

**THEATRE VOICE AS METAPHOR: THE ADVOCACY OF A
PRAXIS BASED ON THE CENTRALITY OF VOICE TO
PERFORMANCE**

THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This study proposes a view of theatre voice as central to performance. It proposes a shift in paradigm through the foregrounding of the function of theatre voice as one of the creative strands of the theatre matrix. The function of theatre voice becomes a theatrical function. Theatre is created in the voice and, therefore, any act of theatre should include conscious questions about the meanings that are, or can be evoked through the voice in theatre. A second thrust to this study is that theatre voice practice should be included in, and theatre voice practitioners should actively engage in, broader debates about theatre.

Introduction: The idea that the voice in performance is the enactment of conscious theatrical choices is set up through the notion of the theatrical use of the voice. The introduction outlines the kinds of performance contexts in which a theatrical use of the voice takes shape. This includes an assessment of the degree to which the specific South African context of the writer is useful to questions about a theatrical use of the voice. The concepts which are central to such a view of theatre voice are expanded. These are: the theatrical agency of the actor, theatre voice, the theatrical use of the voice and praxis. Selected examples from local and other productions are offered to illustrate a range of interpretive possibilities open to the voice when considered, in the first instance, as performance.

Chapter one: The actor's relationship with voice is explored through the notion of actor agency. Historically, actors were theatrically empowered by a closer involvement with playwriting, staging, apprenticeship forms of actor training and theatre management. It is argued that the emergence of the director as a new theatrical agent has diminished this actor agency. On the other hand, the introduction of a realist acting methodology has given the actor autonomy of craft, empowering the actor in unprecedented ways. The theatrical agency of actors, directors and theatre voice practitioners is explored as influencing the status and the perception of theatre voice within theatre. The proposal of the centrality of voice to performance is dependent on the agency of actors, directors and theatre voice practitioners.

Chapter two: It is argued that an Aristotelian Poetics of Voice has, under the influence of realism, developed into a "Poetics of the Self". The paradigmatic shift proposed through a view of the voice as central to theatre, is explored through a post realist, intertextuality of voice. This includes a re-consideration of the contemporary theatre voice notion of the "natural" voice.

Chapter three: Cicely Berry's work, with particular reference to The Actor and his Text (1987), is analysed in terms of realism and the theatrical use of the voice. A second focus in the analysis of Berry's work supports the argument that voice practitioners theorise positions for theatre voice even though their texts are

practical and technically orientated. Berry's work is singled out here because the contemporary practice of the Central School tradition is the generic tradition of South African English theatre voice practice.

Chapter four: Strategies and constructs are proposed in support of the centrality of voice to the theatre. Ways of realising a theatrical use of the voice are also suggested. This is based on a shift in the way in which practitioners think about theatre voice. In the first instance, it is suggested that practitioners move beyond positions of polarity and actively embrace that which is contradictory in theatre and theatre voice practice. Secondly, a traditional hermeneutic understanding of the interpretation of voice is challenged. Thirdly, the use of metaphor which is pertinent to actors, directors and voice practitioners is explored as a means to vocal action. Concrete examples of the creative use of the voice, are provided through the sonic texts of Performance Writing. By way of conclusion, some ideas are offered about the issue of empowering the actor in a theatrical use of the voice.

This study is intended to contribute to a theoretical and practical debate which will promote the argument for the centrality of voice to performance.

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I have observed among voice practitioners a tradition of acknowledging their master teachers. Apart from the respect accorded these teachers, this tradition connects an individual practice to a broader theatre voice practice and to a culture of theatre voice. No such master teacher stands in my background but my classroom and rehearsal spaces have, for over eighteen years, been peopled with actors whose passion for theatre continues to inspire me. This work is possible because of them.

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INTRODUCTION

The Relationship of Theatre Voice to Performance

The focus of this study is theatre voice and more specifically the relationship between theatre voice and theatre. This relationship is examined through the notion of the centrality of voice to performance. The vocal presence of the actor and the probability of a verbal or vocal text in any piece of theatre are the basis for a belief that the actor's voice, and therefore theatre voice, is central to performance. However the notion of centrality implies more than the presence of actors' voices, interpretation of a dramatic text and the development of appropriate vocal skills to support such interpretation. The argument developed through this study favours a broader understanding of centrality. Here, centrality also implies a conscious engagement with the transformation of the actor's voice for the medium of theatre.

The terms actor's voice, theatre voice, voice and theatre voice practice are used to allow for differing emphases. Actor's voice is intended to suggest the actor in performance, while theatre voice, which includes the actor in performance, also refers to the body of techniques and theories belonging to the practice of voice for the theatre. Theatre voice practice refers to the work generated by vocal practitioners in a range of contexts: vocational training, rehearsal processes and the innovation of new practices and approaches. The general term voice is used

to cover the actor's voice and theatre voice along a continuum of voice ranging from performance to theorising.

The understanding of the centrality of voice to performance developed through this study emphasises the conceptual processes of creating and performing theatre. Any conceptualisation for performance would thus include a conceptualisation of voice with specific reference to how the actor uses her voice. Equally, any theorising about voice or skills training for voice would be framed by the idea of the voice in performance, the idea of voice being subject to the conceptual and performance possibilities of a particular performance. Thus voice becomes active in the creative matrix of theatre or central to performance. This idea of centrality is not one of polarity, in which one aspect of theatre is considered to be central while other aspects are seen as peripheral. This notion of centrality is inclusive - it recognises that all aspects of theatre are central to the conceptualisation and performance of theatre. The centrality of voice to performance, therefore, *foregrounds voice* in the act of theatre: performance. It includes theatre voice, both the performance and practice, as central in making meaning of a theatrical text.

1. The Theatrical Use of the Voice

Counsell refers to a theatrical text as a "semic unity" in which even discordant, fragmentary and contradictory images, words or actions are organized into a

meaningful relationship (1996:13). The notion of the centrality of voice to performance aligns the function of theatre voice with the creation of theatrical texts. A dual function is signalled here: that of making meaning (the organizing of meaningful relationships) and that of signifying meaning (the theatrical text in action). Theatre voice as a practice offers ways of making meaning. The voice as sonic image signifies meaning in performance. When the making of vocal meaning and the signifying of vocal meaning are held central to the act of theatre, then the voice can be conceived of as having multiple sonic possibilities. The term sonic is used here to suggest that the voice is present as a sound image as well as being present as spoken text or vocal gesture. The textures or the quality of the sound which the actor produces through her verbal text or through vocal gesture, elaborates the theatrical possibilities for theatre voice.¹ In other words, sound itself has theatrical potential beyond its organization into words and recognizable noises.

This sense of working theatrically with the voice, of vocal play, and of entertaining unknown vocal outcomes, will be referred to in this study as the theatrical use of the voice. The theatrical use of the voice points to the use of the actor's voice for the purpose of creating a theatre performance. This use is a mediation of the voice and performance. The theatrical use of the voice implies conscious questions about the style of vocal delivery; about the relationship

¹ A parallel example of this idea of simultaneous sound image and verbal text is found in contemporary sound therapies based on Tibetan and Mongolian "deep voice" chants. Participants are taught overtone singing. This is a form of singing in which two tones are

between voice and the conceptual framework for the production; about the relationship between voice and the form of the text; about the recognition of voice as one of the texts of the multi-textual field of theatre; and about the understanding of voice as the creative action of the actor. The theatrical use of the voice is, thus, the vocal expression of actor agency.

The theatrical use of the voice, as a consequence of the centrality of voice to performance, is dependent on the degree to which questions about the relationship of theatre voice to theatre are consciously raised in the process of working. A series of questions can be posed to illustrate the structural connections suggested by the notion of centrality. The initial question simply asks what vocal image is present in the imagination when speaking about theatre. Is voice one of the frames through which theatre is conceptualised or organized in terms of meaning? What does the voice signify in theatre? How does theatre voice inform the debate of theatre? These are all questions which demand an awareness of our *experience of voice* in theatre. Here the question is directed at voice specialists, actors, directors and members of the audience: what meanings are evoked by *the voice* during performance?

produced simultaneously: a sustained bass note which underscores a developing melodic line (Kornblum, 1999).

2. The Origin of this Study: A Specific Theatre Voice Praxis and a Specific Theatre Voice Tradition

This question of thinking about voice in terms of performance, of stating the idea of creative vocal choice as a conscious part of both the preparation for performance and of performance itself, has been prompted by my experience. I am a teacher in a vocational training programme for student actors. My area of specialization is theatre voice, but further and related contexts are those of a teacher of acting and director of both student and professional productions. The questions raised around the theatrical use of voice are, in my experience, pertinent along a continuum from the student voice class to the professional production. My experience at any point along this continuum is one of contradiction: of observing or participating in extraordinarily creative vocal exploration, the rich exploration of theatrical vocal choices, which then bears little or no resemblance to what is offered for public performance².

This dislocation of rehearsal and performance contexts reflects something of the dislocation of the theatre voice contexts of my own theatre voice experience. Berry's text (1973) is the seminal text of my praxis - a praxis that is essentially interactive with a range of texts on theatre voice, improvisation, acting and various forms of physical work, in particular, the Alexander Technique. The

² Berry articulates a similar experience in relation to character interpretation: "For it seems to me there is so often a gap between the life that is going on imaginatively within the actor in order to create the reality of the character he is playing, and the life that he gives the text which he finally has to speak" (1987: Introduction).

primary theatre voice texts I use are Berry (1973, 1975 and 1987), Linklater (1976 and 1992), Lessac (1997), Grotowski (1986), Little (1987)³, and Rodenburg (1992, 1993 and 1997). As a self-taught theatre voice teacher, I cannot claim the mentorship of a master teacher or the integral links with a long tradition of voice work that access to such a teacher would bring. My praxis is, thus, contextualised more by a South African theatre experience than by identifying with a specific technique or vocal tradition. However, located in the Drama Department of the University of Cape Town (UCT), my work is surrounded by and subtly influenced by a theatre voice tradition stretching back to Elsie Fogerty at The Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art (Central School / Central) in London.

Elsie Fogerty and Sir Frank Benson⁴, both proponents of elocution, founded The Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art in 1906. The students at Central School were “Stage- and Teacher-students” in a two year programme which very quickly developed into a three year programme for the Teacher-students (quoted in Morris 1989:18).

³ Joan Little is a South African voice practitioner, now working in Australia, whose work is based on that of, among others, Berry, Linklater and Lessac.

⁴ Before their collaboration at Central, Frank Benson managed and directed a troupe of actors. He offered student actors the opportunity to travel with the company under an apprenticeship system. The students were tutored by Paul Burton who had trained at the French conservatoire in the French method of elocution (Darnley 1995). Elsie Fogerty trained as an actress under Coquelin in Paris but had to forego her stage career when her father suffered a stroke. She started teaching elocution to support her family. Her early work suggested the same innovative drive with which she shaped the Central tradition as “she was particularly keen to help people understand and speak poetry in the best possible way, ridding the drawing-rooms of London of the old style of reciting” (ibid, 33).

So came into being The Central School of Speech - Training and Dramatic Art...We chose our title to indicate the intention of finding a definite central body of principles for a stage training, avoiding extremes of theory or practice: and we held to our conviction that a proper training in Speech must come first (quoted in Morris 1989:17).

This interest in “a proper training in speech” resulted in a broad understanding of speech work and a wide application of the skills of that training. Fogerty set up the first speech clinic at St.Thomas Hospital in London in 1914. Her own research, into both the theoretical and practical aspects of the physiology of voice production, aided the development of Speech Therapy. Fogerty also worked closely with Daniel Jones, the phonetician who wrote The Pronunciation of English (1909). Thus the theatre, social, educational, medical and scientific applications of contemporary theatre voice practice all found form in the Central tradition.⁵

Cicely Berry taught at The Central School for twenty years and Patsy Rodenburg both trained at Central and later worked with Berry at the Royal Shakespeare Company⁶. In 1926 Rosalie van der Gucht, who shaped the speech and theatre work at UCT, enrolled at Central School under Fogerty. Van der Gucht came to South Africa in 1940 bringing the Central tradition with her. This particular British

⁵ The vocal training which developed out of eighteenth century theatre practice has diversified into various forms of voice teaching, among them speech therapy, professional communication skills, oral education, voice over and microphone technique.

⁶ Cicely Berry has been the Voice Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company since 1969.

influence took root in South Africa because “teachers trained by Fogerty worked in many of the foremost educational institutions” in this country (Morris,26). At UCT, Drama was given Departmental status under Van der Gucht in 1948 and, in 1955, she instituted the Performer’s Diploma in Speech and Drama. The Performer’s Diploma in Speech and Drama is the basis of continued practical vocational training for actors at UCT and the context of my theatre voice work with students.

At the time of my own training, in the mid 1970’s, this theatre voice tradition was no longer in the hands of teachers with direct links to Central or with a “conviction that a proper training in speech must come first” (ibid, 17) but a British ethos was in place. A significant part of this ethos was an unspoken sense that for standards and for confirmation of the authenticity of theatre voice practice, the practitioner should look to Britain.

Although I was not consciously looking towards Britain, Adrian Noble, Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, provided a phrase for me which gave form to my growing sense that theatre voice was subtly becoming more and more peripheral to the activity of theatre.⁷ Noble described actors as “domesticating texts” (Noble 1995, seminar). Noble was commenting on the degree to which television culture has impinged on and diminished the sphere of

⁷ Rodenburg suggests a view of theatre voice as one of the more dispensable aspects of the craft of acting when she claims that “drama departments all over the West are cutting down on essential training techniques like voice - it is one of the most expensive and time-consuming parts of training” (1997,xi).

theatre, particularly in terms of theatre voice. The phrase “domesticating texts” referred to the degree to which actors approach performance through their own domestic vocal register. From the perspective of my own context, this seemed to sum up what actors did on stage in South Africa too, in spite of innovative exploration in rehearsals and a mixture of traditional and non-traditional teaching methodologies. Following Noble, I argue that actors “domesticate” verbal/vocal texts by shaping (and limiting) them to their own particular vocal skills and purposes, rather than elaborating and contextualising these skills to serve the possibilities of the text. Berry’s view of the actor/text relationship supports this when she concurs with Noble’s sense that actors tend to manage texts on their terms rather than trying to meet the terms of the text. Berry suggests this relationship through different images: “we make the language behave”, “and so we put a straight-jacket on the language” (1987: 19 and 25). This tendency among actors forms part of what Barba (Watson 1993) and Pavis (1992) call the “actor’s culture” and will be explored further in chapter one. The western actor’s approach to dramatic action through character motive further subverts the dialogic relationship between the theatrical possibilities for the voice and the text. This results in performances in which degrees of realism, ranging from colloquial to formal speaking, are touted as the full range of vocal choices available to the actor.

The contradiction between the way in which actors work, in my experience, and what is heard in performance points to a view of theatre voice as a means to

experiment in the rehearsal or exploratory phase of theatre but which requires a more formalised but essentially realist style in performance. The theatrical use of the voice thus becomes central to one modality of theatre - actor training or exploration - but not central to theatre's primary modality - performance.

2.i. Theatre Voice Contexts: Theorising and Experiencing

The primary material for both theatre and theatre voice is material which is essentially *experienced*. This is true of both the creative phase (the rehearsal) and of its "finished product" form (performance). Theoretical debates and other writings on theatre and theatre voice cannot substitute for their essential, primary form which is an immediately present, unrepeatable activity. Theory is a reflective undertaking and abstracted from the act of performance. However, these two texts, the performative and written, need to be acknowledged as equally valid sources for the exploration of theatre voice.

The *experience* of theatre voice will become increasingly pertinent in this study because voice as sound can only be experienced (Ong 1967). This experience is the modality in which the theory of theatre voice articulates with its practice, and through which actor and audience collude in interpretation. The questions raised around theatrical choices in theatre voice, necessitate a re-examination of how we interpret text. Here Sandra Kemp's analysis (1996) is pertinent in that it locates interpretation in the act of performance, because this is the only way in

which the creative action of the actor's voice can be experienced. The theatrical use of voice is located in a temporal and spatial interaction between performer and audience and is experienced in the performance.

There is a paucity of critical writings on theatre voice⁸ which in comparison to the solid body of technical works seem to ignore the issue of the theatrical use of voice. However, the location of theatre voice in action, in the experienced space, will be used to support the argument that theatre voice theorising takes place in action and that, consequently, practitioners do theorise positions for theatre voice in terms of theatre. These, occurring in the space of the vocal experience, operate in an oral tradition form. The resultant invisibility of such theories is a further spur to this investigation. In summary, I must of necessity, range between my personal experience of theatre and those written/performed texts which are available for repeated readings.

2.ii. A Personal Perspective on a South African Theatre Voice Context

Language and Accent

⁸ An index search ([Index to Theses with Abstracts Accepted for Higher Degrees by the Universities of Great Britain and Ireland, 1996, 1998 and 1999](#)) and a cd-rom search ([Dissertation Abstracts International, January 1994 - June 1999](#)) for recent theses on theatre voice, offered only two works. One, focusing on the physiological assumptions in vocal instruction has little bearing on this study and, the other, a feminist reading of contemporary theatre voice practice by Sarah Werner, is referred to, in terms of theatre voice and the broader theatre debate, in chapter four. A second search for South African works ([South African Bibliographic Network - SABINET](#), [South African Studies](#) (including ISAP) and the [HSRC Nexus](#) database) offered two works directly connected to theatre voice neither of which is relevant to the focus of this study.

My work context also invites a range of complicating factors. As stated, I teach in a tertiary institution in the Western Cape, the Drama Department of the University of Cape Town, where the studies in theatre and drama have, historically, been eurocentric in emphasis. Practicing theatre voice in South Africa immediately raises questions of the particular political and cultural hegemony not only of languages, but also of particular accents. This is further complicated by the recent political changes and the effects of these on theatre practice. The stated language policy of the teaching institution, UCT to teach in English⁹, does not tackle the issues around identity, empowerment, or cultural expression in a province dominated by a language mix of Afrikaans, Xhosa and English. Nor does it simplify the search for theatrical refinement when a large percentage of the student body (or the professional acting body) is working in a second, third, even fourth, language.

This research does not have the scope to deal with the particular language/vocal configurations emerging from the South African political and social history.¹⁰

⁹ The University Senate, while confirming English as the medium of instruction, recently approved a proposal to foster multi-lingual awareness and multi-lingual proficiency as a secondary objective of the UCT Language Policy. Language Departments and other key players, for example, the Centre for Higher Education Development, are expected to lead the exploration towards achieving such awareness and proficiency (Senate Meeting, 4 August 1999).

¹⁰ The language mix and the multi-lingual nature of South African society is a rich source of theatre research and a point of reference for a range of investigations, including theatrical modes of expression (Fleishman 1997) and cultural identity (Grobler 1997). The May 1990 issue of the *South African Theatre Journal* 4 (1), focused on language and theatre. Banning (1990, 12 - 37) examines the construction of the dramatic reality through language and the possibility of reflecting the shifting ideologies, of South African society in transition, through that construction. Grobler (1990, 38 - 60) examines the creation of character and character relationship through the dramatic use of dialect, sociolect, code- and register-switching.

However, it needs to be said that I practice from a position which welcomes all languages and accents on stage. Theatre as a visual-aural-kinesthetic medium does not explain or make all of its aesthetic choices indisputably clear to its audience. Equally, the language or languages used in a production do not need to be understood by all or any of the audience. The choices around language and accent should ultimately be a reflection of conscious theatrical choices.

The myth of the “neutral accent” shaped my experience of theatre voice which, after the British tradition, was initially aimed at achieving Received Pronunciation (exemplified by the old BBC accent), and then Standard South African English (exemplified by the old SABC English Service radio accent).¹¹ The hegemony of dominant cultures through language is both pertinently and wittily challenged by Jatinda Verma. He proposes that the vocal work of his theatre company, Tara Arts, be described as “Binglish”, a term used to suggest a form of Asian English “characterized by a striving to ‘be English’ “ (1996: 194). Language as a construct of theatre introduces its own set of complexities. Patsy Rodenburg refers to the privileging of accent as a form of “disenfranchisement” (1992: 4) while Edwin Hees notes how Sher and Doran who are both opposed to “vocal imperialism” found that “even the South African actors resisted the idea of using local accents”

¹¹ The notion of a neutral, standardized pronunciation is linked to a vocal aesthetic constructed around the idea of a ‘good’ voice or a ‘beautiful’ voice. The definition of voice as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ framed speech practice earlier in this century. Sneddon states: “Most people would like to speak their home language well...” and “Frequently I am asked, ‘What is the test of good speech?’ “ (Preface: 2).

(1997: 299).¹² This resistance to the use of local accents was echoed by reviewers in the press reviews. Hees reflects Verma's sense of the complexity of meanings around language and accents when he suggests that the issue of accents is one of representation and not one of "how one vocalises one's vowels" (ibid, 302). Furthermore, he declares that

Instead of 'liberating' Shakesperean verse from plummy British accents (which appears to be part of the commendable rationale behind the production), the production seems rather to proceed from the fallacious assumption that a language and its accent somehow 'embody' culture in an absolute, unproblematic and essential way (1997, 302 - 303).

The debate on accents has not yet run its course and the idea of some neutral standard accent or of some neutral stage accent will continue to need challenging. Preferring one accent rather than another may consequently be recognised as an issue of taste.

Theatrical Choices

In my work with students, I have, for close on a decade, advocated a creative use of the voice in recognition of the centrality of the voice to performance. This has been promoted through components such as vocal style (the examination of vocal indicators of style in the texts of various writers), and vocal graphics (the

¹² Woza Shakespeare! "Titus Andronicus" in South Africa is an account of the process and the production of Titus Andronicus by William Shakespeare, directed by Gregory Doran, at The Market Theatre in Johannesburg in 1995. Hees concurred with the critics view of the accents as "contrived, phony and strained" (Hees 1997: 302). Hees' comments are based on his viewing of a filmed version of the production.

exploration of animated voices, sound effects and vocal gesture). This work is supported by a general curricular emphasis on the avant-garde movements in theatre and an exposure to predominantly stylized, non-realist works. However, although the student actor is surrounded by examples of non-realist theatre and the professional actor is more likely, in the South African context, to perform in non-realist works, the tendency for vocal performance to be located in the determinants of realism continues, in my view, to dominate actor culture.

This preference for realism does not characterise contemporary South African theatre trends. South African theatre has over the last two decades generated a range of theatrical responses to the political and social issues. These theatre pieces had little or no use of realism in form and content. The political plays of the 1970/80's relied on caricature or character types, episodic structures, and elements of farce and/or satire to capture the warped reality of South Africa under apartheid. The theatrical genres and styles of these works provided ample scope for theatre voice to diversify its theatrical intent.

Plays such as Born in the RSA by Barney Simon (Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, 1986), which used realism to narrate personal stories, offered an invitation for South African theatre voice to articulate positions and practices around a South African multi-lingual, multi-cultural identity. Bhekizizwe Peterson when summarizing Black performance between 1973 and 1986, describes the use of language as “aesthetically appealing” in the way in which it can, within a single

performance, “shift from indigenous languages to Afrikaans and English or to a mixture of all of them in township slang” (1994: 44). Ian Steadman speaks of language which functions as “utterance not statement” in that the performed language resonates with the community (1994: 28). Such voices on stage represented real communities with real voices. The impetus for these productions was one of opposition to apartheid and, as such, the voices heard on stage were the voices of those who were attempting to articulate the experience of coercion and suppression by the state. Peterson concludes that “Black theatre, in its response to apartheid, attempts to say everything and if a unifying theme can be found it is that of apartheid” (1994: 51).

South African theatre has also generated and authenticated the workshop process of creating theatre pieces.¹³ These are not viewed as inferior to their playwright-generated counterparts, but are perceived as evidence of a particularly South African theatrical creativity.¹⁴ This strong tradition of workshopped theatre, the proliferation of physical theatre pieces¹⁵ and the

¹³ Workshop theatre is a generally accepted term used to describe a process of collaborative theatre making. This process, alternatively described as devised theatre, gained recognition in the early 1970's with the formation of groups such as Robert Mshengu Kavanagh's Workshop '71 (Steadman 1994: 26).

