



## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Her Material Voice

### The Vocal Female Body in Performance Time and Space

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*Her Material Voice:*

The Vocal Female Body in Performance Time and Space

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

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## Abstract

The research in this thesis (composed of a written element, audio documents and a live performance) focuses on the relationship of the female speaking voice to her own body and others' bodies within the particular temporality of performance space. Arguing that the female voice can be theorised as a resistant theatre material, which through its volatile nature can escape attempts at control, the work here develops practical strategies and methods for discovering how the voice eludes any easy identification or ownership as part of a feminist agenda. Following Michelle Duncan who writes that 'voice puts matter into circulation, matter that is more, or other than language,' the research undertaken investigates how this matter can be manipulated in performance so that the *sound material* of the voice makes meaning. Concentrating on how a female body might 'handle' the voice as matter, with the body in question being both performer of voice, and director/designer of voice, the work develops a methodology of the "auditor-composer," the female body who speaks through careful listening to others' voices. Introducing the model of the auditor-composer through a rethinking of the character of Ophelia, both the practical and textual research undertaken then investigate how bodies compose through long-distance time and space, activating the return of past voices to reverberate in the present. Animating and patterning elements of the theoretical projects of Gina Bloom and Elin Diamond and using Gertrude Stein as a theorist of motion and return, the research argues that the material movement of sound happens in the continuous present, and as such the single voice cites many voices in the action of its live sounding.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Composition as Method

Naturally one does not know how it happened until it is well over beginning happening.<sup>1</sup>

Sound exists only when it is going out of existence.<sup>2</sup>

I cannot now separate the performance of sound from the methods in which sound composes and is composed by others: how sound patterns space in oscillating rhythm; and how such variables as weather and architecture or the instruments and bodies sound travels through can recompose its motion in space and time. The way sound moves, its physics, provokes me to reorder where composition might traditionally *happen*, so that it not only is understood as something *happened* before the performance, but something *happening* in the performance, in the continuous.

Working with sound has taught me that composition, as the method of its making material, is always happening and in many places at once: in air, in walls, in bodies. This thesis is in large part an attempt to provide methods with which to compose for and in performance so as to find how sound moves around and within bodies on stage and in the auditorium. Reflections on *how* strike key notes throughout this study. And by reflections I do not just mean to position a mirror to the past and look or listen back. As I will show throughout this thesis, in practice sound reflects, echoes, resonates, reverberates – moves in its own continuum – not simply to play-back what has come before, but to vibrate on, after the *beginning happening*.<sup>3</sup>

In *vibrating on*, sound moves forward and sequentially so. Sound happens and the perception of its happening follows after: the beat... the beat *heard*. This deferral in time in our perceiving of

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<sup>1</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Composition as Explanation." *Look At Me Now and Here I Am, Gertrude Stein: Writings and Lectures 1909-1945*, ed. Patricia Meyerowitz (London, Peter Owen Publishers, 2004), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen 1982), 71.

<sup>3</sup> Sound happens, and perception follows – there is a delay in communication between the thing happening and the thing perceived, which Gertrude Stein picks up on in relation to the anxiety of watching a play and feeling out of time with it, as the audience and performer operate in different temporalities, in syncopated time. As well as Rebecca Schneider's references to Stein's essay, 'Plays,' one of which I mention below, Elin Diamond and Cormac Power also cite this instance of the gap between 'the thing seen and the thing felt' as a way of explaining the strange shifting presence in theatre and performance temporality. Stein's essay is addressed again in chapter 2.

sound, as it travels through space to reach our receiving ears (and past them) is exemplified in instances of such an iconic delay as that between lightning and thunder; between the speeds of light and sound, the break in between the sound seen happening and the sound heard happening. In such instances we can rationalize the distance between sound source and sound heard as a result of its grand visual scale. But perceiving or comprehending sound is not so clearly articulated, it is not ‘an end in seeking,’ when as receiving bodies we intercept or decipher the sound in the action of its happening, or ‘in the wake of movement.’ For, as P.A. Skantze illustrates:

...sensual apprehension occurs in the wake of movement: that is, in its immediate aftermath, as if the movement was an originary vessel cutting through the air and leaving behind waves that lifted and plunged the receiver.<sup>4</sup>

Skantze’s use of the term ‘apprehension’ here acknowledges the uncertainty in receiving sensual information, an uncertainty which is important to claim as productive when thinking and practicing with sound. For as I shall argue later in this thesis, it is the ability of the sounded voice to act both *outside and inside* the body in ways the body making or receiving the sound hadn’t expected/intentioned that gives the sounded voice such deep potential as an artistic material to work with, and particularly so for a feminist agenda which seeks to complicate how a female body is perceived and received in the live moment of performance.<sup>5</sup>

The *how* of sound and the method(s) through which sound moves (or is made to move) is central to any study of the sonic in physical terms.<sup>6</sup> As evidenced in both the initial vibration and the successive vibrations of the medium it travels through, sound can and does move in *many* ways.

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<sup>4</sup> P.A. Skantze, *Stillness in Motion in the Seventeenth Century Theatre* (Oxon: Routledge, 2003), 23. Skantze continues ‘This image reverberates in the province of sound, described as moving in waves, but also makes room for the kinetic consequences of movements made by the actors and perceived by the audience.’

<sup>5</sup> One of the results of my research was to find more complexity in the motion and time-sense of “moment,” so that rather than defined as holding onto time, the “moment” helps move time on. For this reason, I use “moment” as a precise theoretical term here, and throughout the thesis.

<sup>6</sup> Sound has a method of vibratory movement, but then others can shape it, such as through an instrument or the voice, which the experiments of the early modern period exemplify.

It is this myriad movement that is (implicit in) the *performance* of sound, something I will return to as integral in understanding how and why the aural force (the sound material) of the voice can affect how the female body is (re)presented in the particular temporality of theatre. As a result this study as a whole borrows something of sound's motion as method, both physically and philosophically: practicing with what it means to move oneself through time and space (in front of an audience). Just as sound, in its transmission, composes a trajectory determined both by what has come before and by the (im)perceptible limits of the space it has to practice and progress within, so does the work undertaken here chart successive *movements* of thought, of making, of investigating.

Gertrude Stein and Walter Ong begin this introduction in honoring time travel – with composition and with sound respectively.<sup>7</sup> The strangeness in acknowledging or registering something after it has, in effect, begun (Stein) and is in the process of going (Ong) is implicit in the discussion of sound, and especially when approaching voice, in how it differs so extremely from what is comprehended in reading what is written down. Again, we can only ever apprehend what is heard, and Skantze's usage of the term 'apprehension' incorporates the attempts made in doing so. As listeners we can neither flick back through the pages of a radio show, or slow the pace of receiving information when ideas become dense. It is precisely this impossibility of holding on to words made of sound, and the complication in the carrying of language in voice alone that necessitates a way in which to discuss the voice for its sounded potential without having to revert in reference or reverence to the literary or linguistic as dominant support structures. In response to the formulation of such a 'preposterous term' as 'oral literature,' Ong acutely observes its limitations in how it 'reveals our inability to represent to our own minds a heritage of verbally organized materials except as some variant of writing.'<sup>8</sup> Although Ong acknowledges thirty years ago that such terms' usages were diminishing in frequency, there is

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<sup>7</sup> It is appropriate to begin this work on the performance of sound with time in mind. Not only because this study relies on many past generations of thinking, practicing and imagining with and through sound, but also as the events of making sound and making performance share in their states of existence; in their afterlife imprints in the air and architecture and in those bodies who have received and might resonate on.

<sup>8</sup> Ong, 11.



still today a difficulty in approaching and articulating voice as a critical ‘sound material.’<sup>9</sup> In theatre, voice can be conceptualized as a material element of the staging, composed in the conditions of the live performance event with the physical co-presence of performer and audience. Is this something to do with the temporality of theatre and performance lending its own distinct materiality to the voice once staged? After citing Stein’s particular nervousness in *Plays* (that of experiencing the syncopated tempo of theatre in the delay between ‘the thing seen and the thing felt’) Rebecca Schneider writes:

Many have claimed temporality itself as theatre’s primary medium, where any material, composed in if not contaminated by repetition is spatially encountered both in time and of time.<sup>10</sup>

That ‘this fundamental temporality is volatile, easily swerved’ as a result of theatre’s logic to present and *re-present*, being a medium of ‘...the mimetic, the copy, the double,’ is even more reason to use theatre’s temporality as the testing ground and testing air for this study. Voice, as I will show, is ‘volatile’ too and once staged acts almost to disclose theatre’s unstable temporality, sounding out the time passing and coming, and materially connecting the stage and auditorium, performer and audience. As a result of this co-presence of bodies there is a tangible “between” in theatre, which can be formalised, organised, and consciously configured and illuminated by sound. In later chapters I discuss how this distance between performer and audience is a site in which voice might practice independently of bodies, materializing itself in space through its own patterning transmission. For now though, I want to introduce this study on the material of voice by thinking about the material of sound and how an understanding of sound as both material composition itself and simultaneously the material to be composed might offer a method with which to approach voice in performance.

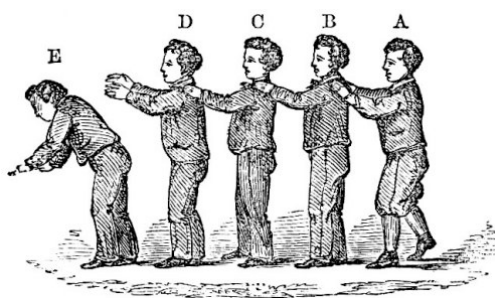
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<sup>9</sup> For this reason I am indebted to writers such as Michelle Duncan, Gina Bloom and Liz Mills who have all helped me conceive of sound as a theatre material.

<sup>10</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in times of Theatrical Reenactment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 89.

## Sound Composition

In the science experiment, as on the theatre stage, sound performs. John Tyndall's Eight Lectures on Sound, delivered at The Royal Institution of Great Britain in 1867 were publically staged experiments in front of a live audience. This model for presenting and performing science is still, of course, used as a way of explaining or demonstrating what is not so easily comprehended from the page. In the written composition of these lectures, however, Tyndall attends with care to physicalising how sound performs; of making the immaterial, material:



...sound is projected through the air as a push is through a crowd; it is the propagation of a *wave* or *pulse*, each particle taking up the motion of its neighbour, and delivering it on to the next. These aerial waves enter the external ear, meet a membrane, the so-called tympanic membrane, which is drawn across the passage at a certain place, and break upon it as sea-waves do upon the shore. The membrane is shaken, its tremors are communicated to the auditory nerve, and transmitted by it to the brain, where they produce the impression to which we give the name of sound.<sup>11</sup>

Whether consciously or not, Tyndall ties the movement of sounds to the movement of bodies, imagining the motion of sound akin to a crowd in resonant relation to each other. Illustrating sound's communicative energy this way demonstrates something important about how sound composes itself in space in the continuous: were there more bodies in Tyndall's illustration, the movement would continue on through them, slowing and diminishing in intensity the further it

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<sup>11</sup> Image and quotation from John Tyndall, *Sound: A course of eight lectures delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1867), 125.

travelled. While sound is energy, this energy can be organized or composed (even translated), in effect arranged in space. I think here of Ong's phrasing - 'verbally organized materials' - for the method in which oral languages compose with sounds rather than alphabets. With this expression, Ong conceptualises oral language as a kind of sound composition in which word-materials as sense-materials are scored. The context in which Ong uses this phrase is important here, that of 'heritage,' in that these materials are organized in a composition made through long and deep investments in time and of time. This passing on of sound through generations must also allow space for the recomposing of those verbally organized materials, enabling the subtle shifts that come from speaking in a new body in a different time.

