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**FREE FALLING BIRD**  
**an encounter with the trojan women of euripides**

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**A script submitted to the University of Cape Town  
in partial fulfillment for the degree of  
Masters in Theatre and Performance  
October 2012**

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For feminists, utopia is a place where egalitarian, consensual, and cooperative relationships flourish and where both sexes are able to engage in meaningful work. They are based on the notion that the key to a satisfying life is opportunity for love and work where the two are compatible. In feminist utopias the social structure is such that women do not have to choose between work and love. Another feature of feminist utopias is size - either the whole society is small or people live in fairly small-sized communities. Families, however, are communal and extended, not the isolated, privatized nuclear families characteristic of post-industrial society. Feminist utopias are ecologically conscious. There is no exploitation or severe depletion of natural resources. In a very real sense, feminist utopias celebrate what we usually think of as traditionally female tasks and traits: nurturance, expressiveness, support or personal growth and development, a link with the land or earth.

*Charles L. Mee from **The Trojan Women: A Love Story***

## Reunion in Sarajevo

They meet regularly, the dark-robed women.  
The time and place  
Of the next meeting is never known,  
Only that there will be one.  
The ancient disgrace  
Will be re-enacted, the old moan  
By the fresh earth, the white face  
That says everything and nothing: and always a boy  
Broken on the stones of Troy.  
It was the Athenians who first troubled the graves  
Of the dark-robed dead.  
Triremes cut the unprotected waves  
To Melos: the decree leaves  
Nothing male living: the boys bleed  
With the men, the women rostered as slaves.  
And Hecuba stirs in her dark bed,  
Andromache's ashes gather, Cassandra's lust  
For prophecy is born again in the dust.  
They have lost count now, the dark-robed mourners,  
Of the many times they have met.  
Fresh blood draws them, injustice gathers  
These shadowy ladies, so that whatever suffers  
Shares the remembrance of suffering, the wet  
Cheeks, the torn hair, the terrors  
Repeated again and again. They meet  
Always in the hope that this will be the last  
Reunion, that they may return in peace to the past:  
They stand silently, the dark-robed women,  
Heads leaning together in mourning.  
No words can express their centuries of pain,  
Only brushing of hands and cheeks, the fallen  
Beauty of having seen too much, sensing  
Too keenly that it will happen again.  
They depart to their temporary graves, knowing  
The next reunion is penciled: only who will destroy  
Is still uncertain, and what particular Troy.

*Don Taylor, June 1994*

*Written in response to **The Women of Troy***

## WHO

a suggestion of Hecuba / Chorus  
a suggestion of Andromache / Woman in White Dress / Chorus  
a suggestion of Cassandra / Chorus  
Woman 1 / Talthybius / Helen / Chorus  
Woman 2 / Polyxena / Chorus  
Woman 3 / Chorus

## WHERE

Troy: a nightmare from the future with various imaginings of the past.

## WHAT

The space suggests a warehouse, the backroom of what was perhaps once a clothing store or a shop of mannequins, now the site of the remains. A point of transition, where bodies are held and stored in crude brown cardboard boxes, primitively taped together, large and stacked, stamped with FRAGILE stickers, THIS WAY UP, HANDLE WITH CARE, CAUTION: CONTAINS LIQUIDS and so on. The walls are covered in these. The remnants of mannequin dolls and Barbie's, torn apart at the limbs, coolly scattered. A discarded landscape of broken kitchen appliances, bits of toaster, refrigerator, kettles, the skeletons of electronics. The cogs and insides of the appliances bleed into the space. Suggestions of a machine war, calculated, broken, bloodless - clean. Somewhere, perhaps suspended from the ceiling, there may be a sculpture made from discarded bodyparts, like a macabre chandelier. The walls are fluid. Nothing belongs to the earth.

A working phonograph is set up to one side, alongside a microphone.

Or else, all is empty.



*She is lifted into a cardboard box and the lid is taped shut.*

*The box is removed. The wails of the woman with the white dress continues and dies in the distance.*

*The rest of them hum, station themselves around the room, some seated, some standing.*

*The chorus of women sing. They are oozing, sexual parodies of themselves. Gaudy.*

All of me  
Why not take all of me  
Can't you see  
I'm no good without you  
Take my lips I want to lose them  
Take my arms I'll never use them  
Your goodbye left me with eyes that cry  
How can I get along without you?  
You took the part that once was my heart  
So why not take all of me

WOMAN  
And he's got me down on my knees  
Four times a week  
And it's getting so I don't know  
What it feels like to stand up  
Or even if I have any legs at all  
Attached to the tops of my knees.  
But!  
On Monday I am on my knees in the kitchen  
Oh Lord I groan these goddamn stains won't move  
The pasta sauce and the brown stew  
And my knees are scrubbing at the dirt  
And my knees cry  
But only a little bit  
Only a little bit  
And on Wednesday I am level with the floor again  
As his boot grinds me into the carpet  
Stepping down onto my shoulder blade

His big dick swinging (metaphorically of course)

You're  
On  
Your  
Knees  
Now  
Bitch  
And on Friday afternoon  
To the serenade of police sirens and the rabies-mad bark of a dog  
I am down on my knees voluntarily  
Scuffing the skin and pulling him apart  
With my teeth  
And on Sunday on my knees  
Pleading with the urgency of a dripping tap  
Asking retribution  
For a man I'm not sure exists  
From a man I don't believe in.  
Yes he has me down on my knees  
Getting to four times a week  
And I can't get up  
I'm not getting up.

*The chorus disperse. Variouslly:*

- Powerful love spell
- Business spells!
- Revenge!
- Powerful divorce spells!
- Have you been disappointed?
- It's time to regain your happiness, through Dr. Saba's powerful spells all is possible!
- Do you need penis enlargement?
- He has a massai gel to help!
- Are you demanding money from someone who doesn't want to pay you?

- Court cases, witchcraft, removal of misunderstandings in relationships!

- Lucky spells!

- Protection spells!

- Powerful business spells!

- Divorce spells!

- Are you having many obstacles in your life?

- Are things happening in your life that you can't explain?

- Do you need protection from enemies?

- Do you want to know your enemies?

- Witchcraft!

- Do you need a marriage partner?

- Do you want to reunite with your lost lover?

- Do you want to separate a couple?

- Do you want to attract someone?

- No matter how your situation may be through my strong Spells and spiritual powers all is possible, many have been successful through my spell casting Healing and it's also your chance to experience a complete change in your miserable life, it's never too late through my strong ancestors all is possible, it's time for you to break through your problems and not to spend another year regretting saying that i wish i had known about Dr Saba earlier, remember you were born lucky and why do you give chance to certain obstacles that have taken all your happiness and joy and left you with emmisary suffering?

i'm here to help you to overcome all your problems and restore Peace and Happiness to your life.

HECUBA

I've never seen so much blood.

All of it spilled slick onto the streets, slip sliding on the remains of human innards with every step.

Our brothers and sisters have died in this war, their bellies exploded by the shrapnel, leaving us in the aftermath.

WOMAN 2

To clean up the mess as usual.

To sweep and scrub walls and pick bits of bone off the floor.

HECUBA

How long has passed since we last saw a living thing?

WOMAN 2

A goddamn month.

HECUBA

And since then no child?

No wailing for comfort, unless from the mouth of a severed head?

No baby wanting to be fed?

WOMAN 1

I'd kill for a fucking scone and a pat of butter.

HECUBA

At midnight a child, soft boned, was thrown from a building.

Merciless, flung by its feet and went crashing into the pavement.

Head first, the tender skull smashed by the force of the stone.

WOMAN 3

Its mother's fault where was she?



HECUBA

Metres away, her body torn apart and  
broken at the seams,  
from cunt to mouth a bleeding gash  
where they left her.  
They haven't been gentle, they've  
spared no one.  
They've herded us like ox into the back  
of armoured trucks.  
They've driven us like cattle into this  
hole.  
To make sure we don't hurt ourselves,  
they say, or one another  
while they watch us sleep.

*WOMAN 1 speaks to a leg, wearing a  
shoe.*

WOMAN 1

Oh she.  
Oh!  
If only these feet had known,  
so daintily slipped into her...  
Her...?

WOMAN 2

Louboutins. Those are Louboutins.

WOMAN 1

If only these feet had known.  
That they would find themselves here,  
among the other rubbish of the day,  
the living and the dead,  
foot  
indistinguishable  
from  
leg  
indistinguishable  
from  
arm,  
SHE WOULD NOT HAVE WORN HER PRETTY  
SHOES!

*Raucous laughter ascends into hysteria.*

HECUBA

And we'll accept, will we, this  
scavenging?  
The hunting like animals for prey,

the bloodshed set to a clock.

WE ARE NOT ANGRY ENOUGH.

*WOMAN 3 speaks to a decapitated head.*

WOMAN 3

They said to her: your husband.  
We know Him, your husband, that brave  
man who went fighting,  
(this was before, before she knew of the  
war, the nature of it),  
they said to her: we know Him.  
And He has requested, yes He has asked  
that you send along something to Him.  
Something to remind Him of home, a  
little token, a little souvenir of love.  
Bake for Him, they said to her.  
Bake for Him.  
Who knows when He'll be back home all  
He asks is that you  
Bake for Him.

So they sat down in her kitchen these

MEN

While she mixed together with her  
fingers the flour,  
the sugar,  
the salt,  
the eggs,  
the yeast,  
the vanilla,  
a touch of nutmeg.

And set the oven to two hundred and  
fifty degrees

Celcius.

They watched as she poured the batter  
into the tin,  
and kept conversation while they  
observed, through the oven door,  
the rising of the cake  
for her husband.

And oh!

The oven chimed and there was the  
cake.

The cake for her husband, which she  
turned onto a cooling rack and  
wrapped in wax paper,  
snugly like the baby Jesus.

The baby Jesus made of cake.

Handed her baby over to them and said

*thank you for this*

she said

THANK YOU FOR THIS.

And taking the package they grabbed  
her by the hair  
(she still confused, damned woman)  
Her long hair in tight fistfuls and the  
open oven door at two hundred and fifty  
degrees Celcius  
and they pushed her head there  
held it  
while the heat engulfed her beautiful  
black head  
setting it aflame  
and they ate her perfectly formed baby  
off of wax paper at the kitchen table.

HECUBA

By nightfall they had dragged the  
women from their beds,  
Feet chained together, one-legged,  
some of them falling knees bent to beg  
for their lives,  
chained and dragged through the mess  
made by their boots.  
Grim jaws upturned as they pulled  
women from beds beside which the  
radio still played  
sad jazz tune upon sad jazz tune.

*The chorus sings.*

*The women embrace, sing along, dance  
stiffly.*

Birds flying high  
You know how I feel  
Scent of the pine  
You know how I feel  
Breeze drifting on by  
You know how I feel  
It's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a  
new life  
For me  
And I'm feeling good

WOMAN 2

I've always preferred orange, or green.  
Yellows. Bright ones. Red has never

looked good on me, the colour against  
my dark skin washes out. If given a  
choice wouldn't I rather be covered in  
the colour of sky? Drenched in the  
colour of earth? Wrapped in pastels the  
colours of a real lady? But to have red,  
inescapable, inside my veins. Black red,  
blue red, purple red, the hue of bruises  
secreted to the surface as my flesh is  
sliced, again, sliced, while I regard my  
blood absently and I think I'd much  
rather prefer yellow. A bright one.

WOMAN 1

When we get our hands on them  
we will  
tear them.  
Separate limbs, wreak havoc on their  
daily planners  
confuse their computers  
and spill blood. We will find our  
revenge.

WOMAN 2

Sneak up in an alleyway while walking.

WOMAN 3

Pounce from the backseat while driving.

WOMAN 1

Drag underwater while swimming.

WOMAN 2

Crush from above while waiting.

WOMAN 3

Stab from behind while running.

WOMAN 1

Slit while sleeping.

WOMAN 2

Decapitate while smiling.

WOMAN 3

Set fire to while reading.

WOMAN 1  
Maim.

WOMAN 2  
Mutilate.

WOMAN 3  
Deface.