¹⁴ Steadman notes that the early collaborative work succeeded in “creating a type of syncretic performance which drew on many different influences but which were crystallised in the process of rehearsal”; the result of which was a seventies “crop of theatre directors and performers who dedicated their energies to articulating a local identity in rapidly evolving local formal conventions” (1994: 26).

¹⁵ The term physical theatre is used here, quite loosely, to refer to those pieces of theatre which are based more in physicality than in spoken text. They might originate out of dance, mime or theatre contexts, and influenced by those contexts, then lean more towards one kind of theatre or another. Common to all such pieces is the recognition of a new genre of theatre and the desire to name or describe this newness. For example, Lloyd Newson says of his company: “we called

increased presence of theatre based in the physical performance traditions of dance or mime (particularly the Lecoq tradition of mime) is confirmation of a theatrical community that values the collective generation of theatrical material and original contribution.

These aspects of south African theatre provide fertile theatrical ground for raising questions about the theatrical use of the voice but I believe that an exploration of such questions in terms of specific South African texts will also lead to questions about the ways theatre articulates with the politics of government, and the politics of identity as particular to their historical time. Particularly in those instances where works were the product of the South African struggle for liberation, there can be no question of attempting to assert theatrical relevance for theatre voice: the theatre itself provided an oppositional voice for the oppressed.

The divisive policies of apartheid have ensured that theatre voice cannot be referred to in a unified way in South Africa. Theatre voice has developed differently for different South African theatre communities. The current official status of eleven languages in South Africa compounds the difficulties of dealing with theatre voice questions in terms of specific South African texts. The current situation is a result of a particular history which would require a detailed contextualisation of any commentary on what could be considered a South

ourselves DV8 Physical Theatre, not a dance company: because I think 'dance' has many limiting associations" (Tushingham1994: 45).

African theatrical use of the voice. Thus, this exploration must range between continents while anchoring itself in the texts of Cicely Berry, Kristin Linklater and Patsy Rodenburg brought to life in a particular South African practical experience.

3. Evidence of the Theatrical Use of Voice

With these contexts in mind, the notion of the centrality of voice to performance is present in a variety of theatrical uses of voice. The following examples of productions in South Africa and elsewhere, demonstrate that the voice is conceived of creatively. These examples seem to be the result of particular inspired visions. Collectively these productions have not managed to shift a traditional sensibility around theatre voice which locates it in determinants of realism.¹⁶

3.i. Mainstream Theatre

This categorisation of mainstream theatre is strictly a spatial one. The examples of the theatrical use of voice cited below are examples from productions viewed

¹⁶ The suggestion of a general sensibility which locates theatre voice in determinants of realism is based on my experience of professional and student actors in the working process. The actors' need to be or to feel vocally "real" was highlighted in the work of participants in a series of workshops I conducted on experimental theatre (1999). Colleagues at UCT have expressed similar difficulties in relation to acting when working towards highly stylised performances. The notion that theatre voice becomes located in determinants of realism will be explored in chapter two.

in theatres which are mainstream theatre spaces. As such, these productions were accessible to a broader theatre going public. However, in the South African context, such a spatial categorization is merely notional and is based on a predominantly white urban theatre tradition. Thus the notion of a broader theatre going public does not take into account the economic or geographical factors which would determine who constitutes that public. Furthermore, the works themselves, in terms of form and content, would not necessarily be categorised as mainstream theatre.

Language as conscious theatrical choice

The consideration of language as an aesthetic choice as distinct from the desire to represent particular communities through language was evident in Medea (Nico Arena Theatre, Cape Town, 1994), conceived and directed by Mark Fleishman and Jennie Reznik. This production proceeded from the starting point of South Africa as a multi-lingual, multi-cultural society and reflected this position in the language choices of English, West Coast Afrikaans, Xhosa and classical Tamil. The choice of a specific Afrikaans dialect¹⁷ plus the choice of using classical Tamil, which was not likely to be understood by many or any members of a given audience, points to a fresh way of thinking about the use of language on stage. The West Coast dialect was both culturally specific and respectful of the enormous range of dialects which exist in the country. The classical Tamil

¹⁷ The attention to the detail of the dialect contributed a dramatic specificity. In my view, South African accents are often generalised by South African actors, possibly because South African accents are not taught, to my knowledge, in actor training institutions.

probably operated as a sonic aesthetic for the majority of the audience. The aesthetic of the chosen languages was echoed in the use of dance forms from the same cultural spheres. The multi-lingual aspect of this production is not new to South African theatre (cf. Banning 1990 and Grobler 1990), or to South African society, but the choice to place the audience in a position of non-comprehension signalled the use of language as sonic image.

Sonic text as character interpretation

La Bete (Nico Arena Theatre, 1995), in which actor Kurt Wüstmann gave a performance of vocal gymnastics in his interpretation of the beast, was both a seductive and a repellent use of the theatrical use of language for characterisation. Wüstmann drew on a declamatory style of delivery, stretching and manipulating the sonic text to a point of crudity to signal distortions of both art and character.

Sonic text as action

The choice to characterise through sonic text was also used in Elizabeth: Almost by Chance a Woman directed by Christopher Weare (Nico Arena Theatre, Cape Town, 1996). Here the vocal gymnastics of Robyn Scott's performance were a mark of the character's flamboyance and eccentricity with ritualised repetitions of inflection used as a character signature. Furthermore, the manipulation of sonic

text was used as stage action. Dramatic tension was created through stretched sound and silence; potential action literally dependent on the emotional direction of the next sonic phrase. Similarly, repetitive sonic patterns and vocal gesture¹⁸ were used as comic device, for example, the use of clear sonic signals of a build up towards verbal explosion which in the final beat was undercut by a low volume off-hand vocal response while the character's physical response denoted near apoplexy. These vocal devices served the play's genre: satirical farce.

The Unspeakable Story conceived and choreographed by Gary Gordon for First Physical Theatre Company (Little Theatre, Cape Town, 1996) uses text as a kind of transforming action. At selected points in the work, narrated text seamlessly becomes dance as though the two media were both interchangeable and connected.

Sonic text as scenic device

The South African political theatre of the 1980s, as exemplified by Woza Albert (Baxter Concert Hall, Cape Town, 1984), drew on the "poor theatre" ethic inspired by readings of Grotowski and Brook (Mtwana, Ngema, Simon, 1983) and relied on an imaginative partnership between actor and audience to create characters, objects, places and atmospheres out of a handful of basic

¹⁸ Benedetti describes vocal gesture as "a symbolic, but nonverbal, expression of personality and emotion", qualifying it further, as a "means of communication far more universal than language as we understand it" (1970: 69).

transformable props and the suggestive use of body and voice. However, while these productions brought a new set of representative sounds to the stage for White audiences, the sounds remained constructed out of realism because the sounds were chosen to suggest the actual object or personal expressions of emotion in question. These were sounds designating, in quite literal ways, helicopters, trains and taxis as well as the vocal gestures (vocalisation of reflex emotional responses) of the Black community¹⁹. However, the extent of the use of vocal gesture, and the presentation of objects through sound, and the particularly vibrant, energetic quality of the vocal gesture, generated a new sense of the possibilities of the voice as sonic text.

Sonic text as cultural device

Sunjata, written and directed by Mark Fleishman (The British National Student Drama Festival, UK and Little Theatre, Cape Town, 1995), is one of many productions to draw on the cultural elements of South African oral traditions in the use of the aesthetics of the Xhosa praise singer. The aesthetic of the praise singer relies on a guttural sound, which uses the throat in a manner completely opposite to that advocated in traditional voice practice. The appropriation of this cultural form to theatre engenders the possibility of an extended exploration of the aesthetics of the praise singer. However, the literal use of the praise singer

¹⁹ Storyteller and actress, Gcina Mhlophe gives an example of the expressivity of vocal gesture which needs little or no translation: "...there are certain emotions and exclamations that you can drive home easier in Zulu than you can in English. ...terms like 'Nx!' ...That's all...it has such an

keeps the aesthetic located in its own sphere of realism, and is not yet liberated into the sphere of theatre voice.

Sonic text as imaginative possibility

The difficult but theatrically different attempt to abstract sound and language as text has been present in selected works. Andrew Buckland's Feedback (Baxter Theatre Studio, Cape Town, 1995) is representative of Buckland's own distinctive style of physical theatre. It entertains the audience with sonic images that have no realistic correspondence. Clearly, as a theatre creator, Buckland conceptualises in sonic terms. In his work non-realist and non-sonic content, for example, the flying cheeses, are not merely anthropomorphised but gather their own theatrical mythology, part of which is a sonic mythology.

Language, sound and sonic text as production concept

The British production of John Ford's The Broken Heart, directed by Michael Boyd (Swan, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1995), provided examples of a directorial concept which had been conceived in terms of theatre voice and sound. At a

impact combined with the expression I have on my face. So I don't even have to translate that into English" (August 1994: 281).

particular point, Orgilus laments the obstruction to his love for Penthea.²⁰ In the staging of this moment, three spaces were superimposed: Orgilus and Penthea, separately, each in a moment of solitude, and the court where the machinations of those in power have crushed the possibility of their union. The solitary Orgilus was placed in the centre of a circle of courtiers, who with palms pressed together performed a beautiful, stately court dance the rhythm of which was measured only by the sound of the sliding and placing of their soled feet on the wooden floor of the thrust stage. Orgilus sang his lament in a voice that was cracking and hoarse with grief.

These two sound texts were performed against the music of a live ensemble. Music which captured the melancholy and despair of the lovers: a single note held on the violin for many seconds was counterpoint to the sound of small hand rung bells and the delicate cascade of pumice stone through the length of a rainmaker. The final layers to this sound text were defined through silence: the soundless steps of the despairing Penthea as she circled the perimeter of the stage and the caught energy of the audience experiencing the moment on held breath.

²⁰ A programme note sets the scene as follows: "Sparta's warring houses of Thrasus and Crotolon agreed to seal a peace with an arranged marriage between Thrasus' daughter Penthea and Crotolon's son Orgilus. On Thrasus' death, his son Ithocles revoked this agreement, despite its having grown into a love match, and married Penthea secretly to Lord Bassanes instead" (The Broken Heart by John Ford, directed by Michael Boyd, Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon: 1995).

These productions are proffered as examples of how theatre voice, when conceived of as central to performance, opens up its own creative possibilities for theatre. While such vocal innovation is erratic and seemingly arbitrary in the mainstream theatre tradition, the avant-garde theatre²¹ of the twentieth century has produced a dynamic range of theories and practices which have also generated dialogue on theatre voice within those practices.

3.ii. Avant-garde Theatre

Contrary to mainstream theatre practice, the avant-garde theatre has vigorously opposed a theatre based in language, based on traditional theatrical forms subscribing to a linear structure for dialogue and a cause and effect structure for dramatic action. In opposition to mainstream theatre, the theatre of the avant-garde has generated an exploration into all aspects of theatre, amongst them theatre voice. Artaud (1970) proposed a completely new, visceral language for the theatre free of the linguistic and ideological forms of the prevailing linguistic practice. Brecht (Willet:1967) revised the analysis of theatre, generating a political theatre which advocated an objective view of language and how it was used on stage. Grotowski (1968) articulated a vocal practice in which the actor's voice becomes resonant and animated inside a stripped, highly technically skilled body. Boal (1979) developed a theatre in which the theatre medium itself is the

²¹ The writer has used Innes (1993) as a guide to the themes and ideas which characterise the twentieth century avant-garde theatre practice. His text has also provided a source for the manifestos and practices of particular practitioners. Other sources, linked to individual practitioners, are acknowledged in the body of the text.

language and becomes the means of communication for multi-lingual communities which do not share the languages or dialects. The Roy Hart Theatre (Martin 1991:63 - 69) produced a vocal aesthetic completely alien to that which audiences had previously experienced.

These practices offer a range of practical approaches as well as a range of theoretical perspectives on voice and language: on theatre voice. From the perspective of dramatic literature, the new writing of the modern theatre challenged the linguistic frames of language by abandoning logic and the linear cause and effect structure of texts. Nevertheless, the structural innovations of these texts did not precipitate corresponding shifts in theatre voice aesthetics. However, certain innovations such as Caryl Churchill's highly developed use of overlapping dialogue in Top Girls (1982), insist on the redefinition of conventions regarding the presentation of dialogue on stage²², as well as the conventions around what is heard and how audiences listen.

The theatre voice exploration in the avant-garde theatre, apart from that of The Roy Hart Theatre, has always formed only a component of some broader experimental concern; for example, a challenge to the ideological base of theatre

²² Kritzer notes that the modern theatre has "generally mandated that theatre's communicative density...be subordinated to a thematic and stylistic unity of production". This unity "reduce[s] the range of meanings within the boundaries of a single voice" (1991:11-12). One of the ways in which this operates is through the linear structure of the dialogue and the convention of single speakers which enables the audience to hear every bit of the dialogue. Contrary to this, Churchill's dialogue presents the fragmentary, the contradictory, the inconsistent and the simultaneous speaking of characters which offers the audience a multiplicity of voices.

by marginalised groupings, or a redefinition of performance. The voice of this greater cause has been louder than the voice of theatre voice within the cause. The aims of the avant-garde are also essentially oppositional to mainstream theatre and, in this opposition rich, creative vocal practices have remained isolated and exclusive to the particular ideology out of which they originated.

In the light of the above, I wish to address the question of the centrality of the voice to performance in terms of:

- theatre voice in relation to ideas about actor agency
- the articulation of the contemporary voice practice with realist acting methodologies
- the work of Cicely Berry
- questions of interpretation, and observations around the multiple dimensions of voice.

This exploration confirms the creative relationship between theatre voice and theatre as proposed through the notion of the centrality of voice to performance. As such, theatre voice is re-articulated as a creative, imaginative mode of performance based in the acquisition and refinement of technical skills which are transformed through theatrical innovation and conceptual thinking for the theatre.

4. Expansion of Central Concepts

The question, stated earlier, which underpins the notion of the centrality of voice to performance is directed at voice specialists, actors, directors and members of the audience: What meanings does the voice evoke in performance? It is a question arising directly from an understanding of the actor as a theatrical agent and the voice as part of the theatrical agency of the actor. As such it places theatre voice central to performance. The theatrical agency of the actor, theatre voice, the theatrical use of the voice and an understanding of praxis as applied to theatre voice, are explored separately as key concepts for mapping the relationship of theatre voice to the theatre.

4.i. The Theatrical Agency of the Actor

In theatre, directors, actors, designers and choreographers make choices in interpreting material and in developing a style for the production. These are conceptual and performance choices. Theatre is viewed as a creative matrix in which performance choices are made in relation to proxemics, kinesics, sound, lighting, costume and scenography (Martin 1991:Introduction). These choices inform the physical and motive interpretation of character and the realisation of “what the work is about” (Kemp 1996:155). They are an assumed function of a designer, a director, a choreographer and an actor. The notion of the centrality of voice to performance places the actor in a similar position of choice in relation to how she will use her voice in the performance of a dramatic text. Consequently, her voice is open to stylistic, cultural and theatrical transformations. These

choices are part of the actor's theatrical agency. They also require the collaboration of the director and the voice director.

4.ii. Theatre Voice

Theatre voice, in its broadest context, embraces both physical techniques for developing appropriate vocal skills *to support the actor's voice in performance*, and, interpretive processes for both dealing with dramatic text and creating performance. Theatre voice is a process. In the performance context, it is a process shaped over two phases. The first is the rehearsal phase, an exploratory phase, in which the concept for the production is defined and refined. This results in a contiguous conceptual and technical performance plan which is performed, in the second phase, during each performance. When the modality for theatre voice is not a specific performance, for example during actor training, the motive for the work remains connected to performance with the idea of contiguous conceptual and technical practice.

4.iii. The Theatrical Use of the Voice

The theatrical use of the voice requires a deliberate separating of means (the voice of the actor) and function (the performance potential of the actor's voice) to dislodge the perception that the spoken text and the voice are the same text. The distinction being made here, is that the voice, actor sound, is a text in itself; a

sonic text used to represent the dramatic text.²³ The theatrical use of the voice denotes the range of representations or presentations which are possible as sonic text. Speech-act theorists note two uses of the voice; the constative and the performance uses. The constative use lies in conveying the “proposed or asserted...content of an utterance” while the performance use points to how the text may be spoken, for example, ironically or playfully (Connor 1996: 107). The theatrical use of the voice stretches the performance use of the voice beyond the layers of interpretation representing character motive. The use of the actor’s voice for performance, invites choice in terms of the following considerations: language and accent as theatrical choice, style as theatrical choice, the imaginative (non-representative, non-derivative) sonic text as theatrical choice, stage action through voice as theatrical choice and the overall production concept as theatrical choice. Implicit in this range of theatrical choices is always the idea of a vocal use that is not yet known. In summary, the theatrical use of the voice is circumscribed by the range of possible - especially those that are still unknown - expressions, sonic images and imaging that are available to the actor. The theatrical use of the voice is a response to the conceptual thinking that projects theatre into the imaginative and metaphoric realms.

In Ek, Anna van Wyk by Pieter Fourie (Nico Theatre, Cape Town, 1999), director Marthinus Basson offered an example of the conceptual thinking which invites a range of theatrical uses of the voice. The realism of the original play was

²³ The dramatic text is defined in semiotics as a text which is “composed for the theatre” and is distinct from the “theatrical or performance text” (Elam 1980: 3).

retained for the lead character, Anna, while the supporting roles were highly stylised as archetypes, dream figures, cultural stereotypes and symbols of the feminine and masculine principles. This re-casting of the realist support roles created physicalised icons as the terms of a discourse on identity, which also layered the realist identity of Anna. This mix of theatrical styles provided a construct in which theatre could deconstruct itself through the performance of the play. The notion of the centrality of voice to performance proposed in this study extends the conceptualisation for a production to include theatre voice.

4.iv. Praxis

Throughout this study, and with particular reference to chapter four, praxis is used to imply both the theoretical and practical aspects of theatre voice; a distinction of particular importance to theatre voice in that theatre voice practitioners seem to be caught in two modes. The first of these declares the work as non-theoretical, either by intent as with Rodenburg; “My work is never theoretical but always practical” (1997:Introduction), or by implication through the usual construct of theatre voice or voice texts in describing technical exercises. The second mode, is one in which theatre voice practitioners attempt to validate the technical text through a form of scientific empiricism.²⁴ The possibility of perceiving theatre voice as inevitably caught between these two constructs is challenged by an understanding of praxis as theoretically and practically based.

²⁴ Rodenburg notes this tendency towards scientific justification in certain vocal texts which seem “to be terribly clinical and to strain too hard to be like medical texts” (1992:Introduction).

An essay by Kuan-Hsing Chen (1987) examining Hans-Georg Gadamer's appropriation of Aristotelian praxis and its application to traditional hermeneutics, reveals a particularly dynamic relationship between action and the practical and ethical knowledge required to determine the action.

...Aristotle distinguishes three different modes of knowledge: *theoria* (theory), *techne* (technical skill or craftsmanship) and *praxis* (practice). ...*Techne* is the realm of knowledge contingent to the acquisition of skills for the purpose of making tools. *Praxis* is concerned with the knowledge of human beings, specifically human action, which is not universal, but contingent and situational (1987,185).

Praxis is, therefore, not just a repetition of *techne* but rather the application of ethical and moral knowledge to human action as particular to a situation; thus "*Praxis*, practical knowledge, is dialectically constituted by action and *phronesis* (practical reasoning and practical wisdom)" (ibid). The relationship between the practical and the ethical knowledge is one of practical/theoretical dialogue. A relationship between action and a knowledge of human beings is central to teaching theatre voice.²⁵ An examination of knowledge through this relationship by Gadamer finally resolves the oppositional thinking around different kinds of knowledge: the distinction between knowledge and experience no longer makes sense in that praxis (ethical knowledge) is a "subspecies of experience" (quoted in Chen 1987:187). Furthermore, the classical distinction between theory and

²⁵ Robert Barton (1997) supports this idea in an essay, written from a Neuro-Linguistic Programming perspective, outlining adjustments which the voice teacher can make depending on the categorisation of the actor as a visual, auditory or kinesthetic learner.

practice was a “contrast within knowledge, not an opposition between science and its application” (quoted in Chen 1987:187). Finally, Chen states:

What Gadamer suggests here is that if theory can hold at all, it is for the purpose of *praxis*. Theory starts out from discrete human practices and ends with serving the purpose of human *praxis* (1987:187).²⁶

This understanding of praxis is important to theatre voice for it both validates experience as knowledge and it recognizes theory as generated in practice.²⁷

The advocacy of a praxis based on the centrality of voice to performance restructures this basic relationship into one that requires the practitioner to keep three constituent areas in play: the interpretive needs of a specific theatrical intent, knowledge of the actor in terms of her use of voice and the vocal action most appropriate to the latter two areas.

5. Conclusion

In this introduction it is suggested that theatre voice has become a marginalised aspect of the creative matrix of theatre which, in turn, suggests a need to revise theatre practitioners’ understanding of voice as a theatrical and performative medium. While there are performances which signal a theatrical or creative

²⁶ Katherine Verdolini points to a pertinent issue in voice teaching when she remarks that “even as my knowledge of voice physiology increased, my ability to ‘do it’ and to ‘teach it’ was not necessarily improved proportionately” (1997: 65). The ability to “teach it” is predominantly located in the ability to apply the knowledge of human beings to the desired action.

²⁷ Berry, Linklater, Rodenburg and Lessac all locate their work in their experience of working with voices.

approach to theatre voice, they are sporadic and, similar to the innovative practices of the avant-garde theatre, they are the exception rather than the rule. The current theatre voice tradition based particularly in the work of Berry, has become, in my view, too closely aligned with the determinants of realism. These determinants have also redefined the actor's theatrical agency. The theatrical use of the voice and the concept of the centrality of voice to performance theatre is dependent on this agency and on the agency of voice practitioners and directors.

CHAPTER ONE

The Centrality of Voice to Performance: Issues of Agency

The centrality of voice to performance and the consequent theatrical use of the voice, are not simply the result of actor agency but, rather, the result of a particular kind of actor agency. The positing of the notion of the culture of the actor by Barba²⁸ (Watson 1993) and Pavis (1992) provides a useful frame for examining actor agency.

Actors also possess a culture, which is that of their own group and which they acquire especially during the preparatory phase of the *mise en scène*. This process of *inculturation*, conscious or unconscious, makes them assimilate the traditions and (especially corporal, vocal and rhetorical) techniques of the group. Because actors belong to a certain culture, they have convictions and expectations, techniques and habits, which they cannot do without. Actors are thus defined by ‘body techniques’...inscribed by the culture on their bodies, then on performance (Pavis 1992: 9 – 10).

Barba distinguishes between “incultured” behaviour which is absorbed on a daily basis and considered to be normal for the group, and “accultured” behaviour which is “extra-daily”, specific, learned behaviour, for example, the acquisition of specific acting skills (Watson 1993: 37 – 38). The actor’s culture is a combination of both inculturation and acculturation; comprising determinants

²⁸ Eugenio Barba is a director and theatre anthropologist who founded the Odin Teatret in 1964. He and his colleagues at Odin are involved with research into theatre and performance.

which are both conscious and unconscious. The extent to which the actor stores past actor cultural knowledge and also generates future possibilities, is indicative of a “semiotic project of culture” for Pavis (1992: 15) and of “the capacity of adapting to and modifying the environment” for Barba (quoted in Pavis 1992: 16). The actor’s culture is, thus, both dynamic and conservative.