The historical is embedded in both Ong and Stein's writing, where they relate the need for the generations making/sounding/writing in the present to commune with the past in order to compose in and for the continuous. Both Ong and Stein express the need to pass knowledge on, albeit fully aware that in the passing on there is a shift in the content because of how the knowledge is shaped. In this way, the thing that is passed on - whether that thing be knowledge in the form of sound, or in the form of writing - practices a method of looping the past and future into what Stein would famously call in her essay "Composition as Explanation," the continuous present. This term, the *continuous present* (and its composition) so integral to this study as a whole, I employ here as a methodological tool to carry out a certain purpose, that of simultaneously supporting and provoking the two wider contextual questions of this thesis: 1. How ways of thinking and practicing with sound in early modern conceptions of the aural can be used *now* as still vital experimental and imaginative tools for working with sound as an artistic material. 2. How the particular sound of the voice performs, moves, composes itself through shifting temporalities in theatre performance space. With these two (not unrelated) applications of the *continuous*, it is then the main motive of this thesis to ask how and why the sound of the female voice in performance can use such a method (and a framing) as composition in the continuous present as a strategy for feminist action. As a tradition (which through definition is a method of carrying across in the "transmission of knowledge from one generation to another")

feminism has its own tenacity as a continuous composition, something which has been crucial to my own shaping of how feminism might be composed now for and within my own generation.

While I am thinking here alongside two quite different temporalities in terms of both Ong and Stein's investments in History, as well as their interest and concern for what is happening in their own generations' moments of making, these two time-senses of the long term historical and the short term historical are always in relation to each other. The long time defines the short time and visa versa: relatively speaking, a play is short because life is long. Keeping pace with both the long and the short of history helps keep knowledge in motion; so that the play and the life share in a continuum which keeps all times in conversation with one another, or put in the way I am using it here, *in composition* with one another. Why this is important to me, here and now, is for what 'composition as the site of conflicting temporal qualities' can offer as a way in which to work with and understand how sound performs in multiple sites at once, with many foci of attention developing 'as a field of innumerable centres.'<sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup> This pluralizing of the sites of action in which sound performs resonates with my questioning of how sound performs/materializes/takes place in both the body *and* outside of it. It is my contention that harnessing the complex qualities of sound's movement, as an act of composing in the continuous between and within bodies (of performer and audience for example), might offer an artistic strategy to destabilise any easy identification or representation of the female body. In the context of women claiming (*composing*) their own subjectivity, the confusing of female representation *still* emerges as a desirable strategy, and as such this study can itself be taken as an action in the continuum of female performance practice which has worked to shake the patriarchal structures in which women are framed and contained. Indeed, it is the very assumption that 'women's bodies are presumed to be incapable of men's achievements being weaker, more prone to (hormonal) irregularities, intrusions and unpredictabilities'<sup>14</sup> which I will respond to in relation

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<sup>12</sup> Brad Bucknell, *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 170.

<sup>13</sup> Bonnie Marranca's Introduction: "Presence of Mind" to Gertrude Stein. *Last Operas and Plays*. ed. Carl Van Vechten. (Maryland: John Hopkin's University Press, 1995), XXVII.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 14.

to the female voice, the subversive performance of which productively exploits any irregularities, intrusions and unpredictabilities. The work undertaken here explores the potential of investigating the coding of the female body as unpredictable, especially in her mimetic alliance with the motion of sound and non-linear time.<sup>15</sup>

In the introduction to *Unmaking Mimesis*, a book which has offered me valuable provocations to expand upon as I consider the aural within this study, Elin Diamond joins ‘the most pressing questions of feminist theory with the oldest questions of theatrical representation’ to ask *who or what is in control?*<sup>16</sup> This is an important question I will return to and discuss with reference to speaking and listening, both actions with their own claims to controlling the performance of sound. However, as I will show, both acts of voicing and acts of audition can never be total claims to control, for as I have said above, sound also practices in the airspace, in the distance between bodies, and so who or what is in control then? How might this middle ground further complicate any singular body’s claim to control?

In the chapters that follow, it has been through my attention to how sound and theories of sound travel through both the temporality of history *and* through the temporality of performance that I have come to conceptualise Stein’s continuous present as a valuable way to understand something of how sound performs, has performed and will perform. And particularly valuable now, when sound is building its vocabulary in a new generation of artists and scholars across many fields of study.<sup>17</sup> Within distinct disciplines, where sound is science, sound is music, sound

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<sup>15</sup> In his essay “End Time Now,” Adrian Heathfield identifies the relationship of non-linear time with the feminine when he writes: ‘The cyclical is often associated with the natural world, with biological rhythms and with femininity, as such it is often subtly coded as soft, whereas linearity is often coded as hard, is perceived in a masculine register, it is taut, directional and doesn’t curve.’ From Adrian Heathfield, “End Time Now.” *Small Acts: Performance, the Millennium, and the Marking of Time*, ed. Adrian Heathfield (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2000), 110.

<sup>16</sup> Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre* (Oxon : Routledge, 1997), ii.

<sup>17</sup> While many people working with sound articulate its secondary positioning to the study of the visual, the critical discussion and dissemination of sound is taking place in ever more “visible” arenas, which celebrate interdisciplinary forums of exchange. In the last six months alone there have been two major conferences held in London with sound as their central subject: *Her Noise* at the Tate Modern and *Supersonix*, part of an Exhibition Road Cultural Group Project, both bringing together artists and thinkers from across a range of disciplines including film, literature, musical composition, technology, fine art, architecture, neuroscience, town planning and even fishing science (to take a selection from of areas of study from the *Supersonix* programme). (footnote continued on next page...)

is design, sound does find its own specialised languages, and yet descriptions of how sound performs might profit from holding on to all of sound's "disciplines" at once. I have found through practice that to attempt to isolate sound to one discipline is unproductive, therefore to understand sound as continuous composition is also to offer it a framing and a context that resists bounds. The continuous is in perpetual movement, and so facilitates and sustains sound's own nature to a) retreat and come back again, b) to lose words to the past or the future, and importantly c) to support its reception as a melding of the sensuous and the intelligible. Acknowledging sound as happening in the continuous present opens up the space to receive and understand sound sensuously, and to observe something in practice of how sound's intelligibility, is inextricably linked to that (sensuous) method of receiving. Allowing sound its perpetual movement, we accept that meaning does not solely reside in what we can fix and, for example, make linguistically significant, or tie to a source or origin. To reason with sound, as Veit Erlmann so brilliantly argues in his recent work, is to resonate with it.

While I will come back to Erlmann's *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* at the end of this thesis, it's necessary to take up a detail of his work here, having just spoken about meaning not only belonging to the aspects of sound we might "fix." In outlining his own method of 'giving Foucault's famous concept of the "author function" an aural twist,' Erlmann writes:

One might say that the listener is not simply the recipient of an indefinite number of significations that fill his or her hearing, nor does he or she come after the work. Rather the listener is a function that fixes these meanings with the goal of circumscribing and prescribing the auditory ways in which individuals acknowledge themselves as subjects.<sup>18</sup>

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(...) The "emergence" of the discipline of "sound art" and its proliferation in study across art schools and universities has also added to the promotion and popularisation of sound as subject. A prime example of this is London College of Communication's CRiSAP (The Centre for Research in Sound Art Practice) set up in 2005 and co-directed by Cathy Lane and Angus Carlyle. David Toop, a prolific and acclaimed musician and writer in the field of sound art, who wrote *Haunted Weather: Music Silence and Memory* is a member, as is John Wynne, who is the first sound artist to be represented in the Saatchi collection. It is not just the specialist research centres which have added to the increased discourse on sound, but also the courses or specialist teachers who augment already established disciplines, such as Ross Brown, Professor of Sound at Central School of Speech and Drama, whose recent book *Sound: A Reader in Theatre Practice* (2010) largely addresses applications and discussions around theatrical sound design.

<sup>18</sup> Viet Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 24.

Erlmann nominates the listener who grasps his/her own subjective meaning from what is heard, and so in effect “fixes” the sound through processing it. The function of the listener in deciphering sound meaning is a very important element of this study, but what is important to clarify here in order to augment Erlmann’s significant point, is that the fixing of sound is always a temporary action, in process. It is maybe more helpful to align Erlmann’s “fix” with Skantze’s “apprehension,” in that even while we discern meanings from what we hear, even in the act of discerning/making sense we are also experiencing the escape of the sound as initially perceived. What Erlmann illustrates is useful in positioning the listener as an aural author; the listener becomes a composer through audition. Erlmann grants a more subtle form of agency and action to the role of the listener as a body who makes meaning (as well as the role of the speaker, often positioned as the more obviously *active* role). But as I shall argue further in this introduction, my angle on the subjective agency of the listener is aligned to her role as a composer of other people’s sounds (other people’s voices), so that I highlight a particular relationship between the bodies that speak and the bodies that listen.<sup>19</sup> Through the application of Stein’s continuous present — the method that reconfigures what has come before in the sense that new meaning is made through the re-arrangement of knowledge in new generations of bodies, times and spaces — I focus on both successive generations composing anew and successive speakers on stage composing anew. In this introduction I apply the methods of composition in the continuous present, as outlined above, in discussions about the female body as an auditor-composer, as a body who through listening composes her own voice. The model of the auditor-composer will be developed through attending to two women who “work” with the material of sound in very different contexts and times. Firstly, I concentrate on the persona of Ophelia, re-thinking her voice, traditionally perceived as passive in the play of *Hamlet*, as commanding a strategy of subtle agency through her acts of composing. Following this, I use the argument built around Ophelia’s power as a composer to provoke a dialogue with an artistic practice using sound in the present day. Concentrating on the work of British artist Georgina Starr, who uses sound as a recurring material element in her work, I focus particularly on how her use of sound pays attention to its

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 4 for further discussion of the “author function” in relation to the body speaking.

material composition as air or breath, at once in the body and outside of it, at once in control and out of it.<sup>20</sup>

### ***The composition is different that is certain – Ophelia composing herself***

Thinking about Ophelia and her own acts of vocal composition within *Hamlet*, I have been struck by her few lines, her brief appearances in every act like a metronomic measure of time passing, and her long presences as auditor to others. I have been thinking about her agency as an experienced listener within the play, and how her composure, her self-control as a character is related to her sounded and unsounded vocal compositions. And so now as I have come to *my own* act of written composition in order to make a sense of these ideas: to bring sometimes strangely distant elements into conversation with each other, to lose the words which fly too far off the track or even find a phrasing which might cause stars to stand ‘like wonder-wounded hearers,’ I am struck by how much I play a part in testing some of the questions I ask within this work, and how *this* written composition happens in a suspension of sorts, a space in time which demands a translation of the cognitive composition into a composition made of text.

