When the Voice Itself Is Image

Modern Drama , volume 52, number 4, winter 2009, pp. 389-404

Liz Mills

Abstract This article explores a notion of "vocal image" understood as the generating of or presence of vocalized sound intended to form an acoustic image either linked to language or independent of language. Vocal image is considered, here, from a very particular space: the space of performance practice. It is suggested that the actor's resistance to a playful exploration of sound in the abstract or within language has its roots in the layers of reasonableness inherent in language and in a concept of character as person. This resistance arguably inhibits a dimension of vocal creativity as well as possible vocal access to the articulation of the various texts of postdramatic theatre. In response, Julia Kristeva's identification of the semiotic and *chora* provide the basis for a theorizing of an intertextuality of voice that references a dimension of sound play already evident in the theatre and performance practices of experimental theatre.

Can text – the spoken text in theatre – function as an image of itself? Can text – the dramatic text of the playwright – function as an image of surface sound apart from its deep semantic structure? Can actors' voices be deconstructed and reconstructed as multiple texts? Can an intertextual play of voice, spoken text, and dramatic text enable different kinds of listening and a hearing of different kinds of vocal performance? These are some of the questions that provoke curiosity, fire the imagination, stimulate play, and drive the research practice of my work as a voice practitioner.[2] These questions also pose very real conceptual and practical challenges for directing,[3] particularly for those works that are categorized as postdramatic.[4] Implicit in these questions is the idea that utterance, whether verbal or non-verbal, can evoke an image: an acoustic image.

An acoustic image is an image that relates to the ear, a composition evoked through the hearing-imagining and the physical sensation that sonic stimulus can and does produce in the hearer. The following two possibilities are offered as examples of the stimulation and generation of acoustic images. They are instances in a range of creative responses that open up if the conceptualizing for and the interpretation of theatre is approached through privileging the imagining ear. Acoustic image is the result of a deliberate aesthetic construction created to allow an interpretive experience of sound. Martin Welton's account of *War Music*, which is introduced towards the end of this article, will extend the understanding of acoustic images through its focus on performance that immerses the audience in sound. The limitation of this article in addressing this issue lies in the silence of ink and paper as well as in the formality of tone and concept that writing brings through its particular spatializing of language. Writing can describe the vocal production of sonic image, but it cannot reproduce it.

The first example involves performance drawn from everyday life, in which the operation of viewing (and hearing) vocalizing as abstract patterning enables an aesthetic interpretation of acoustic image. A person (possibly a performer) steps up to a free-standing microphone ostensibly to make an announcement, perhaps even to sing. The presence of the **[End Page 389]** person, the physical action, and the object (the microphone) signal the onset of sound or vocalization. The audience's attention is already focused on a future action that will be realized in sound. The audience anticipates speech or song. Then the person with a jarring of the vocal folds clears his throat: "herrmm." The audience registers the sound with a momentarily suspended breath or with a quickening of anticipation. The person

shrinks back from the microphone, re-advances, and again clears his throat: "aaghermm." The audience probably now engages this sound with irritability, embarrassment, confusion, or some other emotion that links the person with the audience's anticipation of speech or song. The person shrinks back a second time and advances to the microphone only to clear his throat once again. Those members of the audience that do not completely succumb to impatience or embarrassment are suddenly alerted to another possibility. The repetition, the patterning, a kind of choreographing of sound – of throat clearing – is now moving beyond the obviously attached meanings of "he is nervous," "he has forgotten his text" or "his throat is dry" into another kind of text: a sonic performance text. The throat-clearing becomes an event, an acoustic performance constructed through an image of inarticulate sound. He is now performing a sonic image. If this scenario does not yet stimulate the possibility of an imagined acoustic performance, then consider the choreographic techniques employed by Lloyd Newson of DV8 Physical Theatre. Newson creates complex and compelling works built on the repetition and patterning of closely observed personal or domestic gestures.[5] As the example suggests, acoustic image can be constructed in a parallel process that draws on vocal gesture – what Robert Benedetti refers to as "symbolic, but nonverbal, expression of personality and emotion" (69) – and results in composition with sound.