Pavis notes that “the preparatory work of the actors does not simply involve rehearsal or the choice of a theatrical form, but the actor’s entire culture” (ibid,15). The notion of the culture of the actor thus embraces the application or utilisation of “body techniques” as well as the actor’s relationship to those techniques and to the application of those techniques. Actor agency, which was described in the introduction as conscious actor choice in relation to stylistic, cultural and theatrical transformation is also, in respect of Barba and Pavis, actor culture in operation. Vocal agency, a part of actor agency, occurs when similar choices are applied to the voice. Simply put this becomes a question of *how* the actor uses her voice in performance. The actor’s use of the voice is, in turn, directly dependent on how the actor thinks about theatre voice in relation to theatre. It is in respect of this thinking about theatre voice and, the proposed centrality of voice to performance, that the incultured body techniques of the actor need to be interrogated. Such an interrogation requires the actor to articulate her relationship to theatre voice. In the context of the actor’s culture which embodies past actor knowledge and promises future possibilities, one

articulated position invites the question: what other relationships with theatre voice are possible?

1.1. The Actor as “Architect”: An Inclusive Notion of Actor Agency

German director Peter Stein articulates, as a theatre director, the desire for an inclusive relationship with all aspects of theatre. He uses the term “architect” to describe a theatrical agency in which the conceptualisation and the actualisation of theatre are intimately connected (Delgado and Heritage 1996: 253). For Stein, the notion of architect is one which infers a position at the creative centre of theatre; a theatre not yet fragmented into a range of diverse roles and contributing fields. He refers to Shakespeare who “was the director but he was also the author and the owner of the work. He didn’t own the whole thing ...[but] he had many more functions [than the contemporary director], just as Aeschylus had” (ibid,253).

Stein looks to Aeschylus, the ancient classical Greek actor-playwright, “and the total control which Aeschylus apparently was allowed to exercise in his lifetime by being actor, composer, and choreographer” (Walton 1987:26). Aeschylus would presumably have conceptualised the performance of the chorus. Walton suggests that “if the mask offers the first guiding principle to the nature of Greek acting, the chorus provides the second. Choruses were dancers. That is what *choros* means and their instructor was a choreographer (*chorodidaskalos*)”

(Walton 1987:33). Walton claims that “it was the Athenian playwright who made the theatre of Athens the world’s first great stage” (ibid,31); a playwright, as Walton has already suggested, who was immersed in writing, in choreography, in acting and in directing. Any one of these functions would have been informed by the Athenian playwright’s relationship with the others.

This notion of one aspect of theatre being informed by another, which is suggested through Stein’s use of the term architect, is an invitation to recognize that, from within the current division of roles in the theatre, it is possible to operate from a broader perspective; a broader understanding of theatrical agency. A position which suggests a blurring of boundaries around the function of theatre practitioners, particularly where those boundaries imply exclusivity. Such a position is consonant with a contemporary “culture with nearly invisible boundaries separating theatre performance from dance, music, film, television, video, and the various performance art ‘disciplines’ ” (Birringer 1993: 182). Stein’s notion of architect suggests the possibility that the notion of “being informed by” and the notion of “blurred boundaries” can operate quite comfortably in the conceptualising process of theatre even though the actualisation of the performance of the actor might, finally, be more narrowly determined.

The notion of architect applied to the agency of the actor opens up the relationship between the actor’s body techniques and the theatre piece as a

whole. It infers a commitment to the overall design of the theatre work in question; a way of connecting that which is fragmentary. The notion of architect foregrounds conceptual thinking as an essential part of the actor's task and conceptual thinking suggests a breadth of choice. All of this impacts on the culture of the actor. The traditional western actor culture which subscribes to an approach to acting through creating a character denies a breadth of theatrical choice. Character creation, approached via the realist acting methodologies²⁹, implies a specificity at the outset, and not a breadth of choice.

Walton states a belief in the genesis of the actor in the oral, epic poet:

My own belief has long been that the actor was a development of the Homeric bard, always separate from the chorus, whose initial function was to dance the story the actor told (1987:33).

This original storyteller was, for Walton, immersed in speech, music and dance through his relationship with the chorus. He points to the fact that the words survived because they could be recorded, adding that

Western theatre is mainly verbal and years of indoctrination have inclined us to fit Greek tragedy into the mold of its Italian, English, or French successors. It may be that we have been wrong to do so. The classical dramas of China, India, Indonesia, and Japan show in their own specialized ways how the integration of music and movement provide

²⁹ Stanislavsky's system laid the foundation for the realist approach to acting which spawned a range of interpretations outside of Russia. Stanislavsky's system was outlined in detail in his two texts: An Actor Prepares (1937) and Building a Character (1950) The development of Stanislavsky's work in America has become known as Method Acting.

theatre that is not only as rich as the verbal but of as widespread and general appeal (Walton 1987: 33).

Thus the ancient Greek playwright /actor/choreographer/director offers a model of architect that conceives of theatre across a broad range of functions. A similar model is offered by the African, or other oral poet. The notion of architect as designer/composer/performer of the piece is still present in the contemporary oral poet and added to this within the performance, within the actualisation of the work, a tradition of improvisation and innovation adds a further dimension to the notion of architect. Finnegan notes that

...characteristic of oral literature...is the question of improvisation and original composition in general. In other words, something more may be involved in the delivery of an oral piece than the fact of its actualization and re-creation in and through the performance, aided by a technique of delivery that heightens its artistic effectiveness (1976: 7).

Improvisation or innovation is of particular importance to theatre voice.

Improvisation and innovation offer breadth of sonic choice in the actualisation of the word, particularly where the word itself might not be open to the innovation of "original composition", for example, when working with an existing text.

The scope of the artist to improvise or create may vary, but there is almost always some opportunity for 'composition'. It comes out in the exact choice of word and phrase, the stylistic devices like the use of ideophones, asides, or repetitions, the ordering of episodes or verses, new twists to familiar plots or the introduction of completely new ones, improvisation or variation of solo lines even while the chorus remains the same - as well, of course, as all the elaborations and modifications to which the musical aspect is subject (Finnegan 1976:9).

It is in the actualisation of the word that an improvisatory freedom exists for the actor. The extant text will determine both the words and how they are ordered but not how they are actualised. The sonic choices which are possible allow for a more diverse use of the voice than the actor traditionally tends to employ. An example from my work with students points to a non-creative tension between what is considered to be improvisatory or exploratory, and what is considered to be acceptable for performance. In a voice class with senior students (UCT, 1992), a student working with Grotowski's exercises (1975: 152 - 153) on an extract from Euripides' Medea, chose the sound and the energy quality of a butcher's knife as a sonic symbol for the character of Medea. Vocal experimentation with the sounds of cutting, chopping and slicing were then transferred to the text. The students were instructed to make fairly literal transfers of sonic elements to the text, ignoring if necessary, the sense of the text in the attempt to actualise a new vocal quality. The student playing Medea found a synthesis of sound and text which silenced the other students working around her and which drew spontaneous applause at the end of the extract. In the silence which followed, another student said: "You know, you could actually do that in a performance". This statement, while signalling the glimmer of a different possibility for the voice, also signalled more loudly the notion that the actor does not give herself permission and is not given permission in the art form to vocally do more than what is considered normative for performance. In this context, the students assumed that an acceptable or authentic Medea should sound real.

This points to questions that need to be asked in the context of the actor's culture. For the western actor, trained in realist acting methodologies, the question of whether all characters should sound real is one of the most pertinent. It is the exploration of this question that for me can eliminate the gap between the rich innovative vocal exploratory work on the rehearsal floor and the sonic text of the delivery in performance. This relationship between the realist acting methodologies and sonic text will be explored in chapter two.

1.1.i. The Actor as “Architect”: An Altered Relationship with Words and Sounds

The performance traditions of the ancient Greek actor and the African oral epic poet also infer a different relationship with sound and words; a relationship which is particular to the oral nature of their respective communities. Ong offers a description of the place of the word and the voice in an oral culture, which suggests a shift in perspective. Sounds and spoken words are central to an oral culture. They do not need to be argued as central as there is nothing else to contest their centrality in the process of communication.

We are the most abject prisoners of the literate culture in which we have matured. Even with the greatest effort, contemporary man finds it exceedingly difficult, and in many instances quite impossible, to sense what the spoken word actually is. He feels it as a modification of something which normally is or ought to be written (Ong 1967:19).

Ong elaborates the contemporary difficulty in understanding oral culture with an example of how we tend to think of oral cultures in terms of a relationship to script, which, is “the equivalent of working out the biology of a horse in terms of what goes on in an automobile factory”. He then uses this analogy to illustrate how the identity of oral cultures, defined in terms of literate cultures, is similar to referring to “a horse never as a horse but always as a four-legged automobile without wheels” (ibid, 21). The importance of Ong’s attempt to shift the reader’s sensibility rests in the assertion that it is possible to relate to words and sounds in their immediacy with as much effect as when relating to them through the modification of print.

Ong claims that

it is common-place that early man, strongly if by no means exclusively oral-aural, experiences words - which for him typically are spoken words as powerful, effective, of a piece with other actuality far more than later visualist man is likely to do. A word is a real happening, indeed a happening par excellence (ibid, 111).

When the idea of sound and words as actual events surrounds the understanding of language, then the potential for spontaneous, improvised performance becomes less arbitrary and open-ended than that which might evidence on the rehearsal room floor in a general creative exploration of a text. Ong’s statement that the “voice is not inhabited by presence as by something added: it simply conveys presence as nothing else does” suggests the potency of a vocal actor

agency which embraces the function of improvisation or original composition as part of the actor's culture (1967: 114).

The origin of both the practice and the function of the western theatre voice tradition lies in the active art of classical rhetoric. Classical rhetoric comprised five major parts, described by Martin as a process in which

...after analysing his subject and organizing his argument (*inventio*), then arranging it according to certain principles (*dispositio*), the speaker was then required to find a suitable verbal form (*elocutio*) as well as commit it to memory (*memoria*). Finally he was to present it to an audience so that it had maximum effect (*actio/pronunciato*) (1991: 1).

All five aspects were ultimately oral activity, as was the overall function of rhetoric. According to Aristotle, the function of rhetoric was “to win belief in the hearer”; a task dependent on the projection of suitable “passion” (quoted in Martin 1991:2). Here then, is the construct of the theatrical agency of the classical actor. The actor is required to analyse, organize, find the appropriate means, memorise/rehearse and perform with intention. It is the construct for the creation of a performance based on the relationship between vocal text, vocal context and vocal intention. There is no division in this model between the concepts of theatre, theatre voice and actor agency.

1.2. The Director: A New Theatrical Agency

Stein notes the “division of the [theatre] cake” into “author, actor, stage designer, architect, director, dramaturg and choreographer” (Delgado and Heritage 1996:

253). This proliferation of jobs was, in effect, an historical decentring of the theatrical agency or the creative decision making in the theatre. The emergence of the director in the mid nineteenth century, as the new overall architect, was clearly necessary in a theatre not only diversifying in terms of roles but also in terms of form, content and convention. The director's role is arguably the choicest role in theatre. In an essentially collaborative art form, the director holds the key to the creative power of theatre because the director ultimately determines the theatrical concept. Though the full weight of responsibility for a production falls on the director, all the magic of theatre is the director's reward. Although structurally dependent on institutions and artistically dependent on finance, the director's universe is, creatively, a utopian state. Canadian director, Robert Lepage, describes directing as "putting the audience in contact with the gods".³⁰ This image conveys a sense of the activity of the director, which deals with layers of meaning which ultimately reach into the metaphoric space. Lepage expresses the function of theatre as that of answering the desire, for actor and audience "to go up Mount Olympus" and of wanting to see the "transfiguration of man" (Delgado and Heritage 1996: 143-144). Delgado and Heritage describe the director, most aptly, as the 'most visible and invisible of artists' (ibid, Introduction).

The director in synthesizing the elements of production and orchestrating the action has effectively replaced the embryonic actor glimpsed in the ancient

³⁰ Lepage is a Canadian actor-writer-designer-director whose work challenges the primacy of the written word and the use of conventional structures for theatre. His theatre company Ex Machina

rhetorician. Manfull points out that the work of directors is “varied and disparate” and because the role of director is a modern concept “we know less about the director’s work than that of other artists” (1999: xv-xvi). However, a traditional approach to directing invests a large portion of the creative decision making in the role of the director. The director decides what to do by either choosing or creating a text. The director decides how that text will be organized by conceptualising the production concept. And finally, the director decides how that text will be spoken by choosing the theatrical conventions through which to realise the concept. Whether traditionally conceived of or not, the activities of the director interact with and are dynamically connected to the actor’s culture. The theatrical agency, including vocal agency, of the actor is overtly or subtly influenced through the actor-director relationship.

1.2.i. Director - Actor: A Co-dependent Theatrical Agency

The director’s sphere of creative planning might be utopian but the choices made are ultimately dependent on the fragile set of relations which determine performance. Performance comprises both action (the doing) and enactment (playing out, impersonating) (Connor 1996: 108). A hypothetical separation of these two aspects reveals the complex power/authorial relationships between actors and directors. Action, understood as the technical skill or ability of the actor to do the action required, places the actor in complete control of what can or cannot happen on stage. Enactment, what the action does (how it makes

meaning), is subject not only to the actor's ability but also to the director's theatrical concept. The range of performance techniques and visual and spatial arts which are combined to create a theatre piece enable the director, if necessary, to influence enactment over and above the ability/skill of the actor to act. However, a director is always dependent on the actor's investment in the theatrical concept. The actor contributes to the realisation of both action and enactment and in performance bears the full responsibility of both aspects. But the director through conceptualising the performance is the author of enactment which will, in turn, determine the action. In this fragile set of dependencies, the director's control of concept is, theoretically, the controlling force of the whole performance.

This set of dependencies between actor and director, in which the relationship between act and enactment is created, is, in theatre voice terms, the exploration of the theatrical use of the voice. It is a synergistic theatrical agency between director and actor, which holds theatre voice central to performance along with choreography and various design elements. It is the exploration of the voice as text and intertext. This conceptualisation process, which is the ongoing process of both rehearsal and performance, *is also a process of theatre debate.*

Theatre debate locates, firstly, in the production in hand and, secondly, in theatre in general. Here actors and directors and other contributors - voice practitioners - work towards a mutual understanding of theorised positions. There is a point in

this process where the actor, the director and the voice director (or practitioner) share a job; an interpretive job. They do not eclipse each other or swap functions; they are equal partners who approach a single task from different perspectives.

Andrew Wade, head of the Voice Department at the RSC, comments on the function of theatre voice practitioners, suggesting that this shared function is neither acknowledged nor understood: "Berry [is]...no *longer just opening the voice out*...but trying to find a way, with the director, for actors to connect with words" and "the more I look at my role in theatre, the more I find that, in order to defend our cause, we have to earn our role" (1997: 135 and 140, my emphasis). This suggests that the agency of voice practitioners seems to be overlooked. Equally, the actor who is guided through "enactment" solely by the director and not through dialogue with the director, is an actor who settles for minimal theatrical agency. Thus the extent to which the actor-director relationship of co-dependency can operate as one of collaborating architects is dependent on the notion of theatrical agency shaped by the actor's culture. This notion refers back to the actor's and the director's relationship with theatre voice and the theatre voice practitioner. It suggests that a director culture sympathetic to the notion of the centrality of voice to performance is necessary for actors to be free to use their voices theatrically.

1.2.ii. The Director: A New Authorial Voice

The proliferation of theatrical forms, methodologies and techniques which constitute the richness of theatre in the twentieth century have been generated largely by directors, specifically by the directors of the avant-garde. In the first half of the century, avant-garde manifestos generated praxes, for example, Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*, which influenced the work of, among others, Grotowski and Brook. These innovations were conceived *out of the practice of* and *for the practice of* theatre, resulting in the beginnings of practical explorations (Artaud: 1970) or bodies of work which could be theoretically and/or practically disseminated (Grotowski: 1986).

These explorations were politically motivated in their challenge to the dominant theatre culture and through these activities, directors also became the authors of new practices; the spokespeople for new forms and for new ideologies. The director became, in part, the generative source of new creativity in theatre. In this way directors have become central to the whole sphere of theatre as well as central to specific works. This creates a greater urgency for a theatre voice dialogue to be heard as part of the broader discourse of theatre.

Avant-garde vocal practices, as outlined in the introduction, have been both dynamic and prolific. However, the avant-garde is radically political, and definitively opposed to what is traditional or mainstream, and therefore a transference of work from one kind of theatre to the other is by definition

potentially not possible. Interestingly, the binary opposition of these definitions does not seem to impede the movement of directors between the mainstream and avant-garde or vice versa. Peter Brook started in the mainstream and moved to the avant-garde. According to Birringer, Robert Wilson's work, in being commissioned for the opening of the 1984 Olympics, becomes a mainstreaming of the avant-garde (1993: 184).

Much of the avant-garde theatre work of the late twentieth century seems to be located in the sensibilities of individual personalities, like that of directors Robert Wilson or Ariane Mnouchkine³¹, rather than in the exploring of manifestos or the practical research of earlier avant-garde groups. The identity of the director is thus located in an individual way, beyond the divisions of mainstream and avant-garde.

The director has in this mobility and through production, an extraordinary potency as a voice in the dialogue of theatre. The question, then, of how directors think about theatre voice is crucial.

The director's theatrical response to theatre voice is pertinent to both actors and audience. The emergence of the director as a function of the modernisation of theatre overlapped the modernist crisis in authorship; a loss of belief in the notion

³¹ Robert Wilson is an American actor-director-designer who has created a particular idiosyncratic style of work through his focus on image and the pictorial composition of theatre. French director Ariane Mnouchkine, is a co-founder and director of the Théâtre du Soleil; a

of an authoritative voice.³² Yet in the theatre, the director emerged as an uncontested, necessary, new authority. The function of the director in conceptualising, in working with the themes of a play is the function of mediating meaning for an audience. The director, a mediator between the different components of the theatre, is also a mediator between the artistic product and the audience: between art and society.

Directorial impulses and directorial cultures are often quite diverse. This points to the potency of debate at the level of directorial action and production. As example, a very different discourse of theatre is evident in the work of Robert Lepage. Lepage uses the universe of theatre to challenge its own construct of the director/theatre relationship. The collective workings of his company, Ex Machina, challenge the director/actor hierarchy through an inversion of the traditional process of theatre, which starts with the script and moves to performance. For Lepage, the performance is the writing and the improvisational nature of rehearsal is concerned with the structuring that will enable that writing to happen. In this construct actor agency is primary. It is also a much broader theatrical actor agency. It is an agency of actor as architect.

Lepage is after the notion of “playing” in the theatre, a notion which he says has been “evacuated in this century” (Delgado & Heritage 1996: 134). In this

company well known for productions which explore the politics and form of theatrical representation.

³² Josipovici (1977) explores the modernist crisis in authorship as a radical shift in world view in which one set of beliefs was substituted for another.

process, Lepage sees himself as a conductor rather than an author or a director, and relies on an homogeneous style to develop in the work through the process. Here the director is not steering the work in line with some stylistic or conceptual intent. The group works with the sense of the work being larger than they are and the work thus being able to determine itself. However, some form of the determining function of the director as external eye is still present, but now it is present during the performance phase. Lepage describes it as follows:

As an observer I can start to see it [the subject matter] move, so when we go through the shows I try to tell them [the actors] where they should look or what they should be attentive to, in order to understand who and what the show is (ibid, 141).

The director is ultimately master of directing. The authoritative influence which the director has on theatre in terms of specific productions as well as on the development of theatre through emergent praxes, is an indicator of the strong theoretical and practical critique of theatre which exists in oral tradition forms, as a practical dialogue in the rehearsal rooms and performance spaces of theatre. There are no records, notes or publications of the extent to which theatre or individual practices evolve in these spaces.³³ These are also the spaces in which, quite literally, a mass of ideas is generated. The ideas are sifted and shaped according to the directorial vision or the collective intent of the group. This is the space where ideas are translated into concept. In this dialogue, in

³³ It is not a general practice in western theatre to publish records of the theatre work processes of specific productions and thus works such as Peter Brook. A Theatrical Casebook compiled by David Williams or Antony Sher's The Year of the King are valuable in offering the reader some understanding of the processes involved.

which the director takes responsibility for holding the overall intent in mind, it becomes easy to transfer the power of spokesperson for all aspects of theatre to the director.

The transference of power to the director as theatre spokesperson seems highly desirable in the light of the creative power and mobility of the director. But the contemporary director as a spokesperson for theatre voice, apart from those who have generated their own practices, seems to be entirely cut off from any theorising around theatre voice. As an example, I refer again to Stein's comment on the division of roles in the theatre. His list of theatre jobs does not include a voice director or coach, but Stein concludes with the following comment: "nowadays you even need somebody to teach you to breathe" (Delgado & Heritage 1996: 253). There is clearly a lack of theatre voice dialogue in a broader debate of theatre and the function of theatre voice in performance seems largely invisible as a theatrically conceptualised function. These apparent gaps also signal a lack of actor agency in respect of the theatrical use of the voice and a broader theatre voice discourse.

Jacqueline Martin in an exploration of directorial visions notes that "one element has nevertheless been common to all of them [directors] - a re-evaluation of the Word" (1991: 82). The "Word" refers to language which is / becomes theatrical text and is reviewed by Martin in terms of a contemporary directorial response to Shakespearean text. This centres on the interpretation of text. Martin thus

pinpoints the area of potential theatre voice debate because it is in the interpretive area, that the work of the actor and the director overlap. This is also the area of overlap with the work of the voice director. An overlap which could constitute the space of theatre dialogue.

1.3. Theatrical Agency and Theatre Voice Practitioners

Dialogue between directors and theatre voice practitioners can be promoted and supported through the actor's culture and the theatrical agency of the actor. The theatre voice practitioner and theatre voice practice are directly linked to the actor's culture in respect of theatre voice. The actor's incultured and accultured theatre voice behaviour and knowledge originates, for most western actors, in the actor training phase. Thereafter, this aspect of the actor's culture will continue to be shaped and influenced through interaction with directors, other actors and voice practitioners who operate in the profession.³⁴ Pavis' sense of actor culture as a "semiotic project" (1992: 15) and Barba's sense of actor culture as "adapting to and modifying the environment" (1993: 16) are both notions which view the actor's culture as dynamic. A dynamic theatre voice culture is, thus, dependent on how the theatre voice practice interacts with actor's culture and with theatre.

³⁴ It is quite rare, in the South African theatre context, to have a theatre voice practitioner or director working on a professional production. The most common form of specialized voice work on production is that of accent coaching. There are a number of directors whose experience includes theatre voice teaching and through this experience voice is an area of the production that would receive their attention. However, for the writer, the effect and reach of this attention, remains questionable when rehearsal periods are short (3 - 4 weeks) and the dominant actor culture, in respect of theatre voice, does not extend to a theatrical use of the voice.

The proposal of this study of the centrality of voice to theatre is dependent on the audibility of theatre voice and theatre voice practitioners in the broader debates of theatre.³⁵ The theatrical use of the voice is always, in essence, a project of possibilities in that it assumes unknown outcomes and the possibility of being surprised by something which is sonically new. The theatre voice practitioner becomes dynamically active in the development of actor culture when she is theoretically and practically linked to theatre voice which is training- centred and to theatre voice which is performance-centred.

The existence of a dynamic, revolutionary contemporary theatre voice practice is not in dispute. Theatre voice shifted from a declamatory style of speaking, determined by the rules of classical vocal conventions, to a practice based on a “natural sound” which recognizes the human voice as organically and individually rich and expressive. Contemporary theatre voice practitioners, Berry (1973, 1975 and 1987), Linklater (1976 and 1992), Lessac (1997 and 1978) and Rodenburg (1992, 1993 and 1997), have built on earlier traditions, developing techniques and practices which have continued the development of theatre voice in terms of its links with acting theory and theatre practice, communication skills and educational theory, as well as scientific and/or medical experimentation.

³⁵ The American publication The Vocal Vision (1997) is a refreshing collection of writings on theatre voice which, though it tends to keep the issues raised located within theatre voice practice, may yet precipitate the desired broader debate. A further suggestion of the possibilities for theatre voice debate, came through Sarah Werner’s feminist analysis of contemporary voice practice in the New Theatre Quarterly (1997).