The beginning of the subtitle above comes from Stein’s *Composition as Explanation*, chosen in

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<sup>20</sup> Music and gender theorist Nadine Hubbs uses ‘composing oneself’ in the context of Manhattan’s modernist composers (such as Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson) not only composing their music, but importantly *themselves*. In her book *The Queer Composition of America’s Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* Hubbs writes, ‘like all of us, these gay artists both produced and were produced by the subjectivities of their cultural-historical locus’ (2004, 176). Recognising the complexity of composing one’s own identity, Hubbs finishes her book: ‘we continue to invent, imagine and re-create ourselves as individuals, as collective and national entities, and, increasingly as a global body. Thus is one engaged, no less than in Thomson and Copland’s day, in composing oneself – in that modern enterprise, eager, reluctant, and ongoing, by which the present and future are orchestrated in concert with the past.’ (2004, 176). This book particularly highlights Hubbs’s interdisciplinary research across the fields of queer politics and sound. Citing this work here, I must note that while I have made a conscious decision in this thesis *not* to bring queer studies into the discussion, “queer sound” (to borrow the title of the recent conference on the subject at King’s College London in 2010) is an area of research offering a future context for this work to take place within and respond to. In particular Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s attention to how knowledge can be perceived through texture in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, has provoked me to imagine a future project considering a specific detail of this thesis: ‘how physical properties act and are acted on over time,’ (13) in relation to the affective textures of sensory materials, and most particularly in relation to the texture of sound, and the possibility for an aural ‘transaction of texture’ (22).



part to echo the curious task of writing words to be sounded or read in the future, but mainly to foreground the notion of a composition as something always in flux, ever-changing through time and form, and happening in Stein's 'continuous present:'

Everything is the same except composition and as the composition is different and always going to be different everything is not the same. Everything is not the same as the time when of the composition and the time in the composition is different. The composition is different, that is certain.<sup>21</sup>

While Stein attends to the written composition, its moments of vocal delivery are implied in the matrix of compositions she develops. When she says 'speaking is composition,' the potential for the auditory life of the words-as-sound ignites. If speaking these words out loud, I would also make a live composition with voice: a sounded composition made from breath, from the air in the body pushed into the mouth and modeled by teeth, tongue and palates. It is the sounded composition I want to pay particular attention to here, *how Ophelia composes herself*, and the influence of sound in doing so. I want to discuss the ways Ophelia uses *listening* to compose, drawing elements from the speech she hears around her. I hope that in giving attention to Ophelia's form (the sound of her vocal composition) rather than her content (the linguistic meaning carried in her speech) I can offer some "explanation," or at least offer her character some more complexity as a vocal body, one who speaks through audition. What is it that the sound of her speech does, or the measure of her silence? For the purposes of this introduction, I will concentrate on her use of speech, rather than on the ballad singing of her final scene.<sup>22</sup>

The various interpretations of Ophelia through gender and agency are well rehearsed, and so what I hope to bring to the deep pool of discussion is a way of thinking her character through

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<sup>21</sup> Stein, "Composition as Explanation," 2004, 24.

<sup>22</sup> While I don't go into any extended reading of Ophelia's singing here, this section can be taken as a provocation to respond in other spaces/places of enquiry, especially regarding Ophelia's decline into madness. Although Ophelia's ballad singing could open up some very interesting discussion, especially for me in relation to how Elin Diamond speaks of the female hysteric 'on stage *and* in the audience' of *Hedda Gabler* (1997, p.3) I am limiting my discussion of Ophelia in this thesis to her speaking voice and her role as a "methodological persona."

sound, thinking with theorists of sound and composition.<sup>23</sup> While keeping our ears and minds open to the potential resonances and residues from the early modern sound world, as a practitioner of performance myself, thinking through the senses, I am also interested in attending to what is absent in audience reception *now*. The wide intrigue and fascination with Ophelia as a subject has moved on from finding in her ‘an audience-like passivity’ to quote Marianne Novy’s reading of Ophelia’s speech in 1984.<sup>24</sup> The obvious provocation in Novy’s implication of an audience as non-active is spoken back to in the work of numerous scholars today and most notably for my subject in the work of Gina Bloom, whose 2007 book *Voice in Motion* dedicates a chapter to ‘the fortress of the ear’: in which the “arte” and “tallent” of “hearing with your ears” is explored as a subtle strategy for female characters to gain agency.<sup>25</sup> And so, I want to seize on what I take to be true of Ophelia in Novy’s reckoning, that she *is* audience-like and it is her audience-likeness, which might grant her a form of agency as a listening/composing subject. Gina Bloom recognizes that a powerful ‘method of resisting authority and challenging social hierarchies’ within Shakespeare’s plays lies in female characters dramatisation as ‘acoustic subjects.’<sup>26</sup> Applying Bloom’s argument to the character of Ophelia, who does not practice the ‘defensive hearing’ that Bloom goes on to contend ‘constitutes a form of agency for women,’ I would listen again to the acoustic subject: I suggest she lets sound *in*, in order to compose speech in relation and resonance with what is heard.

We might think of composition as something formalized, something finished, when the elements

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<sup>23</sup> In addition to the writers I cite within the body of the text who attend to Ophelia’s role within *Hamlet*, Elaine Showalter, Leslie Dunn and Bridget Lyons have all provided me with significant readings of the more intricate nature of Ophelia’s character through attention to (amongst other elements) the actresses who have played her; her vocality and agency in madness; and her use of gesture and prop, respectively. Indeed, to illustrate further the use of Ophelia as the object of interpretation, Showalter begins her 1985 essay “Representing Ophelia: Woman, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism,” with Lacan’s treatment of “that piece of bait named Ophelia,” positioning her as *The Object Ophelia* in relation to Hamlet’s desire of her. This rendering of Ophelia: trapped, objectified and lacking any agency demonstrates the one-dimensional reading that feminist writers have productively contested. As Showalter writes ‘there is no “true” Ophelia for whom feminist criticism must unambiguously speak, but perhaps only a Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives, more than the sum of all her parts.’ (Showalter, 91).

<sup>24</sup> Marianne Novy, *Love’s Argument: Gender Relations in Shakespeare* as quoted in Sandra K. Fischer, “Hearing Ophelia: Gender and Tragic Discourse in Hamlet.” *Renaissance & Reformation*, 26.1 (1990), 6.

<sup>25</sup> Gina Bloom describes how in 17<sup>th</sup> Century preaching the ear is ‘an organ that performs *both* secular and spiritual tasks’ and cites Robert Wilkinson’s *A Jewell for the Eare* (1605), in which he writes of the “arte” and “tallent” of “hearing with your ears” when practicing listening to protestant sermons. (Bloom, 118).

<sup>26</sup> Bloom, 116.

are arranged together and the result is *composed*, in a sense complete, settled into place. And yet, in practice, composition happens in the continuous (as Stein's writing demonstrates) from mind to hand to eye to voice. The composition is moving constantly, and maybe too its author. I began with this idea of the *composition in motion* so as to illustrate my proposal that Ophelia is a character who makes significant use of shifts in composition, complicating any easy reading of her own body's composure. Indeed, as Bruce Smith writes 'Ophelia's identity...seems anything but fixed,' With each appearance on stage, her speech (or absence of) signals quite distinct acts of composition, which in turn shake her character into new shapes. Smith lists her shifts:

The knowing interlocutor with her brother in 1.3, the thoroughly frightened reporter of Hamlet's apparent madness to her father in 2.1, the bait to draw Hamlet out in 3.1, the "straight man" for Hamlet's lewd remarks during The Murder of Gonzago in 3.2, the mad singer of ballads in 4.5, the corpse that precipitates Hamlet's belated leap into action in 5.1...<sup>27</sup>

So, Ophelia is continually composing herself anew as a practiced auditor. As an auditory presence, she hears a great deal of what others say through each scene in succession. Even if warned by her father in 1.3: 'what loss your honor may sustain/if with too credent ear you list his songs' (1.3.29), she cannot help but *hear*.<sup>28</sup> Even if she can't help but hear ('about hearing, you have no choice'<sup>29</sup>), there are vital signs that she *listens* too. Her acts of careful listening are revealed within her vocal composition, in how she phrases, in her choice of words, and in their sounded form. While Sandra K. Fischer writes that 'the sound and sense of Ophelia's speech dim in comparison' to Hamlet's 'deafening vocal posturing' she observes something of Ophelia's speech, which, in my reading makes evident her attention to listening. Fischer writes that 'typically she echoes a statement put to her by rephrasing it into a question.'<sup>30</sup> Although one

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<sup>27</sup> Bruce Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 280.

<sup>28</sup> All references to *Hamlet* use this edition: William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Methuen Drama, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Smith, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Fischer, 2.

could just see this action as the mimicry of male characters' voices because Ophelia speaks in patterns of language prescribed by dominant masculine others, I would suggest her echoic response provides evidence of her role as an active auditor, as a listener, and importantly, she *rephrases*.

One example from Act 3, Scene 1, following the brief to and fro of questioning regarding Ophelia's honesty, is characteristic of this rephrasing:

Hamlet: That if you be honest and fair you should admit no discourse to your beauty.

Ophelia: Could Beauty, my lord, have better commerce than with Honesty?

[3.1.106]

This re-phrasing proves the echo to be more than an act of mindless repetition.<sup>31</sup> In fact what Ophelia performs in her altered reflection of others' words could be compared to the way sound performs in the physical production of an echo. Of course for an echo to bounce and be heard in the physical world the sound wave must bounce at the same angle at which it hits the reflecting surface and the presence of other reflecting surfaces to amplify the sound. But if we describe echo in terms of its performance, an echo carries the sound back to the body that made it: re-patterning, *re-composing*, (*or de-composing*) itself in the act. With the physical echo, the surface(s) the sound waves reflect off, and the distance the sound waves travel through, determine how much recalibration we perceive of the original sonic character. This recomposing of the sound to make echo takes place in the air, between surfaces: as Brian Massumi reasons this 'resonation is not on the walls,' but in 'the emptiness between them.'<sup>32</sup> In her capacity as the performer of an altering echo, as a character who performs with sound, could *air* be Ophelia's material or tool for recomposing? A material to craft, model or sculpt into voice?

Bloom writes 'one of the most important materials of an actor's craft, breath is "material" to the

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<sup>31</sup> I offer an extended discussion in Chapter 4 about the character of Echo (as mythical and literary character and acoustic phenomenon).

<sup>32</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 14.

actor's voice in the broader early modern (now obsolete) sense of "materials" as "the constituent, intrinsic, or essential parts of something."<sup>33</sup> The experimentation with air for its fascination as a volatile material is something that happens throughout *Hamlet*. Carla Mazzio in *The History of Air: Hamlet and the trouble with Instruments* observes that 'this is a play marked by characters who not only have trouble breathing, but who try to take the air into their own hands.'<sup>34</sup> While in *Hamlet* there is much illustration of conceiving or imagining the body as an instrument, or as a machine, Mazzio contends that the air is not 'typically something to be effectually sawed at, penetrated, or cut into.' Indeed it is treated with a respect for its invulnerability as 'the woundless air,' 'the majestic roof.'<sup>35</sup>

In *practice* air is breathed and the body can compose the articulation, amplification, direction of the voice made of breath. To an extent the vocal body can determine the voice's sonic existence in the air outside the body, in the space between speaker and listener. And yet, once transmitted into air space, the sound of the voice is to a large extent unpredictable. Bloom makes a compelling argument for how female characters in *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Othello* and *King John* 'embrace breath's volatile attributes' in order 'to practice a subtle but robust form of vocal agency.'<sup>36</sup> Agency is here connected to an understanding, knowledge of the voice's changeable impact in space. Bloom writes:

Where a traditional view of potent, transgressive speech might emphasise a bond between voice and body – the speaking agent having "a voice of her own" – in these plays the disarticulation of voice from body generates vocal power.<sup>37</sup>

Significantly Bloom emphasises how unlike male characters who attempt to control a substance which ultimately can not be controlled, female characters operating with (not against) the lack of

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<sup>33</sup> Bloom, 68. Bloom's definition of "material" is from the Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>34</sup> Carla Mazzio, "The History of Air: Hamlet and the trouble with Instruments." *South Central Review*, 26.1 & 2 (2009), 176.

<sup>35</sup> Mazzio, 160.

<sup>36</sup> Bloom, 68.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

control manifest a particular form of ‘communicative power.’ The effect of ‘the *disarticulation* of voice from the body’ the disjoining of the authorial body from the voice it speaks could be compared to Ophelia’s practice of distancing herself from her own voice. Not only does she take on and rephrase the voices of those around her, she also in the example above, personifies Beauty and Honesty so that they become the subjects of her sentence, thus absenting herself from the content of her own speech, whilst echoing herself as one who has been “taken” to be both these things. And so in this way Ophelia *acts like* air. Like air, she sets her body at a distance from her voice. Like air, she moves through the play in shifting personas, unfixed and ambiguous. As a host for sound, the air offers the space for sounds to shift, transform, echo and reverberate. So too, like air, she re-composes the sounds she hears. Maybe too *like air* she precariously hosts her own voice, whether aware or unaware, of its oddly detached relationship with her own body, and what that might complicate or conceal of her character?