The second example deals with immediately identifiable theatre material, a play text, and is offered in answer to my introductory question: Can text – the dramatic text of the playwright – function through an image of surface sound apart from its deep semantic structure? In *Top Girls*, playwright Caryl Churchill uses her technique of overlapping dialogue to suggest a patterning of women's voices. This results in dialogue that is almost hyper-real, as characters talk over each other and the audience can only catch fragments of text and the gist of possible meanings. In directing the confrontation scene between the sisters Marlene and Joyce, the director may focus on ensuring that certain lines of text are heard clearly to keep the sense of particular meanings alive. However, in an alternative approach that favours acoustic image, the director could conceptualize the scene by privileging the ear. In such an approach, the confrontation between the sisters could be conceptualized as an acoustic image of degeneration into squabbling, a sound redolent of the sisters' **[End Page 390]** adolescence. In this approach, the actors' primary performance impetus would be to play into and to create the acoustic image of adolescent sound through the text. The shift in emphasis is subtle for the actor, but potentially quite evocative for the ear of the audience as the dialogue would no longer focus primarily on argument but rather on the visceral impact of remembered sounding. As both of the examples suggest, an acoustic image is created or evoked when the vocalized sound "has meaning" and "makes meaning" beyond or in addition to the syntactical and semantic meaning of a spoken text. When this meaning making is centred in the sounding or vocalizing of the human voice, I call it "vocal image."

I have argued elsewhere for the creative autonomy of voice and the possibility of its sonic performativity in the context of theatre; there I have provided a theoretical frame for the idea of vocal image (Mills, "Theatre Voice as Metaphor"; "The Theatre of Theatre Voice"). The examples above describe how sound itself can be interpreted in abstract ways and deliberately patterned as a dynamic composition of sonic energy and shifting sonic texture. Alternatively, dramatic text or speech can be viewed as a landscape of words with an inherent sonic energy and texture that generate a surface sonic image that can embellish or supersede the semantic meaning of the text. Images of this kind of sounding exist in everyday life in both specific acoustic forms like that of a muezzin's call to prayer and in the shifting contours of an acoustic style. Acoustic style suggests the possibility of acoustic shifts within a particular form. An example is the cadence and patterning – possibly a music – that belongs to great oratory and is always present irrespective of content. Oratory

is both a form and a style of speaking, but oratory as sound, as an acoustic style, can respond dynamically through sound to stylistic shifts within the changing rhetoric of the form. In the context of theatre, oratory as a sound, as an acoustic style, is also open to the creative manipulation that is part of interpreting and creating performance.

It is increasingly important, particularly with the emergence of postdramatic works and the establishing of a postdramatic discourse, that actors, directors, and voice practitioners ask challenging conceptual questions about the voice. By way of example, the starting point for a production or piece of theatre should include the question: How does or should this production sound? This question is not posed to elicit ideas about the insertion of music or pre-recorded sound and is only partially concerned with linguistic or dialectal decisions about handling the spoken text. Traditional approaches to text interpretation for performance are likely to include choices about the use of accents in plays where dialect is at issue as well as choices about linguistic uniformity. These choices are obvious descriptors of or responses to the idea of "the sound of a play." The **[End Page 391]** question posed is intended to stimulate the acoustic imagination. It is an invitation if not a spur to consider the proposed production as an acoustic environment potentially rich with sonic texts and vocal imagery (Mills, "Vocal Mise en Scène"). My initial questions about voice and image are an elaboration of such a conceptual probing. By way of response, I intend to trace some of the intertextual relations of voice (understood here as the site of vocal production) that either support or resist the operation of vocal image, of vocal meaning making. The exploration of an inter-textuality of human sound – the voice itself – will provide a clearer understanding of a notion of the multiple "languages" (meaning kinds of vocalizing or layers of sounding) of the voice. The idea of "languages" of sound points to structures of meaning for the voice that allow for a complexity of sonic layering in the production of acoustic image. In following the implications of this insight, my initial questions about vocal image – asked from inside a space of practice – should open outward into more complex conceptual pathways into thinking about voice in theatre.