WOMAN 1  
Scar.

WOMAN 2  
Disfigure.

WOMAN 3  
Murder.

WOMAN 1  
Wound from beneath while fucking.

HECUBA  
Revenge?  
Your weak fool hearts can find nothing  
except a hunger for revenge?  
Tied here, held, foaming at the mouth  
and primitive and still  
UNABLE  
TO  
THINK  
beyond revenge?  
A woman I knew was spirited.  
She had two beautiful children, a  
wonderful husband.

WOMAN 1  
Don't talk to us about husbands, you  
miserable bitch.  
We know husbands.  
We've died at the hands of husbands  
every day for twenty years.

HECUBA  
This woman I knew saw little changes,  
now and then.  
A flicker nothing more.  
It wasn't disgust so much as a cooling, a  
gradual turning down.

Her husband, she realised, was killing  
her  
with the walls of her house.

WOMAN 3  
Oh I know this story.

HECUBA  
SHUT YOUR FUCKING TRAP AND LISTEN.  
Every day when she woke up, the walls  
would be a little closer.  
A centimetre, half a centimetre closer  
to the centre of the room.  
At first it was impossible to tell, just a  
feeling,  
just a feeling in a restless place that  
something was not quite right.  
Day after day she woke up, for months,  
with this feeling.  
What had shifted, what was the upset in  
logic?  
One morning she woke up and a  
bookshelf had overturned.  
Some chairs against a wall, on their  
heads.  
Some lintels cracked apart.  
And she found it strange but moved the  
bookshelf, the chairs,  
set them back against the wall.  
And years passed.  
And always, strangely, an upturned  
piece of furniture,  
the morning remains of a table on its  
side.  
The room, drawing in towards her, now  
tiny,  
covered in two steps.  
No longer a feeling but there, a physical  
example,  
that a thing was no longer right.  
But she knew no way to tell her husband  
of it,  
to ask him, because she hadn't said a  
word to him in ten years.  
So she continued to live in the little  
room  
with its tightening walls  
aware that it was only a matter of time.  
And then on a morning she awoke

and found herself sandwiched,  
immobile,  
between the moving walls.  
Coming steadily in towards her, finding  
her bones,  
crushing them between the cement  
planes  
while her husband was stuck in traffic in  
his air-conditioned car.  
Seven years it took to murder her.  
Seven years of calculation,  
of a slow burn hatred acidic enough to  
prick at skin  
and eat through sinew and marrow.  
And you want  
REVENGE?

WOMAN 2  
Civility no longer matters.  
We are here.

WOMAN 1  
We're imprisoned for the slightest  
provocation.  
For saying no thank you when they  
unzip their flies.  
For not feeding our children the  
recommended daily allowance.  
For allowing cellulite to take control of  
our thighs.

WOMAN 3  
We're not allowed outside after  
sundown, do you know?

WOMAN 2  
They're afraid of what we might do to  
them in the dark.

***Interruption.***

*into:*

TALTHYBIUS  
From the office of the Minister of  
International Relations to The Women  
Who Cower In the Warehouse.

From the office of the Minister of  
International Relations to The Women  
Who Cower In Alleyways.  
From the office of the Minister of  
International Relations to The Women  
Who Prostitute Themselves On Street  
Corners.  
Where am I now?

HECUBA  
You're unwelcome here, piss off.

TALTHYBIUS  
Women.  
Women, ladies, *ladies*, contain  
yourselves.  
I ask for calm.  
Let's not overreact.  
This isn't a fucking hen party  
let's not allow our imaginations to run  
away with us.  
Hmm?  
I'm here as a messenger only.  
I don't know anything about the rape of  
your sister, dear lady  
I know nothing about the smothering of  
your baby.  
As an agent of The Management I'm  
simply here to deliver the -  
(I don't understand violence, me myself,  
I sort of am opposed to it, to its  
mindlessness to its time the amount of  
time it takes to massacre one would  
think they'd have figured that one out  
by now to snuff a human life takes  
forever)  
- simply here to deliver the news, from  
the quarters of The Management.  
I'm a man, you see, of order, of routine.  
Of ritual, of order.  
This is my job, so excuse me .  
When I received this assignment I was  
asleep in my bed (a bed, I have that too)  
still shaking off the tendrils of sleep  
when  
Go  
they instructed me  
GO.  
Go to them and deliver the news

Still hot I stretched out my feet to seek  
the cool place at the corner of my  
mattress, the place no human warmth  
had seeped into when

GO.

I was commanded.

So ladies please.

Remain calm for godsakes this noise this  
hysteria will not do *be calm*.

I COULD BE IN FUCKING BED RIGHT NOW IS  
WHAT I'M SAYING.

WOMAN 2

We are calm you bastard.

CASSANDRA

Bastard man.

WOMAN 2

Coming here you son of a bitch, daring  
to come here.

TALTHYBIUS

You're a lousy lot.

Unmannered, uncouth, no wonder  
you've been left behind.

Your mouths are hot.

And it smells back here, it smells.

The way it always does when you are  
pressed together you lot

in the back of a van, in a shipping  
container, a ship's hold, a cell.

The hot stench of iron and sweat, of  
BLACKNESS.

The blackness reeks off your skin.

WOMAN 2

Say more you *man* and we'll trample  
you!

TALTHYBIUS

I'm a person of order I don't enjoy  
particularly the excesses of violence.

So decadent, all that blood, that ripping  
of flesh.

Violence is a rich man's sport.

A slinging around of cocks for sport for  
laughs.

I'm a middle class prick, proud of it.

None of the oozing wounds for me,  
thanks.

None of the gaping orifices,  
the continual penetration of the body  
with sharp objects.

You meat eaters.

*(pause.)*

Right then to business.

From the office of the Minister of  
International Relations as mandated by  
the Agency For the Swift Removal of  
Refugees as decreed by the Secretary of  
Foreign Bodies in response to 1) your  
illegal occupation of this space as  
prohibited in chapter 7 section A of the  
Occupation of Land by Premenstrual  
Bitches Act and 2) your ongoing  
resistance in the face of a war lost on  
20.04.68 the office of the Minister  
hereby decides and

***Interruption. Andromache runs to the  
microphone, opens and closes her  
mouth without a sound.***

TALTHYBIUS

Someone control her.

Someone Control Her.

I'm a person of order I don't enjoy  
particularly the excesses of violence.

So let me not agree or disagree either  
way

with their decision

that you are all to become slaves.

HECUBA

Slaves?

Slaves us?

To those men, slaves?

To those despicable men, slaves?

TALTHYBIUS

Not all of you.

Some of you more fit for working will be  
wives.

HECUBA  
To these punishers, these bloodless  
criminals,  
to be made into wives?  
To cook their meals, to iron their shirts,  
to bear the children of our captors,  
to be detained by our own wombs,  
to be WIVES?

TALTHYBIUS  
Or slaves.

HECUBA  
Lynch us please.  
Execute us.  
One by one line us up against a wall  
and strangle us.

TALTHYBIUS  
Sorry not my problem.  
The duties of womanhood, slaves and  
wives.  
What else is there?  
No woman would rather be a whore.  
Dear mother, would you rather be a  
whore?

CASSANDRA  
I'd rather be turned to dust.

TALTHYBIUS  
Be quiet you snake, your fate has been  
decided.

HECUBA  
Speak quickly and fuck off.

WOMAN 3  
Tell us so that we can die in peace.

TALTHYBIUS  
A death is for those who deserve it.  
For those who have spent long hours  
working,  
reaching the natural end of their time  
with a gentle exhalation,  
a final breath,  
a sweet goodbye.  
Life is for the shits who remain behind.  
Life is what you'll get.

Is this not a fair verdict?  
Is it not just?  
So easily you could have been left to die  
here  
in your stinking hole.  
To be eaten by your own rot but yet  
but yet  
they have seen it fit to rescue you,  
to salvage you from the stench of the life  
you could have

***Interruption.***

TALTHYBIUS  
Cassandra, who is Cassandra?

CASSANDRA  
Me.

HECUBA  
My daughter.

CASSANDRA  
Tell me.

TALTHYBIUS  
You, to Agamemnon.

HECUBA  
No.

TALTHYBIUS  
To the victorious instigator of your pain.

HECUBA  
It can't be.

TALTHYBIUS  
He will fetch you at dawn.

HECUBA  
She won't go.

CASSANDRA  
I'll go.

HECUBA  
Not to Agamemnon she won't.

CASSANDRA  
I'll be ready.

TALTHYBIUS  
He enjoys his toast burnt at the edges.  
He enjoys his coffee strong.  
Remember that.

CASSANDRA  
And his bed?

TALTHYBIUS  
Cool, with pillows fluffed.

HECUBA  
She will not go.

CASSANDRA  
I'll go.

HECUBA  
She's gone insane.

CASSANDRA  
I've never been more lucid.

TALTHYBIUS  
He enjoys a crisp seam in his trousers.  
He enjoys a belly rub at bedtime.  
Remember that.

CASSANDRA  
And his bath?

TALTHYBIUS  
Hot, and full to the brim.

HECUBA  
WHAT ARE YOU DOING.

CASSANDRA  
And will I be required to sleep by him?

TALTHYBIUS  
As a wife would.

CASSANDRA  
To wake before him?

TALTHYBIUS  
As a slave would.

CASSANDRA  
To fuck him?

TALTHYBIUS  
Yes, yes, yes.

CASSANDRA  
Then I'm ready.  
Tell Agamemnon I'm coming.  
Tell him his death is on her way.

HECUBA  
You wouldn't.

CASSANDRA  
Oh I am.  
My husband to be, the one with the  
blood on his hands.  
The one responsible for our suffering,  
now all my own.

TALTHYBIUS  
Good, now we've sorted that out.

CASSANDRA  
Dear Agamemnon,  
who will come to me at night,  
begging to be kissed deeply,  
begging to come all over my tits  
while I, owner of my own cunt,  
refuse him.  
Frustrate him with no darling, I have a  
migraine,  
or some other womanly excuse.

WOMAN 3  
Sex isn't power you slag.  
You've just set feminism back by two  
decades.

WOMAN 2  
You think you're above being raped?  
That your golden pussy is too precious  
to be torn apart?

CASSANDRA

And after refusing I surrender.  
Coyly giving in, telling him oh  
you've convinced me.  
You're irresistible and I am convinced.  
After which I get on top of him,  
clamping him with my thighs,  
my knees pressing into his sides,  
and he ecstatic oh  
oozing  
at the prospect  
his back arching and I slamming myself  
into him  
both our breaths fast now  
his hot, into my face  
digging his nails into my flesh  
him squeezing and releasing  
me squeezing and releasing  
until he gasps for air, that minute before  
those few seconds before  
and he rises up to meet me  
and as he is on the brink ready to  
explode  
my villainous husband  
I plunge the knife deep  
penetrating his ribcage  
and screwing his heart.  
TELL MY HUSBAND I AM WAITING FOR HIM TO  
COME.

TALTHYBIUS

Sorry.  
What.  
No.  
What.  
No.  
That won't do.

HECUBA

She will not go.

CASSANDRA

Take me to him.

HECUBA

You fool.

CASSANDRA

I'll be packing.

CASSANDRA *exits.*

HECUBA

I will not have my life and blood  
martyred by the enemy!

TALTHYBIUS

What enemy?  
What narrow definition of enemy do  
you hold?  
Men are like this.

WOMAN 3

You're telling me.  
A husband I had would whip me thrice  
before bedtime.  
Even when I was pregnant, whip me  
with his belt,  
like some demented daddy.

HECUBA

The flesh of my children cry at me from  
the soil!

WOMAN 2

Oh enough with the dramatics calm  
yourself.

TALTHYBIUS

This is the way of men.

WOMAN 2

A husband I knew buried his woman  
alive, tossing spadefuls of earth into her  
mouth,  
her eyeballs, her nose. She suffocated on  
her screams.

TALTHYBIUS

This is their way, I am but a messenger.

*ANDROMACHE steps forward. She holds a  
golliwog doll by the feet.*

ANDROMACHE

That is their way heartless pricks sons  
of bitches.