Commentary from voice practitioners, from within the theatre voice practice, demonstrates that the central concerns of the theatre voice practice have been consonant with the general theatre concerns of actors and directors. Linklater articulates the struggle to balance contemporary notions of authentic performance, monitored through the degree of emotional commitment on the part of the actor, with an increased need for technical skill to embrace the needs of a hugely diversified contemporary theatre. On the one hand, the natural voice is the voice of actors who, “if they are earning a proper living through acting, play twentieth-century characters for most of their career” (Linklater 1992: 3). On the other hand, the texts of Berry (1987), Linklater (1992) and Rodenburg (1993) which are directly concerned with the actor’s work on text, specifically classical text, focus on balancing a natural voice with the demands of the classical text. Contemporary actors are increasingly products of societies informed through byte size text and iconic image. One strand of theatre, the classical theatre, requires these actors to live in a literary world overwhelmed by words, another, the more physical-visual based theatre, requires no voice at all, while the media of film and television require the personal non-theatrical voice of the actor.

The emergent sense of a theatrical agency in respect of theatre voice points to a theatre voice practice actively connected to issues of theatre and theatre voice but effective only within its own isolated sphere of theatre voice. Added to this is an actor culture which seeks to “detheatricalise” the voice for the realist demands

of film and television performance and of character creation for stage. An attempt to assess the impact of theatre voice in the public sphere of theatre reflects an inchoate contemporary theatre voice identity with actors, directors and critics largely silent. Appendix A offers a table of comments, literally fragments sifted from a wide range of works in an attempt to piece together a picture of how theatre voice is perceived outside of its practice.

1.4. Conclusion

To sum up: the current role of theatre voice in theatre, is that of a “service skill”. The most uncontested position for theatre voice is in the actor training schools, probably because, as Wade points out, “many a drama school in England was founded or run by qualified voice and speech people who also directed³⁶...only relatively recently have the majority of our training establishments been headed by directing/acting oriented people” (1997: 139). In England the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre have Voice Departments but Wade states that the “ethical foundations” of the RSC Voice Department’s present work as consists “first and foremost in serving the needs of both the actors and directors” (ibid, 137).

The most potent theatrical agency is that of directors and actors. The director-actor interaction will be influenced by actor and director cultures. Any notion of

³⁶ As indicated in the introduction, the UCT Drama Department was also founded by a speech and voice teacher.

theatre voice as central to theatre or of a theatrical use of the voice is dependent on how theatre voice is perceived in both the director-actor dialogue and the director-actor culture with the support of the theatre voice practice and its practitioners. Wade's reflection, as a theatre voice practitioner involved in professional theatre, that "in order to defend our cause, we have to earn our role" (1997:140) is, perhaps, best answered by understanding the implications of his colleague Cicely Berry's statement that "every piece of text we speak on a stage is heightened - it is performed - and we have to find its particular voice and place that particular language" (1987: 10).

CHAPTER TWO

THEATRE VOICE: POETICS, REALISM AND POST REALISM

I have asserted that determinants of realism underpin the vocal work in western English speaking theatre which constitutes the parameters of the epistemology of theatre voice investigated here. Stylistically speaking, the realist use of the voice is a theatrical use in contemporary theatre practice. However, the extent to which the realist use of the voice becomes an assumed vocal presence for the actor, points to a theatre voice practice which is oblivious to its own expressive capability in the medium of theatre and therefore omits a range of theatrical uses of the voice.

The emergence of naturalism³⁷ marks a separation of a classical theatre voice practice, characterized by vocal artifice, from a modern theatre voice practice characterized by a *natural* sound. This natural sound was a logical and creative counterpart to the realist acting methods³⁸ which resulted in character conceived of as personality. It is in this conception of character that the notion of *self* becomes important for the actor. The degree to which the natural voice became

³⁷ Styan notes that naturalism and realism were, in effect, two historical movements which differed slightly philosophically (1995). In this study the terms are used interchangeably to reflect a theatre style representative of real life. This choice accommodates both the works which refer to the acting methodology of Stanislavsky as realist and the voice texts which refer to the natural voice.

embodied, for theatre voice, in notions of the self, determines a vocal realism as the prevailing aesthetic of theatre voice. And, where this vocal realism is no more than a reflection of the extended everyday use of the voice, theatre voice, in my view, slips out of the discourse of theatre. This tendency, described in terms of a *poetics of the self*, refers back to Aristotle.

2.1. Poetics

Aristotle's third and fourth properties of tragedy are "thought" and "diction". "Thought" refers to the way in which the content of the speeches is organized and he notes how "the older dramatic poets made their characters talk like statesmen, whereas those of today make them talk like rhetoricians" (cf. the five major parts of rhetoric). "Diction", the "expressive use of words", is a property of tragedy which refers back to the *elocutio* (the choice of a suitable verbal form) of the art of the rhetorician. Thus vocally, the actor was guided by the principles of rhetoric (Aristotle, Horace, Longius 1972: 40-41).

According to Aristotle, the function of rhetoric was "to win belief in the hearer"; a task dependent on the projection of suitable "passions". Aristotle further advises that the speaker strive for a harmony of text, orchestration of voice and rhythm in order to "lift out...content and character" (quoted in Martin 1991: 2). For the classical actor, "passion" and "winning belief" would have been realised through

³⁸ Contemporary theatre voice notions of releasing and working with an organic sound are consonant with Stanislavsky's exploration of the unconscious, and the intuitive, to inform the craft

the application of prescribed vocal conventions. However, the classical actor's experimentation with *elocutio* manifested in the "use [of] an ornate style in order to reveal personality to the listener" (Martin 1991: 2). This desire of the performer to be present in performance as *himself* gains strength with an emerging focus on the individual. The idea of the individual, the idea of self, became, both, the source of "passion" and the means for "winning belief".

After the Renaissance the individual thinker gains prominence as

artists and then philosophers and critics shifted from an emphasis on the person as a type repeating a universal social order to the person as an independent individual bound into society by his or her physical, mental and emotional abilities and a kind of contract (Townsend 1997: 79).

Townsend points out that "the expression of the thoughts and feelings of the individual takes on new importance", particularly as the psychology of the mind had changed from the classical and medieval idea of "the mind itself being...a reflection of a greater intellect...[to] the mind...as a bundle or collection of ideas provided by experience and held together by natural and acquired associations" (ibid, 79).

Character conceived of as an individual, as a personality, is a determinant of realist theatre and is reflected through sub-textual layering. This is a layering which effectively, elaborated the scope of Aristotle's "passions" and the "expressive use of words", through Townsend's "collection of ideas provided by

of acting (Magarshack 1960).

experience”, which was dependent on the actor’s “natural and acquired associations” (Ibid, 79). The actor not only drew on his personality for performance but now needed to consult his own experience of life. As psychology became more and more part of the human frame of reference, the issue of “winning belief” became less centred in the frame of idea and more centred in the expression of feeling and in the recognition of self.

The influence of realist acting methodologies transformed characterisation. It would be impossible for the contemporary actor to return to pre-Freudian concepts of character. Even at the level of the action of the drama, it is realist characterisation which influences the actor’s impulse. The understanding of action has become an understanding of the psychological motive of character; an understanding which, in turn, inscribes a psychological or personal perspective on the entire content of the play. Thus Aristotle’s balance of text, voice and rhythm to “lift out...content and character” (quoted in Martin 1991:2) is accommodated entirely through the actor formula of approaching the text via character, situation and motive. This approach to acting has not only served realism well but has also transferred, quite easily, to non-realist pieces of theatre. It is the insertion of person-character into the structure of the actor’s agency which has, in my view, inscribed the natural voice with a vocal realism.

2.2. Realism: A Theatre Voice “Poetics of the Self”

In this *poetics of self* the self of the actor becomes both the referential source and the validating means of vocal expression. The emergence of the director as the new theatrical agent has already been charted in terms of a diminished actor agency in the process of creating a piece of theatre. However, parallel to the rise of the director is the emergence of Stanislavsky's methods which empowered actors in an unprecedented way. This empowerment lay in the way that Stanislavsky addressed the classical actor's creative frustration. His system gave actors autonomy over their own art form in its focus on the *how to* of acting. Stanislavsky recognised that directors always tell actors what *not to do* but cannot tell them *how to do* what is required (Magarshack 1960: 11).

2.2.i. The Notion of Self

Access to the craft of acting had previously existed predominantly in the observation of performance supported by a loose collection of texts delineating vocal performance conventions. Stanislavsky's work freed actors of the confirming mode of imitation. Although Stanislavsky's system also relies on observation and simulation, this observation and simulation becomes an act of creative interpretation, an act of theatrical agency, in serving the creation of a realist fictive psyche.

Realist characterisation has become an interpretive puzzle for the actor in a way that the character types of non-realist texts cannot become. This approach offers the depth, the intrigue and excitement of revealing both the human conscious and unconscious intent. The actor's being becomes the source of creativity because the actor needs to rely on parallel personal experience to that of the character, on the observation of humanity and on her own ability to construct that observation into coherent, human patterns of meaning. The actor refers to self in a way which is unique. Self validates both the art form and the person of the actor.

Performance, drawing essentially on the self of the actor and manifesting as the enactment of the emotional life of a character, was consonant with aesthetic theories of expression in which "along with ideas go feelings, regarded either as ideas themselves or as the qualitative accompaniment of ideas" (Townsend 1997: 80). In performance, the actor's experience of character emotion as "qualitative accompaniment" to ideas about the character, becomes the determining factor for good performance. The experience of appropriate emotional enactment becomes the actor's means of evaluating performance. Actor agency is thus elaborated on two levels through Stanislavsky's system. In the preparation for performance, the actor can abstract her craft, via the Stanislavsky system, and prepare on technical and logical levels as well as on levels of enactment. In performance, expression of character is subjectively-

objectively validated: through emotional enactment, the actor can rely on herself to evaluate performance within the objective frame of the dramatic text.

The verisimilitude suggested by the notion of the natural voice confirms this relationship to self in the creative processes of crafting a performance. Firstly, actor intention relocates from the production intention to the character intention, as shaped by the dramatic text. The dramatic text offers the actor a character that she can *know* via her own experience; something she can voice herself. The dramatic text itself will then reorganize the actor's experience into something independent of the actor's life, giving the illusion of entering another world, the world of the character or author. Context is taken care of by the dramatic text and by the actor's ability to win belief. Finally, the actor wins belief because she sounds like the audience (or like someone they know) and the more real her expression of thought and feeling the more the audience suspends its disbelief.³⁹

This relationship to performance is very different to that of the classical actor⁴⁰ whose craft was stylised or abstracted through the prevailing conventions of presentational performance. Darnley gives the following example of vocal performance from Rupert Garry's Voice Speech and Gesture written in 1880.

Darnley writes that the actor was required to "reproduce[s] a pattern, a

³⁹ Berry notes how both actors and audience, influenced by television and film expect a naturalness of speech; "the more 'everyday' it sounds the better" (Martin 1991: xvii).

⁴⁰ This comparison is strictly confined to the development of the craft of acting in western theatre and has no bearing on those theatre traditions, for example Eastern and African, which eschew a

choreographed recitation of the lines [with] such considerations as character and interpretation ...not allowed for”:

THE CURSE FROM 'CLAUDIEN'

Be young - for ever - through the centuries. See generations born - and age - and DIE; and all who flattered served or loved thee - dust.

1 Raise right hand, palm up, half front, emphasise gesture at 'for ever', and drop. 2 Extend both hands, palm up, about level of breast; at 'age', emphasise gesture; at 'die' drop. 3 Extend right hand, palm up; at 'served', emphasise; at 'loved', bring hand back to breast; at 'dust', direct arm downwards, pointing to ground (1995: 18).

The actor in this performance experiences the emotional aspect of performance within the stylisation of the performance and not in any way dislocated from such stylisation. For the contemporary actor, abstraction or stylisation can appear to be dialectically and philosophically opposite to acting emotionally validated via the notion of character as real. Abstraction here refers to the creation of character based on the essence of that character, the obsessive lover or the revengeful hero, rather than on an individualistic motive and emotive life for that character.

To abstract is to remove, separate from, condense, distill the essence of. Art isolates and refines such essences from life. There is no intention to copy external reality....abstraction is not a device...it is a philosophical construct of a process (Blom and Chaplin 1982: 125).

natural delivery, demand a rigorous formal training and a consequent physical and vocal stylisation.

There can be no question of the potency of the actor's agency in the realist approach to craft, but it is an agency in which the question of a broader understanding of the theatricality of the voice has been cut loose.

Conceptualisation, the development of a theatrical concept or the how to of performance, is the level of abstraction; the level of greater theatrical agency which the actor still needs to consciously engage. The theatrical agency in relation to character is only a part of this greater theatrical agency. For the contemporary actor the two have become conflated. For Stanislavsky, the one clearly served the other.⁴¹

In this shift of convention from the vocal presentation of the nineteenth century to vocal representation, theatre voice subscribes to a believability paradigm of acting connected to self. Psychological realism has become the meta-narrative for actors. It is the degree to which the self is used to validate interpretation which leads to assessments of theatre voice as "domestic" (cf. Noble's assessment of theatre voice). The presence of the actor's vocal self becomes a limitation when it determines an actor-personal frame of reference rather than a character-personal frame of reference. The actor-personal frame denies character its interpretive viability as part of the dramatic text viz., that with each successive production, the characters become a function of a new conceptualisation: the metaphor for the production.

⁴¹ Stanislavsky speaks of the purpose of performance as "provid[ing] a scenic embodiment of the playwright's ruling idea". Magarshack states that "everything in Stanislavsky's 'system' exists for the sake of through-action and the ruling idea" (Magarshack: 70-71).

The idea of the artist as an independent thinker introduced a theory of expression which was oppositional to the theory of imitation or mimesis, the notion that art imitates life. While an imitation theory starts with an object, “expression theories start with the mind” and are based on the relationship “of one mind to another” (Townsend 1997: 79). Theatre voice anchored in a mainstream theatre culture of realist acting and espousing the concept of the natural voice subscribes to both imitation and expression theories. However, where vocal interpretation is not understood as theatrical mediation the artistic theories of imitation⁴² and expression are conflated and reduced to producing copies. “A copy can be regarded as a minimal case of imitation...from one copy to the next, all that matters is the preservation of information” (Townsend 1997: 69). A copy that does nothing more than preserve information is not art.

Berry takes issue with the notion of copy time and again: “we tend to hold onto the sound which feels familiar...we tend to limit ourselves to what we know” (1987: 16) and “we are so afraid of not making sense, we end up only making sense - literal sense - and so we put a strait-jacket on the language” (ibid, 25). At the level of “winning belief” it is the sound of the actor’s self, the actor’s everyday voice, that is considered most effective. The actor evaluates her performance at the emotional level, through reference to the self . The same

⁴² Townsend points out that although artists from classical Greece through the eighteenth century took it “for granted that art was essentially imitative”, complex theories on how and what meaning was made through imitation defined art as much more than “just copying something” (1997: 68).

authentication is extended to text: character leans towards the real; the verbal text also leans towards real language and thus the logic of everyday speech underpins all text, even those which are illogical.

2.2.ii. The Discursive Rationality of Theatre

Through the interpretation of the natural voice as everyday speech, the discursive context of theatre voice has become, for actor and audience alike, a socially and personally determined context. Habermas' theory of "communicative rationality" will be used, in conjunction with his definition of ideology, as a way of understanding how the interpretation of the realistic acting method, as an appropriation of the everyday voice, has subverted our relationship to language as language in and for theatre (Eagleton 1994: 203). A secondary impact is the difficulty of abstracting voice and/or language as *text* when acting is framed by the realist determinants of motive and believability.

Pavis refers to the actor's entire culture which is involved in the preparatory work for performance. He echoes Barba in describing this as the living, theatrical knowledge which actors acquire; a knowledge which, he notes, is not free of codification:

The culture of the actor, especially the western actor, is not always readable or codified according to a sum of stable and recurring rules and practices. But even western actors are not protected by a dominant style or fashion, or by body techniques or specific codifications, but are

impregnated by formulas, habits of work, which belong to the anthropological and sociological codifications of their milieu, imperceptible codifications which try to escape notice, the better to proclaim the original genius of the actors, but which are in reality omnipresent and can easily be picked up and parodied (1992: 15 - 16).

Part of the actor's acquired knowledge is an understanding of the natural voice as the everyday voice of the actor. This voice, even with the necessary technical modification for large auditoria, is the voice which in Pavis' terms "proclaim[s] original genius". It is also the voice of the believability formula referring the actor back to self. If the actor and the audience do not understand the intent of believability in acting, as a theatrical intent, then the idea of realist comes to mean real life as opposed to realism. The self of the actor then no longer operates in an artistic frame but in a real life frame. The actor's theatre culture resonates too closely or is even eclipsed by the actor as a cultural being.⁴³

The real life frame, the actor as cultural being, is always present because as Berry states, our voices are our "sound presence"; we are present through language and sound (1987: 16). If we consider language from the notion of self, it becomes clear that our voices do not only declare us to be a member of a particular linguistic community, but that, through language, we declare both a communal and very personal patterning of thought. This patterning of thought can be described, after Habermas, as our individual "reasonableness" which reflects our reliance on a "communicative rationality" (Eagleton 1994: 205-206).

⁴³ Pavis states that "cultural anthropology, particularly in America (Benedict, Mead, Kardiner), investigates culture with regard to the coherence of the group within the sum of norms and symbols that structure the emotions and instincts of individuals..." (1992: 8).

According to Habermas our linguistic practices have a deep, underlying structure of “communicative rationality”, a rationality based in a human consensus of truth.

[Even] our most despotic speech acts betray, despite themselves, the frail outlines of a communicative rationality: in making an utterance a speaker implicitly claims that what she says is intelligible, true, sincere and appropriate to the discursive situation (Eagleton 1994:205).

Habermas states that “a species that depends for its survival on the structures of linguistic communication and cooperative, purposive-rational action must of *necessity* rely on reason” (quoted in Eagleton 1994: 206). The use of a realist (natural) voice in the theatre has come to reflect too closely the *voice of reason* as described by Habermas.

This voice of reason informs both silence and language. As Berry points out, the contemporary text is as much about what is not stated as it is about what is stated (1987: 47). That which is not stated is vocally or physically inferred in the enactment and the layering which the actor is able to bring to the text. Sub-textual layering is not only the formula for realist dialogue but, post realism, for classical works as well. Williams is disparaging of what he feels is a display of personality when he states that “the play, one feels, is being revived to see what so-and-so can do with it...we are invited to watch Mr X’s Hamlet, Miss Y’s Desdemona, Mr Z’s Faustus” (1964: 38). These productions were not only

vehicles for performances by particular theatre personalities as suggested by Williams, but presentation-representations of an evolving focus on the interiority of the individual and by, extension, of character. Sub-textual layering is also, finally, what Pavis calls a habit of work for actors trained in realist methodologies.

This sub-textual layering produces a domestication of text when, within the intent signalled through the action of the dramatic text, the character's motive is vocally patterned through the patterns of the actor's own intent rather than being patterned by the dramatic text with reference to the actor's understanding of her own intent. In the former, the voice of the actor *describes* the interpretation of the character motive. Mairowitz provides a useful reminder of the theatrical intent of naturalism; a frame through which to consider this slippage of theatre intent into life intent:

Peter Stein's⁴⁴ production of Gorky's *Sommergäste* reminds us, in these days of hand-me-down and thoroughly habitual theatrical experience, just what a progressive historical force naturalism once was, and can still be. We have come to associate it with strategies of play-acting or arrangements of furniture, but in its heyday naturalism was a reaction both to social and dramatic artificiality, one which branded the world of bourgeois deceptions as unacceptable. And a major formal characteristic of the more critical naturalist writers was the ability to specify the dominating imagery of social class, to locate a corner of the criticised world in the mouth of the proscenium arch - often just a corner, but a corner in its totality (Mairowitz 1977: 18).

⁴⁴ Peter Stein is the German director whose notion of "architect" was used in relation to actor agency in chapter one.

The activities of interpreting and of conceptualizing for theatre are activities essentially for creating communicative structures in and for theatre. The dramatic text, whether written or described through a director's concept for a piece of theatre, becomes in performance, the communicative rationality of theatre relying on the audience/performer consensus of a *theatrical truth*. In the theatre this truth extends to the fictive and the fantastical; all that might be called into play in our willingness to suspend our disbelief. This truth also presupposes the possibility of something we do not yet know. This consensus invites metaphor as truth. Together the director, designers and cast construct the communicative rationality for the piece of theatre in terms of both text and conceptual ideas. In performance, the discursive rationality will then be redefined by actor and audience. Clearly, the very nature of theatre as not-real is an invitation to theatre to redefine its own discursive rationality, from performance to performance if necessary. This already operates in terms of physical language and pictorial language on stage. It is the operation of developing a concept and an appropriate style for the theatre piece.

The discursive rationality of theatre voice has remained aligned to that of the society in which it operates in spite of other discursive rationalities offered by the avant-garde theatre, in spite of very varied conceptual frameworks for productions and in spite of a modern body of dramatic text. Once again, the self as referent seems to determine an underlying realist structure of communication. For example, in the conceptualisation process, it seems that

the act of talking about the meaning which is being constructed, the fact that language is used to facilitate, drive and create the process of performance becomes of itself *the performance of the human voice* and thereby excludes the notion that the voice can be open to further interpretation. The voice is so present that it becomes invisible as a theatrical force.

The process of creating character, already described at length, finally becomes for the actor a coherent whole; a whole which then also coheres with the discursive rationality of the actor's world. The character is represented through an intricate web of psychological clues to the character's motives, all parts of a coherent whole with which the actor works. This coherent whole is part text, part concept (director's invention) and part actor's invention. The actor portrays the *reason for that character's being* (a communicative rationality for the actor) through her interpretation and obviously, in the style of realism, employs the *sound of reason* in speaking. Even where a text might demand the sounding or speaking of a character's madness; the audience will hear both the *reason of* and the *reason for* the madness because it is a part of the coherent whole.

The modernist body of work which was predicated on the erosion of structure, on the illogical, on fragmentation and the discontinuous did not precipitate corresponding conventions for speaking the texts⁴⁵. This body of work generated between about 1880 and 1950 was "characterized by a rupture in

⁴⁵ Refer to Marshall Berman (1983) for an appreciation of the modern condition and for reference to some of the writers, works and artists who identified the experience of modernity.

theatrical communication and dialogic exchange”, a crisis which met with the “rescue attempts” of naturalism and existentialism or attempts at resolution through “expressionism, epic theatre, montage, Pirandellism, etc.” (Pavis: 1992:56). It would seem as though, at the level of language, directors and actors, in dealing with new conventions in writing, actually relied on the presence of a rational human voice to articulate the structures of non-reason in the writing. Ironically perhaps, the actor’s voice of reason became the vocal representation of textual non-reason in much the same way that the modernist writers only had words to express that which they felt words intrinsically betrayed: silence. Pavis quotes Adorno who cites the “artist’s manner of speaking” as the organizing principle or “principle of harmony” which “demands interpretation”:

Even so-called absurd literature - in the work of its best representatives - has a stake in the dialectic: that there is no meaning and that negating meaning maintains nonetheless the category of meaning; that is what both allows for and demands interpretation (Quoted in Pavis 1992: 56).

The discursive context of these works admit what Pavis calls a “clear-cut consciousness of character” (ibid, 58). Alternate to this, the postmodern work of, for example, Heiner Müller⁴⁶ refuses such a consciousness of character. A new relationship to the dramatic text in these works creates a text of “sound pattern and a signifying rhythmic structure” (ibid, 32-33). Such texts demand a re-considered vocal response.