I ask these questions from the perspective offered by mainstream western theatre voice practices, which focus largely on technical vocal training for actors and on the interpretation of text.[6] However, they arise more specifically from my research interest in what I have called the "materiality" of voice (Mills, "Sonic Materials"), from those properties of sound that form the building blocks of vocalization in and for theatre. The materiality of voice in my practice of more than ten years is an exploration of sound per se. In this respect, I am referring to the sounds produced by an actor independently of language; in other words, the sounds an actor can generate and sculpt in the imaginative space of theatre. In this kind of exploration, the focus is cumulatively on the relationship of the actor to sound: on the kinds of sound the actor can generate, the architecture or shaping of sound, the relationship of one kind of sound to another, the relationship of silence to sound, composition with and through sound, and the development of a methodology of working with sound in its perceived materiality. The exploration begins with listening and the actor's relationship to the world through the medium of the ear. This stage is followed by phases of play intended to loosen the hold of language on sound and subvert the actor's expectation that vocalizing inevitably results in words and in words as dramatic text. In conformity with Adriana Cavarero's insight, the process of loosening disrupts the conflation of voice and language that "[f]ounded in the visual realm of the signified, speech blinds the natural sensibility of the ear" (178). The process deepens with an exploration of the texture of different sounds and of the sonic energy inherent in sounds. The exploration progressively invites a different relationship with sound. And the practice itself proposes multiple languages for voice. As Cavarero insists, the "point is not simply to revocalize logos. Rather, the aim is to free logos from its visual **[End Page 392]** substance, and to finally mean it as sonorous speech" (178–79); in this context, we should read "mean it as"

as describing sonorous sounding working towards a vocal image independent of words. As our drama department trains both actors and theatre makers, it allows for a view of the performance space as a transforming landscape of complex aural and visual images authored by very different kinds of creators.

Anticipating Sound

My argument is a conscious attempt to gather as much terminology as is possible about and around voice. My desire is to make voice "resonate" outside of its common-sense descriptors. The language that belongs to voice is appropriated by diverse disciplines and has a broad range of references beyond human utterance; in my view, this appropriation has prompted a loss of specificity or potency when applied to human utterance or sound. "Sonic" and "acoustic" are my preferred terms and are used interchangeably to remind the reader of the present focus on sound, on that which is vocally both made manifest and heard. Critiquing the western philosophic focus on thinking suggests "that the 'subject,' in its classic Cartesian clothes, has no voice and speaks only to itself through the mute voice of consciousness" (Cavarero 173). The philosophic focus on Logos or reason does not insist on the presence of Logos as a sonic object or the awareness of interlocutors as acoustic subjects. Moreover, I would argue that the act of speaking may not, in and of itself, awaken the speaker or the listener to the sonic and acoustic dimensions of Logos but rather privileges the notion of Logos as thought spoken aloud. Cavarero insists that "[t]hinking is structurally immune to the musical and relational interference of the acoustic sphere of speech" (173–74). The point is that speaking is heard and is intended to be heard as "sonorous speech" (179) in a space "in which the relationality of mouths and ears comes to the fore" (Cavarero 174). The terms "sonic" and "acoustic" signal this relationality; in effect, listening for the presence of sound is crucial to the idea of relation. At first glance, an understanding of vocal image through sonic or acoustic mapping might appear to be the province of semiotic theory. However, I am more aligned with those philosophers and feminist theorists who, in refusing the conflation of voice and speech, are also seeking to articulate the multiple texts of the voice itself in what are powerfully performative ways. For example, when Cavarero points to the "sonorous materiality" (1) of the voice as a unique imprint of individual identity, a marker of the sound of individual sound, she exposes the silent voice of philosophy – the voice understood as thought spoken aloud – to think about the acoustic sphere of the voice in the "vibration of a throat of flesh" and "the pleasure of **[End Page 393]** giving a personal form to sound waves" (2). For Leslie Dunn and Nancy Jones, it is the overuse of the term "voice" that undermines our awareness of the non-verbal utterances of voices (1–2). Their field of reference is feminist discourse in which the term "voice" functions as a metaphor for asserting identity and agency, as in "having a voice," "finding a voice," and "allowing a voice." Dunn and Jones therefore adopt "vocality"[7] as the term that will point to the acoustic presence of the voice. While "vocality" refers to embodied sound and the phenomenological presence of the voice, it more specifically refers to a cultural construct formed in relation to who hears the voice. As they describe it, "[V]oices inhabit an intersubjective acoustic space; hence their meanings cannot be recovered without reconstructing the contexts of their hearing" (2). This contention echoes Cavarero's "relationality of mouths and ears" (174), but as an index of constructed acoustic spaces, the term also applies to the context of theatre. The performance text of theatre is deliberately constructed for a particular audience. It is a construction in which human sound or vocalizing becomes or can be reconfigured as art. The writing of theorists from a range of disciplines[8] reflects the struggle to find a language that enables a conceptual and practical working with the multiple texts of voice. Each of these writers is confronted with the same task: how to call attention to voice or human