WOMAN 2  
Why is she speaking?

WOMAN 3  
With this burning insult we implicate ourselves.  
Always to blame, us,  
we are the bitches who brought those sons into the world, after all.

ANDROMACHE  
I don't deserve this I flossed my teeth nightly and I tended to my marigolds I blew your son on Wednesdays and went to his office parties where I behaved in a civilised manner always breaking wind behind my hand always saying 'shit' softly under my breath  
I WAS NEVER HYSTERICAL.  
I felt guilt every morning waking up in my quilted bed when someone somewhere was hungry and so I donated money to the homeless to charities  
with my sense of obligation as a human being AS A WOMAN always at my heels like a dog in heat chasing me down and now civility no longer matters and we are here.

WOMAN 3  
What does she think this is hard?

WOMAN 2  
She thinks this is difficult?

ANDROMACHE  
And all I could've done the things I denied myself being civilised holding myself back when for example I could've owned a collection of black dildos breaking my desire on plastic for many hours I could've gagged myself committed sordid acts during the daytime and mounted my tumble dryer but too timid I behaved like a wife and now what does it matter? I went out into the streets wearing my best cocktail gown and while around me blood

spilled from veins I danced to repetitive pop songs.

WOMAN 1  
Your voice is like a dripping tap.

ANDROMACHE  
When I could've taken photographs of myself naked and bound or defiled my body with suicide and planted trees indoors which being overcautious I resisted the urge to snort cocaine I resisted or to shoot vials of heroin into my bloodstream I behaved for too long.

*She falls to the ground.*

Mother, mother, do you remember your son? Do you remember how his eyes turned concrete as he kicked me into the dust as I begged while a hail of weeds sprouted hard from the earth and my marigolds were crushed underfoot?

TALTHYBIUS  
WHAT IS THAT YOU'RE HOLDING?

HECUBA  
A daughter.

TALTHYBIUS  
Another one of you?  
Another one like you?

HECUBA  
Not like her at all this daughter is without tongue.  
Unable to form words this daughter does not overspeak,  
does not wail,  
silently bears,  
not like her.

TALTHYBIUS  
Give it here.

HECUBA  
Leave it, leave it, the thing is helpless!

TALTHYBIUS

We can't have any more of these  
running around, more like you.  
Bitter women.  
Vocal women.  
Banging fists against the floor women.  
Dark women.

*He rips the doll from her hands and tears  
it apart.*

*ANDROMACHE wails. She grows mute.*

*The women put the broken doll into a  
tiny box and tape the lid shut.*

*Helen sings...*

It costs me a lot  
But there's one thing I've got  
It's my man  
It's my man

WOMAN 3  
Now's not the time, Christ.

WOMAN 2  
Mournful bitch.

*...and stops.*

HECUBA  
Everything is ripped from me.

WOMAN 2  
You still have your face, be glad.  
A woman I knew had hers melted off her  
head with a fertiliser bomb.

***Interruption.***

WOMAN 3  
What do you call a woman who has lost  
95% of her intelligence?  
Divorced.  
How many males does it take to screw  
in a lightbulb?  
None. Let the bitch do it by herself.

What do you call a woman who has lost  
her mind?

A widow  
Why did the woman cross the road?  
Who cares, why was she out of the  
kitchen?  
Why did God create women?  
Because a cock can't suck itself.  
Why can't you trust a woman?  
You can't trust anything that bleeds for  
five days and doesn't die

TALTHYBIUS

And now the girl.  
Which one is she?

POLYXENA  
Here.

TALTHYBIUS  
You will go to Achilles.

HECUBA  
To a dead man?  
What sort of filth is that, to have my  
daughter lie with a corpse?  
To copulate with blood run hard  
to lie post mortem?  
Take me instead, this girl can give you  
nothing.  
I have reared flocks of babies, she is a  
baby herself.  
I made a home, sewed my own curtains.  
What love can she get from him, what  
warmth?

TALTHYBIUS  
She can't make him warm. But he will  
make her cold.

HECUBA  
Nothing would kill me sooner.

POLYXENA  
Oh mother, you fucking kill ME.  
I'm a woman too, I have lips and breasts  
and arse, why should I miss out on the  
fun? Everyone gets a man, all of you, to

go and fuck a conqueror, and I am  
passed over because I am young.  
You don't know the thoughts I have,  
quietly touching myself at bedtime,  
and why would you?  
You're disconnected,  
you live like a hermit,  
the real world is not in here it's THERE.  
And if he's a corpse, fuck it.  
So what.  
A man in the hand is worth more than  
ten women in a bush.  
I'll not howl and panic and resist,  
I'll die by my own hand.  
I'll free fall through to my death and  
best of all  
I won't die an old maid.

TALTHYBIUS  
Take her then.

*The women assemble and lift POLYXENA  
into a box. The lid is taped shut. The box  
is removed. They sing.*

When the moon's kinda dreamy  
Starry eyed and dreamy  
And nights are luscious and long  
If you're kinda lonely  
And all by your only  
Then nothin' but the blues are brewin'  
The blues are brewin'

**Interruption.**

WOMAN 3  
A man I had would beat me to a pulp in  
the afternoons. Then in the evenings we  
would go to the cinema. It was the only  
place we could be in the dark. I would  
pull my teeth from their sockets, one by  
one, while he drank his Coke. I wonder  
how many ushers discovered how many  
teeth scattered in those aisles. And  
revenge is out of the question?

HECUBA  
We are not like them.  
It doesn't bubble in our blood, it doesn't  
live on our skin,

the hunger for anger and vengeance is  
for men.

WOMAN 3  
And we remain still and sweet,  
gently dissuading,  
meekly saying no.  
no.  
no.  
While they rape us from behind?  
No one enjoys that kind of treatment  
'cept dear Helen.

HELEN  
I've been trying to get back.  
I want to go back.  
I can't be in here with you women,  
you creatures.  
I want my man.  
There is a stalemate  
between our side and theirs.

No one is moving,  
I'll take my chances.  
This is your fault.  
Your son the rapist.  
Your son stole me.  
He started this war.  
This war between men  
and us.

WOMAN 3  
Not true, slag!  
You left your husband.  
You had an affair and fucked someone  
else.  
This was your doing and you came and  
hid behind our aprons.  
It was your misleading cunt that caused  
this shit in the first place.

HELEN  
I will plead with him and beg.  
Beg on my knees if I have to.  
Humiliate myself to get back to him.  
But I can't stand for a moment longer  
these voices,  
these women's voices and their hysteria,  
the shrieks of birds in my ear.  
I must get away.  
I will seduce him.

He has never resisted me.  
I will seduce him.

WOMAN 3  
The playing field has changed, Helen. He  
will kill you.

HELEN  
No man can say no thanks to this.  
You poor oppressed animals.  
It must be hard, being unattractive.

WOMAN 3  
No peace to be made!  
I'll wring your whore of a neck.

HECUBA  
Let her go.  
This is no utopia either.

HELEN  
Farewell you man-starved spinsters.

*HELEN exits.*

*WOMAN 2 enters with a photograph.*

WOMAN 2  
Here she is.  
Your daughter.  
Her body perfect and flung.  
Tossed over the stones.  
Tossed onto the grave of Achilles.

HECUBA  
Who took this photograph?

WOMAN 2  
The same one who began to slaughter  
her,  
drew his knife to her chest.  
But she insisted, demanded, to cut  
herself.  
She cut herself wide open.

HECUBA  
Stupid girl!

WOMAN 2  
They've spared no one, not even her.  
Her tears would not have helped, her  
charms.  
They've grown too hard.  
Her childish pleas would've solved  
nothing  
(this disregarding the fact that she  
didn't plea).

HECUBA  
They've smashed it all,  
every piece without fail.  
Civility no longer matters.

WOMAN 3  
We'll bury her here amongst the ruins.

HECUBA  
As what?  
An example?  
A beacon?  
A martyr?  
The grave of my child is not an altar!

WOMAN 2  
We're just saying we could do it up all  
pretty like.

WOMAN 3  
Put a few wreaths around it she'd like  
that.

WOMAN 2  
Well she couldn't like it now but she  
may have.  
She may have.

WOMAN 3  
We could do up a bouquet of lilies.

WOMAN 2  
A bouquet of rot in memoriam.

WOMAN 3  
An assembly of broken things.

WOMAN 2  
Broken bones.

WOMAN 3  
Broken birds their wings unstuck.

WOMAN 2  
A piece of contemporary art.

WOMAN 3  
We'll call it  
THE FREE FALLING BIRD.

HECUBA  
She was mine.  
She was all.  
There's nothing left to take.  
Our daughters never belong to us.

WOMAN 2  
To arrange the wings in the shape of her  
face.

WOMAN 3  
Like a man I had, who arranged my face  
in the shape of his fist.

HECUBA  
We must retaliate.  
We must retaliate.  
We must retaliate.

*HECUBA sits rocking the photograph.*

*The women leave her one by one, each  
caught in mid-step and suddenly frozen –  
Abraham's wives looking back at Sodom.*

*The world crashes around them.*

*Hecuba continues her pleas ad nauseam  
into*

**Blackout.**

## **ANNEX 1 - How To Stay Calm and Not Be Angry by Dr. Arnold Nerenberg**

Today's topic

is

How To Stay Calm and Not Be Angry:  
Respectfully Real Intention.

One of the keys to Staying Calm,  
one of the big keys to Staying Calm and  
not Getting Aggravated when somebody  
is saying something to you

(but particularly we're talking calmness  
in interpersonal relationships)

is through

Forgiveness

if you Forgive the person...then you're  
not walking around Agitating Yourself

about wanting Revenge and the Anger  
and what you should have said, what

you should've did, what you're planning  
to do, because you Forgive the Person.

now Forgiveness is not only good for the  
other person, it's very Healing for

Ourselves,

it helps us to stay Calm and Not To Get  
Angry

Now, in terms of being calm and not  
getting angry there are two parts to it.

One is...to Intend No Harm, to cause no  
harm

the second part is the Urge To Goodness  
so the aspect of causing no harm is so

important to staying calm, to finding  
peace and harmony in ourselves and not

getting angry

to Cause No Harm

TO NOT CAUSE HARM TO OURSELVES as well as  
not causing harm to others

because when We Get Angry

we become more at risk even for  
cardiovascular events

the anger interferes with digestion, it  
interferes with sleep

it's a fact now...that anger...is HIGHLY

CORRELATED WITH CARDIOVASCULAR EVENTS  
such as Strokes and Heart Attacks

so causing no harm is an important part  
of staying calm and...and...not getting

angry.

We don't want to damage ourselves  
So it has to be a career mo-, I don't, I  
Refuse to Damage Myself  
I don't want to hurt myself.  
I don't wanna walk around, uh, who,  
with the resentment and and not being  
able to eat or think or becoming  
obsessed  
what happens when we become that  
Angry and Agitated and Resentful  
we become obsessed with the thought,  
we walk around with a dark cloud over  
the eyes  
and so that people may even talk to us  
we don't hear them  
you playing a sport, uh, the ball's being  
pitched, you can't quite see it...cause  
it...you're having this resentful thought  
You know a boxing match, a passing  
thought goes by if, if it goes into your  
mind it, you pause, you hesitate for a  
second you get hit  
whatever it is that distracts you could  
cause an accident

you're on a freeway you need quick  
reaction time  
but because you're obsessed with a  
particular thought you don't even see  
what's happening  
or you notice gee I almost missed my  
exit you, uh, swirl  
and you could cause a collision, more at  
risk...for accidents...when we're angry  
because of the obsessive quality that  
happens walking around resentful  
so we don't want to be Damaging  
Ourselves  
to cause no harm to Self  
to cause no harm to Others  
not causing harm to the Others

University of Cape Town

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## *Acknowledgments*

A huge thank you to the staff of the UCT drama department, especially Jacqui Singer for her guidance, time, insight and patience during the process of completing this research. To Gay Morris for her organization and caring, to Christopher Weare for his guidance and continued support and to Mark Fleishman for his always incisive and valuable feedback.