⁴⁶ Birringer describes German playwright Heiner Müller’s plays as “antitheatrical theatre collages” (Birringer 1991: 46)

Vocal Ideology

Psychological realism has been described in this study as the meta-narrative of character in contemporary theatre. The extent to which it determines how actors approach character establishes psychological realism as the dominant ideology of character (cf. situation-character-motive). The argument in this study is not an anti-realist argument but it is an argument against a single vision for theatre voice. Entertaining the idea of a range of vocal expression, including as yet unknown forms as the communicative rationality of theatre requires an ability to dislodge the notion of social reasonableness as the only theatrical reflection for language. Here again, Habermas' definition of ideology might prompt the critique which is necessary to engender a choice of communicative rationalities.

Habermas views ideology as a "form of communication systematically distorted by power" (Eagleton 1994: 203). Systematic distortion ultimately confers the appearance of normativity on the form of communication. The result of systematic distortion is that the

...network of communication ...tends to conceal or eradicate the very norms by which it might be judged to *be* deformed, and so becomes peculiarly invulnerable to critique. In this situation, it becomes impossible to raise *within* the network the question of its own workings or conditions of possibility, since it has, so to speak, confiscated these inquiries from the outset (Eagleton 1994: 204).

It is the notion of self, actor-self, character-self, self-as-believability-referent, which is the distorting power of the communicative rationality of realism. This distortion is reflected in the way that actors speak about their characters as though they are real people, particularly where those characters “inhabit” non-realistic texts. British actress, Sinead Cusack speaks of her interpretation of Lady Macbeth: “I wanted people to see someone who had warmth and fecundity; I liked the idea of her hair being fair. I didn’t see her as a very clever woman - she is a grasper of opportunity” (Rutter 1988: 55). The mixture of subjectivity and objectivity, and the way clarity of image emerges through the disjunctive meandering of the human mind, all confirm a sense of *person* around Lady Macbeth.

Actors are not necessarily alone in working from the sense of person or of the real situation. Directors and theatre critics might collude in a discussion of characters as real people. This series of personal voices - the character’s, the actor’s, the director’s, the critic’s - is compounded in a tradition which understands interpretation as being the representation of an author’s (playwright’s, director’s) intention - yet another personal voice. Within these layers of “distortion” the possibility of Lady Macbeth breaking into a declamatory style of speech or blurring sense through a dominance of consonants as suggestive of fecundity, for example, cannot arise because it will destroy the discursive rationality that declares all characters to be real people.

Although the interpretation of character, and the interpretation of the play through the director's concept, is open to varying degrees of psycho-vocal interpretation, directors and playwrights can still hear the sound of a play in their imagination: because it is the sound of their own discursive rationality. It is *the sound of their own voices at work*. Here is the operation of Habermas' point that an ideology can neither critique itself nor see its own possibilities.

The exploration of human motive through the realist acting methods shifts the Platonic idea of mimesis beyond verisimilitude into the realm of personal identification with the character/subject matter. Both Berry's sense of the strait-jacketing of language, Noble's domestication of the voice and my objection to realism as an assumed (unconscious) vocal choice, support a notion that theatre voice, even though operating in an Aristotelian paradigm, has settled largely for copy, and not mimesis.

For, as Townsend contends, "art as imitation provides no sure route back to what is being imitated. One has to learn the conventions of imitation before understanding the object of the imitation". While a copy is also an imitation, an "imitation [as art] does more than the original does" (Townsend 1997: 69). The notion that the discursive rationality of theatre rests in an agreement on a "consensus truth" between actor and audience is the invitation to theatre voice to "do something more than the original does".

2.3. Post Realism: The Intertextuality of Voice

The use of the voice in theatre can be reconsidered through reference to the notion of intertextuality⁴⁷ and through reference to Pavis' mise en scène both of which challenge a monological view of theatre voice. Crucial to theatre voice is the fact that these constructs entertain the unknown; that the performative understanding of theatre voice is expanded.

In the introduction it was suggested that there is instance of the theatrical use of the voice in contemporary mainstream productions. A use of the voice which indicates a degree of invention, of creation and mediation similar to that which is extended to all aspects of theatre in creating a work. A use of voice which can be used, along with the rich vocal practice of the avant-garde, and the innovation of the oral performer, to map a vocal terrain which is theatrical and open to new possibilities. This use of the voice places theatre as central to an understanding of voice practice. Equally so, this use of the voice places the voice as central to performance.

2.3.i. Dramatic Text versus Vocal Text

⁴⁷ The term 'intertextuality' is taken from Julia Kristeva's work (Abrams 1993). Kristeva is a literary critic, psychoanalyst and intellectual of international renown. Intertextuality is also reflected in the notions of "pluralism" and "double coding". Jencks, whose chief involvement is in the field of architecture, explores these notions, in terms of art and architecture, in his publication What is Post-Modernism? (1986)

To propose the centrality of voice to performance as a paradigm for theatre voice practice appears, at first, to be neither challenging nor contentious. Such a proposal might even be regarded as stating the obvious. Theatre is an art form constructed on language, brought into being in the rehearsal process in an oral tradition (language, speech), participated in publicly (watching, listening, discussing), reviewed in print (text, language), recorded in print (text) or on digitized tape (image, speech, sound) and theorized in books and articles (text, language). Represented in this way, the dominance of the actor's and others' voices, the dominance of voice or sound as part of the theatre matrix is foregrounded. This is a construct of voice as language, and of language as representing text; a construct in which theatre voice simply comes to mean the speaking of the dramatic text. In the mainstream theatre tradition text/language, more often than not, implies a literary text.⁴⁸ Raymond Williams attributes his "considerable dissatisfaction with contemporary practice" to "the phase of naturalism". He proceeds from a definition of drama as literature and "literature in its most general definition, is a form of communication of imaginative experience through certain written organisations of words. And drama, since it has existed in written plays, is clearly to be included under this general definition" (1964: 16).

⁴⁸ Theatre semiotics, as distinct from a literary semiotics, recognizes two texts: one "produced *in* the theatre and [one] composed *for* the theatre" (Elam 1980: 3). The text of Williams' definition is the dramatic text ; a text intended for performance.

Written in the early sixties, Williams' view of theatre as based in literary text persists as a foundational notion in mainstream western theatre.⁴⁹

Text and language, and therefore voice, are mediums of theatre and, as such, become subtly taken for granted. The result of voice understood as language/literary text/the speaking of the dramatic text, is that the actor's voice is not heard as a theatrical expression of either Williams' "phase of naturalism" or as a theatrical expression of any other style of text. Viewed through the frame of Habermas' communicative rationality, voice as the speaking of text is, in effect, indifferent to changing literary forms and structures. The question of the centrality of voice to performance, is not a question about the *presence of voice* in the theatre but a question which asks: what kinds of presence can the voice have in the theatre?

The notion which conflates theatre voice with language and specifically with speaking the language of the literary text, is a single vision of the centrality of voice to performance. It obscures the multiple possibilities of the theatrical agency of the actor in respect of the voice and it ignores that aspect of theatre which Barthes calls "a genuinely polyphonic system of information, which is theatrical" (Barthes 1979:29). Borrowing from Barthes and Kristeva (Abrams 1993:285), the theatrical use of the voice proposes a view of theatre voice

⁴⁹ Billington (1995: 2) confirms an Oxford or Cambridge English Literature background as common to British theatre critics and notes a similar background among directors at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company.

practice as a “polyphonic system” through which theatre voice evidences its own intertextuality. Barthes describes intertextuality as the recognition that all texts are intertexts “for there is no textuality without intertextuality, that is relationships with other texts” (quoted in Moriarty 1991: 147). Such other texts are present in more or less recognizable forms. They are the texts of the surrounding cultures. Kristeva’s notion of an “intertext” includes “those [texts] which will be written in the future” (Abrams: 285).

2.3.ii. Vocal Text as Plural Text

In the light of Barthes’ argument, the voice can be called a text, one of the entities of theatre’s “polyphonic system”. The voice cannot become an object of study in the way that a painting can but the notion that voice is one of the texts of theatre, objectifies it to the extent that we can begin to think of voice as plural; as having its own intertextuality. The voice has no permanence. There can be no record of voice.⁵⁰ An art historian can speak of the aesthetics of individual artists and movements but theatre voice has no such record. However, leading on from Barthes, an example of the intertextuality of theatre voice, is the recognition of the cultural vocal text of the actor being present in the theatrical vocal text of the character. Film-maker Gaston Kabore refers to the “internal culture” which

⁵⁰ Rubidge in examining the issue of authenticity in the performing arts, concludes quite persuasively that a recorded version of a performance of an art form like dance (read voice) is a record of a particular performance at a particular time including possible errors, shifts of emphasis and so on. A vocal text in respect of its temporal-spatial nature can never be repeated which makes the issue of authenticity more complex for the vocal text (1996: 223).

distinguishes individual film-maker's films from each other. His elaboration of "internal culture" as "their sense of space and rhythm" which is both "personal and cultural" could be used to describe the individual vocal text. (Matshikiza: 1999). The theatrical use of the voice which is proposed through the paradigm of the centrality of voice to performance is a use which consciously explores the vocal texts of performance.

This paradigm proposes a view of voice that is plural. If the idea of theatre as the medium remains central, then theatre voice practice becomes engaged in a much broader discourse, the discourse of theatre practice. For example, the postmodern⁵¹ works of Robert Wilson in which "the audience is presented with pure visions and pictures, not with the interpretation of a text or story" (Birringer 1993: 194) excludes current theatre voice practice in its exclusion of text and interpretation. However, if theatre voice is problematised in relation to theatre, then the notions of "pure visions" and "picture" become theatre voice notions and Birringer's (1991: 224) description of the performances in Robert Wilson's spectacles as "pictorial lines drawn onto the surface, moved, and then frozen to be redrawn - and presented as positions or numbers within a visual and auditory configuration" points to a sonic choreography with possible vocal outcomes (cf. Introduction for South African examples).

⁵¹ Jencks (1986) provides an overall view of postmodernism but for specific reference to theatre and postmodernism refer to Birringer (1991) who explores technological landscapes, the manipulation of the body, the re-writing of myth and history and presentations of consumerism as evidence of a postmodern theatre culture.

It needs to be stated that the above example is not a claim for a new style of sonic representation for all forms of theatre. It is an illustration of the dialogic possibilities of all forms of theatre with theatre voice practice and, more importantly, it states the belief that theatre voice has a discursive place in the creative process of theatre.

2.3.iii. A 'Mise en Scène' of Theatre Voice

Pavis proposes an understanding of *mise en scène* which can accommodate the plurality and the complexity of signifying systems in performance. He describes it temporally and spatially as “provid[ing] the dramatic text with a situation that will give meaning to the statements of the text” (1992: 30). Pavis’ understanding of *mise en scène* is concerned with the range of cultural influences that are used in the work of, for example, Brook and Mnouchkine, and the varying discourses such works introduce into a single production. It is also an understanding of *mise en scène* which accommodates postmodern works which have redefined the relationship between directors and text:

New dramatic writing has banished conversational dialogue from the stage as a relic of dramaturgy based on conflict and exchange: any story, intrigue or plot that is too neatly tied up is suspect. Authors and directors have tried to denarrativize their productions, to eliminate every narrative point of reference which could allow for reconstruction of the plot (Pavis 1992: 59).

Theatre voice located in self and believability has no way of articulating, theatrically with a theatre which has no recourse to the “clear-cut consciousness of character” (Pavis 1992: 58). However, theatre voice as a theatrical text, and as an intertext, states the vocal text as an aesthetic, theatrical and cultural signifier. While theatre voice is a signifying system in Pavis’ *mise en scène*, the methodological process of his *mise en scène* can be appropriated as a way of understanding the plurality of voice.

Pavis defines *mise en scène* as a “theoretical fitting” between the text and the social context in which the *mise en scène* “examines every cultural representation, exposing each one to the eye and the ear, and displaying and appropriating it through the mediation of stage and auditorium” (1992: 1). This is a move away from a “logocentric notion of theatre, with the text as central and stable and the *mise en scène* necessarily an incidental transcription, representation and explanation of the text” (1992: 32) In this “fitting” between text and context the *mise en scène* is open to change with each new social context; the *mise en scène* changes from performance to performance. The *mise en scène* is the “concretization” of the dramatic text in terms of the “choice of acting style, scenography, rhythm, in the series of relationships (redundancies, discrepancies) between the various signifying systems” (1992: 34). It is essentially something which comes into being in performance through the actor-audience relationship of enactment and reception.

While Pavis' understanding of *mise en scène* engages the signifying practices of theatre and the plurality of their signification, any elaboration of the enactment of the voice does not extend beyond issues of rhythm⁵² and multi-lingualism in his account. In a table exploring the relationship between theatre, film and television, Pavis describes the voice as "delivered and received 'naturally' " in the theatre (1992: 104). It is further described as part of "a dialogue between what is said and what is shown" (1992: 34). References to a postmodern "return to a time before dialogue" and to "earliest theatrical forms" describe dramatic structure rather than vocal enactment. While the construction of Pavis' *mise en scène* accommodates the plurality of signification and the unknown in and for performance, his reference to theatre voice does not go far enough in allowing for the multiple signifying capability of vocal enactment.

2.4. The "Natural Voice" Reconsidered

The natural voice of theatre voice has, in my view, been inscribed with notions of real to the point of blurring the distinction between what is arguably a desirable foundational state for the actor's voice and realism as a style. Linklater speaks of a "vital difference" between the voice that is "natural" and the voice that is

⁵² Pavis refers to the "undoing of rhythm" as a way of creating new meaning with the classical text. The classical text's "vocal articulation (*mise en bouche*), is supposed to breathe a physical and respiratory meaning into the text, the consequence of its global enunciation" but current research on rhythm makes "theatrical enunciation become, by way of the actor, the new priest of utterance". This refers to the vocal and gestural performances in the work of Brook, Mnouchkine, Vitez and Grüber where the "undoing of rhythm" is an undoing of the "so-called natural expressive reading to get beyond a purely psychologizing or philological reading" (1992: 61).

“familiar” (1976: 1). In order to illuminate the distinction being made here, I would like to draw some parallels with the work of Jacques Lecoq.

Lecoq’s school of mime begins with the concept of the “neutral mask”, a state of being which the actor needs to attain before the work can become expressive, stylised, personalised or symbolic. For Lecoq, the neutral mask is a pre-cognitive, pre-verbal state of being; a state of being which requires the erasing of personal story.

In the beginning, it is necessary to demystify all that we know in order to put ourselves in a state of non-knowing, a state of openness and availability for the rediscovery of the elemental (quoted in Felner 1985: 148).

This is possible because, for Lecoq, physical expression precedes thought; “the body’s impressions and imitations give way to thought” (Ibid, 148).

This resonates with Berry’s desire for the actor to remain free to her “basic primitive response” to language. Primitive, for Berry is the sense of being “less consciously organized, and less culturally based” (1987: 19). Berry points to the origin of speech in pre-verbal utterance. Lecoq refers to a state of vocal being as the first of two levels of communication:

There is a primitive sound that exists prior to formal language, but that expresses primal needs; i.e., the scream, the groan, the cry, and there is a developed formal phonal pattern of language (Felner 1985: 150).

The mime rediscovers the environment through imitative action and imitative sound.

The natural voice is not a direct correlation with the neutral mask in that the natural voice is a verbal as well as non-verbal or pre-verbal state, connected to the emotional being of the actor. But it is more useful to understand the natural voice as a vocal state of “openness and availability” for both discovery and rediscovery than to allow the idea of natural to be eclipsed with the notions of real that are circumscribed by realism. After Lecoq, the natural voice can be described as a desirable vocal state prior to becoming theatrically “expressive, stylized, personalised or symbolic”. The notion of the voice needing to become “personalised”, is a useful theatrical understanding for realist characterization.

Quite opposite to Lecoq’s neutrality, the vocal state of the ‘natural’ voice is one that is connected to the emotional centre of the actor; an emotional centre no longer defended in terms of social patterning but “transparent” in that the voice reveals rather than describes emotional states (Linklater 1976: 2). This idea of revelation is the key: the actor becomes luminous through the natural voice. She does not simply speak the dramatic text. She is responsive as opposed to reactive. She becomes the presence of the rhythmic, sonic, energetic vocal *mise en scène* as described by Pavis (1992).

Linklater describes the “perfect communication for the actor...[as] a balanced quartet of intellect and emotion, body and voice - a quartet in which no one instrument compensates with its strength for the weakness of another” (1976: 4). The natural voice is thus not the totality of theatre voice but a state of vocal presence from which the voice enters into the dialogue of theatre in the creation of its enactment.

2.5. Conclusion

At the heart of contemporary theatre voice is a debate about the articulation of the natural voice within theatre, and the range of contemporary theatre forms. The natural voice is interpreted, with reference to realist acting, as reflecting the vocal being of the actor but it fails to negotiate the basic creative function of the act of theatre which places a range of texts (voice included) in confrontation with each other. The natural voice interpreted as a state of vocal readiness, is open to the expression of a range of theatrical forms, including, as yet, unknown vocal possibilities. This sense of the dialogic possibilities of theatre voice is present in contemporary theatre voice practice and will be explored through a re-reading of Berry.

CHAPTER THREE

Berry: The Actor and the Word

A re-reading of Berry's texts (1973, 1975 and 1987) confirms that the theatrical use of the voice and the desire to actively embrace *the unknown* as part of the creative vocal process, does not require a new theatre voice practice. Berry's third text, The Actor and his Text (1987), her most recent text, representing her most developed work is the focus of this re-reading. Although the exercises in this text are developed through work on classical texts, specifically Shakespeare's texts, enough provocative commentary is provided to investigate the notion of a theatrical use of the voice which can be applied to all texts.

Berry's basic approach to voice remains unaltered. She focuses on the word (dramatic text) as the origin of all aspects of performance. The actor uses the text to construct character and to lead her, through language and structure, *into a different world*. The aim of the actor is to be surprised by language and to use language to enable the audience to be surprised. The work on different texts, thus, educates the actor's actor sensibility and, by extension, educates the audience's vocal performance sensibility. Language and words have an inherent energy which actors need to respect, and harness, in performance. Words are able to move the audience through this inherent energy, and through their sound,

on levels that are not logical “for it does not need to explain anything” (1975: 105).

These overall aims are developed through a balance of technical work and imaginative work which is dependent on a particular notion of *the actor in action*. Berry states that “words are the actor’s tools”; words bring actors into action (1987: 30). The question of the function of theatre voice is thus always present in that the actor is working towards performance or in performance. Berry constantly confirms the notion that theatre voice work is not an end in itself and any suggestion that the work on the voice is “only... technical exercises” (1987:28) or that theatre voice functions “as an end in itself” (1987: 15)...”will not necessarily enhance our use of words” (1987: 28). If the actor does not let the exercises go, and work imaginatively with the text , then the actor will not express the inner life of the text. Central, then, to Berry’s practice, is the actor and the word; both also being central to any notion of actor agency and to the centrality of voice to performance.

3.1. The Multiple Contexts of Theatre Voice Practice

There are a number of other contexts which inform Berry’s work, and which come into play in different ways. There is not the scope in this study to explore these contextual relationships fully, but it is essential that the voice practitioner who is using Berry’s text, or any other text, should first ask questions about the context

of the work before engaging with the work. These are questions of context around Berry's work, some of which will be outlined here, and, more importantly, questions of context around the work of the actor and the voice practitioner. For example, in the South African context, the natural voice has eleven official sonic texts. Furthermore, while it can be assumed that these sonic texts are supported by foundational notions of realism in white theatre, such assumptions cannot be made about black theatre which has no basis in realism.

3.1.i. The Context of Textbook

Berry's publications are a good blend of technical exercises, theatre voice theory and ideas about theatre. The technical aspects of the publication draw on factual physiological information but clearly these only become dynamic on the floor and particularly in the hands of the experienced vocal director. Therefore, in recording appropriate vocal exercises, a practitioner like Berry is mindful of educating both the ear and the eye of the actor and the voice practitioner because the work is experiential. She alerts her reader to the idea that the natural voice, identified as the individual voice, has the potential to reshape the vocal experience of every exercise. When writing such a textbook it is difficult but necessary to find appropriate ways of reflecting work which is essentially processual. This results in an implied positioning in relation to theatre theory and in an assumption of certain shared, accepted practices. For example, Berry does not explicitly debate the believability paradigm of realist acting but her work demands a "real" sound

which is not “strait-jacketed” by a real life vocal impulse, and which is able to respond to different kinds of realist writing (1987: 11, 25 and 43). In drawing these three fragments of commentary together, something of a debate about theatre and about theatre voice as theatre is evident; questions for debate which are probably quite strongly articulated in Berry’s rehearsal space.

The advent of a coherent text, like Berry’s, is the answer to the desperate how to questions of the self taught practitioner. Her texts can be followed in detail, resulting in good classroom or rehearsal floor practice. However, the exercises in themselves do not raise questions about theatre and if practitioners do not engage with the fragmented theory, they are likely to end up in a position of perpetuating sound physical, technical practices without engaging in questioning the relationship of those practices to theatre. The question of what sonic models are being appropriated to inform the practice, or of what kind of theatre the vocal practice promotes, are questions which are provoked through an awareness of contexts. These are the contexts of a theatre voice practice represented in print and the theatre voice/theatre practice of the practitioner who uses the texts.

3.1.ii. In the Context of an Institution

It is not in the interest of this thesis to unravel the particular politics of British theatre nor of the Royal Shakespeare Company but, it is telling that within a professional organization with an established Voice Department, there is a

silence around theatre voice similar to that in the broader sphere of theatre. Cicely Berry is a published practitioner, whose work has shaped contemporary theatre voice practice. She has co-ordinated two international voice conferences, she lectures and teaches around the world, she works in prisons and schools and she has directed a range of poetry and other productions. In 1985 she was awarded an OBE for her contribution to theatre. In short, Cicely Berry is an accredited theatre practitioner. In a range of articles announcing seasons of work and new directions for the RSC (Plays and Players May 1982 - May 1991), Berry is mentioned twice in a retrospective review of an RSC/Almeida season, as the director of a production of King Lear. The work of the Voice Department is not mentioned nor the work sent by that Department into schools.⁵³ The articles detail the vision of the artistic directors, forthcoming productions, the directors of those productions and some of the lead actors. In the programmes of RSC productions which I attended, Berry is credited for the position she holds, currently Director of Voice, but there are no production notes in relation to voice or the theatrical use of voice or the vocal direction of the company.

This suggests a Company whose work is defined by directors (not including voice directors), selected “stars”, and their particular debates with theatre, as evidenced through their productions; all of which operates within some broader

⁵³ In 1988, Berry directed a production of King Lear “as part of an RSC education project” (Plays and Players 1989: 2). It was revived in 1989 as part of the RSC/Almeida season. Vera Lustig, in article entitled ‘Making Noise Quietly’, looks back on the season and mentions Berry’s production and the accompanying workshops as “engag[ing] the public in a quite exemplary way” (Lustig 1989: 26). In 1995, the writer obtained a copy of BillBoard, an RSC newspaper publication designed to “bring Shakespeare and the work of the RSC to a young modern audience” (1995).

consensus of what a classical company does. It also suggests that there is a hierarchy in relation to what is considered educational and what is considered main profile. Berry came to the RSC at a point when directors were experimenting in the theatre. Integral to that experimentation was the belief that actors needed to remain in training. The voice work clearly falls into the brackets of education, service skill and training - brackets which render it invisible.

If this silence around theatre voice is one that is director-driven, then it points to a lack of understanding or ignorance of the function of theatre voice on the part of the director. When theatre voice functions as central to performance, then the work of the voice practitioner intersects with that of the director, as it does with that of the actor. The point of intersection lies in the process of interpretation, which is the process of creating the production.⁵⁴ A directorial concept or vision, as with any other aspect of theatre, is fragile in its evolution because the director, irrespective of a clarity of vision, is finding the way forward, wary of having the concept hijacked. It is difficult in this process to admit and acknowledge a third interpretive partner, particularly a voice director who, working from a single perspective, is able at points to be more potent on an isolated issue of interpretation than the director, who has to balance all aspects of the production all of the time.

Although there is no mention of the Voice Department in this first issue, Billboard is clearly designed to look at the internal workings of the RSC.