sound as a phenomenon separate from its formation as language. This problem, coupled with the reach of their concerns, maps the complexity of the performance space vocally occupied by the actor. However, in my experience, the actor's idea of vocal complexity in practice and in performance appears primarily in technical concerns about managing vocal performance or in interpretive concerns about fashioning a particularly "personal" understanding of a character. Even in those texts that are not character driven, the actor is present as interlocutor. As soon as the actor speaks, sound as vibration, sound as energy, and sound as texture are eclipsed by the presence of language. As soon as the actor speaks, her acoustic presence or "the uniqueness that makes itself heard as voice" (Cavarero 173) is transformed into the semantic meaning of the spoken text. Sound is instantaneously accepted *as language*. In other words, all the efforts to tease out a sonic, intertextual layering of voice, of other frames of reference for vocalization, Julia Kristeva's "semiotic" (her term for prelinguistic vocality) (34), Roland Barthes' "grain of the voice"[9] (181), Cavarero's "sonorous materiality" (1), and Dunn and Jones's "vocality" (2) are silenced by the powerful lure of language.

As we see, the voice itself is a site of complex sonic "texts." These "texts" include the prelinguistic vocalization recognizable in the babble of babies, the inarticulate sounds that litter everyday speech, the particular *frisson* of sonic energy that Barthes refers to as "grain," and the uniqueness of sound that for Cavarero singles out the individual who speaks. It is difficult to hold **[End Page 394]** onto the idea and *to hear* that sounding is the production of complex sonic patterning, which, in a sonic intertextual operation, is transposed into the syntactic and semantic patterning of language. Although these texts are all present in the same voice, I am deliberately separating non-linguistic sonic texts from linguistic ones. The effect of this separation is to attune the ear to the full range of sonic texts in order to listen for the possibilities of intertextual play across non-linguistic and linguistic sonic texts. Kristeva identifies the "*two modalities* of what is . . . the same signifying system": "so-called natural language" as "the semiotic" (the prelinguistic) and "the symbolic" (language itself) (34; emphasis in original). Her delineation of these modalities is an early attempt to theorize the voice as a multidimensional space in which a variety of sonic texts materialize, blend, and contend. In this reading of meta-sound, Kristeva's two modalities evince the intertextuality of the human voice; they are, for me, distinct sonic texts within the voice.

As I have already explained, the "semiotic" refers to the prelinguistic phase of vocalization; it is important to remember that the semiotic is not simply a developmental stage in the acquisition of language. It remains available to actors as a resource, both as a source of sound and of sound patterning as well as for acoustic interpretation and play. Kristeva distinguishes a *chora* within the semiotic, a "trace" that refers to drives or energies that are distinctive. Although she provides the term "*chora*," she insists that it represents a "nonexpressive totality" (35). The term "*chora*" can be traced back to Plato's creation story in the *Timaeus*, where the word suggests the idea of a space that provides "a fixed site for all things that come to be" (Plato 41). That is to say, the term distinguishes a possibility of sounding or vocalizing with inherent identifiable characteristics, none of which can yet be construed as language. It is an articulation that is independent of representation in language; rather, it "lends itself to phenomenological, spatial intuition, and gives rise to geometry" (Kristeva 35). Here, then, is the allusion to the patterning that creative vocal play is likely to impose as it shapes vocal image in much the same way as a freestyle or a jazz singer creates song through a patterning of shifting cadences and rhythms. As Kristeva reminds us, the *chora* is "analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm" (36). Cumulatively, these concepts suggest a site for the voice that is rich with energy, possibility, and creation.

This sounding is ultimately transposed into language or what Kristeva calls the symbolic.