A very special acknowledgement to two practitioners who continue to incite my creativity: Sandra Temmingh, for the hours and hours of conversations and inspiration during these past six years, and Liz Mills, whose writing and practice serves as continued motivation for my own.

To the staff and students at the drama department of Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, as well as the writers from the Women Playwrights International Conference in Stockholm and the friends and colleagues at the Lincoln Centre Directors Lab in New York: thank you for adding fuel to this process.

To Chas Unwin, Lara Bye and Lesoko Seabe, for your friendship and for sharing this experience.

And finally to my family – Sharon, Mogamat and Benjamin – who never withdrew their support throughout my journey and have been my biggest fans since the day I started writing. And to Sanjin Muftic, for keeping me sane and for always believing in everything I do.



## Abstract

The focus of this research relates to finding praxis for making theatre within a contemporary feminist framework with specific emphasis on writing for the theatre. It explores ways of opening up the possibility of feminist conversations beginning with the written text and how playwriting may problematise the representations of women on stage. This essay is a supporting document to my script, *Free Falling Bird*, as well as a supplement to the full production of the script in partial fulfillment of my MA degree in Theatre and Performance with a focus on playwriting.

Firstly, I will establish a context by tracing the history and evolution of feminist performance practice, focusing especially on process, form and purpose, and introduce Sue-Ellen Case's notion of contiguity as well as recent developments in post-feminism from theorists Elizabeth Wright and Elin Diamond. I will use the work of Roland Barthes, Richard Schechner, Hans-Thiess Lehmann and Catherine Bouko to trace parallel developments in the field of postdramatic theatre, especially with regards to the 'death of the author' and the decentralisation of the playwright as the maker of meaning. Finally, I will introduce Simone Benmussa and Helene Cixous' term 'spheres of disturbance', as adopted by Elaine Aston, to propose how feminist playwriting may offer an intervention which disturbs the representations of women on stage.

Secondly, I explore a practical model for creating and staging theatre which is located in the 'sphere of disturbance'. Using a scheme proposed by Aston, I will offer an analysis of my own text and look at Diamond's writing on narrative interventions in order to offer ways that the feminist text may be 'activated' in performance.

Finally, I return to the postdramatic, focusing on Hans-Thiess Lehmann's notion of independent auditory semiotics, Liz Mills' writing on acoustic spaces and Bouko's ideas around the jazz body of the performer to investigate how the silenced female can articulate, speak and sound herself. I will lastly discuss how the combination of theory and practice articulated in this essay will feed into my own process as I work towards staging work which embodies and gives voice to the female experience.

## Introduction

In attempting to find an articulation for the threads, themes, stagings and preoccupations that have surfaced throughout this research, I have found that a central image dominates my work as a playwright and director : that of a woman struggling to find a voice. Whether she is mute, silenced through political control or simply unable to find words to speak her experience, these characters have reappeared in my work and find themselves at the root of my writing. My theoretical research and resulting practice has thus stemmed from a belief in and adoption of this assumed 'voicelessness' in the representation of women on stage. I have attempted to interrogate notions of women as being 'unheard', 'silenced' or 'absent' and grappled with finding ways of 'sounding', 'articulating' or 'speaking' the presence of the feminine. This assumption of absence and/or silence has led me to the question stated by Elissa Marder in her essay *Disarticulate Voices: Feminism and Philomela* (1992): 'In what language can one speak the effect of being silenced?' (148). Marder asks how the experience of feminism can be spoken and questions the relationship of the discourse to the experience of women as a collective, as well as the problems inherent in the label of feminism – what it implies, to whom it refers, who is included and excluded in the assumption that "we" are silenced, suppressed, marginalised or unheard. She asks: 'If there is no experience "outside" of patriarchal structure and no discrete language "outside" of patriarchal discourse, in what manner can [our] experience be spoken?' (1992:148).

In this thesis, I propose that the experience Marder asks for – the experience of 'women' and the problems of collectively representing an 'us' – may be addressed and further problematised through playwriting. One of the concerns I will address for my own work is how, and if, beginning with a play text by a single author may allow for a multiplicity of experience and representation of the feminine. A practice rooted in playwriting appears to contradict current models for creating feminist theatre. Ensembles identifying themselves as committed to themes of feminism (although not necessarily feminist) have stressed the importance of democratic processes that de-emphasises the playwright as the primary maker of meaning. Sara Matchett of the *Mothertongue Project*, a collective of South African women artists, states in a 2004 profile:

[Our methods] are inclusive, involving collaborative, democratic processes: a radical shift from the patriarchal authority of the lone playwright. For us, the notion of the lone playwright is intrinsically linked to and typifies patriarchal discourse. Conversations and

multi-authoring, on the other hand are governed by fluidity, which allows for “differences” to emerge, collaborate and create.

Furthermore, writer Shelley Scott says, in writing about feminist company Nightwood Theatre (Canada’s oldest professional women’s company):

The awareness of sexism [in other companies] led to a commitment to some form of collective structure, as a conscious disavowal of the patriarchal structures that had been rejected. At least half of feminist theaters in existence [since 1979] were organized as collectives and over two-thirds used a collective/collaborative process to create works for performance. (2010:221)

This focus on devised or shared spaces when making theatre often excludes the position of a singular female writer in the need to find an egalitarian process for creating theatre. In these models of creation, the text is seen as a secondary object to the primary goal of creating through processes that are authored by the collective, without the authority of a single writer. A process structured in this way rejects a patriarchal ideology: that of a hierarchy of power, a single dominating position or the control of an idea or representation. However, I would like to explore the possibility that, in beginning with a text as created by a singular playwright, a multi-representational and multi-voiced process of collaboration can still be found, in process and performance, when creating explicitly feminist work. I would like to demonstrate and propose models for how I will do this in my own work. I propose that feminist playwriting is important as it can similarly offer an intervention that disturbs the mechanisms that en-genders representation, based on Elaine Aston’s<sup>1</sup> concept of the ‘sphere of disturbance’ (1999). Working within this ‘sphere of disturbance’, the research is toward seeking a practice that actively allows the female ensemble to be the agents in and subjects of their own representation and to ‘sound’ the feminine. Within my understanding and throughout this paper, the idea of ‘voice’ and ‘sounding’ is not always manifested in the physical, aural presence of resonances produced by speech, but encompasses the notion of finding a site where Woman, as subject of her own world, can embody a position that liberates her from passivity, apathy and patriarchal governance and places her as an active agent, as opposed to an object, within theatrical representation. Judith Thompson speaks of feminist writing allowing for a literal embodiment: ‘Women can put themselves on stage – their history, their oppression, their

---

1 – The term ‘spheres of disturbance’ was originally used by Simone Benmussa in *Benmussa Directs* (1979), but I will use it as appropriated by Aston and employ her contemporary interpretation as described in *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (1999).

humour, their experience, their bodies.' (Moser. 1998:41). In my plays I have identified this voicing as taking the form of language, vocal utterance, physical conflict and psychological manipulation. In *Kitchen* (2009), three short playlets that were staged as my final undergraduate theatremaking exam at the University of Cape Town, four female characters attempted rebellion against an unseen male figure by verbal attack and the use of words and language to extricate themselves from torture. In my minor project towards fulfillment of this MA degree, entitled *Don't Smoke* (2011), finding voice became a literal task as the three female speakers struggled to articulate themselves and experienced the consequences of inserting their own sound into a space. In *Free Falling Bird*, the thesis production for this MA, I hope to illustrate how 'sounding' the body manifests when the women of Euripides' classic re-claim their own representation by 'subverting conventional representations of history and chronology, [allowing for] an alternate way to view the past and present.' (Scott, 2010:214). The focus of this thesis and the resulting practice, therefore, is towards finding praxis for feminist theatre conversations and collaborations that allow for women to 'embody' themselves, in whatever manner or form that may take, with the scripted play-text as a root, anchor or starting point of that conversation.

### *Whose Feminism?*

In attempting to find a workable definition for the term 'feminist theatre', Lizbeth Goodman (1993:13) grapples with the intrinsic contradictions when attempting to reconcile theory and practice in the creation and criticism of feminist theatre as well as with the concept itself. The adoption of the term 'feminist' and 'feminism' has, at various times, been contested, abandoned, reimagined and discarded by theorists and practitioners alike. I feel it necessary therefore to state my position with regards to adopting the word 'feminism' in the context of my own work and by stating what is implied by my use of the term.

In *Gynesis* (1985), Alice Jardine describes presenting a paper that spoke to theories around French feminism and highlights the questions raised by that presentation. She notes how heated discussion became when debating the terms 'feminist' and 'antifeminist', as if 'the problems...could be resolved if everyone in the room could just come to an *agreement* of what feminism is or is not' (1985:55). Jardine goes on to say that what is important is not to decide who is or isn't a feminist, but to examine 'how and why feminism itself may be problematic...is

itself connected to larger theoretical issues...is not a natural given but a construction like all others.' (1985:21). Although, as Marder has noted, the terms of Jardine's debate may be out of date in the context of 2012, the angst around definition that fuelled the debate is still evident in contemporary feminist performance theory. Marder notes that the need to come 'to an agreement' of what the term feminist means is feminism's 'central dream' – a dream of the necessity to be a collective speech act versus the impossibility of defining a 'we' (1992:3). Janelle Reinelt, as recently as 2007, states in her article *Navigating Postfeminism* that '[in] the "contemporary context"...it is not clear what the term feminism designates...the circumlocutions necessary to utilize this term render 'appropriate' usage difficult' (17). However, Jardine's challenge to move away from seeking theoretical, definable parameters for the term and investigate instead the implications of the feminist construction is how I adopt the concept of feminism. The complications inherent in identifying my work or myself as feminist stems from the anxiety around 'agreement' as highlighted by Jardine. The agreement of who is being referred to by the term 'we', who is included or excluded in the discourse and whether the term encompasses the discourses of class, sexuality and race is, according to Reinelt, one of the tenets of so-called 'third wave feminism'. Up until the mid 1980's, the increasing criticisms around the exclusion of women who were not white, middle class and heterosexual led to the lack of a 'focal point' for the feminist conversation (2007:19). She states that the drive by young women has been towards individualism in the face of the lack of a single identity of 'woman'. Along with the rejection of the restrictions of the category called feminism, Reinelt argues that the need for an organized movement has not disappeared, but the need to categorize oneself as being a 'feminist' has. Political categories of feminism have proved problematic precisely because the assumption of 'we' is at this precarious point. The question posed is whether there is the possibility for a feminist project in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, what that project may encompass, and how and whom it may seek to represent.

In choosing her own ideological position, speaking specifically on identifying with a politically categorised feminism, Gayle Austin (1990:1-10) cautions against drawing lines too rigidly. She posits that it may lead to the taking of sides and the danger of neglecting a drama that falls outside of those definitions. She offers instead the position of 'woman in the cracks' between major categories, in the liminal space between politically defined feminist theories, as the most helpful position to take. It is in this 'between' space where I would like to position myself, although in a somewhat different context. I acknowledge that the term 'feminist' may be polarising and lead to assumptions or exclusions while its opposite, 'antifeminist', denies the

cause of the women-centered work I create. Furthermore, analysing theatre strictly from a feminist position may lose work that defies easy categorisation and slips past the permeable borders of feminism into postmodernism or the postdramatic. I am therefore cautious about labeling my work in a political category of feminism and shutting down the possibilities presented by 'falling between the cracks', as I will outline below. On the problem of academics, Nina Baym (1995:101-117) offers an objection to feminist theatre theory: '[Theory merely] addresses an audience of prestigious male academics and attempts to win its respect'. This highlights one of the major concerns held by women who identify themselves as feminists within theatre: a reservation towards debating womanhood within a construct that is essentially male dominated. At the outset, women are disenfranchised by the strictures of the academic framework. Barbara Christian in 'The Race for Theory' offers a similar protestation, labelling Western theory (specifically in relation to black feminism) 'elitist, apolitical and not relevant to the [feminist] project...' (1987:55). Another concern is that, in the 21st century, experiences of gender can – and are - endlessly problematised and complicated by developments in sexual and cultural politics.