Bruce Smith illustrates the importance of the correlation between voice and character in relation to the air as host when he writes:

Character is a function of performance in general, but of voice in particular. It is located not in the actor on stage, or even in the audience’s imagination, but somewhere between the two – in the air, within the wooden [o:]’<sup>38</sup>

Although instead of characters, Smith suggests we ‘might more accurately talk about the persons of the play...which captures the double sense of person as both a body (the actor’s “person”) and a voice (sound-through-a-mask, from *per-sonare*, “to sound through”).’<sup>39</sup> Bloom points out that the mask, termed “persona” by the Romans, as well as ‘producing a visual effect...helped amplify the actor’s voice via a resonating chamber in its forehead.’<sup>40</sup> While Persona connected to an ancient technology of amplification hidden in costume is fascinating in itself, this connection reverberates when we think of present day stagings of *Hamlet* that make use of ever more

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<sup>38</sup> Smith, 280.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Bloom, 212.

sophisticated sound technologies to alter persona through vocal character. Of course, I am thinking here explicitly of The Wooster Group's 2007 production of *Hamlet* in which all the actors (doubling the film version of Richard Burton's 1964 *Hamlet*) wore head microphones, through which sounded voice was affected and moved between speakers, alongside the film image and soundtrack of voices. Not only in The Wooster Group's *Hamlet*, but in general performance practice, the microphone performs an electronic action of distancing the voice from the body, with the potential to swallow sounds and carry them to far away speakers (in both senses). Sound technology today can compose or re-compose character in an instant, stripping away all of what one might recognize to be the qualities or defining features of one's voice.

Ophelia on the page has no microphone or resonating mask, but she does have some practical methods with which to test how her voice "works" in relation to others and herself. Finally, to reiterate, in her re-phrasing the words she hears, in re-forming air in the mouth, Ophelia *composes*. In performing this act of composition through listening, through observation, Ophelia is able to practice subtle *moments* of subversion, twisting words into new orders and feeding them back to those who uttered them. I choose 'moments' as a measure of time for Ophelia's acts of subversion quite particularly, for this character appears as a vocal subject and complex communicator only in a few brief instances. Ophelia's questions are insistent, and on many occasions she asks for clarification: 'My lord?'/ 'What means your lordship?'/ 'What is my lord?'/ 'What means this, my lord?' Like a prompt in helping other voices compose, Ophelia has *moments* of helping keep pace within dialogue. Ophelia's questions ask others, primarily Hamlet, to answer again, to repeat, to reconsider, to re-compose, even if her interlocutor refuses to communicate the desired answers.<sup>41</sup>

When we say a person is composed we note something about his/her character, his/her state of being, his/her relation with themselves. The composed person is collected, calm, self-possessed.

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<sup>41</sup> And certainly this is something Gertrude does with more exactitude and assertion when she asks for 'more matter with less art' from Polonius's speech in Act 2, Scene 2.

He/she is measured, with 'feelings or passions under control.'<sup>42</sup> To reiterate the title of this section at this endpoint: *Ophelia composing herself* emphasises how I take this action of composing to be both a *sounded* composing and a *bodily* composing. I do not think of these as entirely separate acts, so it is curious that we might imagine a composed body to be a relatively quiet, or still body. What are the sounds that characterise composure, the composed body? Let me turn briefly to Ophelia's final scene where singing has famously been the defining characteristic of her mental *de*-composition.<sup>43</sup> I would suggest that the practice taken to be composing her voice offers Ophelia a method with which to compose her body. As a speaker she listens to others and then listens to herself. Maybe too, she practices the kind of singing we make without even knowing. Many people sing to themselves in order to compose themselves. The combination of this instinctive practice and the final scene of *Hamlet* leads me to ponder on whether over the arc of the play, Ophelia is perpetually in the process of composing herself without ever reaching a state of composure. To be composed implies the action is already done: it is in the past. Ophelia is a character in the continuous, in Stein's continuous present. Ophelia composes herself, but is never simply composed.

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<sup>42</sup> Oxford English Dictionary definition.

<sup>43</sup> One of my motives for speaking about the agency of Ophelia's speaking voice, as opposed to her singing voice is that her singing voice is given much attention (in feminist discourse) as the means for her to make noise; to break free of the confines of courtly manner; to finally make herself heard. Music, of course, affects the voice in an altogether different register, which I am not attending to in any depth in this thesis. When it comes to Ophelia, there is much critical discussion of her singing as strangely empowering. For example, Leslie Dunn writes 'when Ophelia sings, she takes on a mask of performance: her personal voice is estranged, filtered through the anonymous voices of the ballads, multiplying and thereby rendering indeterminate the relationships between singer, personae and audience. At the same time these voices are doubly embodied in music's materiality - in the melody that "works" at the language, and in the "grain" of Ophelia's own voice - which causes a further surplus, and therefore slippage, of meaning' (58). In madness, Ophelia is more visible through becoming more audible, but in my reckoning gains this visibility through a lack of power, or control, and so this is a severely compromised agency through audibility. I think there is definitely something about the excessive and disorderly singing voice gaining a certain attention for Ophelia, in relation to the quieter strategy of knowingly composing in speech (as I am arguing) that could be expanded on elsewhere. This would be an especially rich area of discussion given the dramatic shift in the "matching" of her vocal content to the courtly context she is in. The antique words she sings are remembered, recalled fragments and quotes recomposed, so that while she is still using this method of listening to others voices in order to compose her own, something has drastically shifted in her manner of delivery. It is not just that she is vocalising in song that draws attention to her, but also that the content of her song is no longer close enough to that of the surrounding voices. In this way, in her singing voice, she is very much out of context.



## A Brief Note on Fluidity.

Ophelia finally takes her ballads to the water. Scholars such as Dunn, Beizer and Showalter have discussed Ophelia's fluidity in voice and body in relation to her madness: when she sings her breath is laced with the metaphorical properties of water, until ultimately it is replaced by 'that element.'<sup>44</sup> Historically, sound and water are elementally bound to each other, as Douglas Kahn illustrates in the introduction to his dedicated chapter on the subject in *Noise, Water, Meat*:

There has been a long-standing association of water and sound in observational acoustics from antiquity through Chaucer to Helmholtz and beyond, with the sound of a stone hitting water producing a visual counter-part, which was then mapped back onto the invisible movement of sound waves.<sup>45</sup>

Continuing the metaphor, voice as sound is also connected to *the fluid*. As Michelle Duncan writes: 'Voice is like water, a material that can be held in hand, but never held fast.'<sup>46</sup> Of course, not only the substance of sound or voice gains a meaning and definition by watery words. Woman's body, too, with its threat of excessive, unruly flesh has been traditionally characterised in opposition to its contained masculine other, as an 'unstructured' form: 'soft, fluid.'<sup>47</sup> In her essay, *The 'Mechanics' of Fluids*, Luce Irigaray attends to the fluid form as particularly female in relation to the dominance and permanence of male-defined solid matter. In her challenge she turns back to "science" to elaborate a "'theory" of fluids' rather than rely on historically outmoded definitions of the fluid, which can only exist within the binary framework of the solid.

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<sup>44</sup> From Gertrude's speech describing Ophelia's drowning:  
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds  
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,  
When down her weedy trophies and herself  
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,  
And mermaid-like a while they bore her up,  
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds  
As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and indued  
Unto that element... [4.7.170]

<sup>45</sup> Douglas Khan. *Noise, Water, Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge: MIT, 1999), 246.

<sup>46</sup> Michelle Duncan, "The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body: Voice, Presence, Performativity." *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 16.3 (2004), 285.

<sup>47</sup> Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*. (London: Routledge, 1993), 17.

For Irigaray, fluid as a turbulent material has traditionally been understood within the context of the solid in order to keep from ‘jamming the works of the theoretical machine.’ As such she suggests the ‘historical lag’ in attending to fluids betrays the difficulty in advancing ‘any articulation of sexual difference,’ an articulation vital for challenging the configuration of woman in patriarchal discourse, defined only in relation to man.<sup>48</sup> Significantly for my work here investigating the physical motion of sound, Irigaray provides an argument for the particular resistant power performed by the natural properties of fluid. In describing something of fluid’s nature to shift, she writes how ‘it is already diffuse “in itself,” which disconcerts any attempt at static identification...’ And Irigaray could well be describing both the symbolic and actual characteristics of sound when she writes that fluid ‘eludes the “Thou art that”. That is, any definite identification.’<sup>49</sup>

Eluding ‘any definite identification’ can be useful practice for a female body if claimed or re-claimed, as Irigaray strives to do in her theory, as a positive state, and as Bloom demonstrates in her study on early modern female characters’ use of breath (where voice carried by breath and air can elude patriarchal control). However *the elusive* poses all too familiar limitations, if not acting on its own behalf, with serious consequences and fates. Kahn focuses attention on the association of women to water in the observations of male Surrealists, and the potential problems in reducing a woman’s voice to sound, or her body to fluid. In doing so, he cites Klaus Theweleit in his finding ‘a specific (and historically relatively recent) form of oppression of women’ in his book on the fascist imaginary, *Male Fantasies*:

It is oppression through exaltation, through a lifting of boundaries, an ‘irrealization’ and reduction to principle – the principle of flowing, of distance, of vague, endless enticement.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985) 111 and 117.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Klaus Theweleit as quoted in Kahn, 258.

While Kahn does not expand into any wider discussion between Theweleit's and Irigaray's readings of (female) fluidity, this work is taken up by Elana Gomel who highlights the very particular dangers in applying the metaphor of fluidity in such different ideological contexts.<sup>51</sup> For Theweleit 'the topology of the fascist body...is structured by the opposition of the hard, impregnable surface and messy, fluid, uncontrollable depth.'<sup>52</sup> As a result, Gomel warns that 'the metaphor of corporeal fluidity that Irigaray uses to express the natural essence of femininity is historically linked to the fascist rhetoric of the organic state,'<sup>53</sup> whereby she concludes (quite solidly) that Irigaray's rhetoric runs the risk of inscribing the female body 'with the political message of fascism.' While Gomel's thesis demands a far lengthier and detailed response than I can offer in this introduction, for example examining in depth the seriousness of her identifications between the fluid female body and the fluid fascist body, her argument reminds us to acknowledge that no use of language is ever neutral. Irigaray's rhetoric in particular has been subject to much critique and criticism, most often linked to readings of her work as reductively essentialist.<sup>54</sup> While Gomel 'illustrates how the present philosophical turn to Irigaray is dependent on the erasure of her rhetoric,' I would argue that to be *aware*, rather than to *erase* offers a more productive way of reading: to read 'with an eye to rhetoric' to borrow Gayatri

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<sup>51</sup> While Anais Nin and Meret Openheim are briefly mentioned for their lyrical appraisals of "living waters", in fact in his eloquent section of writing focusing on women and water, Kahn's discussion quite glaringly lacks any further critical discussion with female voices, artistic or theoretical. While in his introduction, Kahn does make clear his omission of female artists at the heart of modernism is down to 'practicalities of time and resources,' (14) it does seem strange that writing focusing so sharply on the silencing of women by water should not be spoken back to by women who have used water and/or sound in artistic practice for very different socio-political ends. A significant number of women artists and thinkers have used the metaphor of fluidity in order to practice mimetically, interrogating the space, shape and form of water in their work, and importantly taking control of it. Even if Kahn does not want to stray from the context of Surrealism, and his quotation from Klaus Theweleit, this work must be augmented, especially in pushing against Theweleit's aligning of female fluidity with female oppression. With no resistance, Theweleit's assertion holds the very solid ground that women practicing with fluidity attempt to disrupt. Ultimately 'What we find is that these [female] voices are absent' (257), not only in the window displays as described by Roussel, Breton and Aragon, but also unfortunately in Kahn's discussion of fluidity in general. As a result, it appears that Kahn's submerged women are destined to remain just that: immersed, silent and up for description, and inscription by men gazing at shop windows.

<sup>52</sup> Elana Gomel, "Hard and Wet: Luce Irigaray and the Fascist Body." *Textual Practice*. 12.2 (1998), 200.  
<sup>53</sup> Gomel, 203.