But to reach back to the phase between the semiotic and the symbolic is not to re-enact the vocality of infancy. Instead, the hope is to access the acoustic palette in all its diversity, while vocally retrieving the energies and rhythms that existed prior to language. In this sense, Kristeva's work elaborates upon the notion of "dialogism" proposed by Bakhtin (see Allen, *Intertextuality* 21). For Bakhtin, the voice always contains the presence of the other in that conversation is in response to an **[End Page 395]** other and language itself is acquired from an other. Words are thus not neutral or newly crafted but are thick with the meanings of the other. While this concept reaffirms the idea that voice is made for mouths and ears, it also deepens our understanding of the voice as sonically layered or echoing its own intertextuality. For example, the sound of the mother's voice is one template for developing vocality; the unique sound of the voice itself is its own sonic template, and the inflection patterns absorbed from another become yet another sonic template and so on. The voicing subject for Bakhtin inhabits a space of "heteroglossia"; a many-voiced space (Allen, *Intertextuality* 29). Combining Bakhtin and Kristeva's ideas reveals an intertextual layering of voice that can be thought of as formed by prelinguistic and linguistic acoustic presence.

It is reassuring in the context of working with voice in the theatre to know that Kristeva's theorizing of the semiotic and the symbolic was in response to a crisis in modern literature represented by the work of Mallarmé, Joyce, Artaud, and others. These works represent an "exploding [of] the phonetic, lexical, and syntactic object of linguistics" as well of "the subject and its ideological limits" (Kristeva 29). The texts themselves insisted on new ways of hearing; this insistence is just as crucial to grappling with postdramatic texts. The subjects of both groups of texts similarly demand a new understanding of the presence of the subject in text, which is marked by a shift from character to figures in landscapes. In terms of the semiotic, the actor inhabits a complex space in which subjective experience, literary artefact, aesthetic imperative, craft, and unfolding conceptualization contend, capitulate, align, and resolve. The result is an embodiment of multiple texts that become the satisfying whole that is the performance text. As she moves from production to production, the actor's journey in vocally inhabiting a variety of diverse texts is not necessarily sufficiently supported by equally diverse approaches to voice within the process of crafting a performance.

Resisting a Prelinguistic Text

The actor expects to perform through the medium of language. The actor trained in the traditions of western theatre expects the dramatic text or the written text to articulate the linguistic rationality of character (generally understood in a realist representational way as person) or of argument (possibly understood in a presentational way in terms of the practices of traditional western rhetoric). The eclipse of acoustic presence, of vocal grain, of sonorous materiality by language discussed earlier is to be expected because language is a formal structuring of sound into words, phrases, and sentences in pursuit of communication.

As is generally understood, people are social beings oriented towards forming relationships through language. This linguistic impulse is described **[End Page 396]** by Jürgen Habermas as communicative rationality (134–46), in which he discerns the contract inherent in the structuring process that is language – a shared and *agreed* to belief in the rationality of language. In other words, irrespective of the many instances of miscommunication that can form a part of daily interaction with other people, the subject always speaks in the *absolute belief* that what is said is reasonable and that the listener understands the reasonableness of what is said. As Habermas contends, the "*supposition* of a common objective world is built into the pragmatics of every single linguistic usage.

And the dialogue roles of every speech situation enforce a symmetry in participant perspectives" (138; emphasis in original). Consequently, if the actor simply sounds or vocalizes outside of the structure of language, if she vocalizes from a prelinguistic text – a text outside of Habermas's common objective world of linguistic usage – she can no longer proceed from the base of communicative rationality that is assumed to inhere in language. She cannot proceed in the belief that she as speaker is reasonable and that the listener will understand. Language powerfully offers and confirms the notion of shared meaning. Habermas confirms this view in claiming that "for everything that claims validity *within* linguistically structured forms of life, the structures of possible mutual understanding in language constitute something that cannot be gotten around" (139–40; emphasis in original). But, in much the same way that modernist works provoke Kristeva to theorize what lies outside textual utterance, theatre texts have also been challenging actors for more than a century. These texts produce structures and forms that operate outside the realm of dramas relying on dialogue. Familiar examples are the early Dadaist texts focused on sound and expressivity rather than words; Ionesco's direct challenge to the communicative rationality of language; Heiner Müller's multi-persona-ed characters in monologic landscapes and Suzan-Lori Parks's insistence on an individual orthography for her particular cultural linguistic representations. The work of these and other playwrights insists that language need not conform to received ideas of normal communication in order to be communicative. Works like these are typical of what Kristeva describes as a signifying practice that "explod[es] the phonetic, lexical, and syntactic object of linguistics" (29). The invitation in these texts is to find a performance language that both meets the challenges and honours the innovations made by these theatrical and anti-theatrical forms.