Although understanding the position adopted by these critics to shun a system of thinking organised to be favoured and dominated by patriarchy, I nevertheless find the importance of women practitioners engaging with academic theory as feminists – however the term may be personally interpreted - to be invaluable. I wish to engage the term with an awareness that the sliding and invisible borders between what is and isn't feminist theatre is itself a construct and not a given. But as a playwright, articulating my disagreements and position within the discourse of feminism allows me to locate my own identity as a female writer within the framework of the academy. It also allows me to recognise that the position of 'woman in theatre' is fraught with its own inconsistencies and conflict; to acknowledge that no single 'female' position is able to contain us all, but also that theory allows one to step back from the pragmatics of creation in order to ask the pertinent questions. What is what I write saying about women? Is it what I want to be saying? The purpose of my research project, in working within a feminist theatrical frame, is to demonstrate activism firmly rooted in the application and critique of theory, to deconstruct notions of patriarchal culture within my own work, and to write the language of feminism, the woman as subject, myself as an 'I', by engaging with – instead of dismissing – the discourse. And finally, a personal engagement with feminist theory affords me the understanding that no single theory or position is able to encompass all women; that the state of feminism is continually slipping, contradicting and changing itself and will never, as a

discourse, stand in place of the experiences of myself as a woman. That in falling 'between the cracks' of the feminist dialogue, I come 'to know that there is no comfortable place for me within any single discourse' (Dolan:1989:58).

## Part One

In this chapter I outline how feminist performance evolved from its earliest manifestations as political demonstration, through to the more sophisticated and less explicitly political work produced by fringe companies during the 1980's, up to the current theoretical positions in the contentious field of 'post-feminism'. I will outline the past and present day theory and practice in the field of feminist performance by focusing on and tracing three areas: Purpose (what was and is the intention for making feminist theatre?); Form (past and present debates around a women's morphology and who is included and excluded by the term 'women') and Process (how is feminist theatre made? How and should the process of creation reflect the mandates of feminist performance?). I will also focus on the parallels between the development of feminist theory and Barthes' notion of the death of the author, as well as developments in the field of the postdramatic as it relates to 'postfeminism'. For the purpose of this thesis and my practice, the second and third parts of this essay will be mainly concerned with my own process in conversation with the theory outlined in this chapter. Attention to purpose and form is vital for creating the context in which I currently create my work as a playwright inside the discourse of feminism.

Feminist theatre collectives have always been defined by their unwillingness to exclude. They have insisted on the representation of women, outside of traditional patriarchal representation, and sought the inclusivity of the female voice on the stage, in the theatre and inside the process of making theatre. In the introduction to *Feminist Futures?* (2007), Elaine Aston and Geraldine Harris emphasise that feminist performance has always been strongly attached to collaborative and collective models of creation and aesthetics. The origins of the feminist movement in performance can thus be traced through the history of women's companies and collectives and in the history of influential theatre groups in America and Britain during the late 1960's and into the early 1980's. Lizbeth Goodman in *Contemporary Feminist Theatres: To Each her Own* chooses 1968 as a debatable starting point for the feminist theatre movement (1993:24). The year saw a coming together of the political and the social and a correlation between political demonstrations and the forming of theatre collectives as an alternative,

organised means of protest. Goodman identifies this moment as the first 'gender-oriented political demonstrations since the era of the suffragists' [sic] (1993:24). In voicing their dissent about censorship, women as sexual objects and gender biased policies, and in the interests of 'liberation' for women, female companies used theatre with a specifically political, feminist intention in mind. Evolving from political demonstrations, the forms used by radical feminist companies such as The Women's Street Theatre Group were explicitly agitprop and agenda driven. Traditional realist forms were rejected as being 'patriarchal' and, aesthetically, work took on Brechtian qualities<sup>2</sup> as women's demands were staged through a feminist lens. However, ideological disagreements within feminist circles led to the emergence of an artistic form with less overt political agendas, wielding feminist politics in subtle and more refined ways. The 1970's saw an increase in feminist companies dedicated as much to 'theatrical production' as they were to demonstration and political purpose. Groups like Monstrous Regiment, Red Ladder and Siren created work that was theatre first and happened to also be political, rather than the street-based demonstrations of earlier consciousness-raising groups. Playwrights like Timberlake Wertenbaker, Deborah Levy and Winsome Pinnock, backed by women's companies and producing collectives, emerged during this period. A statement from At the Foot of the Mountain, an all women collective founded in 1976 in Minneapolis, encapsulates the mandate of feminist companies during this time:

We struggle to relinquish traditions such as linear plays, proscenium theatre, non-participatory ritual and seek to reveal theatre that is circular, intuitive, personal, involving...emphasizing process and matriarchal power structures. (Scott. 2010:16).

The conversation of structure or form, of which form could constitute a 'feminist theatre', is one that happened simultaneously in the 1980's. In 1988 Sue-Ellen Case proposed the notion of a 'new poetics' and contributed to the call for a 'women's morphology'. Along with Hélène Cixous and other French feminists, Case called for a form that dismantled the discourses surrounding the representation of women on stage. The new poetics suggested a refiguring of language

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2 - Janelle Reinelt's essay, *Rethinking Brecht*, points out the similarities between the Brechtian form and feminist performance by drawing on the parallels between the political agendas of both forms as unable to be separated from the art. She also highlights that the task of both Brechtian and feminist theatre is to interrupt habitual spectator reception from a patriarchal or hegemonic point of view. Finally, that both forms 'emphasize the possibility of change, that things might be other, that history is not an inevitable narrative. Feminism is and Brecht was historically embattled in the struggle to make art which dismantles the political and artistic status quo.' (1990:99)



and text that places the female as subject, rather than object. The need to construct models of thinking and talking about theatre that placed the experiences of women at the focal point led to the seminal work *Towards a New Poetics* (1988). Case's poetics refuted a male-centered understanding of theatre – the favouring of an objective, a throughline, a wholeness of character and purpose. She advocated instead for the development of a distinct woman's form that spoke to aspects of the female experience. Case attempted to make room for the presence of women on stage by arguing that the female body, when on stage, is a collection of Western discourses and cultural associations that go hand in hand with the word 'Woman', instead of being a 'biological reality' (1988:145). She called for a deconstruction of how women are viewed and adopted the term 'contiguity' to describe a morphology for feminist theatre. From the Latin *contiguus* and *contingere*, meaning 'to have contact with, the state of being in close proximity with or touching another object, or a continuous mass or series of' (Oxford English Dictionary:2006), Case's feminist poetics adopted this term to define the form and organization of work made by women. Instead of the linearity of a through-line, contiguity suggests a form that continuously and constantly weaves itself, creating logic by association and according to Luce Irigaray: 'Embracing words and yet casting them off, concerned not with clarity but with what is 'touched upon' (1981:103). Also in the late 1970's, theorist-practitioner Hélène Cixous and other French feminists offered their suggestions towards a definition for writing a feminist form, with Cixous stating that a woman's language is 'heterogeneous and far-ranging, un-thinks the unifying, herd[s] contradictions into a single battlefield,' (1976:252) and urging women to 'write from the body'. The idea of contiguity reflected the fragmentation of women's experience, a non-linear aesthetic, suggesting work that is ambiguous, incongruous, incomplete and not whole – text in constant flux and without a clear sense of traditional structure, narrative, central focus or conventional form. Rather than moving in straight lines of association, the contiguity proposed by Case and others was without a sense of closure or ending, eschewing traditional notions of narrative and beginnings, middles and endings, abandoning the 'hierarchical organizing principles of traditional form.' (Case. 1988:147). Contiguity, as defined by Case, is continually weaved from and through itself, moving in circular structures.

### *The Crisis Of 'Postfeminism'*

However, in the mid to late 1980's, questions had moved away from *what* a women's form could be to asking *if* a feminine morphology was possible at all. The contentious field of

'postfeminism' called into question the essentialist notion that a single form may encapsulate the representation of all women. The 'we' was and continues to be placed under scrutiny as giving voice only to a select elite of white, Western, heterosexual and middle-class women. The 'white' feminist movement was challenged as blanketing the experiences of non-white women under the term 'we', not acknowledging the differences of culture and class when speaking for and on behalf of feminism. Black feminist criticism from theorists such as bell hooks and Elin Diamond rejected and challenged the existence of a singular female position – and hence a singular form or 'morphology' for feminist work. Companies like Spider Women (established in 1975) sought to represent specifically black women's experiences, cultures, and stories. Feminism began to join in the discourse of postmodernism, with its denial of a single fixed and whole subject. Elizabeth Wright, in *Lacan and Postfeminism* states: 'The emphasis upon collective action soon revealed internal strains through its neglect of difference, first of class and colour, and ultimately of identity' (2001:6). Postfeminism ushered in an individualistic agenda rather than one rooted in collective political action. This so-called 'third wave' brought with it a shift in the objectives of the feminist project to various degrees of criticism. The freedom inherent in the notion of 'postfeminism' is also one that has been challenged by some as being its most prescriptive. The postmodern concept of the unfixed, unstable subject as appropriated into the idea of postfeminism has meant that the latter movement is characterised as being continually in process, of possessing a flexibility of purpose and remaining open to interpretation of *what*, exactly, constitutes the 'post-' of feminism. Wright offers two 'readings' of the postfeminist: A positive one, which suggests that because of its constant shape-shifting and acknowledgement of the complexities of identity, the post- is able to take a critical view of previous feminist, colonialist, modernist and patriarchal discourses. Wright's more critical reading hyphenates 'post' and 'feminism' (post-feminism), and posits that feminism itself is 'being sabotaged by the post...[suggesting] that feminism can now be dispensed with' (2001:8). Theorist Susan Faludi in *Backlash* (1992) echoes the rejection of the post-feminist label, seeing it as limiting the effectiveness of feminism and the core of its need for collective action by presupposing that its objectives have been achieved. The crisis identified by Faludi has spilled over into the realm of theatre and performance. Jill Dolan, speaking at the Feminist Performance Festival in 2011, states that the critique of feminism by the post-feminist movement as being 'done' has served to push overtly feminist work further underground. She states that as a result the work of women, especially of black and lesbian women, have remained largely outside of the mainstream theatres of the US and the UK, although acknowledging a flourishing fringe and alternative scene. Dolan points to solo performance –

with its economy, narrative style and simplicity of the single body – as a form used progressively by feminist practitioners on the fringe, as well as the powerful impact of collectives and companies.

### *The Death of the Playwright and the Postdramatic*

As early as 1967, Roland Barthes in his pivotal essay *The Death of the Author* already sought to challenge the assumed hierarchy of power between the writer and reader. Barthes argued that with the presence of an author (or a playwright), the meaning of the text is invariably 'closed'. His proposition for the death of the author opens up room for multiple interpretations, liberating a space in which meanings and associations would be made by the reader, outside of the assumption of a textual authority. Barthes suggests a kind of writing in which

...everything is to be distinguished, but nothing deciphered; structure can be followed, "threaded" ...in all its recurrences and all its stages, but there is no underlying ground; the space of the writing is to be traversed, not penetrated: writing ceaselessly posits meaning but always in order to evaporate it: it proceeds to a systematic exemption of meaning. (1967:5)

Barthes' description already contained echoes of the way in which the script is treated in the postdramatic. His belief that the author is only *one* of the makers of meaning is upheld in features of the postdramatic and the avant-garde. As I will illustrate below, Barthes' death of the author, Schechner's notion of the theatrical event and Lehmann's notion of the postdramatic has this in common: that the ideal site of creation is by its nature a collaborative event, free from an authorial (or patriarchal) dominance, and that a written text needs interpretation and collaboration in order to make meaning.