<sup>54</sup> Gayatri Spivak's final question in the following quotation from the interview in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* makes subtly explicit how differently certain theorists are read. In this question she skilfully strikes a gender chord, while resonating wider questions about ways of reading: awareness in reading, expectations in reading and permissions in reading. Talking about charges of essentialism towards Irigaray's writing, Spivak says 'It is only if she is read as the pure theoretical prose of truth – whatever that might be – that she may seem essentialist when she talks about women. Broadly Kojevian French intellectuals read Hegel and Marx with an eye to rhetoric. We know Derrida has to be read that way. Why do we become essentialist readers when we read someone like Irigaray?'

Spivak's phrase. Because of course not only the writer makes meaning, but also crucially the reader, and more crucially still the listener (as I cite Erlmann emphasizing above). On the subject of the reader and in the spirit of the continuous and its method of looping back, it is also critical to understand Irigaray's rhetorical style in writing as a result of her own reading of phallogocentric discourse, and her mimicry of 'the discourse that has always been fabricating essentialist and "sexed" "facts" and "truth" about female (as well as male) sexuality.'<sup>55</sup>

And so, with its ear to rhetoric (for 'sound is one sense that carries great rhetorical force in and of itself'<sup>56</sup>), this gendered study of sound is concerned with women's articulations of their own difference, both the difference of the sexual body and the voice that comes from that body. Rosi Braidotti warns against neutralizing female specificity: 'can feminists, at this point in their history of collective struggles aimed at redefining female subjectivity, actually afford to let go of their sex-specific forms of political agency? Is the bypassing of gender in favour of a dispersed polysexuality not a very masculine move?'<sup>57</sup> Although I do not identify with an essentialist and/or separatist feminism that lacks criticality, I also do not avoid referring to sexual specificity in the work undertaken here. My practice with the voice is related to a particular voice from a particular social sexual body and while not a simple matter of a shared anatomy, it is a matter of anatomy nonetheless. Texts that have informed much of my understanding of the voice as a feminist issue focused on the female body without reiterating patriarchal representations. Following Elizabeth Grosz who suggests her indebtedness to patriarchal texts that have been useful for her 'in extricating the body from the mire of biologism,' so too have I been informed by certain

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<sup>55</sup> Ping Xu, "Irigaray's Mimicry and the Problem of Essentialism." *Hypatia*, 10.4 (1995), 78.

<sup>56</sup> Greg Goodale, *Sonic Persuasion: Reading Sound in the Recorded Age* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2011) Preface, x. Goodale's preface to *Sonic Persuasion* in particular eloquently illustrates his indebtedness to Lawrence W Levine, a teacher and an inspiration in offering expanded ways to think with sound, particularly to "read" sound in order to listen more carefully. Introducing his development of a 'sonic criticism,' which includes 'criticism by listening rather than seeing, the search for sonic evidence, and the willingness to eavesdrop on historical shifts' Goodale mentions briefly Levine's study on the 'rhetorical force of Franklin D Roosevelt's fireside chats' and the relationship of this force with the slow cadence of FDR's voice. As a result Goodale emphasises a key motivation: that through listening we can learn to 'discover histories that have so far remained invisible' xi. It is also useful to point out here for further reading on the subject of sound's rhetorical force that Goodale provides an illuminating discussion of the enthymeme ('through which an audience complete an argument with their own assumptions, and empathy' 127) in aural terms, according to how an audience might choose to "read" sounds heard, or be persuaded to listen in a particular way.

<sup>57</sup> Rosi Braidotti as quoted in Grosz, 1994, 162-263.

phallogocentric discourses, which by their own obsession betray aspects of power and matters of social inscription.<sup>58</sup> It is however Irigaray's texts I turn to for their intellectual resistance to patriarchal representations, opening up my enquiry into the voice as a particularly female subject.

Irigaray's words take on the range of shapes fluidity affords them, as 'a flux and current of words that continually resist solidification.'<sup>59</sup> Her argument that female voice is 'defined precisely by this fluidity, this lack of fixed boundaries, this definition that always resists definition'<sup>60</sup> is a vital reminder that woman's voice can be harnessed, like wind, as an elusive but assertive material force.<sup>61</sup> In aligning Irigaray's and Bloom's handling of elemental forces of nature, I hope to foreground within this thesis as a whole, the importance of fluidity's actual physical properties, as well as metaphorical or symbolic, in demonstrating how the very motion of sound can be strategically employed by the female voice in performance, as a tangible resistant theatre material.

### **Composing an Artwork with Air**

As an example of an artist working today who *composes herself*, Georgina Starr is impressively in command of her own voice as material. A long time recorder of other peoples' voices as part of her own on-going audio collection and archive, Starr knows what it means to be *on record*. And so when she is on record, it is more often than not of her own making and composing. That Starr knows when and why to press record (in that her decisions to record are carefully consciously considered) is significant in this time of documentation saturation in our 'larger *culture of*

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<sup>58</sup> Grosz, 1994, 188.

<sup>59</sup> Elizabeth D. Harvey, *Ventriloquised Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London: Routledge, 1992), 139.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> The material of fluid is the subject of a collaborative project between myself, Emily Orley and P.A Skantze developed for the conference *Sexuate Subjects: Politics, Poetics and Ethics* at University College London in December 2010. Our work, titled *A Methodology of Locks*, was initiated as a response to Irigaray's *The Mechanics of Fluids*, and continues now as an investigation into the way delicate materials like salt and water, and words and dance can move and be made to move to bring about the 'hardy and fragile process of change.'

*recording.*<sup>62 63</sup> I am inclined to relate the position Starr takes, in discerning what to record, to her fascination with listening to sounds from a young age before she had the technological means to record them. Looking back on a childhood without easy mechanical play back, Starr relates much of her early listening as embodied in brilliant recollections. For example, hearing the crackling of electrical cables over Outwood, a village she lived in as a child, she imagined the sound to be the voices spilling out from the telephone lines above.<sup>64</sup> ‘Like an audio voice leak’ she says. And like the wires over Outwood, Starr carries voices with her too. As a child she listened not only to the sounds surrounding her, but also those inside her, sounds impossible to record: the voices in her head which have babbled on since she was five years old, and which she has been trying to decipher ever since. In this way Starr really does know the limits of the record, as well as the limits of control over her own voice (or voices). It is her acknowledgement of these limits of controlling sound, while remaining very much in control of her own presentation of it as artwork, which makes her such an important example of a woman composing with all sounds’ inevitable unpredictability and all its potential ‘audio voice leaks.’

I want to draw attention to Starr’s working with the volatility of voice as sound, especially in order to further develop my analysis of the “auditor composer” model, moving from an early modern example of a character to the practice of a woman working with sound today. With Starr’s work *Whistle* (recorded in 1992), a sound piece inspired first by her seeing the way a particular air formation moved on the Euston station concourse, I will develop the methods I grant Ophelia as a female body who works with air as a material to compose with. It is important to reiterate Diamond’s question: *who or what is in control here?* This question is significant for two reasons: firstly, as the shift from Ophelia to Starr demonstrates a move from the male-authored character to the female artist exerting authorial control over her own work. And

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<sup>62</sup> Kahn, 16.

<sup>63</sup> It is not surprising then that there is no audio document of my meeting with Starr at her London studio, where we discussed her relationship with sound and the use of her own voice as material in many of her artworks. Now, the re-playing of our conversation from my memory of it emerges as a strangely appropriate challenge within this introduction, as Starr’s voice is present here in my re-composition of it - in my own act of composing through audition and composing through remembering.

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter 3 for more detailed attention given to Georgina Starr’s relationship with the (material of the) record.

secondly, because the way Starr skillfully negotiates what she can and cannot control when working with sound augments certain readings Gina Bloom provides for early modern female characters' practice with sound in *Voice in Motion*. Bloom's development of subtle strategies for women gaining vocal agency articulates the woman's understanding of vocal control and, crucially, her ability to let go of it. Bloom argues, 'the breath - ephemeral, mobile, unpredictable, indeed invisible – defies supervision and resists choreography.'<sup>65</sup> As I will show, the making of Starr's work *Whistle* demonstrates a process of simultaneously letting go and holding on to control over the air and the sound of her voice, where breath *follows*, as well as defies, supervision.<sup>66</sup> *And* where rather than simply resisting choreography, the breath in *Whistle* is consciously choreographed as a direct result of Starr's fascination with unpredictable wind currents and framing the chaotic air that does resist.<sup>67</sup>

*Whistle* has three distinct parts to its composition: the first is the score that Starr made from observing a particular movement of air on the concourse of Euston station, when she saw the wind caught in an eddy, whirling in circles. Inspired by the wind having its own directional force, Starr made the correspondence between the action of the swirling air and the action of whistling, in which air as breath is channeled through the pursed lips of the mouth. Wanting to make a piece of work for whistling with the turbulent wind becoming a notational score, Starr released paper arrows into the eddy and photographed the resulting flight. The stilled motion of

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<sup>65</sup> Bloom, 109.

<sup>66</sup> The process of 'holding on and letting go' is a method P.A. Skantze illustrates in *Stillness and Motion*. Writing about the many parables where 'the desire to hold onto that which must move, decay, elapse, brings about tragedy,' (46) Skantze shows that these lessons suggest 'a world dependent on the reciprocity of making precious and letting go.'

<sup>67</sup> While I don't go into an analysis of the close relationship between chaos and noise in this thesis, it is important to note that there is much that could be written here about how women musicians and artists have consciously used the aesthetics of noise in their composing as a political strategy, and much that has already been theoretically written and critically discussed around the subject, including work presented at the recent *Her Noise* symposium at the Tate Modern by artists and thinkers including Cathy Lane, Kaffe Matthews, Pauline Oliveros and Tara Rodgers. Now nearly thirty years on Susan McClary's *Afterword: The Politics of Silence and Sound* (1985) in Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1987), is even more resonant in its predictions about Attali's 'hope for the future, composition' being 'actualised' in the work of 'groups traditionally marginalised, who are defined by the mainstream as noise anyway, and who thus have been in particularly good positions to observe the oppressive nature of the reigning order. Women, for instance, are not only strongly represented in these new modes of composition – they are frequently leaders, which has never before been the case in Western "art" music. Instead of submitting their voices to institutionalised definitions of permissible order, composers such as Laurie Anderson and Joan La Barbara celebrate their status as outsiders by highlighting what counts in many official circles as Noise.' (in Attali, 157).

the arrows was then transposed onto a musical stave, where notes could be plotted where arrows happened to fall on a line. Starr made six scores this way, which make up a larger body of work called *Air Compositions 1-6*, of which *Whistle* is the development of number 3. The second part of the process was the recording of the score in a professional sound studio where an echo was added to Starr's whistling, and the third part is the record of the whistling which 'should be played in an empty space or over the announcement system of a train station.'<sup>68 69</sup>

*Whistle* is controlled in composition at each stage of its making: from the stilling of the motion of the wind in photographic space to the professional recording of the whistled notes and ultimately to the instructions for the site of its playing. And yet the very subject matter of the composition, the wind determining the content of the final record, is a force beyond control. That this strange energetic air should be the starting point for Starr's work is significant in looking at a modern day application of a woman composing with the air and for the air. In scoring the turbulent flow of the wind on the station concourse in order to compose for her own voice's return to such a site, Starr's voice in effect *mimics the medium* it travels through. Starr is continually drawing attention to how an artist might make an object from the air to respectfully return it to that medium. Stephen Connor, discussing the use of air in art practice, articulates the strange paradox of air as both object and non-object simultaneously when he writes:

To work with air is to wish to become it, to evaporate every particle of what would betray art into the condition of an object, while yet remaining exquisitely, infinitesimally intact in that very operation.<sup>70</sup>

Starr's *score I* would argue enables much of her authorial control in composing with the air, in making an object, which draws attention to the task of preserving the air current as 'exquisitely...intact.' At the same time instructional and open for interpretation, the notational

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<sup>68</sup> Georgina Starr's directions for the playing of *Whistle*, as written in Georgina Starr, *I am a Record* (Poitiers: Le Confort Moderne, 2010) to accompany the exhibition *I am a Record and I am the Medium*.