If we now return to the actor in the space of practice, the notion of rational being is ever present as both the challenge and the goal of the actor's craft, even as she confronts texts that explode the "phonetic, lexical and syntactic object of linguistics." In an article entitled "The Actor's Problem: Performing the Plays of Richard Foreman," Neil Swettenham argues that

> [i]n some respects it is reasonable to draw comparisons between Foreman's work and that of a number of other late twentieth-century playwrights . . . like Sarah **[End Page 397]** Kane – in particular 4:48 *Psychosis* (1995) – his "characters" are constantly dissolving, shifting, refusing to come into focus; like Beckett, his environments are decisively removed from those of everyday reality, yet intimately familiar
> (65–66).

What Swettenham calls the actor's problem – characters who refuse to operate as people and environments that refuse to locate realistically – must surely by now have been a theatrical problem (even if it is resolved in rehearsal rooms and in performance by actors, directors and voice coaches) for more than a century. How have the interpretations or productions of such texts informed practice? Is there a recognizable or emergent tradition of performance or acting techniques and approaches applicable to these texts? Hans-Thies Lehmann's welcome theorizing of postdramatic theatre offers a new terminology that has brought those texts and performances that might have been relegated to the margins of alternative or avant-garde into mainstream theatre discourse. A discourse of postdramatic theatre is theoretically established and assuredly practised where theatre ensembles engage with postdramatic works. But the question remains: Is there a discourse of postdramatic voice or voice for postdramatic theatre?

Does practice rely on a manipulation of the prevailing traditions of actor-craft based in the methodologies of realism? If so, it is worth a reminder that theatre is fiction; the act of theatre itself is a contract between performer and audience to suspend disbelief and to participate in a "cultural construct" (to refer back to Dunn and Jones's definition of vocality) determined by the piece of theatre in question. In spite of a range of possible approaches

to performance, the conflation of voice with language and rationality tends to hold the actor's voice in a sonic image of "natural" voice.[10] The actor's voice performs the illusion of person as recognizable other. And the actor, in speaking the theatre text, continues fiercely to pursue "rationality" in a normal, person-to-person, communicative sense. While theatre works that invite the actor to take imaginative flight acoustically are many and various, notions of character as person act as a constraint. The embodied sounding voice is heard, first and foremost, as a signal of the phenomenological presence of the actor as person as well as an acoustic image of the subjectivity of the person who chooses to act or perform. This inevitable investment in voice as an indicator of person, as an instrument of rationality and therefore of language, is difficult to shift so that other kinds of sonic texts can be engaged.

I began my article with questions about the possibility of uncovering the intertexuality of voice from a space of practice focused on the exploration of sound. I have spent some time suggesting the embedded relationships of the texts of human vocality. The challenge for actors, directors, and voice practitioners becomes one of being conceptually and technically equipped to operate across shifting vocalities. Postdramatic theatre demands a **[End Page 398]** vocality that is different from that of dramatic theatre. Vocality as construed by Dunn and Jones (2) refers to a cultural construct brought into being by speaker and listener. In the dramatic text, the cultural construct can be described as the operation of a voyeur audience that is privy to the exchange of interpersonal dialogue within the drama. In the postdramatic text, the cultural construct shifts to that of a possibly detached audience witnessing monologic utterances by decentred characters. How do actors perform vocally as "figures" in the landscapes of postdramatic works?

In attempting to answer this question, I note a historic concern with what Maurice Maeterlink referred to as the "disruption to symbolic understanding that the corporeal actor creates" (qtd. in Fuchs 30). He says:

If man enters on the stage with all his faculties and his whole freedom, *if his voice*, gestures, attitude are not veiled by a great number of synthetic conditions, if even for a moment the human being appears such as he is, there is not a poem in this world which could stand that event

(qtd. in Fuchs 30; emphasis added).

More recently, James Macdonald, in discussing his process in directing Martin Crimp's *Fewer Emergencies*, confronts the same problem and has this to say of the actor–character relationship:

At that point [in the process], it became clear to us that the problem with this material for actors is: who do they turn up as? Are they themselves? If there isn't a character, then actors can get very self-conscious about playing themselves, because they've got no distance on the material

(142).