In a chapter entitled *Context, Creativity, Collectivity* (2010:15), Shelley Scott writes that a commitment to the feminist agenda by necessity influences *how* a piece of theatre is created as much as it does the final product. For most feminist theatremakers, this has meant a shift away from a literary approach to a more group-focused process. In *Producing Marginality*, Robert Wallace writes: 'For many who work in the fringe, theatre no longer is centred on the playwright, nor on the creation of a body of dramatic literature.' (1990:185). In many collaborative models of creating feminist theatre, the playwright has effectively 'died', or at least been replaced by an autonomous body of decision makers. The move away from the written

text as the primary site of meaning making and the subsequent, inevitable defavouring of the playwright was articulated in 1999 by Hans-Thies Lehmann as fitting inside the realm of 'postdramatic theatre'. Lehmann distinguished between 'drama' (the written word, the text, the speech act) and 'theatre' (encompassing the mise-en-scene and/or scenic elements of the production). He proposed the postdramatic model as deconstructing conventional forms of theatre that holds the word at the centre, suggesting instead an equal field of interaction between the script, the performance, and the theatricality of signs. This characteristic of postdramatic theatre as rejecting textual authority is echoed in postfeminist performance theory and practice, with its focus on shifting subjectivities operating within democratic collectives without a sense of hierarchy. Catherine Bouko (2008) articulates Lehmann's notions of the relationship between the text and the performance by drawing on Richard Schechner's research into the avant-garde. She uses Schechner's research to illustrate Lehmann's articulation of the postdramatic, and in the same way I wish to use Bouko's research to highlight the parallel between the postdramatic and feminist theatre.

In the first concentric model, illustrating a conventional dramatic play, Schechner proposes Drama as being the central heart of the event, widening out to the Script as the second, Theater as the third, and Performance as the fourth. In this model the text is seen as 'being the source of all scenic elements' (Bouko. 2008:29). Here the focus is on the element of 'transmission', of imparting information with a focus on making meaning. The written text is central to this transmission.

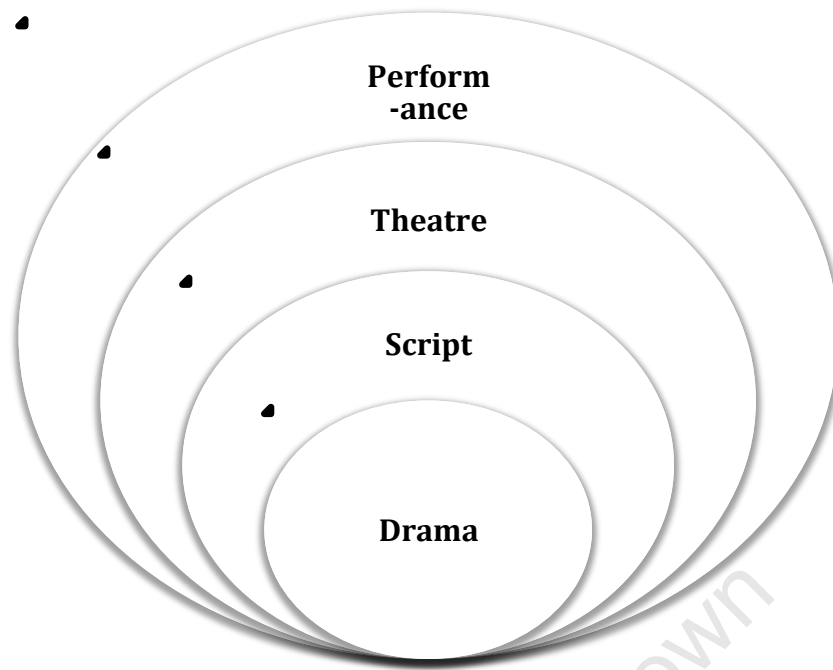


Fig.1. Drama, script, theater, performance  
(Schechner. 1988:72, 2008:31)

In the second model, which Bouko suggests mirrors the model for the postdramatic and, I would argue, for contemporary feminist performance, the diagram highlights the equality between the four parts: Drama, Script, Theater and Performance are equally important and central, with the focus here on the element of 'manifestation'. The model disrupts the way the spectator perceives the performance, the patriarchal authority of the text is removed. Sound, image and word are sometimes unrelated, confrontations between disciplines are encouraged, and a new aesthetic – as well as a new way of 'reading' the performance – is needed. The form and aesthetics suggested by the postdramatic contains echoes of Cixous' call to 'write the body'; of sounding and inhabiting and giving voice to the female body, of 'manifesting' meaning instead of 'transmitting' it.

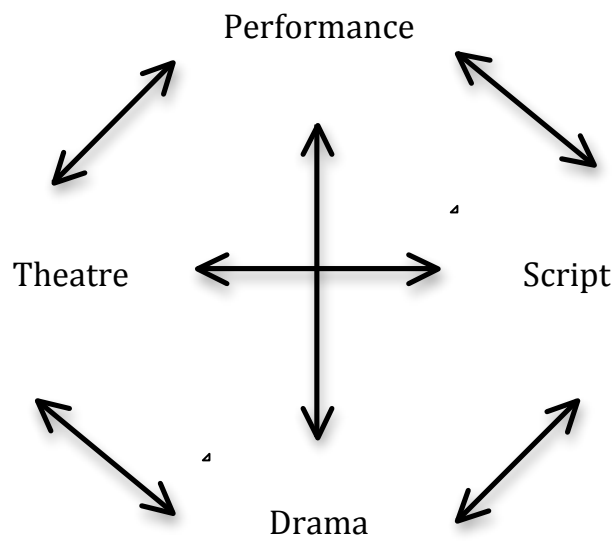


Fig.2. Drama, script, theater, performance - second version  
(Schechner. 1988:76, 2008:38)

In the second model, the script or written text is seen to be destabilised from its authorial position, 'freed from the authority of the drama' (Bouko. 2008:30). This model proposed by Schechner, with its displacement of the author at the centre of creating the meaning for the theatrical event, places less influence on the organizational focus of a script and more emphasis on a manifestation of experience, an aesthetic different from that of the 'well made play', an articulation of Case's 'new poetics' inside the realm of the postdramatic. In a more simplistic articulation, Martha Boesing writes that the experimental nature of women's theatre (read also: postdramatic theatre) should not ' censor itself on aesthetic grounds by imposing standards of excellence that are traditional and patriarchal...based on a language not our own'. Instead, Boesing believes that a new form of criticism is required that may transcend race, class and culture. And along with a new way of looking at a theatrical event, feminist theatre also offers new ways of creating and staging theatre made by women. When it comes to creation processes, the model and characteristics proposed by Schechner and Lehmann as central to the postdramatic points to a notion of equality and democracy within the making of theatre. Lehmann, in his postdramatic theory, proposes a language which is 'both linguistic and non-linguistic...in which the sounds are as important as the meaning of the words' (Bouko. 2008:28). Meanwhile, Schechner's model proposes a level playing field for the separate elements of the production. The execution of these democratic characteristics can be observed

in the aesthetics and processes favoured in the creation of work by feminist companies. Other characteristics of the postdramatic are also mirrored in explicitly feminist work: the use of experimental, image based aesthetics, the circumvention of a single 'truth' or identity, the favouring of effect on a spectator over the construction of meaning, the fragmentation of character and the detachment of the actor from the character and, as highlighted, the rejection of traditional criticism based on aesthetics or conventional forms of 'excellence'. I will address these characteristics in relation to my own work in further detail later in this essay. In particular I am concerned with Lehmann's theory of independent auditory semiotics and notions of the voice as sound versus the voice as discourse, and how this may be applied to the aim of 'manifesting' or 'sounding' the female body.

### *Spheres of Disturbance*

As a practitioner, for the purposes of contextualising my own work and the theoretical parameters in which my practice functions, I will adopt the term 'spheres of disturbance'. I do so to define the way in which theory and practice will interact for the rest of this essay and to present a 'working model' for how theory operates inside a space where feminist theatre is made. The term 'spheres of disturbance' is used by Elaine Aston (1999) in *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook*. Aston defines the term as a formal and ideological space where categories may be undone. She proposes a theoretically informed feminist practice that 'steals' from critical theory to re-direct and create disturbances within practice. As opposed to gender theory, which is located in the textual and the written, in a static space inaccessible to being 'manifested', feminist practice which operates in a 'sphere of disturbance' articulates itself through 'theorised activity' (Aston:1999). Through doing, making and writing in conversation with theoretical models, feminist practice is able to embody the theory it aims to disturb. To insert a woman's body (or sound) into a patriarchal or colonialist discourse may be an act of protest, violence or rebellion. By doing so, Aston argues that feminist theatre practice may disturb existing representations of gender, class and race. To more explicitly 'disturb' a narrative or theoretical discourse, Theresa de Lauretis suggests the remaking or re-telling of stories.

When Luce Irigaray rewrites Freud's essay on 'Femininity', inscribing her own critical voice into his tightly woven argumentation and creating an effect of distance, like a discordant echo, which ruptures the coherence of address and dislocates meaning, she is performing, enacting, the division of women in discourse. When others after her

- writers, critics, filmmakers - turn back the question on itself and remake the story of Dora, *Boheme*, Rebecca or Oedipus, opening up a space of contradiction in which to demonstrate the non-coincidence of woman and women, they also destabilise and finally alter the meaning of those representations. (1984:7)

De Lauretis' reference to the story of Dora is one which is highlighted by Aston as a practical example of working within the 'sphere of disturbance'. Cixous and Benmussa re-told and re-presented the often misogynistic case study first presented by Freud of his 'hysterical' female patient, Dora. By re-writing the the story from Dora's perspective, Cixous and Benmussa inserted their own female voices into Freud's text, thereby 'disrupting the master narrative' (Aston. 1999:72) and allowing for the emergence of a different, reconfigured narrative which placed the voice of the female Dora at the centre. Aston specifically refers to physical storytelling in a workshop space as a means towards this objective. However, I wish to articulate how feminist playwriting may exist in this sphere of disturbance and open up the space suggested by Aston, Cixous and Benmussa, as well as offer practical models for how I will achieve this in my own research.

## PART 2

In this chapter I wish to explore a practical model for creating and staging theatre situated within the 'sphere of disturbance' in dramatic writing and performance collaborations. Using examples from my own work as well as drawing from the processes defined by the Nightwood Theatre company and practitioner Elaine Aston, I will explore the *how* of creating work that allows for women to 'sound themselves' in a postdramatic, feminist context. The aim is to articulate a practical way of managing my own process that will open up space for multiple perspectives in working towards a production of my text. I will focus on activating the feminist script in a theoretical model suggested by Aston and offer an analysis of a deconstruction of narrative form and structure based on the writing of Elin Diamond, with particular reference to my script *Free Falling Bird*.

### *Collective Creation: Defining the Conversation of Feminism in Process*

The collective model is one which reflects the philosophical ideal of feminism, one in which women may be more politically effective through the sharing of responsibility and objectives.



The notion of the collective is one which filters down from the earlier consciousness raising groups of the 1970's, with companies like Women's Theatre Group initially working in an ensemble where all decisions were made by all members of the group. In speaking to a definition of collectivity, Canadian-Latvian playwright Banuta Rubess states that collective processes are 'conducive for women to begin thinking of themselves in positions of creative authority' (1990:29). Although theatre is by its nature collaborative, Scott states that the notion of collectivity points to a more consciously implemented and heightened collaboration (29). As opposed to a hierarchical organisation of power, women's collectives strive for a lateral power sharing process. Michelene Wandor, a feminist critic and playwright, speaks on the working method of company Joint Stock:

The desire to democratise the play-producing process springs from a political opposition to the traditional, hierarchy-conscious theatre, where individual skills are so fetishised that myths develop...political and alternative theatre challenges the crudities of these myths, by finding ways to encourage responsibility for all stages of the work: for what a play is saying as well as how it is saying it; a politicising of the whole aesthetic process." (Wandor. 1982:14)

The conditions in which feminist performance are created, therefore, mirrors the political goal of early feminism to create bonds between women by emphasizing a commonality of experience. The stages navigated by the collective to realise the work are as important as the result, with Scott stating that 'collective creation is more accurately defined by its process than by its outcome' (2010:30). Rubess defines three different models of collectivity which she has used in making feminist theatre:

1. A process without a director, where responsibility is divided between the participants.
2. A director on the outside of the process.
3. A director as part of the collective and acting as the 'translator' in the process.