Berry's own comment on the complexity of this set of relationships is revealed in an interview, early in her RSC career, where she states that "directors here [at the RSC] know that I won't mess them around, that I'll never say to them, 'oh no, it should be done this way' " (Plays and Players 1975: 18). In the same interview Berry refers to three phases of rehearsal in which she states that, although she is involved from the beginning of the process, her work with the actors only begins once they are clear about the director/actor choices for the production. In this working arrangement Berry's contribution is subtly declared to be supportive.

The voice interpreted, however, *is the performance* and the voice director, of necessity, works with/debates issues of performance. If this is not acknowledged about a voice practitioner of Berry's calibre, then the RSC is a limited context in which to understand Berry's work. For example, if Berry wants the actor to surprise and provoke the audience through language, then the RSC with its legacy of remembered conventions from a "golden age of verse speaking" (Billington 1995: 2) and its apparent silence around the work of its own Voice Department, cannot provide the necessary experimental framework.

Berry is writing from a context where she has no overt, or public, institutional recognition of her participation as a theatre voice practitioner *in a broader theatre debate*. Her technical work offered through her publications is that which is tried and tested with RSC actors and her work becomes practically contextualised by

⁵⁴ Berry observes that the actor's experience in Peter Brook's production of *The Dream* "of being absolutely specific with the voice and with the words, was invariably the same problem they had

the RSC productions. However, the fragments of theory in her publications reveal a far less institutionalized, more individual and political voice than can evidence within the RSC tradition.

3.1.iii. The Context of Political Alignment

Berry positions herself with actors - “as actors, we are able...” (1987: 10) - in a way that places her alongside the actor in the work process. This places the voice practitioner on stage both during the rehearsal phase and during performance. It is a position which affirms voice as central to theatre even though there is a silence around the work.⁵⁵ As a device this aligning with actors rather than with voice practitioners is highly political. Her use of “we” at all times connects her to the actor’s experience in a practice where “each person recognizes what is happening with his own voice purely subjectively” and where although “basic principles are common” how they are interpreted is open (1987: 10). The voice practitioner, similar to the director, is thus necessary as the

outside ear for the vocal performance. The voice practitioner is a participant in the interpretive dialogue; a dialogue which overlaps the actor-director-text dialogue. Thus, Berry’s alignment with actors, is a statement about the voice

in acting” (1975: 134).

⁵⁵ Peter Brook in the Foreword to *Voice and the Actor* (1973) states: “Cicely Berry sees the voice teacher as involved in all of a theatre’s work”.

practitioner's participation in creating theatre as opposed to being a participant in the skills training of actors.

The exercises in The Actor and his Text are also a clear indicator that the boundaries between acting methods and methods of working with the voice are blurred - a constructive blurring if the centrality of voice to performance and to theatre is acknowledged. Berry's position of functioning alongside an actor in creating a performance is a position which conceives of the craft of the actor as dynamic. In other words, actors continue to develop their craft through the practice of their profession. This is hardly a contentious observation, but the implications of this observation involve an understanding of the functioning of theatre voice in the profession, which is independent or different to the functioning of theatre voice in an actor training programme.

Linked to the alignment with the actor in action, Berry's practice testifies to a deep understanding of actor processes which she refers to as "relating acting method to practical direct speaking". Berry understands the paradox of the natural voice, "his private means of communication", as the voice of performance which the actor must "begin to know...objectively" (1987: 10). There is a deep sensitivity in her acknowledgement that as the voice is "our sound presence", once the actor is "speaking the part...[she is] already making decisions about it" irrespective of how early in the rehearsal process it is and she "needs that third

eye, or ear” to avoid the tendency “to hold on to the sound which feels familiar” (ibid,16-17). Here then is the dialogue of creating a performance; this is actor/director dialogue and it is also voice practitioner/actor dialogue. This is actor agency in process. It is the dialogue which holds the voice practice central to theatre in a context (particularly that of the RSC) where evidence of overt director/voice practitioner dialogue is missing.

A direct result of this lack of dialogue between the voice practitioner and the director around the theatrical use of the voice is that the function of theatre voice cannot be expanded. As a function dependent on actor agency, it is easily lost in the actor’s insecurity in the work process. Berry refers to the way in which an actor “feels under pressure to present some kind of result”, a pressure springing from the need “to interest our director, our fellow-actor and the audience” (ibid, 23). These tensions inherent in the work space are examined in how they impact on the actor’s work with her “tools”: words (ibid, 30). The result is that actors revert to “description” of text, or “press”, Berry’s term for overlaying the text with emphatic interpretation arising from actor anxiety (ibid, 26-27).

3.1.iv. The Linguistic Context

A second condition of the institutional context is that which could be called an RSC linguistic culture. For the period of their contracts, the RSC actors are in a

linguistic environment that declares Shakespeare's language as normative. This normative language register also includes other classical texts, for example, Jacobean. Even though Berry refers to the actor's fear of the classical works, these classical texts have the added value of being heritage texts for the British actors. The RSC actors become au fait with the devices, the structures and function of classical texts through daily contact with the material. The iambic pentameter is the basis of Shakespearean verse. Described as close to the rhythm of conversational speech, it will be present as a consciously registered pulse for those actors in a way that it would not be for the South African English speaking student actor, for example, whose tendency is towards more emphatic stress patterns and for whom Shakespeare is likely to be synonymous with the set texts for examination in formal education.

All the foundational properties of voice become circumscribed predominantly by Shakespeare's texts and by the ethos of the RSC. For example, energy which is of major interest to Berry (1973, 1975 and 1987) is described, in The Actor and his Text (1987), in terms of, among others, the metre, the structure of lines and rhyming devices. As such, it constitutes the daily linguistic fare of RSC life. Berry and the RSC actors are surrounded by Shakespeare's language on a daily basis. The levels of subtlety in the work are easily hidden for those outside of similar contexts. Furthermore, the reader of Berry's texts needs to consciously re-contextualise her praxis to hear the very potent broader application to theatre voice practice and to theatre.

To return to energy as a foundational property of voice; energy describes both the movement of sound and the presence of the actor - it describes actor agency. As an entity of theatre voice and of sonic text, energy is crucial to making meaning and to articulating different styles of dramatic text. Energy is also a route through which actors can commit to performance, particularly in texts not driven by character motive. If the reader approaches Berry's text understanding the implications of both a context of continuous work on Shakespeare's texts and the broader context of energy and theatre/performance, then the reader will be able to access the issue of energy in terms of Shakespeare's texts and in terms of broader theatre voice concerns.

Berry makes two very important observations about the work on voice. The first is that it is impossible to avoid the subjectivity which is present in the experience of and response to the voice in action. The second is that in terms of sound, we are culturally bound (1987: 18 -19). A third factor linked to cultural sensibility, and of particular interest here in South Africa, is the impact of either an oral tradition or literary based education on the reader's response to the work. While there are many more factors which will influence the collective or individual response to vocal work, these two - cultural sensibility and factors of literacy - are particularly important in relation to reading Berry.

The rich detail of her work on Shakespeare's text might have less immediate resonance with audiences outside of a British/RSC-literate context. Added to this, Berry and the RSC actors, being part of a mainstream classical theatre company, own the literature, not only in terms of its content and status, but also in terms of the linguistic history and the sonic history of the texts. The directing trends at the RSC, the tradition of verse speaking and the particular levels of textual literacy will thus all determine the cultural boundedness of Berry's work.

Berry articulates two extremes of fashion in relation to speaking verse the one, she labels "fascist" and it is determined by strict adherence to metre, inviting no questions. The other is "naturalistic Shakespeare" in which the verse becomes conversational (ibid, 81). These two tastes could determine the artistic reach of Berry's work, a reach which might be experienced as revolutionary depending on where the practitioner is located on the continuum in terms of a belief about how verse should be spoken and what describes the "classicalness" of theatre. (cf. Wardle's response to Tara Arts performing Shakespeare, Appendix B).

Ultimately, needs and context specific factors will determine how these voice texts impact on voice practitioners. An approach to Berry's work from within a strong tradition of owned classical theatre would probably result in a view of The Actor and his Text (1987) as an accessible, hands-on manual for work on text with appropriate commentary around issues which either inhibit or advance the work. From within a context of Shakespeare as essentially foreign literature, this

text is an extremely detailed step by step guide for working on text which, in spite of Berry's constant assertion that all the verse structures are open to interpretation, could be dogmatically reproduced with good effect. Whatever the response, the broader question of how theatre voice functions in the theatre, becomes the question which liberates the work within the confines of its contextual frames.

From the point of view of this study, Berry's articulated views on voice and text are radical in relation to actor agency and the theatrical use of the voice. The perceived potency of inferred positions on actor agency and theatrical use of the voice is only partly evident in the work of the RSC I viewed in 1995 and 1998. At the level of actor agency, the RSC actors have a facility with language which renders the text utterly malleable. There is a naturalistic quality to the verse without a loss of structure and rhythm; an ability to be "on the text", in Berry's terms (1987: 18).

3.2. Berry and Realism

A stated aim of RSC Artistic Director, Adrian Noble, is to make the work of the company "the best classical theatre in the English-speaking world" (quoted in Wade 1997: 134-135). The achievement of excellence, therefore, from a theatre voice point of view, is dependent on the actor's ability to speak the verse. Wade quotes John Barton as summarizing the modern theatre tradition in terms of

“situation, character, and intention”; a tradition which RSC directors believe can “harmonize with older traditions, such as the Elizabethan” (ibid, 136). Here is the stated belief of marrying the realist acting methodology with classical text. Michael Billington’s observation that critics “write chiefly about acting and direction” and are “concerned with the writer’s vision. What ... he or she [is] trying to say?” (1995: 1) suggests that the expectation of theatre voice is likely to be tied up with a contemporary understanding of the classical *elocutio*: finding “the suitable verbal form” (Martin 1991: 2) for revealing authorial and directorial intent.

Contemporary theatre voice practice interprets the “suitable verbal form” as finding a balance between the natural voice, the structure of the classic text and poetic rhythms. This is a considerable challenge for twentieth century actors who are both products and proponents of naturalist rhythms, naturalist sound and naturalist texts. In the context of realist (naturalist) theatre, the notion of a “suitable verbal form” has historically been located in the right balance of emotion or reason for persuading the audience in terms of belief. This emotion/reason balance becomes an added factor in balancing natural sound with classic structure and poetic rhythm (Linklater 1976: 3).

Berry does not engage in this emotion versus reason debate. For Berry, thought is the result of reason and feeling and, “when we hover between being ‘emotional’ and being ‘intellectual’, it is because we do not trust that the two qualities can exist in the same words”. But there is a question of balance,

balance “between thought and feeling...between motive and emotion” as *demande*d by text rather than by methodologies of performance; “different writing poses very different questions of balance” (1987:115).

This broader picture of balance hinges on the understanding of the influence of realism on performance. For Berry, the influence of realism lies in “trying to integrate the inner way...those methods which the actor uses to prepare him for his character, with a way of presenting language”. However, Berry is not content with just a sense of the actor being “real” because for Berry the language offers more; “the language [needs] to be presented in a way that the audience hears not only what the actor is feeling, but something beyond that, beyond the naturalistic, which makes what is spoken remarkable” (ibid, 189).

Realism has already been explored as the acting methodology which has empowered actors in this century and, as indicated, the idea of being real on stage is a construct within which the RSC interprets the work. However, Berry makes an extremely important point when she says, with the proviso that she is not sure about it, that “we have to enter objectively into a way of thinking and presenting ideas before we can get to grips with a character”. She adds that the way of presenting dialogue “has as much to do with style and effect as with reality; and I suppose its style is its reality” (ibid, 34-35).

Here is the heart of the matter for a contemporary theatre voice practice defined by the natural voice with its overtones of realist acting. Framed as a question, Berry essentially asks what realism means in the theatre. It is a question which challenges a single idea of realism; a universal notion of realism. Film and television realism would influence the mythology of a universal realism but Berry draws attention to the *different realisms* which are articulated through the text.

In this country I suppose it was Osborne who finally broke the stranglehold of class, and so brought a realism into theatre - an aggressive realism. Not that there had not been plays about the working-class before, but somehow they had been out of the mainstream. Osborne made the language real; it had a tough rhetoric about it, and after that one could not go back to the kind of language good behaviour which had been the norm in the theatre until then. It made obsolete a kind of upper class, educated stance on language: it was anti-class, wordy, challenging and on the offensive....It was a different realism to the American one: the focus very much on language. There was always a movement a discovery in the language, though the discovery often happened through an evasion of feelings, or touching obliquely on feelings. As with Beckett or Pinter, the evasions came through word games, rhythm games, oblique silences....Now, as in America, a lot of this was happening (as) sub-text, but our sub-text was possibly less psychologically orientated and more to do with telling a story: perhaps more European, and so it had affinity with Sartre and Genet (1987: 43).

Berry is quoted at length here because she articulates that realism is constructed through different conventions, which if they are to inform performance, could have implications for a theatrical use of the voice.⁵⁶ This latter possibility depends on applying the same notions to sonic text.

⁵⁶ Naomi Schor, in her analysis of detail in the realism of the nineteenth-century French novel, says that "realism is as much a discourse *on* the detail as a discourse *of* the detail" (1987:142). This notion of the detail of realism as discourse applied to Berry's insistence on attention to the particularity of language and language usage, immediately creates an opportunity for dialogue between the actor and the realistic dramatic text. There is a theatrical frame to negotiate in this notion; a frame which questions the function of the detail in, or brought to, the realistic text. The way in which the actress describes this function would begin to describe how she might approach the sonic text.

Secondly, Berry's observations raise questions about the actor's approach to text; the actors' methods of acting. Berry states that the value of working on classical and modern texts is a way of "assess[ing] our ways of working on text: for the writing itself makes for methods of acting" (1987: 35). As Berry asserts, text creates character - "the character exists from what is spoken" (ibid, 47) - and in her detailed description of how modern texts articulate form, she may well be describing that "objective" path towards "presenting language" and creating character:

...in the modern text there is a kind of introverted awareness of feeling and thought, a consideration of motive in and around the text, so that therefore what happens between the words is as important as what is spoken and must be accurate. This includes silence, for silence is a positive verbal choice. ...The actor working in Chekhov, the obvious example, has to make his imaginative leap into the character, but what he feels and what he says do not necessarily coincide, and we understand him by what he chooses not to say as much as by what he says. Each character works off what is said to him yet keeps his private motive intact (1987: 47).

In the modern theatre tradition articulated by Barton as: "situation, character, intention", (quoted in Wade1997: 136), the actor is easily drawn to plot and relationship, to create character personality and motive. Berry's "objective" reading of text offers the route of using writing conventions and the substance of language for creating or informing action and character. If this "objective" route is allowed to transform or influence the natural voice of the actor, then the sonic text stretches in range.

3.3. Berry and the Theatrical Use of the Voice

Berry's view of "the word" (or text) could be understood in terms of Kristeva's notion of intertext. One of the texts for Berry, although she does not use the term, is the sonic text of a word. She describes words as having their own energy and substance. The actor's job is to bring this energy and substance into performance. Berry states that "we have to keep reassessing our attitudes to language - never taking it for granted - for this is our commitment; and each piece of writing asks for a different connection between the actor and his audience, a different style of speaking perhaps" (1987: 15). What Berry does not entertain is the manipulation of the sonic text in a theatrical way, but the idea of the sonic text - and one which speaks beyond logic - is important for a theatre voice practice dominated by a naturalistic sonic text.

Words and sounds as sonic text have a qualitative substance and energy which find variety through the temporal properties of voice. Berry works with the textural differences of different sounds (vowels and consonants) and the movement inherent in those sounds.⁵⁷ This focus on sonic text is illuminated through the recollection of Ong's two descriptions of the characteristics of language in the oral-aural society as presence and actuality: "It is common-place that early man, strongly if by no means exclusively oral-aural, experiences words - which for him typically are spoken words as powerful, effective, of a piece with other actuality.... A word is a real happening, indeed a happening par excellence" (Ong

⁵⁷ Berry speaks of the "perception of the length and movement of the vowels, and the length and vibration of the consonants" (1987: 29).

1967: 111) and the “voice is not inhabited by presence as by something added: it simply conveys presence as nothing else does” (ibid, 114).

Berry articulates a sense of what Ong is asserting, from the perspective of the actor’s approach to language: “We make language behave, instead of staying free to our basic primitive response to it - primitive in the sense of being less consciously organized, and less culturally based” (1987: 19). Here “consciously organized” would equate with a literary organised sensorium, to use Ong’s terminology. As Berry concurs:

we see lines on the printed page first, the residual effect is that we keep them in that connotation. Our eyes take in a grammatical set of words - a sense clump - and we make a judgement on them from a cultural and sense point of view, so that our initial response to them is a ‘read’ one and not an intuitive one (1987: 22).

Ben Okri asserts a different relationship with words when he says: “Some of my reactions are very Nigerian. I still believe that words are things”. Okri points to a cultural divide in terms of how words are viewed. He continues to articulate this difference by saying that “words resonate. They are parallel to events” (Hattersley 1999). It is questionable whether we are able to “stay[ing] free to our basic instincts” (Berry 1987: 19) as part of a literate culture but two fundamental ideas are suggested here: firstly, that cultural responses to words differ and secondly, that an understanding of this can facilitate working towards creating different relationships with words.

A further text of the intertext of words and sound, relates to presence. As noted, Berry refers to the voice as “our sound presence” (ibid, 16). A presence which needs to be conceived of beyond the mind/body split as “we tend to think of them [words] as springing from somewhere around the neck up” while remaining “curiously unaware of their physical nature, and [we] think of them in terms of expressing reasons and ideas and of colouring them with feelings, and not in terms of our physical self being expressed through them and involved in them” (1987: 19). The actor’s job is “to find ways to get them not only on our tongue, but to make them part of our whole physical self in order to release them from the tyranny of the mind” (1987: 22).

This view of the word proposes a discourse for theatre voice that is not simply synonymous with the analytic theories based on the playwright’s intention or theories of acting constructed on character, situation and intention. In this discourse the body contextualises the sound and the sound physicalises the body.

3.3.i. Acting Methodologies and Text

Actor agency in respect of text is complex. Berry acknowledges the actor’s difficulty in marrying the inherent substance and energy of a text with realist theories of acting based in character truth; character truth being revealed through

intention and emotion. Firstly, the actor's own experience, reflected in her personal sonic text, limits her theatrical agency in respect of the text. As Berry points out: "we hold on to a quality of sound or inflection which we recognize from inside" (1987: 17). Secondly, intention is frequently conveyed "by loading the sound with meaning" (1987: 17) because the actor becomes caught in a paradox - "the more truthful he wants to be...the more he wants to fill the text" (1987: 15). And thirdly, Berry notes that "an actor may have found all the right feelings and motives, he may also be working from the gut if you like, but if he transmits these only naturalistically it will seldom be enough" (1987: 21).

For Berry, words offer the actor a route for an actor agency that will be characterized by active presence and the release of the "inner life" of the text as opposed to, on the one hand, "explanation" and "commentary" (1987: 19) or, on the other hand, "too [great an] involve[ment] with what we are saying for ourselves, and how we are saying it" resulting in an "overplay [of] our own feelings and our own responsibility" (1987: 20-21). Berry's suggested route for the actor is that she "touch the character through the language" but, also, that she "allow that language to bear on [her] own experience so that it is real for [her]". This she calls a blending of "our own truth with the truth of the character" (1987: 15). Although this resonates with the rhetoric of the realistic acting methodologies, it also holds the text central to performance. A close reading of the text in Berry's terms would signal the possible mediation of the voice and performance. Thus the text reinforces the interpretive step of considering a

theatrical use of the voice. This approach to text also suggests two poles which are connected in performance: a theatrically coded text and the thoughtful-emotional sound presence of the actor. Since the actor assesses performance experientially, these two poles are important as the means for the actor to assess her vocal performance. It is the actor's emotionally intelligent response to heightened text that will lead her out of domestic sound and into theatre voice. The key factor being the actor's responsiveness to theatre, to language and to language as theatre, and to her own experience. This actor agency is based in response rather than in reaction because reaction, Berry asserts, leads actors to explain or "press" the text.

3.3.ii. Text as Actor Action

In those sections of the book where Berry deals with the how to aspect of the work, she alternates between examples of rhythmic devices (rhyming couplets, feminine endings to lines), structural devices (antithesis), pictorial devices (image, metaphor), issues of texture, issues of energy and the practical means to activate these components of text in performance. What this amounts to, is a body of work that turns literary device into *actor action*. Assonance, alliteration, image and metaphor are liberated from the page into the sphere of actor agency.

This work is potentially undermined by the degree to which it resonates with other constructs. For example, if the actor and the voice practitioner are not able to free assonance, alliteration, image and metaphor from a construct of literary analysis, then these textual devices will remain intellectual activity in support of interpretation; interpretation referring, here, to the actor's impulse to locate action in situation-character-motive. If the actor and the voice practitioner are able to be free of the connotations of literature, and can approach these textual devices as action - the character in action and the action of presenting character - then the work opens out into theatrical exploration.

Berry observes the impact of the literary approach on "an actor [who] can be aware of the action through a speech, but because of the nature of the writing, the well-shaped and articulate phrases, he is so often trapped into presenting it in literary shapes". For Berry this changes the actor's performative position because "instead of being present in the action of the thoughts, he presents them as a result of having thought, and they become passive" (1987: 105).

The construct of literature which still lingers around a dramatic text, in spite of semiotic redefinition, is one constraint on Berry's work. A second constraint is the realist approach to acting and this produces a tension throughout Berry's book. Berry points to the manner in which thoughts can become "passive" when the actor is not "present" in the "action of [the] thoughts" (ibid, 19). This presence apart from being described by the action of the thought, is inevitably also

described by the idea of realness, real sound, which draws the actor back into the trap of understanding realism as self.

3.4. Berry and Words that “Surprise” or “Provoke”

My experience of the 1998 Voice Seminar, confirmed Berry’s acute understanding of the actor in the process of creating a performance. Berry’s improvisational exercises are not only vocally illuminating, but demonstrate a deep understanding of how to explore and develop concept, and to deepen the process of interpretation on the rehearsal floor. Her real skill is her ability to act in the moment - outside of the parameters of an exercise. The exercises presented in her publications are those which are tried and tested and, therefore, are reliable in terms of both operation and probable outcome. However, odd fragments of commentary allow the reader a glimpse of the space in which the surprising and the provocative find form.

Berry devised the following improvisatory exercises in exploring Hamlet:

Not long ago I did a workshop in London with the Kosh Dance Group. It was on Hamlet, and we did this exercise: there are four dancers, one woman and three men. The woman was Ophelia, and there were three Hamlets: we improvised round the line of Hamlet ‘Lady, shall I lie in your lap?’. We asked the audience to repeat the line at intervals, and we ended with this image: Ophelia sitting, with three Hamlets in her lap, one head below the other. The image was quite shocking and very powerful, in that it was both sexual and mad (1987: 112).

This is the point at which, for me, her work becomes alive in a most theatrical way. Berry herself, concludes the description of the work with the dancers, with the following statement: “This may seem by the way, but I feel that we so often do not investigate the images freely, and are conventional in our approach” (ibid). It is my contention, that in the approach described, issues of freedom and conventional response, in relation to theatre voice, are hardly “by the way” - they are critical to an understanding of the theatrical use of the voice and its implied actor agency. The conventions which inhibit freedom, which are noted here, are an understanding of text as literature, the choice of domestic vocal realism, and, in respect of Berry, the organisational conventions suggested by being part of the RSC.

Again, Berry makes an extremely potent observation, partly excused: “I know this is a simplistic thing to say, but I do think that we are so intent on making logical sense of everything, we do not allow people to hear all that is there - the undertow”. Berry follows on with the notion of the “imaginative environment of the play” (1987: 111). These statements, again, hint at sonic text, of being free of the reason of language and of allowing for sound and words that are received as energy and music; as imaginative environment, words that are allowed to live in time and space without the pressure of being “about something”. Here is the notion that audience can interact with languages, even their own, as they might interact with shape or colour.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Something of what Berry describes is given substance in Tuan’s description of the effect of music on a listener; an effect which is “not merely visceral but ‘full of mind’ “ (1993: 94). Music is

Berry does negotiate the theatrical potential in the text in her recognition of device and convention in text. She says of rhyming couplets:

they are a gesture in verbal terms, rather like a music-hall comedian who lifts the end of his act with a song or a drum-roll...their artifice makes us conscious of the actor playing a part, and so they remind us of the convention of the play (1987: 78).

