps to have the rest of the group form a rhythm of some kind, vocal or clapping or both.

An example might be:

Actor A: A sweet delicious red cherry
Deep in my belly, very
Tasty indeed, makes me need one
more...

Actor B...please feed me one more
Sweet cherry in my belly...

The less sophisticated the verse the better, the pressure shouldn't be on you to think of highly creative and sophisticated rhymes. If they come to you easily so much the better, but confidence is built up in the group when you have the opportunity to be silly and accepted for it.

actor to engage with language on an improvisatory level, engaging both the body and the voice. I have also done this exercise using favourite childhood sweets as a starting point in order to evoke something real that they have an intense relationship with. Once the student becomes comfortable in the exercise they have the freedom to branch off into any direction they like.

3.3.2 Exploring Rhythm: bopping to a different beat

Music is an essential feature of hip-hop culture and stems from a polyrhythmic base, which relies on a 'baseline' beat and variations thereof to create a rhythmic structure. In order to explore the rhythmic structure of text, I have used exercises that create a group rhythm, based on features of beat-boxing and electronic music. This exercise forms part of a workshop I held with third year UCT students to explore rhythm in text. I set up the parameters of rhythm as we going to view it in that session; that it will form a structure on which vocal elements can play. We spoke about weight, pace and space as being the components of rhythm in order to orient the class towards the exercise.

Beat-Bopping- foregrounding the musical impulse of rhythm:

In groups of four, students are required to make a baseline of some kind, a regular beat that will underpin the whole piece. They are then asked to add a counter rhythm, and then two other elements (which could be a long elongated sound, a high pitched tinny noise...anything that adds to the musicality but is more fluid and more flexible in terms of weight space and time).

The next instruction is to add a pause, a 'suspension' and to see how long they can hold it, then return to the beat in an 'interesting' way. Then they have to find an ending to the piece. This portion of the exercise lasts about 20 minutes, after which each group performs for the rest of the class. An addition to the exercise would be to use the musical rhythm as a starting point for the performance of a text. To firstly follow the rhythm closely, almost as a 'backing track', and then perform it again without the beat, to see the effect an external rhythm has had on the actor's response to the text.

The Freestyle Battle: charging with words

One of the exercises I use to create confidence in some of the younger students I work with follows the lines of a Freestyle Battle. The goal is to win the competition, and in this instance language is the means to achieving that goal. The energy of this game is important as a way of experiencing of how an energized body creates an energized voice. There is an emphasis on the clarity of words in this style, because the insult needs to be direct and audible if it is to make an impact on the other party, so there is no room for mumbling or ambiguity of meaning. The students are encouraged to work in whatever language feels most comfortable to them as this deepens the 'ownership' of the work.

The word war!

Begin with two groups of people, who will spend some time creating a group identity. Allow the groups time to bond and find their common ground. Some students like to all wear their T-shirts backwards, or they all find a similar physicality (slouching, marching etc.)

After about twenty minutes, a neutral party walks over to one group, and tells them that the other group has said they are a bunch of sissies, or something equally insulting. The go-between moves to the other group and says something similar, until the groups are fired up enough to face each other. Working in turns, they begin to build up insults:

Example:

Group A: you guys are silly

Group B: No you're silly and you smell!

Group A: No you're silly, you smell and you all have funny feet!

The reason for the repetition is that it offers a structure in which to play, and demands a building on the insults, they cannot be reduced to using the same one back and forth. It should begin to build to quite a crescendo!

The class then chooses one representative from each group, and they go 'head to head'. If there is time allow each person the opportunity to come forward.

These exercises, and others like them, could easily be absorbed into a curriculum, and may become standard practice in a very short while. It is essential to keep the inspiration of the Spoken Word elements 'alive' in the creation of disordered spaces, to ensure the effects of an intervention.

Conclusion

The Spoken Word Movement is a performance-based medium that can inform vocal processes in a workshop or rehearsal situation, through the creation of disordered spaces. I am arguing for the idea of 'intervention' as a way of understanding how elements found in disordered spaces influence perceptions of what is valuable in the field of Voice Practice. Disordered spaces are first and foremost imaginative spaces which have an effect on the physicality of the voice and the body. They are constructed on oppositional lines, and combine seriousness with playfulness. Through the liberation experienced by the actor, disordered spaces offer alternative ways of being and knowing. A disordered space engages with non-standard dialects and demands a greater physical engagement with sounds. Disordered Spaces co-opt non-traditional elements into a vocal realm, and in doing so become an intervention on the vocal landscapes of actors.

At the heart of these spaces is the ability to imaginatively create a space, or 'play' in it. I have referred to the idea of heightened childhood experiences in disordered spaces, which alludes to the ability to play. An actor can discover a more playful way of engaging with his/her vocal landscape in a disordered space, albeit it in a very specific way. The specifics of the Spoken Word Movement introduce key concepts that are useful to exploring the voice, and discovering new ways of using it. The restrictions imposed by the tight repetitive rhythmic structures afford an intense investigation of vocal elements, from the expansive use of energy to the delicate isolation of the articulators. There is more freedom to become 'other' in these spaces, and as Cicely Berry advocates, language can 'energize the audience...but not by making it beautiful' (2001:3).

Though I have theorised this work as part of an ongoing voice training programme, I plan to use the notion of disordered spaces in the creation of a product, entitled 'White girls ain't got no rhythm'. I shall be exploring both the codes of language operating within the movement, manipulating them to serve my own purpose, as well as investigating the para-linguistic elements of the dialect. In the rehearsal room these ideas will be put to practice, and the emphasis will be on rhythmic awareness, clarity and the foregrounding of vocal delivery. I am drawing on Preston-Dunlop and Sanchez-Colberg's notion of a 'triadic perspective' a term they have coined to represent the synthesis of theory and practice (2002: 12). Their premise is that a dance choreographer operates in three 'interdependent but concurrent ways of functioning' as maker, performer and appreciator. The creative process of making is dependent on the exploration through performance, as well as on appreciating (or criticizing) the process in an objective way.

In this instance, the process of creating a performance is about embodying the theory and allowing it to emerge as practice. As a creator I am willing to immerse myself in this work experientially by celebrating the performative aspects of this work.

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