The distance the actor is seeking is the distance between self and other; it is a distance made visible by the presence of an-other psychological reality (or in this case a character). By contrast, postdramatic text figures or characters inhabit landscapes, devoid of clues to psychological behaviour. The absence of the psychological indices of realism does not mean, however, that the actors simply turn up as themselves. The actor is always a performer, a craftsman, for whom the crafting of the individual psychology of a character in the realist mode is only one kind of entry into performance. The crafting of figures and characters devoid of personality can invite a sonic- or vocal-image approach to performance. The actor could find the desired distance through an understanding of the performance possibilities of multiple vocal texts and the creation of vocal image.

Entering a Space of Multiple Vocal Texts

I want to maintain this focus on Macdonald's notion of "distance on the material" as a clue to theorizing the performance of postmodern and **[End Page 399]** postdramatic contexts. As I have pointed out, the distance that can assist the actor here is not the distance located in the actor–character relationship but the distance that becomes possible when the actor glimpses the layer of sound variously described as the semiotic, grain, sonorous materiality, and vocality. When the actor grasps that sound can operate materially and as image referencing the prelinguistic and language phases of voicing and notions of other, voicing becomes less subjectively grounded and more acoustically liberated. Voicing and sound are free to operate in an aesthetic or theatrical modality of sound patterning or sound architecture for performance. Lehmann begins to articulate this kind of acoustic space when he observes that "[t]he chorus formally negates the conception of an individual entirely separated from the collective," but more importantly, it "[s]imultaneously . . . displaces the status of language: . . . the independent reality of the word, its musical sound and rhythm, is newly experienced" (130). If Lehmann begins to articulate this space, it is Welton's essay, "Seeing Nothing: Now Hear This . . ." (146–55) that allows us to enter the space. He gives substance to the "independent reality of words" and the experiencing of sound anew. He suggests that an alteration of the balance between visual and aural perception allows for a *different relationship to voice*, revealing the possibility of multiple texts: sound, acoustic image, sonic time, and sonic space as well as language. For example, he describes the experience of the 1992–2000 production of *War Music* by Sound and Fury Theatre Company, which was performed in a completely darkened auditorium. Welton admits that "[a]t times I stop following the story; although I know it, it is not for that reason. It is for the cadences of sound, the subtle shifts of pitch and rhythm. There is "meaning" here but not in the lexical matching of words to memory" (148). His reception, his perception, his impetus to engage the work – listening, hearing – all functioned in "an altered sense ratio from within a visual culture" (152).

In this space, "the spoken words become 'things' in their own right" (148). Words attain a strange materiality, a concreteness in which the "solidity is ambiguous" (147). He is aware that it is sight that confirms the materiality of things. But he also reveals that, paradoxically, it is sight that potentially blinds us to the materiality of the voice. Thus, in this "theatre in the dark," sound becomes material object, space is mapped through sound, time is wrought through sound, and the sonic energy of voice that Welton experiences as the "sound of speed" (147–48) is yet another piece of architecture in a sound "world . . . grasped only in a state of constant engagement" (152). Is it only in the context of such a deliberately constructed sensorial experience that the simultaneous multiple texts of voice can operate? And was Welton's experience of other vocal texts – sonic image, sonic time, sonic energy, sonic space – only possible because of the greater organizing structure of poet Christopher Logue's *War Music*, his "account of books **[End Page 400]** 16 to 19 of Homer's *Iliad*," which formed the dramatic text of the production (Welton 146)? From the experience of my own practice, there is a welcome developing awareness of the acoustic layers of voice in a range of theoretical writings. A parallel awareness of acoustic layers is actually quite pronounced in theatre practices that have long since ceased to occupy the margins of theatre. These shifts in theory and practice are testimonies to potential and actual shifts in perception; indeed, theory and practice must continue to inform each other and encourage differences in hearing and vocalization to shape and articulate practices specifically for works in which the voice itself is imagined and produced as image.