Berry states positively that “the actor must confront the artifice, you cannot just slip into it and hope for the best - it has to be dealt with and made part of your style in your particular production” (1987: 126). Again there is a tension between what is vocally possible and the choice of one style for the voice: realism.

Berry’s work promotes language structure and the structure of the text as active and as something which we can understand “in a more physical way” (1987: 115). This is a statement which relocates writing in the body-voice and a positioning which challenges Cartesian thinking located in the body/mind split. Berry notes this as a fundamental challenge for working with Shakespearean text: “A major change of view between Elizabethan thinking and our own came about in the mid-seventeenth century, whose dualism separated mind from matter, soul from body” (1987: 116).

also described as “forward movement...in the virtual acoustic space of foreground and distant horizon” with the ability to move the listener through an “almost tactile sensuality of rhythms and beats” (ibid, 92).

Berry states that “words spring from many layers of consciousness” and that “if we are truly to make the words active, it asks for a commitment to the work beyond a personal commitment”. For Berry this goes beyond a recognition of the sonic and other texts of the word to an understanding of “theatre as a serious political force in the context of the society we live in” (1987: 21).

Berry’s sense of the political and of the word as political is a Brechtian one which views the word as containing an “element of challenge”, of being able to “provoke a response” and which, when used, as “an active force, gives the speaker another dimension” (1987: 21). This links the actor’s agency into the political positioning of a particular production, and to a political positioning in relation to language as actor agency in the theatre, and language as social identity. Berry speaks of the “responsibility to language” which reflected through “the care and life that we bring to it helps the hearers also to be articulate”. This responsibility is particularly weighty in the present time when “computer technology threatens to dehumanize communication, and when the term ‘post-articulate’ has become current” (1987: 10). Relating this to the energy inherent in words, Berry speaks of “reaching out through words” rather than a “dulled, inward-looking speaking of dialogue”. In recognizing a greater cause, actors will be able to make words or text “remarkable to the hearer” (1987: 10).

3.5. Berry, Theatre Voice and Broader Theatre Debates

Throughout this study it has been suggested that both the theatrical use of the voice and the notion of the centrality of voice to performance are dependent on the inclusion of theatre voice in broader debates about theatre. The issues of context, the interaction of prevailing methodologies with the notion of the natural voice and Berry's intent that language should take the actor to unknown places, are all issues which can immediately locate theatre voice in broader debates of theatre. This is a debate for voice practitioners to initiate with actors and directors. It is a debate that ultimately finds form in performance where it becomes a debate between theatre practitioners and an audience.

In 1997 the beginnings of a debate on theatre voice as part of a broader theatre debate, took place in four editions of the New Theatre Quarterly. This debate reflected the difficulties of presenting an oral-kinesic practice in literary terms or of subjecting it to academic analysis. The debate was initiated by Sarah Werner who published an essay (1997) in which she examined Berry's work in terms of a feminist discourse of performance. This analysis concluded that theatre voice rhetoric which encourages actresses to allow the authorial voice of the text (Shakespeare's voice) to "speak" does not empower those actresses to deal with the gender politics implicit in notions of the authorial voice. This prompted an angry, joint response from Berry, Linklater and Rodenburg (1997) based on assertions that their respective practices were misunderstood and certainly not investigated on the floor. Ms Werner (1997) responded, in turn, stating that no offence was intended and that her key argument had been ignored in the joint

response. A different response by Jane Boston claimed that the position of Werner was not as oppositional as the article suggested and that all four writers were less diametrically opposed than at first appeared. Boston concludes:

There is also clearly a place for reconnecting the head into the equation, which would bring into voice training and practices a consideration of history, social context, and political awareness. As we have seen, there is a body of useful and progressive analytical theory on performance, feminism, and semiotics which can usefully be employed to the end of articulating the experiential processes of voice. The time is now right for the teaching methodologies of voice practitioners to be viewed, along with those of their counterparts in other artistic disciplines, as both socially transparent and analytically traceable - and thus developmentally answerable to both the academy and the conservatoire (1997: 254).

There are two issues here. The first, in line with the sentiment of this study, is the challenge to theatre voice practitioners, to make theatre voice issues heard and to lay claim to its place in broader debates of theatre. The second issue, which has direct bearing on the first, concerns the epistemology of theatre voice, which Boston describes as the “experiential processes of voice”. Experience and process are integral to the nature of theatre voice and complicate the process of presenting theatre voice in other terms.

However, process and experience are also integral to the whole of theatre and it is through the recognition of the oral-aural-kinesthetic modality of theatre voice and theatre that debate within theatre voice, and within a broader context of theatre becomes possible. Practical and theoretical debate are essential in holding theatre voice central to the act of theatre. The discursive context of this

debate must be defined by all of the representations of theatre voice: the oral-aural-kinesthetic modality of the rehearsal space, the oral-aural-kinesthetic modality of the performance, the textbook and, theatre voice and theatre theory. Central to a debate which must range over these varied representations, is the nature of theatre voice.

3.5.i. The Nature of Theatre Voice

Theatre voice is structured by the actor, the space, sound and a dramatic or other text. "In any plane, physical or non-physical, structure implies relationship" (Rolf 1977: 30). The theatre voice practitioner is therefore concerned with the relationship between the actor (oral-aural, physical, emotional, intellectual, imaginative), the space (internal, external), sound (temporal, spatial) and the dramatic or other text (literary, imaginative, technical). The task is to bring something into being through the dynamic relationship between actor, space, sound and text.

As noted Berry describes the voice work as subjective (1987: 10) and also states that the actor cannot hear her own voice as other people do because she hears via the bone conduction of the head (1987: 16). Furthermore, the actor needs the third ear in working with the voice (1987: 17). Such statements are made

alongside others which claim that, in doing the exercises, the actor will understand what is meant; the idea that the issues will become clear through the practice (1975: 50).

This is, of course, both true and untrue. Any practitioner, leading actors through Berry's exercises will experience something of what they claim to do but they will not be able to bring Berry's context - "what people talk about" - to the work and the ultimate effectiveness of the work will be circumscribed by the individual practitioner's own response and by the actors' response to the work .⁵⁹

Voice work also relies fundamentally on presence. The degree to which both the voice practitioner and the actor are present in the process determines the levels of responsiveness to the task and to each other. Ong (1977) describes usefully, the sense of being present which determines the oral-aural space. It is a condition of being in the moment that requires an appropriate speaking to the moment. Such appropriateness being determined by those who are present. The voice practitioner and the actor constitute an oral-aural community, in Ong's sense, and their collective knowledge will describe the discursive context of their theatre voice practice. Ong describes both the sense of presence and the collective knowledge pertinent to the oral-aural community.

⁵⁹ American voice practitioner, Kate Burke, in a paper entitled 'On Training and Pluralism' (1997), argues that while many aspects of a voice teacher's work might be derivative, the major impact of the work comes through that which is generic: the personal stamp of the individual who is teaching.

Certainly, living in an oral-aural universe, the village consciousness has to live in simultaneity in the sense that it lives in the present to a degree unknown to man who can relate to the past circumstantially through writing and concomitantly to the future through highly controlled and sophisticated planning. Primitive life is simultaneous in that it has no records, so that its conscious contact with its past is governed by what people talk about (ibid, 91).

While as members of a literate culture the voice practitioner and the actor do have recourse to experience preserved in print, the simultaneity that Ong refers to is that which is operative during the work. Both the voice practitioner and the actor respond in the moment as they bring the work into being. It is the “what people talk about” that is at times intellectual, emotive, descriptive and anecdotal in pursuit of affecting change in the relationship between those entities which structure the work.

This “what people talk about” is the context of using language to generate appropriate practice. This is where appropriate use of simile, image and metaphor lead the actor to greater understanding and use of the voice. Of more importance to a generation of appropriate practice, is the useful ranging of the voice practitioner between anecdote, generalisation, authoritative sources and that which is completely esoteric.

Berry articulates very clearly the need to be accurate with language but this is not the same as the academic rigour of refining argument (1975: 45). Rather, it refers to an accuracy required to refine the processes of the body, the intellect and the imagination in producing sound. The skill of the voice practitioner is largely

dependent on a flexibility of language registers and a mobility between discourses.

An analysis of Berry's work reveals that voice practitioners can, and do, theorise positions for voice and can, and do, approach theatre voice through various discourses. These theoretical positions, these discourses are subtextual in the work and need to be consciously extracted. They are also, not necessarily stable because the discourse can shift from one production to another or, as emerged through Berry's work, they exist in tension (cf. Berry's own inclination towards a political discourse defined by Brecht compared with the acting tradition of realism which Boal defines as a political discourse coercion).

The difficulty of satisfying both the academy and the conservatoire lies in the fact that the one modality does not translate easily into the other. Academic ideas which generate no practice require, for their usefulness to the conservatoire, a practitioner who can translate the one into the other. The conservatoire, when going to print, has a right to reflect the language of its own discursive context and should not need to "describe the horse in terms of the automobile" (cf. Ong) but is then subject to issues of translation and misunderstanding.

Theatre voice work will connect with the whole sphere of theatre when all these contexts become possible referents of the theatre voice dialogue. This becomes possible if the theatre voice practitioner approaches the work as "processual" to

appropriate Zarrilli's term (1995: 30). Zarrilli applies the term "processual" to the practitioner's approach to acting. A processual approach recognizes that acting cannot be conceived of as "a truth (that is, one system, discourse, or practice)". The processual approach "cultivates a critical awareness of acting as multiple and always changing" (ibid, 3). A processual approach to theatre voice activates a questioning of positions which becomes a co-ordinating frame for theatre voice contexts and modalities. Within such an exchange the question of what meanings the voice evokes in theatre, is integral to any vocal activity.

3.6. Conclusion

Berry's desire to "provoke" and "surprise" both actor and the audience alike, is the result of an altered relationship with sound and words which is reflected through the texture and energy of the actor's sound presence. This suggests a re-examination of how we interpret the voice; it suggests a divergent view of the theatrical possibilities of theatre voice and an altered experience of the voice in the theatre.

CHAPTER FOUR

Strategies for a Praxis based on the Centrality of Voice to Performance

The foundational belief of the proposal of the centrality of voice to performance, is that there are far more vocal choices available to actors than are currently consciously used in theatre. As noted, the avant-garde theatre voice practice has generated a body of techniques and concepts which can be used to liberate current theatre voice practice into a more broadly conceived of theatrical space. The range of productions, cited in the introduction, suggests an erratic, but active, awareness of a possible theatrical use of the voice among actors and directors. The examination of Berry's work points to a theatre voice dialogue which supports a greater theatrical exploration than evidences in present interpretations of the natural voice. These choices become dynamic when theatre practitioners approach theatre voice from the perspective of creating meaning theatrically through the voice. Central to this approach is the belief that the actor can vocally reach for the unknown, Berry's "surprise" (1987: 19), through sound and words. Access to these choices requires a shift of perspective on theatre voice by all theatre practitioners.

4.1. Shifting the Perspective on Theatre Voice: Ways of Thinking about Theatre Voice.

A conscious engagement with strategies and constructs which hold the voice central to performance can shift perspectives on theatre voice. Such an engagement invites consistent questioning around the meanings that the voice evokes in theatre. This engagement can also inspire theatre voice practitioners to devise appropriate exercises for exploring multiple vocal choices, as ideas become meaningless unless they can provide a route to sonic action.

4.1.i. Embracing Contradiction.

An initial shift in perspective could start with the mapping of contradictions in theatre voice practice; a mapping which would end with an active engagement with those contradictions. In the introduction to this study, it was noted how the avant-garde defines itself in opposition to mainstream theatre, and how as a result, the theatre voice practices of these two traditions have remained polarized. In chapter three inherent contradictions, within mainstream theatre voice practice, emerged in examining Berry's work. For example, Berry's desire for Brechtian provocation is contradictory to the situation-character-motive approach which leads to a real voice. Consonant with the idea that an active, broad theatre debate is necessary for keeping theatre voice central to performance, is the idea of embracing such contradictions within current vocal

practices. It has already been suggested that the “processual” approach of Zarrilli opens out the theatrical possibilities of theatre voice in that it recognizes a multiplicity of approaches, methodologies and discourses as the discourse of theatre voice. It becomes a means of accommodating the polarity between the avant-garde and mainstream voice practices. An historical view of the processual approach, allows for such practices to be separate in time but, when looking back, all vocal practices are recognized as part of a “multiplicity” of theatre voices which constitute a discourse of theatre voice (1995: 3).

However, moving beyond the historical sense of “processual”, but staying with the notion of instability, which is inherent in the idea of the processual, the practitioner is placed in a position in which the contradictions are *present as material*. The embracing of contradiction becomes an active engagement with that *which is different* about the two, or more, approaches in question. This does not imply a translation of one practice into the terms of another, nor a search for the most useful compromise between two poles. Rather, it suggests a positioning which asks: “If we hold these two things in mind what becomes possible?” In this way, polarity or contradiction suggests the possibility of the unknown and demands active exploration.

Fundamental to embracing contradiction is the notion that the outcome is not known at the outset. For example, in the Berry/RSC context, the exploration of the Elizabethan or other traditions, with the knowledge that the voice will sound

real, is sonically predetermined to a certain extent. Ultimately, the issue is not whether the production employs a real sound or not, but that debate about making meaning through the voice, debate about actor agency as vocal agency, debate around using the voice theatrically, and the affirmation of the voice as central to performance, will take place.

Polarity and contradiction are not new to theatre or to theatre voice. The understanding of theatre voice and theatre voice teaching is often constructed on contradiction. For example, the achievement, the *doing*, of physical and certain vocal releases is based on the notion *not doing* anything. Theatre, as Birringer points out, generates itself through contradiction in extreme form; that which Birringer calls the “contradictory space” of theatre. This is a space in which the nonsimultaneous exists simultaneously (1993: 3). Theatre’s “different realities”, its live medium and fictional content create a reality of fiction. As a live medium theatre is physically expressed, playing out through time its own constructed spatial-temporal world. Inherent in that “liveness” is the knowledge of its own unreality; the knowledge that its constructed world is a fiction. “It cannot hold onto the reality it imagines and produces, and the lived body of work becomes a fiction the moment it vanishes. What remains...[is] the unconsciously produced image the theatre has of itself and conveys to its culture” (1993: 4).

This “contradictory space”, which Birringer identifies as the essential nature of theatre, is a space in which theatre *constructs itself out of its own contradiction*;

the contradiction of its fictive reality. Theatre, thus, suggests a creative space in which the impossible is the possible. This sense of contradiction is already present in contemporary theatre voice which employs voice as a real sound for a not-real art form.

4.1.ii. Theatre Voice as a Process of *Bringing-into-Being*

The exploration of Habermas' theory of "communicative rationality" revealed a need to loosen a hold on reason and a reasonable sound, as determinants of the discursive context of theatre voice, in order to conceive of voice theatrically. Similarly, it is necessary to examine the way in which text is *read*; to examine the underlying notions of interpretation. To ask the question: what meanings does the voice evoke in theatre? also requires the question: how is the voice heard in theatre?

Voice is predominantly heard as representing the "communicative rationality" which structures daily communication. And as a voice of reason the actor's voice confirms a tradition of interpretation which is concerned with *demystifying* text - with playing out, vocally, the meaning inherent in the text. The actor's voice of reason, reflecting the audience's reasoning, leads the audience back to the origin of an inherent meaning: an authorial or directorial intent.

A disruption of this demystifying process of interpretation becomes possible when the audience members have no knowledge of the language spoken, or when, although the language used is their mother tongue, it is so formal that the text is difficult to follow and the experience of the production is one of only getting the gist of the spoken text. In these situations the audience enters into a different relationship with the spoken text of a play. While audience members might experience a certain frustration, they form a different sonic relationship with the production and, as a result, experience language as sound image, as sound energy and/or as sonic music. The production is experienced sonically. These examples offer a point of entry in terms of theatre voice, to Sandra Kemp's work on interpretation in which the relationship between experience and interpretation is explored. An exploration which has important implications for the theatrical use of theatre voice.

Kemp asserts that the postmodern theatre has raised questions about "the nature (or importance) of interpretation, about the threat (or promise) of multi-media (and multi-cultural) texts, about the freedom (or stability) of the reader", but that, these questions have been raised from the perspective of a literary method of reading texts. The literary method of reading texts is constructed on Plato's notion of mimesis in which "to interpret is to relate interpretation to interpreted, either through a direct relationship of similarity or homology or through a mediated, allegorical relationship, a relationship guaranteed by the artist's intention" (1996: 153-155).

However, mimetic readings of art forms like dance or music do not hold in that they are not “in any simple way a language; neither is necessarily ‘about’ anything; neither clearly ‘represents’ or ‘imitates’ “ (1996: 155). Here Kemp draws on the writings of Benjamin⁶⁰, who suggests that the “object *for* interpretation...is an aspect *of* interpretation, and cannot exist apart from it”. In other words, the experience of dance is the interpretation of dance. This makes dance a “becoming- object” and interpretation “a process of *bringing-into-being*” (1996: 155).

This understanding of interpretation as the experience of art, as located in the temporal nature of art, has direct application to theatre and, in particular, to theatre voice. A vocal performance is essentially temporal; it is a vocal-aural interaction between actor and audience which cannot be repeated. Theatre voice is a *bringing-into-being* process of interpretation. Theatre voice is an example of Kemp’s “act of meaning making” which is dependent on “a kind of *collusion* between performer and audience” (1996: 156).

This understanding of interpretation which focuses on the act of vocal performance invites a consideration of voice as performance text and the exploration of a theatrical use of the voice in which realism becomes one of a range of choices. The audience no longer waits for clues to some meaning

⁶⁰ Kemp has used ideas proposed by Andrew Benjamin in Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde (London, Routledge, 1991).

which will become apparent, rather, the performance is the making of meaning. This as Kemp states is an invitation “to be mystified” or in the terms of this study, to entertain the unknown (1996: 155).

4.1.iii. Metaphor as Vocal Action

The idea of the unknown, the idea of creating resonant meaning, the idea of metaphor is synchronous with the process of creating theatre. Thus it is part of the fabric of the theatre voice practitioner’s praxis. Theatre voice as the actor’s “sound presence” (Berry 1987: 16) is a complex area of work because part of the work is concrete (muscles, bones, written text) but a greater part of the work is intangible - accessible only through the imagination. For example, the actor cannot directly control the vocal folds or touch the diaphragm. Converting breath into sound is partly accessible through understanding the physiological action of the body but becomes more accessible through simile, image or metaphor: “try not to *make* the sound; try to let it be the by-product of the ‘touch’ picture, in the same way that you do not *make* light in an electric bulb; you press a switch, or put a plug in a socket, and light *happens*” (Linklater 1976: 39). Here Linklater starts with picture and moves to metaphor in the language of the oral-aural-kinesthetic space.

Metaphor is particularly important in dealing with the voice because it can function in two ways: it can define and describe ideas and actions more acutely

through image, thus clarifying technical aspects of theatre voice, and it can also open up a realm of previously unconsidered possibilities when applied to an action or idea, thus extending the creative possibilities.

The following example illustrates this dual functioning. All theatre voice work is predicated on a physical readiness usually called relaxation (but with tone) or a “free” body, so that the voice can be “centred”. None of which, the actor must “do” but rather “allow”. These ideas, and this terminology, are common currency in theatre voice. As terms, they are not necessarily illuminating, not obviously indicative of sound or physical action, and the actor needs to be guided towards a greater and greater physical-vocal understanding of these concepts by the voice practitioner. Through the use of metaphor the dynamic physical and vocal function of these ideas can be released. Ida Rolf⁶¹ in clarifying the action of muscles, uses a tent as a metaphor for the balanced body. A metaphor which is appropriate to the physical readiness desired for theatre voice.

Ask a city man what holds a tent upright, and he answers, “Why, the tent pole of course.” But the woodsman knows that in a properly stretched tent, it is the downward pull of the left side that upholds the right side, and it is the right side that upholds the left. The function of the tent pole is to ensure the appropriate spatial balance for the two sides. So it is with bodies. Bones determine spatial position of attached muscles and thereby the efficacy of the agonist-antagonist balance. To the seeing eye, the surface contour of a body delineates the underlying structure (1977: 65).

⁶¹ Ida Rolf developed a technique called Rolfing which deals with the structural integration of bones and muscles.

This idea, of bones creating space for appropriate muscular movement, is dynamic in fostering a sense of internal space for the actor (for breath, emotion and idea), for encouraging a balanced (free) body able to function: to *act*. The fact that the “seeing eye” misreads the function of the contour of the body directs the application of this metaphor internally, resulting in an internal physical experience. The actor working with this metaphor for creating internal space and a physical balance between bones and muscles begins to “allow” a necessary state of being. Any misconceived notions of relaxed as floppy or inert are dispelled.

The point at which this metaphor opens up more creative possibilities for the actor is through the notion of space. Berry’s concern with energy, and the criticism of domesticating the text through the voice, is something that can be resolved through the actor’s understanding of space; both internal and external. The actor connects her internal space to the external space through sound, and through energy. Actors who are read as domestic on stage are those who define their work through their own internal sense of space and energy. While actors need to draw on their own experience, that experience must be energetically and spatially translated or transformed for the theatre. To return to Rolf’s tent (and by implication the actor’s vocal body), the body as tent is no longer understood as a static object but rather as an active state of balance.

Metaphor is not new to theatre voice; it is the area in which the work of the voice practitioner, and of the actor, intersects with that of the director. It is a common shared construct for interpretation. The process of interpretation, whether circumscribed by metaphor or not, operates paradoxically - narrowing down and opening out meaning - similar to the operation of metaphor described above.

4.1.iv. Metaphor as Intrinsic to All Theatre

The process of interpretation in the theatre - the creating of the theatre piece - is generated through two distinct drives or energies: the one reaches into an unknown possibility and the other drives hard at definition. All theatre presupposes both energies at the outset, albeit in the most simple terms. The theatre company with a text, set design and a clearly imaged idea of what the production will ultimately look like, will still stumble upon those moments of surprise when exploring the text or in playing out the text. What is of importance though, is that the presupposition of these energies does not ensure their vitality through the process. They need to be consciously nurtured as equal partners in the creative act.

The energy which reaches for an unknown possibility, is the energy which embodies the idea of *being at play*. In the theatre at play is a notion of process, of the theatre practitioner as a free ranging agent across spheres which are obviously part of theatre as well as across spheres which have not previously

been entertained. It is an energy that demands that the theatre practitioner work in the dark, play, and risk. The reward is that what will be uncovered is that which is not already known. This entertaining of the unknown is an essence of creativity. It holds theatre in a dynamic space as a project of possibilities, and rests in the belief that beyond the presently conceived boundaries there lies more.

Simultaneously, the energy which drives at definition is that which will ultimately concretize the unknown into a coherent piece of theatre. With this energy the theatre maker will hone meaning, develop appropriate techniques, and coordinate a range of skills in a way that allows them to speak to an audience beyond the mere articulation of those skills. This speaking beyond is that quality - that dimension - which is perceived to be missing when referring to a performer who is technically 'perfect' but lacks 'presence' or 'soul'.⁶² It is a dimension of resonant meaning (cf. Berry's idea of words operating beyond logic). This is the dimension which links the defining energy to the energy of possibility. Both energies are essences of creativity and a balance of these energies is the ongoing work of the theatre practitioner.