(Scott. 2010:29)

For the purpose of my research, I will be adhering to the second model and acting as 'director on the outside'. Rubess cautions that with this method of working, members of a collective explicitly empowered to be part of an egalitarian process may feel a sense of aesthetic powerlessness which could lead to conflict. However, she also highlights that a director may serve as a navigator and translator of the process for the performers and present an understanding of the larger context of the work while empowering the collective. This is the space wherein I will be working.

## Activating the Feminist Script

In addressing specific challenges with regards to staging the feminist text, Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement state in *Upstaging Big Daddy* (1993) that the work of a feminist writer does not, by default, guarantee a feminist production. 'There is the ever-present danger that, without certain checks, we will reflexively reproduce the very gender and racial stereotypes that we ought to be challenging' (1993:35). What may constitute these 'checks' in working with and approaching the staging of a feminist text? Aston speaks specifically about an activation of the text that explores ways of heightening aspects of the feminist narrative through analysing the formal qualities and ideological underpinnings of the script. The aim of such a process, for both performers and director, is to be made aware of the possibilities inherent in the text rather than pinning it down to a single, fixed interpretation. She suggests this process as critical to the work of the female director and her cast, and highlights the pitfall of leaving 'the artistic and political challenge [of a text] unquestioned' (2001:124). The analysis of the feminist text in this way may reveal its conservative limitations or its radicality and, once known, can be played with or against in the directing and collaboration process.

I would also argue that for me as the playwright, such an undertaking may allow me to step back from the work and critically question my own choices in light of my intentions for the text and reveal where or how these intentions can be clarified or opened up in rewrites. In order to 'disturb' or intervene in the patriarchal narrative, Aston suggests that a firm critical-practical understanding of what constitutes the ideology of the text may be helpful. I will apply this analysis model to my script, *Free Falling Bird*, in order to illustrate a theoretical and practical workshop in which the feminist text can begin to be 'activated'. I will undertake the process by addressing the script in the manner of an objective critique as if reading without any knowledge of the ideological concerns of the playwright. However, to facilitate the feminist conversation in my own process, I will also apply Aston's scheme in order to interrogate and strengthen my own objectives for the script, as writer and director. Figure 1 (page 21) offers a critical diagram for thinking about political feminist ideologies in relation to performance registers and the dramatic text and will be the basis for this analysis.

Guided by Aston's scheme, I can locate *Free Falling Bird* as encoding several formal feminist characteristics and straddling the lines between cultural and materialist feminism – an example of the 'falling between the cracks' position stated earlier by Gayle Austin (1990). As defined by

Case, the cultural feminist paradigm works on the basis of sexual difference and the separation of gender categories, seeking a female aesthetic and separating the experiences of women from men. The focus is on the spiritual, often biological and corporeal experience of women rather than being located in a socio-political, historical sphere. Cultural feminism contests patriarchal constructions by placing the bodily experiences of women front and centre. This is reflected in my own intention for the text: that in representing the women of Euripides' original in a context inscribed in matriarchal (rather than patriarchal) hierarchies, I would foreground the bodies and experiences of the women in Euripides' classic. Materialist feminism, on the other hand, implicates itself in the material economic, social and historical conditions of women. In order to 'transform gender based systems of oppression' (Aston. 1999:127), materialist feminism situates itself in the very specific circumstances of women's lives, often fragmenting and deconstructing theatrical forms and gender identities. Materialist feminist intentions can be seen in more political, agitprop and activist-style pieces. Scott, however, is careful to point out that the definitions of feminisms operate with constantly shifting borders and that several characteristics may be observable within a single production, sometimes in conflict (2010:212). This is evidenced on closer analysis of my own text. In its narrative and formal properties, the structure of *Free Falling Bird* remains open and cyclical, with no easily identifiable narrative signposts to suggest a conclusion and wholeness of story. There is a lack of a singular unifying focus, a fragmentation and ambiguity of experience and a predominance of memory as the women recall and share their own stories and the stories within their collective memory while they are imprisoned and in mourning. Within the world of the play, however, there is never a temporal disjuncture or the transgression of linearity that may be observed in a materialist form. The causality of time remains present, but with memory and episode building adding to an experience of time that remains circular without moving forward: a sense of suspension, a continuous state of 'waiting for something to happen'. The danger of this form is the instinctual need to narrativise the events of the play, what Keir Elam has stated as:

...the prime object of the spectator's hypothesizing in witnessing the representation: he anticipates events, attempts to bridge incidents whose connection is not immediately clear and generally endeavors to infer the overall frame of action from the bits of information he is fed. (1980:120)

Similarly the dialogue functions within a cultural feminist framework, using the indeterminateness of words to present a denial of absolute truth and a slippage between meanings, performing the function as stated by Cixous of 'herd[ing] contradictions into a single

battlefield' (1976:252) and the characteristic of postdramatic theatre, as stated by Lehmann, of resisting logocentrism. Unlike the dramatic text and its ability to render fiction as though it were 'real', Lehmann argues for the disappearance of mimesis, narration and story by openly questioning 'representation' in performance and allowing for performance to question the state of its own reality. The women of the play represent a slide into a materialist frame; as characters with shifting subjectivities, they are unfixed and reconfigured. Multiple roles are played by all the actresses, swinging between parts often without clear markers, with the actress playing Woman 1 inhabiting both male and female identities. A notable exception to this is the character of Hecuba. Whereas the women all shift between performance registers and play characters at once historical and contemporary, Hecuba remains firmly singular, prevented from slipping into a bourgeois representation only by her resistance to naturalistic speech. As a 'text heavy' piece, *Free Falling Bird* is dominated by a verbal sign system identified by Aston as bourgeois feminism. Although resisting logocentrism, meaning is yet made predominantly from verbal association, although a deconstructed, materialist approach is invited into the work with multiple roles and an acting register defined by Aston as 'not-but': 'A register that states 'this represents me, but is not really me' (Aston. 1999:127). To oversimplify this analysis of the text, *Free Falling Bird* situates its structural spine in a cultural feminist position, while more complex materialistic positions are introduced through the characters and the acting style suggested by the text.

When observing *Free Falling Bird* through this critical lens, the possibilities for activating feminist angles within the text can begin to be explored by myself as director entering into process with the script. The analysis reveals the conservative or radical properties embedded in the script that may be pushed to the extreme, contradicted or emphasized and teased out in the workshop process. For example, although the dramatic text (with its contiguous narrative form, multiple fractured characters, and heightened dialogue) presents a departure from a bourgeois realism, the dominance of word over image locates the script as being fairly traditional in its approach to making meaning. There is also the potential, in the rehearsal room, of deconstructing the text further to alienate naturalistic speech forms by focusing on the materiality of the voice or a focus on sonic spaces. In a critical view of the text as a director, the script presents a conventional verbal performance register, another aspect which may be challenged in the workshop process. Facilitating a workshop wherein performers are given the liberty to insert themselves into the text, while being directed or guided by it, will be the key challenge for opening up the feminist conversation as I embark on my process. However, being

able to critically examine the dramatic and political objectives of the text beforehand is a valuable step in unlocking those possibilities.

Fig 3: Activating the feminist script: Aston. 1999:127

	<i>Bourgeois feminism</i>	<i>Cultural feminism</i>	<i>Materialist feminism</i>
<b>1 Feminisms</b>			
<i>Political aims</i>	to increase opportunities for women in society	to contest the patriarchal organisation of society	to radically transform social, cultural, economic and gender-based systems of oppression
<b>2 Dramatic text</b>			
<i>Form/Narrative</i>	realism; linear and closed; forward-moving; mimetic representation of 'real' time	woman-identified forms of ritual, myth; open, contiguous; collective and cyclical cultural memories	epic; episodic arrangement of scenes; alienation of linear; disjunction of time zones and worlds
<i>Characters/Roles/Subjectivity</i>	strong roles for women, often represented within domestic and familial spheres	'Woman' as 'Other', as communal, universal, subject; intra-feminine – emphasis on mother/daughter relations	unfixed, state of change and flux, re-configuring and contesting social arrangements; characters marked by difference and diversity of gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity
<i>Dialogue</i>	naturalistic speech forms	resistance to logocentrism	alienation of linguistic sign-system
<b>3 Performance registers</b>			
<i>Acting style</i>	psychological 'method'	woman-centred, corporeal	'not...but' demonstration
<i>Character</i>	performer and character identification	'Woman' as performer	non-identification of performer and role; multiple role playing
<i>Verbal and non-verbal sign-systems</i>	dominance of verbal sign-system	foregrounding of non-verbal, 'speaking' body	historicisation of body and word

## Notes On Narrativity

I would now like to return to the 'spheres of disturbance' suggested by Aston, linked especially to the narrative interventions proposed and articulated by Elin Diamond in her essay *Refusing the Romanticism of Identity* (1985). I want to demonstrate how narrative interventions in feminist playwriting, with particular reference to *Free Falling Bird*, may locate my work in this sphere. To begin with, Shelley Scott highlights the characteristics of theatre produced by female companies by stating that 'Collective creation has come to connote a particular kind of theatre piece: episodic in structure, presentational, and made up of a number of stories that all contribute to some overarching theme or purpose.' (2010:30). By implication, feminist companies often reject the style of narrative associated with a conventional theatrical event because of the patriarchal associations embedded in the idea of narrative. Through doing so, feminist performance has questioned the assumptions of the dramatic, Aristotelian structure by consciously engaging with the principles of narrative and form in a self-reflexive manner. As the authoritative text on playwriting and dramaturgical form, Aristotle's *Poetics* (trans. 2006) insists on the primacy of plot articulated through action. He states that '[t]he poet should be a maker of plot-structures [...] in so far as his status as a poet depends on mimesis, and the object of his mimesis is actions' (in Halliwell 2006: 41). Samuel Bicknell summarises the key points of Aristotle's three unities by stating:

The logical structure and progression of the order of events gives the impression of cohesion between the passing of time and the intensity of action. Catharsis takes its effect when the order of events leads to the inevitable peak of intensity...the Aristotelian model relies on the relationship between the fictional time and events, and how these unfold, to produce an effect. (2011:19)

However, many theorists have questioned Aristotle's primacy of cohesive plot structures and the centrality of narrative in the *Poetics*. In 1987, theorist Peter Szondi argued in *The Theory of Modern Drama* that the content of modern drama no longer fit the form proposed by Aristotle. Szondi's writing on Ibsen as an example of this content evolution highlighted his theory that drama had moved beyond the prescriptive form articulated in the *Poetics*. Playwright and theorist Lajos Egri, similarly, reflected on the limitations of adhering to the formal structure which places exposition at the beginning of a play, thereby limiting the development of the characters beyond the exposition. Feminist practitioners have especially questioned the relationship of narrative to patriarchal structures of representation. Elin Diamond paraphrases de Lauretis' view that 'the subordination and exclusion of women is endemic to narrative, inherent

in its very morphology' (1985:275). Typically this means that women have come to be excluded and 'absent' from modern historiography as the legacy of women as subordinate continues to be perpetuated in the narrative of history. Diamond argues that narrative itself is a tool of power and authority, that the 'relentless teleology' of history, its insistence on beginnings middles and endings and a structured ordering of events, is endemic to a patriarchal society. It would seem that the very notion of narrative, then, undermines the position of women. This is the reason why many feminist companies have insisted on models of collectivity that shun a narrative organisation that 'is intrinsically linked to and [typical of] patriarchal discourse' (Matchett:2004). However, Diamond offers a defence of the narrative form as a tool that may be used by feminists to actively critique the position and identities of women. She insists that the understanding of history as a narrative is an advantage and opportunity for feminist playwrights and theatre-makers to interrupt the processes through which narrativity is engendered. A feminist intervention within the narrative structure may expose the representations of women within a patriarchal narrative by revising, reordering and rewriting history. A crucial key to this 'intervention' or 'disturbance' of history is the notion of narrativity: the process by which a watching audience orders meaning based on a linear progression of events, what Diamond has called the 'inferred story' and Patrice Pavis has called the 'metatext' (1982:150). The feminist intervention, by making explicit the mechanics of narrative and history as a patriarchal construct, forces an audience to perceive differently. By allowing 'narrative...to invade their stages', female playwrights may 'interrupt the dramatic present with intimations of the past' (Diamond. 1985:277). Challenging audience narrativity to this end may take several forms, highlighted by Diamond, which can be observed in *Free Falling Bird*. The first element is the way in which time is treated. In the script, intrusions and shifts in time interfere with the wish to make a coherent story out of a sequence of events. Although the causality of time is never completely dismissed, there is a jarring of the narrative indicated in the script as 'interruption'. This interruption denotes a shift in logic and may indicate a subtle break, a beat, or a drastic change in energy. In all cases, time (and hence narrativity) challenges the audience expectation of structure and the ordering of meaning. Diamond also highlights another feature which may indicate narrative intervention: the subverting of a unified image of female identity through 'the collision between the 'here' of theatrical representation and the elsewhere of narration' (1984:281). This may be seen in the performance registers used by the characters, in the disjointed use of language that switches from a lyrical, heightened register to a domestic, naturalistic one within the same speech. The use of expletives often intrudes on the heightened dialogue of the characters, the crassness of the language interfering with the illusion of poetic