<sup>69</sup> The visual score and the sound of Starr's *Whistle* is at <http://georginastarr.com/whistle.html>.

<sup>70</sup> Stephen Connor, "Next to Nothing: The Arts of Air." Birkbeck University of London, <http://www.stevenconnor.com/airart/airart.pdf> (accessed on February 24th 2010).



score made of arrows suspended in mid air materialises the practice of the simultaneous holding on and letting go of control I mention above in relation to working with the unpredictability of air and breath. As a graphic score *Whistle* could arguably be “played” by anyone, up for interpretation in performance, as only the musical notes are given. Starr even augments this graphic musical score with the installation instructions, a kind of event score in themselves: she instructs how the resulting record should be played over a railway loudspeaker system. These precise instructions still allow enough space to transform them and alter the sound of the work completely. Yet, while Starr has invited musicians and singers to interpret other of her artworks, most notably to provide various soundtracks to her silent film *Theda*, *Whistle* appears to be a composition for her own voice, and shaped by the air in two distinct instances: in its initial score made from the unpredictable wind and in its eventual playing in a train station. When eventually played over the loud speaker *Whistle* is in effect returned to the fate of the air’s movement. In this way, *Whistle* is a sound piece continually shifting in and out of Starr’s control, and she sets up the framework for it to do so.

Knowingly working with, and not against, the unpredictability of turbulence is what both Bloom and Irigaray in their arguments identify as a particularly female strategy for gaining vocal and symbolic empowerment: for causing ‘whirlwinds’ in the ‘framework of the ruling symbolics’ (Irigaray); for proving ‘difficult to monitor and discipline’ (Bloom).<sup>71</sup> Starr’s composition begins with her experiencing the movement of air caught in an eddy, the definition of which is in fact itself a type of miniature whirlwind, as the current moves in a circular motion: looping the air back on itself. In *Chaos, Territory, Art* Elizabeth Grosz identifies how Art frames the motion of chaotic vibrations to create sensation.<sup>72</sup> Discussing the ontology of music and its relationship with chaos in conversation with Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?* Grosz cites their illustration of how sensation occurs as an overlapping of vibrations across time: ‘what comes before has not yet disappeared when what follows appears.’<sup>73</sup> Grosz echoes this shape of the

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<sup>71</sup> Irigaray, 106 and Bloom, 109.

<sup>72</sup> And in doing so highlights again that *vibrating sonic forces move in the continuous*.

<sup>73</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari quoted in Elizabeth Grosz. *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 55.

continuous overlap in her own description of vibrations:

Vibrations are oscillations, differences, movements of back and forth, contraction and dilation: they are a becoming-temporal of spatial movements and spatial processes, the promise of a future modeled in some ways on the rhythm and regularity of the present.<sup>74</sup>

*Whistle* is an example of an artwork that practices knowingly with how to compose or frame the unpredictable vibratory performance of sound. Starr's authorial framing of the elemental air grants her artistic control over it: she takes the photographs, transposes the score, whistles the tune and determines the site for its performance. Grosz writes:

Art thus captures an element, a fragment, of chaos in the frame and creates or extracts from it not an image or representation, but a sensation or rather a compound or a multiplicity of sensations, not the repetition of sensations already experienced or available beyond or outside the work of art, but those very sensations generated and proliferated only by art.<sup>75</sup>

Starr's use of the objects of score and record are compositional steps in an effort to return (to loop back) to the performance of the (non)object of air. In mimicking the whirling wind with her whistling Starr literally re-composes a sensation of movement in turbulent air, capturing 'an element, a fragment, of chaos in the frame.' *Her* frame.

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And so *I have been thinking* here, in this introduction, of composition as an action moving in the continuous present, and of how the speaking body vocalising herself through audition, through careful attention to how her voice moves, is a method which can be strategically employed by

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<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth Grosz. *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 55.

<sup>75</sup> Grosz, 2008, 18.

female artists in performance across times and spaces of making. The particular tense I use above- the present perfect progressive - is a tense I am fond of for its reach from the past through the present and into the future. *I have been thinking* holds all temporalities at once in its phrasing – it does not specify or pin point time, but lets time act in the continuous; and lets the action time carries run *from, through* and *onwards*. I think about the performance of sound this way, as continuously moving, composing as it carries through airspace. With particular attention to how a female body might use the sound of her voice to complicate any passive form of aural spectatorship and by extension her representation on stage and off, my practice accompanying this written element applies this method of continuous composition to stage the female voice as a force both carrying *and* complicating the identification of the speaking body. If voice as sound is always on the move, in flux, then any easy identification of it is, in a sense, already complicated. Distinct from the temporality of “the durational” in performance practice, I use the temporality of “the continuous” for its particular motion of looping, of circling back and recycling time: for its refusal to adhere to a formal endpoint. Practicing in the continuous, then, has less to do with performance time length/duration as a kind of container, and much more to do with acknowledging the happening of performance as part of the wider continuum of lived (and unlived) time. Adrian Heathfield identifies, through Henri Bergson, that the phenomena of duration in performance also ‘deals in the confusion of temporal distinctions – between past, present and future,’ emphasizing the durational as kinetically connected to the continuous.<sup>76</sup> I use the continuous here, though, for its resistance to ordering or objectifying time, effects that Heathfield warns can still time’s complex flow:

to think duration was already to have ordered it through thought, to have attempted to make time an object or a thing, and thus to impose upon its complex flow a solidification, a stilling cut, a spatialisation.<sup>77</sup>

Smith writes ‘as human beings we are surrounded – and filled – by a continuous field of sound,

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<sup>76</sup> Adrian Heathfield, “Impress of Time.” *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Tsieh*. Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Tsieh (Cambridge: MIT, 2009), 22.

<sup>77</sup> Heathfield, 21.

by sounds outside our bodies as well as by metabolic sounds within.<sup>78</sup> We cannot escape the humming drumming continuum of the sonic world; we are perpetually in the wake of sound's motion, as well as in advance of it. Within the following chapters I investigate how the performance of sound can be employed by the female speaking voice through my own practice focusing on voice as a moving material between bodies in the dark (Chapter 2), on the record (Chapter 3), and in character (Chapter 4), and how each of these distinct contexts illustrate acts of composing in the continuous.

Before I turn my focus from the material of sound to the material of voice, let me focus briefly on the context of this thesis as a space in which voice moves. The medium of this thesis - like the dark, the record or the character - is also intended to host voice as a 'moving material,' offering different ways of experiencing my own and others' voices through text and sound. As well as reading this textual document, I also invite you to listen to certain audio recordings that I have called "Endnotes," sound documents of the works under discussion in each of the three central chapters. At specific points in the text, a footnote will ask you to "hear" an *Endnote*, and shift from reading material to listening material.<sup>79</sup>

As well as these explicit shifts from text to sound, I have also noticed through practicing with the voice as a theatre material, how a significant relationship has occurred with *writing as material*. Content is "material." The script, the speech and the score contain a form of notational material (whether textual or musical) to be animated by the voice in performance. The material of *this* thesis is written, inscribed on paper and as I voice the words I want to write in my head and out loud, I edit my voice as I write, edit my writing as I voice. And so this thesis is a duet in the sense that the voice echoes and reverberates in the written word. 'Sound haunts the written word': the ephemeral sonic utterance haunting the material inscriptions.<sup>80</sup> I have composed and

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<sup>78</sup> Smith, 9.

<sup>79</sup> Accompanying this work also, but not so neatly bound into its printed form, is the performance work yet to be shown, the performance you will experience in the wake of reading. This performance is the live component of the PhD practice led research, and will be shown in the Jubilee Theatre at Roehampton University, a space in which I have developed nearly all of my practice over the course of the PhD.

<sup>80</sup> Ruth Salvaggio, *The Sounds of Feminist Theory* (New York: State University New York Press, 1999), 20.

designed this thesis, so that the voice not only moves between different media (the text, the performance, the record), but also vitally moves (shifts, changes, translates) within each singular medium. Through his written composition, then, I practice with how I can make the material move – materialising the sound of the written word toward transforming these inscriptions into vibrations.

## CHAPTER 1

### Material Voice

Voice comes into being under pressure. The body is loud, blood makes noise, but the live voice is materialised through force. In *The Strains of the Voice*, Stephen Connor briefly cites Aristotle's description in *De Anima* of sound as a suffering, as the air is 'battered, stretched, percussed.'

Following this he writes that 'the voice never simply appears, but is expressed, its shape formed out of resistance.'<sup>1</sup> Although I am writing here about the physical sounded voice, made in the body and articulated out loud, Connor's description of voice as resistant force relates closely to another aspect of voice as 'the metaphor for asserting agency and identity,' the sociopolitical position of "having a voice" and using it.<sup>2</sup> Within my research practice, while I am concerned with the (potential for) resistant force in both sounded and metaphorical understandings of voice, my study questions how specifically the force of *sounded* voice in theatre time and space is both player and played upon in agency. How does the female voice assert agency and identity through its own sound quality? And how may sound as agency lead to, or divert from, the position of a female body "having a voice?"<sup>3</sup>

It is important to foreground how integral both these elements of voice and their interrelation are within my thinking and articulation. The materiality, the sound and substance of the voice is a crucial and critical part of "having a voice," the metaphor for a physical and sociopolitical positioning of the body who speaks. Yet, as well as the difference between the metaphorical and material voice, the voice is also crucially 'the site of perhaps the most radical of all subjective

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Connor, "The Strains of the Voice." Birkbeck University of London, <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/english/skc/strains/> (accessed on February 24th 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Liz Mills, "When the Voice Itself Is Image." *Modern Drama*. 52.4 (2009), 394.

<sup>3</sup> Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked* (1993) and Rebecca Schneider's *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1997) have both provided foundational texts articulating female performance practice that consciously complicates the relationship between the performer's body and the audience. Both these books contextualised my MPhil thesis and practice (2008) which researched how a solo female performer could be rendered present through her bodily absence in performance (and resulted in turning a theatre into a camera). This PhD project is rooted in my previous engagement with Phelan's and Schneider's texts, continuing my investigation into female authorship and agency in performance in aural terms. For example, Phelan's understanding of an 'active vanishing' (19), through which one may attempt to escape the trappings of representational visibility, remains of importance to me in thinking through my enquiries into sound, and particularly the voice, as opening up a wider area in which to investigate female presence and absence in performance.

divisions – the division between meaning and materiality,’ as the sounds in and of the voice ‘always exceed signification.’<sup>4</sup> Ruth Salvaggio, writing about a sonorous reception of feminist theoretical language, observes that ‘through sound, words move.’<sup>5</sup> Her argument foregrounds the criticality of hearing sound in the writing and reading of text, and citing Michel de Certeau, she emphasises how the ‘scriptural and the vocal’ have a mutual affect on each other in scholarly writing, activating a ‘return of voices’ through ‘quotation, sentence fragments, the tonalities of ‘words’ the sounds they make.’<sup>6</sup> The “material of sound” activates meaning, pushing words into meaningful motion.<sup>7</sup> As Mladen Dolar asserts: when it comes to the voice in speech ‘in its most common use and in its most quotidian presence’ as ‘any kind of linguistic expression,’ the voice ‘is an opening toward meaning.’<sup>8</sup>

Using and understanding voice as a *material*, as sonic substance, I am crucially aware that this element of voice is continually in negotiation with the implications of vocal meaning. Thus I address the material voice as a sort of theatre material, of which the matter might be shaped or worked with in performance. I ask how this shaping might promote the agency of the vocal body, she who speaks. In doing so, I necessarily include an analysis of what meaning is included or excluded from the material.