⁶² Barthes seems to be expressing something similar in his exploration of melody when he speaks of "where the melody really works at the language - not at what it says, but the voluptuousness of its sounds-signifiers, of its letters - where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work" (1977: 182). The effect of this is "jouissance", a term which translator, Stephen Heath, points out, has no English equivalent. It is a term denoting a range of meanings embodying a particular force. Heath offers "bliss", "thrill", "climactic pleasure", "come" (the sexual connotation) and "dissipation", which suggests the loss within the state of bliss, (ibid:9).

The most tangible bridge between these two energies is the theatrical concept: the director's concept for the production and the actor's concept for her part linked in to the director's concept. When these concepts are carefully articulated, both energies are liberated in the rehearsal space.

Marion Woodman⁶³ in the contemplation of "soul making", in the context of Jungian psychology, discusses the role of metaphor as the linguistic transformation of matter into "symbols of spirit"⁶⁴, citing the Greek meaning of *meta-phor* as that of "carrying across" (1990: 24). She speaks of metaphor as yoking matter and spirit together "without bloodshed". The theatrical concept - the director's concept - creates just such a yoking between the energy to define and the energy to open out, while respecting the totalities of those two energies - Woodman's "without bloodshed". Where there is an imbalance between these energies, or no bridging, then the theatre veers either towards what Brook called "deadly theatre" (1968) - a state in which theatre is merely rhetorical - or, it veers towards chaos. One form of chaos being a state so free of definition, that it is like Milan Kundera's man, who due to the "absolute absence of a burden ...[is] lighter than air, ...soar[s] into the heights, take[s] leave of the earth and his earthly being, and becomes only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant" (Woodman 1990: 36).

⁶³ Marion Woodman is a Jungian analyst and the author of several books, many of them reflecting her concern with a reevaluation of the feminine principle.

⁶⁴ Refer to Jung (1979) for an elaboration of Jungian symbols and the pictorial language of dreams.

An experience of the perfect balance of these two creative energies, for me, is the experience, of being present at a performance where the meaning evolves over time but where the meaning of experiencing that piece of theatre, cannot be *fully told* and has no closure. This experience is one of intellectual, emotional *and visceral* knowledge of what the piece of theatre evokes, and the door to the unknown is comfortably left open in the know-ing of that meaning. Integral to this kind of meaning making is an audience actor collusion.

The following example illustrates the possibility of the director's metaphor intersecting with actor's work on the voice. Canadian director, David Rotenburg, described his metaphor for directing Pinter's The Betrayal as "the opening of eyes" (Directing Seminar, University of Cape Town, 1997). The usefulness of this metaphor is that it contains movement; it implies a shift from one state of being to another. This acknowledges the temporal nature of theatre and of theatre voice.

This metaphoric movement signals much more than just a way of qualifying the action of the plot. This movement can be translated into a scenic development in the design for the production. This movement is also a structure for vocal action which could point to a shift in sonic text, distinguishing one state of being from another. If the choice was to remain within the style of realism, then the vocal shift could reflect a sonic distinction of realisms (cf. Berry's acknowledgement of the distinctions in realism in contemporary American and British texts, pp. 65 - 66). There are also other quite dramatic theatrical uses of the voice which could

be employed. British director Annie Castledine describes her use of a “soundscape” for her production of Goliath. Three pieces of symphonic music which reflected “an idealised and unrealistic concept of England” were composed as “a point of ironic commentry”. Her concept of music was extended to include the nineteen voices portrayed by actor Nichola McAuliffe. This Castledine describes as “a music of the voices of this country [England]” which she conceived “in terms of music” and which she wanted to represent with “dignity, honour, and integrity” (Manfull 1999: 28).

The point, here, is one of thinking about the voice as a text of the intertext of theatre. Therefore, the voice is part of a theatrical text (the text of meaning making, determined in this example through metaphor), the voice is part of the dramatic text (which is layered with literary and dramatic form: structure, semantic meaning, subtext), the voice is part of the situation-character-motive text (essentially the way the actor works), the voice is sonic text, the voice is physical presence.

4.2. Practical Possibilities: The Sonic Texts of Performance Writing

Allsopp describes Performance Writing as “the continuing and transforming relationship between the two terms of its discourse (performance, writing), proposed both as boundary markers and as two terminal points in an open circuit across which the luminous arc of performance writings take form” (1999: 77). Performance writing is an area of work exploring notions of writing, notions of reading and notions of performance.⁶⁵ Historically, writing intended for performance “has traditionally resolved itself in a variety of conventionalized (but not unproblematic) forms: the play text, the libretto, the lyric, and so on”. These forms, according to Allsopp, have until recently been “divorced from the study of their performance” (ibid, 76).

Focusing on the live performance, Sumner describes the performance as “rich in its acknowledgement of the reference language makes to meaning, but ... most rich in its acknowledgement of language as material, subject, substance...live performance in which the primary focus is the spoken patterning of language rather than language’s hermeneutic content separate from that live vocal patterning” (1999: 81). Performance writing thus engages with the voice as intertext: sonic text, physical text, movement text and spatial text .

⁶⁵ Historically, Performance Writing originates from a course in “writing for performance” which was set up in 1976 as part of the academic programme at Dartington, a specialist arts college in England. The course was set up in response to the “making of ‘physical, non-narrative and visual’ experimental theatre and ‘new dance’ work and...[their] relations to wider social and politic contexts” (Allsopp 1999: 77). The inspiration for the course had come from a literary model; a course started at Black Mountain College in North Carolina in 1952 which was described as “The Act of Writing in the Context of Post-Modern Man”.

Sumner's prescript for his The Unspeakable Rooms suggests a vocal performance:

use text as springboard from which to leap
lead observers into abstract spaces, mute
spaces of potential narrative
lead observers into unspeakable rooms
allow observers to explore, without feeling
coerced into particular interpretations (1999: 86).

A second piece THE PLACE OF THE F (LUTE) OOT IN C (ALT.) URE by cris cheek (sic) has the following instructions for performance: "Written to be performed by two people. One taking the left column throughout and the other the right. The columns on each page are to be performed simultaneously. The 'play' emerges in those navigations which performers make through their materials and the concomitant interplay generated for their audiences. ...Don't be anxious, interplays will occur" (1999: 117).

In these pieces the writing itself strongly suggests the performativity of the texts. Two extracts are reproduced as examples of this; examples of texts in which "a diverse set of writerly practices...are now performing both on and beyond the page" (Allsopp 1999: 79) (See Appendix B). These pieces of writing are not usually rehearsed in a traditional way or at all, but they are, usually, performed by the writers themselves. As material for theatre voice, the vocal task would be one of making an eye/sound response, of translating the "writerly" devices into sonic text with an awareness of the spatial and physical

dimensions suggested through the writing. A performance in which the actor is present in her sound.

4.3. Actor Agency: Vocal Empowerment in the Creative Space of the Actor

The actor occupies a unique space in theatre: the space of translation. It is the actor's job to work in the space between the text and the performance, between the concept and the realisation of the concept. In that space the actor explores the choices that will translate text/concept into a spatial-temporal reality expressed through voice and body. None of the other participants in theatre is required to translate the theatrical concept into a form similar to that of the actor in performance. The actor is, furthermore, required to maintain those choices, and to recapture the potency of their actuality, for however many consecutive performances of the production run. Sandra Kemp points to the nature of this space of translation in a description of performance. She is worth quoting at length because the actor is engaged with similar processes in the rehearsal space before the performance.

The point here, I think, is that as performers we do not first create something - the performance-as-text - and then assess it; rather, assessment, a *continuous* process of judgement, is what we mean by a performance in the first place. A dancer's movements are at once thoughtless (determined by the music / choreography : objectified) and thoughtful (determined by listening to the music / choreographer: subjectified). Sport provides an interesting analogy here: the perfect race, the perfect game is that in which there is a perfect match of technique and occasion, body and mind; for a moment, the athlete or footballer *is* will-less. Performance, in short, is by necessity a matter of technique; it is

about the body in the mind, the mind in the body. And it is a critical practice because it also involves, by necessity, the act of *giving form*, whether to a musical sound, a physical shape, a social gesture (1996, 156).

The actor's space of translation is the how to space which Stanislavsky's and other acting methodologies codify into technical means or practices. As suggested earlier, the codification of these methodologies has empowered the actor as the theatrical agent of performance. However, this how to of the space of translation must not be confused with the technical configurations of various methodologies or with the range of expressive languages which the actor has at her disposal. These expressive languages refer to learned styles of acting, styles of movement and vocal styles. What is operative in the being of the actor, in this space, is a creative-imaginative response around a notion of theatre as a performative project of possibilities. The actor is at play and will draw on her known languages but will also entertain the possibility of and *enable* the emergence of something that she has not yet imagined.

The word language is used here with intended irony because when theatre voice is understood as the language of the dramatic text, its creative-imaginative dimension, its dimension of play, is subtly lost. The narrative of the actor's seduction into psychological realism and into a space where conceptualisation revolves around character, points to a further limitation on the 'space of translation'. The realist conceptualisation of character ties the actor irrevocably to text and a demystifying process around that text. It ties the sound of the

character's voice and the inflection patterns to a socially identifiable set of patterns - a domesticated sound. This links the 'space of translation' directly to writing, shifting it further away from its own creative centre: a space in which voice and body are free to transform, mutate, evolve in response to any kind of stimulus. It is a space of conceptual play. It is the point at which ideas, sounds or feelings which have no material form find form.

4.3.i. Abstraction and Authenticity

The actor cannot go unguided into an exploration of a theatrical use of the voice. Apart from the support of the voice practitioner, or director, the actor ultimately needs to develop her own internal guide - her own sense of authentic expression. The realist acting methodologies have tied this process of authentication to character intention which is accompanied by appropriate emotional response. In a theatrical use of the voice, sound and language can become abstracted bearing little relation to human motive and attendant feeling. Words and sounds become theatrical events and sonic responses as opposed to being reasonable or describing a recognizable discursive rationality. In this exploration, there are three areas in which the actor needs to develop her artistic independence:

- working with text in the abstract
- accepting sonic response as communication and theatrical expression
- and assessing sonic performance.

The ability to deal with text, dramatic text or language, as abstract, as artefact, or as material for performance, begins with the actor's ability to listen for the texture of sound, and then, to physically and vocally connect with the pulse of the vocal energy. Barba describes energy as the "how" of performance; the "how to make the invisible visible: the rhythm of thought" (1995: 50). He further describes the actor's developed ability to modulate, adjust and shape energy as a "scenic biology" which the actor "invents" for herself. This is "the ability to identify and distinguish between the various facets of energy" and Barba identifies it as part of a "professional strategy"(1995: 61).

The exploration of words and sound in the abstract, an exploration of sonic imagery - is present in the work of Linklater where sound is strongly connected to emotion, before it is connected to character intent (1976:138 - 140). For example, Linklater explores the interior of the body through visualising colour, which is then, sonically expressed. Grotowski offers very fine exercises for exploring the texture of sound (1975:134 - 135). Berry's work points to literary device as vocal action which, framed in the abstract, can become sonic action (1987: 82 - 138). Most improvisatory work encourages vocalisation as part of the exploration. This vocalisation requires confirmation as being essential to, as being expressive, and not just supportive of some larger intention. As the actor becomes more adept at handling sound in the abstract, such sound will be experienced as sonic response within a theatrical scenario. The texture and energy of these responses or sonic images will, over time, be experienced by the actor, as either

appropriate/authentic or inappropriate/inauthentic. This will become possible through the development of the actor's ability to assess those responses in terms of energy and sound, in relation to the *overall theatrical concept or intent*.

Realist acting methodologies have created the means to authenticate performance through experience. The actor requires reassurance that experience will create a means of assessing performance when there is no apparent, or logical, character intention. Steinman states that "performers today, to make a wide generalization, are determining performance values through their own experience, and particularly in and through their bodies. They are finding ways to voice them which feel true to their fundamental origins in human experience" (1995: 105). It is this context that gives form to both Berry's (1987: 19) and Linklater's (1976: 2) insistence that voice is a mind-body experience - an intellectual-emotional-physical expression and experience.

Finally, the gap between improvisation and product, or theatre production, must be bridged by the courage to declare new discursive rationalities on stage. These are not the emotionally hollow declamations of the previous century but new sonic gestures and sonic responses drawing on the personal expression of the contemporary actor meeting the demands of theatrical transformation.

4.4 Conclusion

A dynamic contemporary theatre voice practice is one which is actively connected to evolving theatre forms and theories. Theatre voice is both part of the craft of the actor and a conceptual means for creating theatre. The discourse of theatre voice is simultaneously a discourse of theatre which benefits from the participation of actors, directors, voice practitioners, critics and audience. In the light of this, this study proposes the development of a very particular actor agency. One which conceives of theatre voice as central to performance and contributes to an actor culture characterised by multiple vocal responses.

APPENDIX A

This collage of public comment on theatre voice is presented as simultaneous commentary illustrating a general theatre voice sensibility. These fragments sifted from a range of works, speak more loudly of a lack of identity than of a coherent vision around theatre voice.

FROM THE STAGE

ff

Adrian Noble, the Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) made the following comment to a group of voice practitioners attending a British Council/RSC Seminar on Theatre Voice (1998). Noble, in rehearsal for a production soon to open, literally “popped in”, to welcome the delegates before returning to the rehearsal room. However, he courteously offered to field one or two questions before disappearing back to his work. The first questioner asked him to articulate his view of the role of the voice teacher/coach. His pat answer was that ‘in an ideal world’ there would not “be a need for a voice coach”.

At a similar seminar three years earlier, Noble had spoken quite brilliantly on the domesticating effect of realism on voices in the theatre. As with, most directors he eschews realism as a style and locates himself in theatre’s identity as something quite other than the ‘real’ but there is nothing to indicate an understanding of theatre voice as part of where he locates himself.

ACCREDITED VOICES

sotto voce

Patsy Rodenburg says of Cicely Berry: “No one in voice work today can deny the immense contribution that Cicely Berry has made. Almost single-handedly she has made the work both respectable and exciting for actors, theatre directors, educationalists and students alike” (1992:xiii)

Actor, Ian McKellen bluntly describes the course of his education in which his “would-be posher schoolmates went to ‘Elocution’ to have their native sounds taken out like tonsils”. McKellen further refers to teaching himself to hide his accent when at Cambridge and, relishing the fact that he never entirely lost his “native sounds”, he now “belong[s] to that first generation of British actors who *have been allowed* to bring regional accents back to the classical drama” (Rodenburg 1992: vii - viii, my emphasis).

IN THE DAILY BROADSHEETS

ff

Jatinda Verma’s Asian adaptation of Troilus and Cressida (1993) provoked the following response from Critic, Irving Wardle: “I feel an attack of blimpish nationalism coming on; damned outsider gatecrashing the club, doesn’t know the rules’. Verma identifies part of the foreignness as that of ‘seeing a troupe of Indian performers flirting with the English language” (1996: 194 - 196).

Michael Billington, theatre critic of the Guardian, in a paper entitled The Critics View of Voice Work (1995), writes of how when he sat down to prepare this paper “The first thing to hit me was that critics rarely do have a coherent view of voice work. We are concerned with analysing a finished product rather than examining a process. ...But

EPISTEMOLOGY OF VOICE

ff

Theorists in theatre semiotics have articulated theatre in terms of a complex science of signs which codify and describe the making of meaning in theatre. Within this science of theatre *the actual use of the voice* is noted as a small sub-category called paralinguistics.

Elam describes paralinguistics as factors like “pitch, loudness, tempo, timbre and non-verbal sounds”, which are considered to be “over and above” the “phonemic and syntactic structure” of the speaker’s discourse. Paralinguistics are also described as related to the speaker’s “parakinesic orchestration” of his speech; an extension of the gestural life of the character (1980: 79).

South African Actor and theatre maker, Mbongeni Ngema speaks of the making of Asinamali: "I wanted to develop a style of theatre that would communicate with anyone anywhere in the world, that would bridge the barriers of language and culture, something in which the body tells the story much more than the words. Certain sounds that we hear, even if we don't know what the actors are talking about, can go right straight to the heart" (Stein 1990: 102 - 103)

A random selection of interviews with luminary contemporary directors yields one reference to theatre voice. German director, Peter Stein, describes the function of the director as being originally the "architect" of and also the owner of "quite a nice portion of the cake" as opposed to a less multi-faceted function in the current situation. In listing the various facets of theatre - a list which does not include a voice coach-Stein throws a in final comment: "Nowadays you even need somebody to teach you to breathe" (Delgado and Heritage 1996: 253).

Five RSC actresses giving voice to their work under the title of Clamorous Voices Shakespeare's Women Today (1988), make one reference to Cicely Berry's work. However, it is an important comment in that, Juliet Stevenson, expresses Berry's position in relation

South African director, Mark Fleishman states that theatre making "gives rise to a complex 'text' in which the written word, the spoken word, and the transformative material body, amongst others, are in a constant state of dynamic dialogue. There is no essential hierarchy where one mode of expression, one process of making meaning can be seen as more important than another. All that exists is their confrontation" (1997: 200).

Andrew Wade, current Head of the RSC Voice Department:: "Our rights as voice people will never be statutory, because theatre never has and never will operate in that way. Time and time again relationships based on mutual trust have to be established, renewed, sought for, with actors and directors. With unfailing fervour we must constantly earn our role anew" (Hampton and Acker 1997: 140).

South African actor-director-theatre maker, Andrew Buckland says that theatre voice "feels like its changing" from a "logocentric link" to the word that is being delivered, to a position where the voice has more potential to be used differently and to be viewed differently. For Buckland the voice can create a tone for a theatre work. The voice creates atmosphere. The voice can create a "soundscape". Furthermore, directors and

I would say most of us are pretty innocent of voice-work. Most of us haven't got the foggiest idea of what goes on in the voice-sessions conducted by a company like the RSC". Billington continues to speak about the ways in which verse speaking has changed over the years and notes the fact that the theatre critics of the daily and weekend broadsheets are mostly Oxford or Cambridge literature graduates, who hold a consensus view of the centrality of text, and its meaning, to theatre.

Len Ashton responds to a combination of Fo's character writing and the actor's interpretive vocal work in Elizabeth: Almost by Chance a Woman: "The significance of the gobbledygook-prating Dame Grosslady... is not immediately apparent...Grosslady has invented an obscure language of her own, all incoherent fragments and spoonerisms. It is difficult enough to understand why the creature exists at all...In the end, the reaction is impatience..." (The Argus, 15 March 1996).

Verdolini exploring the relationship between theatre voice practitioners and voice in the sphere of medicine notes that "we [theatre voice practitioners] tend to approach training with fundamentally different thought-tools... the theatre trainer's tools are often predominantly intuitive, whereas the speech pathologists tools are often predominantly analytical" (1997: 226).

to text: “language doesn’t just have intellectual meaning. It has a sensual life of sound and energy” (1988: 43).

actors should not work with “a separation of voice as a tool and body as a tool” (1999, Interview).

In 1972 Doreen Lamb was commissioned by the South African Native Affairs Department to help develop black performance in Soweto. Lamb taught stage-craft, acting “and ‘correct’ pronunciation” (Bhekizizwe 1994: 41).

British director John Barton, at the outset of discussing the playing of Shakespeare and how to interpret his texts, states: “I should also make it clear what I am *not* talking about. I shall hardly talk at all about directing, and at first I shall try to keep clear of interpretation” (1984: 7).

Actor, Anthony Sher says of Patsy Rodenburg, founder and Head of the Royal National Theatre’s Voice Department since 1990; “Patsy is a new breed of voice coach, light years away from the Elocution teachers of yore; grand, plummy-voiced ladies, who reigned from the depths of their armchairs” (Rodenburg 1993: xiv).

APPENDIX B

TWO EXAMPLES OF PERFORMANCE WRITING

Extract 1:

THE PLACE OF THE F (LUTE) OOT IN C (ALT.) URE by cris cheek

Their Houses (a) h and
 function (s) (h) as Freed
 From an face a tangy
 map, scoops o (r)
 n evaporative loom view
 margin of transp (a) ort a
 Flurry of spears
 freighter ooze frothy pop
 hy (mn) pocrite (a) s (e) b
 (u) o dy fractions use
 General No Gloves
 within which 'nature'
 cheese reunion and 'cu (l) ture'
 ba (g) lance each other
 may (blossom) tr (i) ack
 stagger on le (a) ver
 change involves
 new petit bourgeois achieving
 shaved foam (surely
 shh) motives
 the profiterolle marlin belonging
 to a negative rea (l) m
 as the so (shall) cial is
 perceived rest (r) aint
 so wet hairs f (r) ame
 condu (c) it
 homes display c (l)
 ue primary drone of the prim
 ontological means
 articulated

am junctions Theme
 selves of (f) t (o) aste Become
 objects
 scope (st) rung point
 hands the f (l) eet hot ribs
 bond though (t) douses
 her sp (u) i rits p (l) an
 above blues qui (l) t (e)
 ephem (in) eral
 with iced vodka dire (-) ctions
 film of manure
 nome (n) clat
 ter (f) ad
 van (t) (age) c
 (s) ing (re) cover the
 smoothe clay f (e) i (g)
 ned (inst) abilities
 and pleasure outing
 nodes oiling emergence
 integrated for (u) m
 hives beam (ing)
 strain male on a chin
 dreams under-closeted
 wheat paint red
 (con) duct (or) hidden (p)
 li (a) e (r) rs re
 scuzzy-jazzy feet of clay
 (suit) secondary
 semantic status of the drum
 holds biker attention

Extract 2:

THE HUNGRY FORM (G. EEK MIX) by Caroline Bergvall

3. ACTION

Refillable inflatable. The want that will. The thumb is fat and smooth. That wants by sucking dry. Travels light but leaves excessive trails.

The door flings open. The floor sags.

MEDEA

Was I brought here to witness: this stolen feat: my own magnificent unravelling: indeed would I still not be rolling forever more across your mind: hungry and adored: full to the eye. Hadn't the door been flung open: hadn't the floor sagged.

hungry and adoring/adoring and adored/being absolutely open/not split but reproducible/

CHORUS (*from the great distance and confidence that sudden awareness brings*)

What is the onion defines your difference

What you are

What you only seem to be

What real is truly different

What difference is pure style

What sameness kept us different

What same difference might ally

What differences grow from sameness

What difference remains the same

What sane different only seems so at a glance

What I peels

What I solidifies



MESSENGER FUCKMINE, FREE

[To force an arm in deeply]

Lo! blood cum and crown:

If it's all in the name

I've always been dead meat

so what the dagger cannot reach

let the doldo finish off:

Hunger follows those

who cannot wait

For as long as there is juice

the hungry I/the empty form/full to the eye/

clapcla clapcl
 clapclapclapclapcl
 clapclpclapcl
 apclapclp clapcl
 apclapclapcl
 apclapclapcl

This piece was specially devised for the Performing Arts Journal and "functions as a spatial reworking of a prose poem entitled 'The Hungry Form'" (Bergvall 1999: 112).

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- Pentecost* 1995. Written by David Edgar, directed by Michael Attenborough, The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon.
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<i>Ek, Anna van Wyk</i>	1999.	Written by Pieter Fourie, directed by Marthinus Basson, Nico Theatre, Cape Town.
<i>Elizabeth: Almost by Chance a Woman</i>	1998.	Written by Dario Fo, directed by Christopher Weare, Nico Arena, Cape Town.
<i>Feedback</i>	1995.	Created by Andrew Buckland, directed by Janet Buckland, Baxter Studio, Cape Town.
<i>La Bete</i>	1995.	Written by David Hirson, directed by Marthinus Basson, Nico Arena, Cape Town.
<i>Medea</i>	1994.	Created by Jazzart Dance Theatre and Magnet Theatre, directed by Mark Fleishman and Jennie Reznick, Nico Arena.
<i>Sunjata</i>	1995.	Written and directed by Mark Fleishmann, The British National Student Drama Festival, UK and Little Theatre, Cape Town, 1995.
<i>The Broken Heart</i>	1995.	Written by John Ford, directed by Michael Boyd, Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.
<i>Woza Albert</i>	1984.	Created by Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon, directed by Barney Simon, Baxter Concert Hall.