speech. An example of this is when Woman 1 interrupts Hecuba's descriptions of babies being murdered during war with the plaintive 'I'd kill for a fucking scone and a pat of butter' (2012:7) and later, when Hecuba herself breaks the telling of a story to admonish the same woman to 'Shut your fucking trap and listen' (2012:11). The 'elsewhere' of the narrative (an epic, post war landscape in which women are pawns at the mercy of the grand narrative of history) can in this way be seen to collide with the 'here' of theatrical representation (where women insert their own contradicting voices into an interruption of that narrative). In representing the women of the play as fractured, with multiple identities and playing various parts, the script performs another narrative intervention. The character of Woman 2 moves between articulating a hunger for revenge and retribution after suffering atrocities at the hands of her husband, yet later slips into Polyxena, who insists on being taken to Achilles because 'A man in the hand is worth more than ten women in a bush' (2012:24). Diamond articulates this contradiction as a strategic absence of cohesive character and argues that:

By refusing her protagonist a coherent identity, a recognizable selfhood, [a female playwright] also refuses the logic of social narratives in which women are inevitably constrained and refuse to perpetuate a romanticized female who transcends all constraints. (1985:285).

Diamond argues for female characters that are flawed and fragmented rather than women whose identities are romanticized to represent power, authority and transcendence over patriarchy. The characters she suggests may highlight the exclusion or absence of the female rather than presenting a false, utopian world where women are superficially valorized.

In a final note on narrative form, Julia Kristeva identifies three phases regarding feminism and time which ties into thoughts on narrative. In the first phase, she notes that women 'aspired to gain a place in linear time' (1986:36). This led to an insistence on social and political equality and the rights of women within the organization of society as women attempted to find a way to insert themselves into the present and the future. In the second phase, women attempted to find a place in cyclical time, to find a place outside of patriarchal representation and political and social boundaries, concentrating instead on 'women identified' forms of ritual and perpetuating a matriarchal-structured society. The finding of a place in cyclical time was towards transcending the boundaries of history and temporality and creating a corporeal awareness of the body. Kristeva then identifies a third and, according to her, a most effective phase for contemporary feminism. Instead of linearity which perpetuates the very system it

aims to dissolve, or a contiguous form which offers a utopian countersociety where the realities of women's lives are ignored, Kristeva proposes a practice which subverts from within. By eschewing the representation of women as defined by social roles and by resisting the creation of utopian women-only worlds, a female playwright may employ the narrative of history perpetuated by patriarchy and 'disturb' and intervene in our collective history. Diamond describes this as

...offering a provisional representation of the female subject in history. For it is in narrative, which bears all too painfully the inscriptions of patriarchal history, that we find the female subject, not transcendent yet not erased, but rather carefully, subversively at odds with what exists. (1985:286)

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## PART 3

In this chapter I wish to look ahead to the realization of my production by returning to theoretical models presented by Catherine Bouko concerning the musicality of the postdramatic. I particularly want to explore the concept of the silenced female towards notions of 'sounding', 'speaking' or 'articulating' the female voice and body based on Bouko's notion of the jazz body of the performer. I will also use Hans-Thiess Lehmann's theory of independent auditory semiotics and Liz Mills' investigations into the acoustic materiality of sound, linked to concepts of feminism, as a specific area of focus for this thesis production and my future practice.

### *The Speaking Body and the Violence of Voice*

The notion of women as being absent from theatrical representation has been stated and echoed by a number of feminist practitioners. The patriarchal narrative of history as highlighted in the previous chapter further serves to, in a re-statement of de Lauretis, 'subordinate' and 'exclude' women. The perception of silence and invisibility so intrinsic to the condition of being female is pointed out by Gayle Austin in her articulation of how a feminist practice may begin to address this absence:

A feminist approach...means paying attention when women appear as characters and noticing when they do not. It means making some invisible mechanisms visible and pointing out when...the empress has no body. (1990:136)

Cixous' call for women to 'write their bodies' presented an earlier response to the absence of females in representation addressed here by Austin. Cixous states that '[the female body] has been more than confiscated...has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure, the nasty companion...the body [un]heard.' (1976:250). But the assumption of a coherent sense of self, the notion of a female essence or *écriture féminine* proposed by Cixous, has been criticized by Julia Kristeva (1986) as it points once more to an acknowledgment of sexual difference in which the patriarchal system is inscribed. Informed by Lacanian discourse, Kristeva points to the exclusion of the female from the symbolic order of symbolization in language. In Jacques Lacan's model of subjectivity and sexual difference, men and women are positioned in an hierarchical system when entering language: the

symbolic order of law and culture (the 'law of the Father') being phallic, while the female body is refused representation. For Kristeva, the solution lies in a theatre which dissolves identity and repressive male authority but also dissolves the limitations imposed by Cixous' insistence on an irreducible female-ness. But Kristeva's position may pose problems, which Diamond points out. A female practitioner may be unwilling to ignore sexual difference since to do so would be to ignore the historical conditions that support a patriarchal status quo. She may also wish to dismantle identity using sex and gender difference as a starting point. Both theorists share the same basic assumption that women are unrepresented, absent or 'voiceless', but present opposing ways of addressing this. Kristeva sees an opportunity to embrace the lack of identity by not attempting to construct one and, rather, to further dismantle it. Cixous sees a necessity to fill the absence with a form which writes the female body and at the same time the female identity. I propose Lehmann's model of postdramatic voice as a tool towards the dissolving of identity, as suggested by Kristeva, and how it may work to subvert representation 'from within'. At the same time, feminist playwriting may give women the language to articulate their own experiences of being female, their absence and voicelessness, as Cixous proposes.

The theory of postdramatic theatre has modified the dramatic art by suggesting the upending of a hierarchy that places text at its centre. Lehmann's theory of independent auditory semiotics, although undeveloped in *Postdramatic Theatre* (2006), encompasses the notion of sound as separate from dramatic meaning and the emergence of a new non-linguistic form. Bouko takes this a step further by pointing out a particular dramatic form derived from Lehmann's theory which she terms 'postdramatic metadrama' – a work encompassing postdramatic devices within the frame of the dramatic (2008:27). This involves approaching drama in a postdramatic way, rather than an altogether discarding of the dramatic dimension. Bouko states:

In such productions, the text re-emerges but is still deprived of its authority: the other elements of the performance are no longer tied to it. In some performances this leads to a confrontation between the dramatic and the choreographic spheres, while in many others, we can observe a specific approach to musicality. (2008:27)

This approach to musicality, and in particular to voice, is what I would like to address in the production of *Free Falling Bird*. In Lehmann's theory of independent auditory semiotics, the 'intrinsic musicality' of the text takes as much (and sometimes more) prominence than the meaning of words; the 'drama' of the play may be set aside in favour of the sensorial quality of sound, its rhythm and musical characteristics. Bouko speaks particularly of 'voice as sound'

versus 'voice as discourse'. Where discourse tends to favour the underlying semantics of the word, a focus on voice as sound favours acoustic image, vocal gesture and rhythm over meaning. In such cases, Bouko states that 'a text may be considered as a material which is above all constructed following rhythmic constraints' (2008:31). Liz Mills speaks of such a text as 'a deliberate aesthetic construction created to allow an interpretive experience of sound' (2009:3). She speaks of a directing practice which conceptualizes performance by 'privileging the ear' in a particular example which I will apply to my own text. In the following extract, the patterning of the dialogue is constructed to build one on top of the other, with each subsequent line of dialogue feeding and building from the previous one:

WOMAN 2: Sneak up in an alleyway while walking.

WOMAN 3: Pounce from the backseat while driving.

WOMAN 1: Drag underwater while swimming.

WOMAN 2: Crush from above while waiting.

WOMAN 3: Stab from behind while running.

WOMAN 1: Slit while sleeping.

WOMAN 2: Decapitate while smiling.

WOMAN 3: Set fire to while reading.

WOMAN 1: Maim!

WOMAN 2: Mutilate!

WOMAN 3: Deface!

WOMAN 1: Scar!

WOMAN 2: Disfigure!

WOMAN 3: Murder!

WOMAN 1: Wound from beneath while fucking!

(Free Falling Bird. 2012:11-12)

According to Mills, a conceptual approach to acoustic image would mean a privileging of the ear over the particular semantic meaning of the text (Schechner's 'manifestation' over 'transmission'). An acoustic image is created when the sound of the voice creates meaning independent of semiotic language. The image suggested here may be approached in a way which could suggest a rising hysteria, the increased pitch mirroring a descent into madness, a sound reminiscent of a crowd of competing women's voices. Freed from meaning, this section of text may exist in an acoustic space that favours its material sound and highlights its energy, its rhythmic pulse, the grain of three women's voices, placing 'the body at the source of a discourse that is independent of the speech' (Bouko. 2008:32). It is in this carnal embodiment of a patriarchal order of language where feminist practitioners may find the space to dismantle identity and articulate themselves. Bouko goes on to suggest the concept of the 'jazz body of the performer' in the absence of a traditional dramatic character. Meaning is suspended as the jazz rhythm works through the breathing and tone of voice of the performer, swinging 'between presence and absence, between autonomous jazz physicality and the dramatic universe'. (Bouko.2008:33). In the same way that sound may become autonomous from language, physicality may be freed from meaning and open the work up to a interpretation based on the senses. The text is transcended and meaning is made beyond the words themselves, inviting a twofold perception: the interpretation of the dramatic signs of the work as well as an experience of acoustic space. The conventional method of spectatorship and perception is disrupted, 'disturbed', as the work questions the traditional hierarchy of drama, script, theatre and performance by allowing the senses to perceive as well as the intellect. In this way, a focus on the rhythm of the text and its inherent musicality as well as on the jazz body may simultaneously create the space Cixous proposes of 'writing the body' while embracing Kristeva's call for the dismantling of identity within a feminist collaboration and practice.

## Conclusion

In beginning with the notion that women's voices are suppressed and unheard, I have attempted throughout the course of this essay to open the possibilities of a feminist performance practice that may give language and voice to the feminine. I have acknowledged that no single form, term or language is able to encompass the many experiences of women's lives, and have instead sought to articulate a playmaking practice which allows for a space of collaboration, conversation and collectivity. I have applied theories of the postdramatic in an approach to voice and narrative structure and attempted to apply a theoretical model of analysis to my script in order to investigate the ideological and practical underpinnings of my writing. As I look ahead to the staging of my thesis production, I anticipate that appropriating the concepts, theory and case studies provided here will enable the elucidation of a feminist playwriting and playmaking practice. Such a practice will work within the 'sphere of disturbance' towards creating landscapes, language and a diversity of representation that voices the feminine and unlocks the feminist script in a space of collaboration and conversation. The script *Free Falling Bird* presents the first step of a 'disturbance' which will culminate in the process of staging a work that intervenes in Euripides' classic to give voice to the individual experiences of femininity in the collective. The production will serve as the meeting point for theory and practice, a space wherein I will explore and discover the application of a process which 'sounds the body' and opens up the space for a feminist conversation in my practice at this point, and in the future.

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