If we return briefly to Dunn and Jones's use of the term "vocality," we see that their distinction is predicated on the social construct of speaker and listener (or in this context

actor and audience). If actors can find ways to operate in the acoustic sphere, exploiting the exciting possibilities of producing and constructing images with sound and text, then audiences will cooperate with them in producing that acoustic space as well. Welton's experience bears this out; the acoustic image appeared precisely because he was deprived of sight. Theatre offers an invitation to hearing the voice as distinct in itself or to "reading" the text that is the sound of sound. Lehmann's references to texts-capes, soundscapes, and audio landscapes (148–50) should not be seen as terminology reaching to describe phenomena so much as terminology that vocal practice seeks to inform. In this regard, I am reminded that Robert Wilson's "occasion[al] remark . . . that his ideal theatre was the union of silent film and radio play" itself invites an acoustic imagining (qtd. in Lehmann 148). As Lehmann contends, we are granted a fascinating challenge in the realization that "[w]hen we are watching (a silent film), the auditive space is boundless, when we are listening (to a radio play) the visual space is boundless" (148). Finally, I want to suggest that, as this space is prised open it will reveal an acoustic geography that is provocative for the actor and the audience. This acoustic geography enables a range of exciting theatrical excavations of a space in which voice can function sonically as vocal image in one kind of oral–aural text and, in another, function linguistically as vocal image, through spoken or dramatic text.

Liz Mills Liz Mills is a senior lecturer in the Drama Department at the University of Cape Town, where she teaches theatre voice, acting, and directing. She convenes the postgraduate studies in the department and runs the Drama Residency, a program that brings professional theatre practitioners and students together to work on creative projects. She has created two bodies of voice practice, Voice as Material and Vocal Mise en scène, from her research in voice. She directs for the department; recent production work includes Chekhov's *The Seagull* and Martin Crimp's *Attempts on her Life*. She is a recipient of the UCT Distinguished Teacher's Award.

Notes

1. A shorter version of this paper was presented at the Theatre Noise Conference, Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, 22–24 April 2009.
2. The people who work in voice and with voice in theatre and/or theatre-training contexts identify themselves in a range of ways: voice coach, dialect coach, dialogue coach, or voice consultant. Alternatively, they reference themselves through the dedicated practices that inform the way that they work with voice: Linklater teacher, Lessac teacher, or Fitzmaurice teacher. Although I use more **[End Page 401]** than one of these terms, I tend to favour "voice practitioner" – although as a term it has little "heart" – because voice people invariably are deeply and broadly immersed in praxis and are conceptually far more adept and invested than the usual designations suggest.
3. I work in the Drama Department at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, teaching voice and directing at undergraduate and/or postgraduate level. I also direct productions for the department.
4. Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* theorizes and describes as post-dramatic those theatre works that do not conform to the traditional structure of the drama: conflict presented through interpersonal dialogue. Postdramatic works eschew traditional narrative, plot, situation, and character.
5. *Strange Fish* (1992) and *Enter Achilles* (1995) are good examples of Newson's work with domestic gesture. The observation, imitation, and repetition of domesticate gesture becomes a choreographic technique for creating work.

6. The practices that have informed my voice practice are those seminal and related practices of the western theatre voice tradition: Berry, *The Actor and his Text; Voice and the Actor*; Linklater, *Freeing the Natural Voice; Freeing Shakespeare's Voice*; Rodenburg, *The Actor Speaks; The Need for Words; The Right to Speak*; Lessac, *The Use and Training of the Human Voice*; Houseman, *Finding Your Voice*; and Barton and Dal Vera, *Voice: Onstage and Off*.
7. Dunn and Jones adopt the term "vocality" from the work of medievalist Paul Zumthor who uses it to focus on the orality of medieval verbal art; see Dunn and Jones 2.
8. Apart from those theorists in philosophy and feminist studies already mentioned, the complexity of talking about human utterance is also taken up in linguistics and semiotics starting with De Saussure's *la parole*. Equally, in literary and cultural theory, Bakhtin's identification of a double-voiced discourse, Julia Kristeva's distinction between the geno- and pheno-texts, and Roland Barthes' *grain* of the voice, all extend an understanding of the notion of voice in increasingly complex ways. For a useful overview of these ideas, see Allen.
9. Barthes (179–89) extends Kristeva's notion of "geno-text" (57–59) or prelin-guistic utterance by focusing on what he calls the "grain" of the voice, an attempt to name the particularity of the material presence of the voice.
10. The contemporary tradition of voice is epitomized by working with the natural voice of the actor or the actor's personal sound. This is understood in opposition to the historical aesthetic of the declamatory style of voice used in theatre in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as to the accents that, by preference, dominated trained actors' speech in the first half of the twentieth century. The influence of film and television has compounded the idea of natural voice in performance, often, with respect to the concerns of this paper, to the detriment of a more creative view of voice.

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