How then, to approach and handle the voice as sound, as a material substance, as distinct from voice as language? Of course, as I have said above, voice as speech carries language within it: we search for, and decipher audible meaning in even the most densely layered soundscapes. Like Jean Cocteau’s Orphée hearing voices of the dead in the in-between stations of his car radio, our

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<sup>4</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988), 44. Perceiving the division between meaning and materiality is in large part dependent on who is listening. Furthermore, the sounds in and of the voice shift (in quality and substance) according not only to *who* is listening but *how*, *when* and *where* they are listening. Technically speaking, the voice is not materialized as perceived sound until processed by the ears and mind of the listener, and so it is important to simultaneously research the voice’s reception in both my ears *and* those of an audience in this study.

<sup>5</sup> Salvaggio, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Michel de Certeau, as quoted in Salvaggio, 24.

<sup>7</sup> I write “material of sound” acknowledging that from the perspective of physics, sound is immaterial, it is not made of matter per se. Sound affects the matter (medium) it is travelling through, be it air, string or copper piping. In this study, sound and voice are under investigation as theatre materials, and whether the unique space and time of theatre can make them into materials.

<sup>8</sup> Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2006), 14.

ears are alert to the signs of audible meaning even in scratching static. However, voice is vocal, it is *sound*, and sound has a three dimensional materiality (identified by Rick Altman) which moves the air around us and ‘sets matter in motion.’<sup>9</sup> As voice is also crucially ‘always the voice of someone,’ this matter has a unique identity formed by the body it materializes within.<sup>10</sup> Vocal matter has a body materializing, somewhere.

Both Michelle Duncan and Liz Mills identify the particular struggle to articulate voice as ‘a phenomenon separate from its formation as language.’<sup>11</sup> Yet to approach the voice as its material substance of air forced out of the body as breath and sound is to enter into a vast web of different definitions for what the matter is; grain (Barthes), sonorous substance (Derrida) vocality (Dunn and Jones), resonant voice (Duncan), vocal image (Mills). All seek to distinguish and/or give a name to the extra-linguistic element of voice, with sound as a material. But do words really ‘fail us when we are faced with the infinite shades of voice’?<sup>12 13</sup>

Writing about the materiality of voice in Opera, and ‘a preoccupation with reading as the legitimate mode of analysis,’ Michelle Duncan proposes a shift of attention towards the ‘resonant voice.’ Arguing that the reliance on gleaning meaning from ‘the realm of textuality’ has led to a forgetting how to *listen*, Duncan calls in to question how this resonant voice ‘acts and how it participates in the creation, disruption or dissolution of registers of meaning independent of linguistic signification.’<sup>14</sup>

As I illustrated in the introduction, Gina Bloom’s analysis of voice, gender and agency in early

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<sup>9</sup> Rick Altman, “The Material Heterogeneity of Recorded Sound.” *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, ed. Rick Altman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 19.

<sup>10</sup> Adriana Caverero, *For More than one Voice: Toward a philosophy of vocal expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 148.

<sup>11</sup> Mills, 394.

<sup>12</sup> Dolar, 13.

<sup>13</sup> The ‘infinite shades’ of voice are connected to the infinite shades of sounds one can perceive. Ears have access to an acoustic environment that provides many pitches, tones and textures. Furthermore in another definition of ‘shades of the voice,’ the shades can also be understood as spectres, ‘acoustic spectres,’ as Marina Warner names the phenomenon of listening to recorded voices in *Fantastic Metamorphosis, Other Worlds*, (2004).

<sup>14</sup> Michelle Duncan, “The operatic scandal of the singing body: Voice, presence, performativity.” *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 16.3 (2004), 284.



modern England, *Voice in Motion*, is valuable in helping understand how breath as air made of matter might *act* in order to practice differing forms of female agency. Bloom asserts that ‘as a consequence of its mobility, and spatial indeterminacy, the voice has the capacity for even greater “flux” than the body.’ The voice is unfixed. In an early modern context she argues that this peculiar motility of voice can ‘effect surprising forms of subversion’ of gender ideologies.<sup>15</sup> Of course, Bloom’s analysis of voice is situated within a context where it is predominantly female *characters*, not literal female bodies that harness the flight of voice for their own subtle moments of subversion.<sup>16</sup> On the whole, it is men who have written these women’s voices, and boys who have vocalised them. ‘Contained, confined and channelled,’ the manipulation of the woman’s voice parallels the ‘constraints placed on women’s bodies.’<sup>17</sup>

The concern here is with how in theatre practice and performance space today, a woman might be able to ‘embrace breath’s volatile attributes’ in order to be in authorial control over both her voice and body. In one of my early practical investigations using copper piping to funnel the sounds of my voice back into my own ear as an exercise in *channelling*, I attempted to re-imagine the constriction of voice as an artistic choice. Although prompting other interesting questions about the performer/audience relationship, the act of constricting the voice meant that not only access to the materiality of voice was restricted, but meaning too. The only way an audience member could hear me would be to place an ear to the plumbing thus constricted by the route I had directed and designed for my voice (see picture overleaf). The audience sitting at a distance had to change their own body’s position in the space and become a part of my installation if they wanted to hear what I was saying. Copper as a solid material conducts the vibrations of sound more quickly than air, so the acoustics of the listening apparatus led to a transmission which at times became non-linguistic, as the material of the conduit reverberated with my breath.

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<sup>15</sup> Bloom, 16.

<sup>16</sup> I offer an extended discussion of character and voice in Chapter 4.

<sup>17</sup> Christine Ehrick, “Gender, Voice and Women’s Radio Speech.” *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, eds. David Suisman and Susan Strasser (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 69.



*Copper piping listening prop. December 2008.*

If ‘voice puts matter into circulation, matter that is more, or other than language’ then how can this matter be manipulated in the theatre/performance space?<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Bloom asks ‘can matter as transient and ephemeral as breath be choreographed?’<sup>19</sup> For Mills, a voice practitioner in theatre, becoming aware of the sound of the voice inspires a practice of voicing that is ‘less subjectively grounded and more acoustically liberated.’<sup>20</sup> Her method for actors to ‘grasp’ the materiality of sound is for sound to operate as a ‘vocal image.’ This ‘vocal image’ appears when ‘meaning making is centered in the sounding or vocalizing of the human voice.’<sup>21</sup> Martin Welton’s description of a performance taking place in ‘a completely darkened auditorium’ demonstrates the material of sound in speech becoming not just idea, but a tangible ‘thing.’<sup>22</sup> He observes that

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<sup>18</sup> Dolar, 303.

<sup>19</sup> Bloom, 67.

<sup>20</sup> Mills, 400.

<sup>21</sup> Mills, 391.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

‘the spoken words become ‘things’ in their own right.’<sup>23</sup> For Welton it takes a performance space with all visual stimuli removed, so that he is in effect blinded, for words to become material. While ‘he is aware that it is sight that confirms the materiality of things’ Welton ‘also reveals that, paradoxically, it is sight that potentially blinds us to the materiality of the voice.’<sup>24</sup>

I would hope that we *could* perceive a materiality of voice if we still have our sight. That the restricting of certain senses foregrounds our reliance on sight as the most easily accessible confirmation of a material environment is not a revelation. I will often close my eyes to listen hard, privileging the attention of one sense. Yet do we have to absent sight, or at least the sight of the voicing body, in order to grasp (at) the materiality of sound in performance? Cannot these senses be affected simultaneously? When in Ivana Muller’s *Playing Ensemble Again and Again*, the actors who have been slowly moving through the actions of a post-performance bow inevitably retreat behind the curtain, their voice-overs continue.<sup>25</sup> The audience is confronted with an empty stage: no props, no obvious “readable” visual material. The voices of those players, who are now invisible, fill the space. Like Welton’s description of the dark auditorium where the words *become* things as a condition of the staging, in *Playing Ensemble Again and Again* I experience words becoming things most acutely once they are the only moving stimulus I have to focus on. While I can look at the stage, albeit in an empty and consciously “undesigned” state, I am focused on words as ‘things’ because they are moving in the space. They are present, while the bodies are not. These spoken lines, ‘fragments’ as they are called in the programme, are intoned in measured and uninflected voices. I am struck by how this conscious careful delivery seems to level all voices, male and female, to sound like the same material, cut from the same cloth.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mills, 400.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> *Playing Ensemble Again and Again*. Concept, choreography and direction: Ivana Muller. Text: Ivana Muller, Bill Aitchison and performers. Sadler’s Wells, London. January, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> One of the outcomes of my research into how sound performs materially is understanding sound to be something like fabric, with texture, pattern and elements woven together. In particular, Massumi’s description of the bouncing and patterning echo (which I mention below) provoked me to test the patterning of sound in practice, which is particularly evident in Chapter 4.

Liz Mills's research into the materiality of voice encourages a working with 'sounds an actor can generate and sculpt in the imaginative space of theatre.'<sup>27</sup> Does the voice become more material, more malleable, in theatre space? I find Mills use of the term "sculpt" particularly compelling, as a way of approaching how to handle voice in a theatre space. The resistance and persuasion of breath through our bodies could equally be identified as a type of sculpting, a pushing to fit and fill the forms of inner bodily cavities, but once the voice is transmitted, pushed into air-space, how does the specific space of theatre allow the body to sculpt its own voice? A female body sculpting voice has its own significant implications, as she becomes her own sculptor.

In the chapter 'Flesh' in his 2007 book *It*, Joseph Roach focuses intriguingly on the character of Eliza Doolittle: the Covent Garden flower-girl whose voice is trained from excessive 'boohooing' to controlled 'newly sculpted vowel sounds' by Professor Higgins, the Pygmalion of phonetics.<sup>28</sup> Like Lauren Bacall and her Pygmalion director Howard Hawkes who sent her outside to read her scripts out loud in order to deepen her voice to give herself "an image" beyond that of her obvious good looks, Eliza Doolittle is transformed through the re-modeling of her voice. In the stage directions for *My Fair Lady*, the musical based on George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Alan Jay Lerner wrote 'Eliza appears on the landing – a vision.'<sup>29</sup> When she finds her voice, or more accurately is given her voice by two men, she is re-cast as a vision. Here, sound materializes the sight, as the female voice appears to re-form the female body. A strange exchange happens here. As a phonetician, Higgins sculpts Eliza's lips and mouth into new shapes, which remodel her voice and then refigure her body. Here sculpting voice sculpts the body anew. Eliza has a new form: the form of 'a lady.'

Reforming voice to alter the body's class status has significant implications for 'being heard' by a particular group of people in particular environments or situations. Voices are heard and the bodies, from which they emanate, imagined. Judgments are based not only on content, but also on the sound and accent of the voice. The voice's power to transform a body, how it looks and

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<sup>27</sup> Mills, 394.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Roach, *It* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 2007), 200.

<sup>29</sup> Roach, 201.

even how it acts is well known and documented by voice practitioners in the theatre— the voice is like a costume. Auditors of Drama hear voices constantly and may even judge how “convincing” they are, especially if accent plays a part. But historically and politically it has been the convincing voice that holds power, with sound and tone then serving to mask content, and consequently meaning, in an altogether more sinister way. The implication here is not that theatre is purely the realm of play without political or revolutionary force. In fact my study takes place within theatre/performance studies for exactly these qualities. But living in an age when Conservative voices drop the ‘dark L’ to sound less patrician in the UK, makes for discussion about the implications of ‘sculpting’ voice even more urgent.<sup>30</sup>

### **Voice as Sound Material**

Here an echo: Gina Bloom emphasises in *Voice in Motion* that unlike male characters who attempt to control a substance which ultimately can not be controlled, female characters operate with (not against) the lack of control to manifest a particular form of ‘communicative power.’ It is important to reiterate that this study is about co-operating with the uncontrollable. Sound in its nature is unbound, and this research is not an attempt to contain or control it. Descriptions of sound and by extension the voice are lent aesthetic characteristics to help make tangible and relatable an invisible and complex force. While this study depends on an acknowledgment of an aesthetics of sound, and a use of voice as a theatre material, it does so with a delicate awareness of playing with the air. My practice is a way of testing the rich and complex ways that voice *acts* within and without the body of the speaker in the space and time of the live event and the record. Like the event of Theatre the voice is live and, once spoken, lines retreat to the past while signalling the future. So how then might the female body ‘handle’ the voice as material in both the live moment and the record with the body in question being both performer of voice, and director/designer of voice?

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<sup>30</sup> The ‘dark L’ in phonetics is emphasised by the ‘L’ sound at the end of ‘people’ for example.

If voice can be thought of, or imagined as a theatrical material, how might it *become* that material and be used in practice? The manners in which contemporary digital manipulations of the sonic have made sound into an (apparently) more plastic and malleable substance share peculiar similarities with early modern ways of perceiving sound as a kind of shapeable material. Bloom's analysis of models and machines to contain, control or choreograph voice by seventeenth-century scientists and inventors emphasizes particular 'attempts to shape vocal sound, mastering its movements to achieve certain effects.'<sup>31</sup> Bacon's discovery that to speak into a 'bucket submerged halfway under water' offering the illusion of a far-away distant voice and Athanasius Kircher's "speaking statues" are examples of the imaginative acoustic experiments which both came out of and contributed back to the collective imagining and understanding of sound at the time, producing inventive experimentation in order to "master" sound. Paradoxically to work with sound, and to make attempts at describing, analysing or theorizing sound, is to treat it as a type of material object. While the act of shaping sound has fostered new technologies and machines, our desire to manipulate its form and texture has never ceased in our attempts to make material out of the immaterial, defying certain scientific sense. Even though Bacon eventually admits the futility of attempts to control sound, stating that it cannot be 'guided,' sound continues to find itself the object of design, to the point now that the role of sound designer in theatre has become as vital as the set designer.

In his essay on sound particles and the delicate inconsistencies of thinking sound as matter in the digital sound age, Mitchell Whitelaw suggests that the material metaphor has become ingrained not only in the descriptive analysis of experimental sound works, but also crucially in the cultural imagination. The proliferation of digital information alongside the need to interpret, catalogue and store sound has led to an imagining and handling of digitized data as object. Whitelaw argues that 'through the intermediary of sound, digital data is figured here as exactly the thing that it is not: matter.'<sup>32</sup> While this figuring has taken place through 'discourse around contemporary experimental electronic audio,' it has significant implications for the study of sounded voice, and

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<sup>31</sup> Bloom, 76.

<sup>32</sup> Mitchell Whitelaw, "Sound Particles and Microsonic Materialism." *Contemporary Music Review*, 22.4 (2003), 93.

especially a practice concerned with realising a materiality of voice in theatrical space, especially given how Whitelaw also foregrounds the way conceptions of the material have shifted:

While once considered base, corrupt and imperfect, the material domain has come to be understood — largely through the sciences — as rich and complex, dynamic, and imbued with life. No longer seen as the container for an animating spirit, or the work of an almighty Hand, we are left with a sense of wonder at matter's capacity to organise itself.<sup>33</sup>

This shift in consideration has happened 'largely through the sciences,' but also I would argue through imagination, or rather the willingness to think more creatively about how exactly matter might not only organize itself, but *perform* itself too. Whitelaw describes how the 'audio subculture' has appropriated 'values from matter' to approach the sonic, positing that 'it wants to think of sound-data as being like matter, having those complex dynamics, that internal richness, that immanent activity and also that ultimate malleability and plasticity.' The way that sound is cast as a pliable substance in the audio subculture translates to theatrical space where sound takes on a dimensionality particular to the aesthetics and acoustics of the auditorium it vibrates within. Furthermore, the motion of sound waves in an enclosed space can to some extent be mapped. Theatre acousticians shape sounds through building materials, which reflect, reverberate and absorb the energy of the sound waves in the space, and so sound waves can in effect be drawn into space, reflecting off smooth surfaces as light does.

The space one speaks within effects the sounding voice, as much as the direction and projection of the speech itself. Yet theatrical space does not only offer particular acoustics for the shaping of voice, but also crucially for this study, a transmission of the voice in the live moment. The event of theatre hosts the event of the voice, both acknowledged by an audience, whose presence materialises the *act*. The vibrations of the voice carried through the air eventually materialise in the ears of the listener. Theatrical space offers then not only an environment in which vocal

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<sup>33</sup> Whitelaw, 97.

acoustics are shaped by spatial dimensions, but also a space of motion and action, where the voice can experiment with its form: a live form as momentary as the act of theatre itself.

When voice can dance in the imaginative space of theatre can it be conceived and perceived as something more tangible, a sculptable substance like stone or plaster? And following this what are the wider sociopolitical implications of an attempt to sculpt voice: what does sculpting as an act of momentary containment do to the female voice and her body? As I hoped to show with attention to Georgina Starr's *Whistle* in the Introduction, there are ways of practicing in and out of control with the voice, which can provide rich areas of analysis. In the chapters that follow, the voice is staged in specific scenographies, offering at once controlled settings and instructions as well as the scope for performance interpretation and the inevitable intervention of unscripted sounds or interruptions.

In my research here, concerned with a particular use of the voice as material, I concentrate primarily on the form of the speaking voice. The speaking voice that sings, and the singing voice that speaks inevitably play their parts regardless of discerning *types* of voicing, but for the sake of clarity it is important to foreground the speaking voice as my primary subject of analysis. This differentiation helps me theorise a *texture* of voice, as the use of the term has its own informal framework within music studies, where the musical voice (as distinct from corporeal voice) is 'a part' scored, conducted and played to form a sound quality which is *felt*, as well as heard.

Defined as the 'feel of sound, a matter of contrapuntal density, harmony and timbre,' texture as understood in music theory provides a useful attention to the tactility of sounds heard, although like Barthes's 'grain' and Duncan's 'resonant voice,' this texture is a condition of the voice in song, characterized in part by its movement through a range of melodic pitches.<sup>34</sup> About the speaking voice, too easily cast as the textual relation to the textural voice in song, I ask: How might the speaking voice be manifested as a textural substance in negotiation with the textual content it delivers?

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<sup>34</sup> Paul Griffiths, *The New Penguin Dictionary of Music* (London: Penguin, 2006), 211.



Two research performance works, both duets between my voice and female voices from the past, have been significant in questioning ways in which the act of vocalizing material-as-content might make the voice perform and act more like a material itself. Using two types of speech material, the written script and the audio document, alongside my live voice I investigated the possibilities and potential for a contouring of voice, mapping and translating the distance between myself and the audience.

Towards answering the questions posed above through practice, I sought out voice recordings where the voice has become a physical material through its attachment and commitment to a material document: a vinyl, a tape, a CD,<sup>35</sup> which I could experiment with through various duets with my voice in performance. Seeking to make physical the echoes or reverberations that a voice transmits through time in the replaying of audio material, I staged two separate works in which the resistant female voices of Eleanor Roosevelt and Virginia Woolf were broadcast alongside my literal readings of their work.

Eleanor Roosevelt's speech *On the Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, delivered and recorded in Paris on 9<sup>th</sup> September 1948 played from two speakers in front of the seated audience, while my voice speaking live simultaneously spoke the same lines played from behind the audience. The two voices were not so much layered on top of each other, as meeting and mixing in the performance space, having been projected from opposite ends of the room. The experience offered was to listen both forward and backward simultaneously in terms of both time (the voices from 1948 and 2010) and space (speakers in front and behind the audience). Making explicit the temporal and spatial distances of two distinct voices emphasised the peculiar ability of sound to fill voids and charge a space with sensations of material presence. In the performance, distance became a length or unit of time and space to traverse: the voices directed between (at least) two points. The simultaneous readings, my voice paced within Roosevelt's, resulted in various manners of listening, with two ways of listening emerging as especially

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<sup>35</sup> The digital, or digitised document is an intriguing area for further discussion and to make note of here, as in our contemporary moment the material object (the tape, vinyl etc) is disappearing. The digital file has the potential to become any one of these "hard copies," yet it exists in storage almost invisibly.

significant for this study. Audience members described a focusing in and out, listening both to individual voices to decipher words and their meaning and then shifting to listen to the layered voices as a “whole” sonic experience in itself. Another way of describing this focusing is to propose that the audience were practicing listening both closely and distantly.

Jacques Ranciere’s conception of distance in *The Emancipated Spectator*, as ‘the normal condition of any communication’ is especially useful here in its definition of mediation as an autonomous component (“thing”) in itself:<sup>36</sup>

There is the distance between artist and the spectator, but there is also the distance inherent in the performance itself, in so far as it subsists, as a spectacle, an autonomous thing, between the idea of the artist and the sensation or comprehension of the spectator.<sup>37</sup>

The spectacle, as the mediation between the artist and spectator, is defined by Ranciere as the ‘third thing that is owned by no one,’ the thing to which both artist and spectator refer, but which prevents ‘any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect.’<sup>38</sup> What implications does this have for the voice in transmission between performer and spectator/auditor? Bloom argues in *Voice in Motion* that it is the ‘voice’s distance from rather than presence in, the body that constitutes the conditions of agency’: that the far, distant voice can be less easily relied on to ‘perform a speaker’s will’ undermining ‘male investments in vocal control.’<sup>39</sup> While Bloom’s analysis offers models of positionality from the perspective of Elizabethan drama on page and stage, it resonates interestingly with the idea of Ranciere’s ‘third thing owned by no one.’ Distance complicates any simple or passive attempt at ownership, serving as an intermediary state in which the sounded voice can exist outside of both bodies of performer and spectator. While the voice originates in the body of the performer and is caught (or maybe glimpsed) by the

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<sup>36</sup> Jacques Ranciere, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), 10.

<sup>37</sup> Ranciere, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ranciere, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Bloom, 17.

ears of the spectators/auditors it exists in the time and space of performance also as ‘autonomous thing.’ Brian Massumi’s example of an echo as its own event emphasizes a sonic materialisation of this distance:

An echo, for example, cannot occur without a distance between surfaces for the sounds to bounce from. But the resonance is not on the walls. It is in the emptiness between them. It fills the emptiness with its complex patterning. That patterning is not a distance from itself. It is immediately its own event.<sup>40</sup>

The echo travels through the distance of space - it ‘bounces’ back into resonance in the air and off the ‘walls’ that can neither dispel nor contain it. The space the echo fills, the distance, is a vital space for voice to practice its own autonomy as sonic utterance. This conceptualising of distance allows voice to remain in play, to host its own reception and condition itself through its own movement. Massumi describes this patterning of the echo, the bounce of sound ‘back and forth’ as the ‘relation of the movement to itself: self-relation.’<sup>41</sup> Reckoning with its own transmission, the echo is continually negotiating itself through its collisions with itself, its relation to itself.

In the layering of the two voices (Roosevelt’s and my own) the voice was not only in relation to itself, but also to another. The resulting duet taking place between echoes in the distance, meant that for the audience, listening was less to find and access meaning, but more to *glimpse at* meaning through the materiality of the voice. The distances of time and space offered a partial and momentary view of each voice, and a glimpsing of their content through the colliding shades.

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<sup>40</sup> Massumi, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. I am very interested in how Massumi describes the sound of the echo as patterning itself in the act of repeating on its movement. The patterning practice of sound, and the echo in particular, will be discussed further in the thesis, as it helps toward understanding the materiality of sound in space, in relation to bodies, but integrally ‘in relation to itself.’ Elizabeth Grosz defines a particularly female substance ‘in relation to itself,’ in her discussion of Luce Irigaray’s ‘concept of the mucus,’ the fluid of the womb ‘which always marks the passage from inside to outside’ as a specific distance which ‘escapes control’ within the female maternal body. Grosz writes: ‘The mucus is neither the subjective touching of the toucher nor the objectivity of the touched but the indeterminacy of any distance between them.’ (Grosz, 1994, 107).

What is a glimpse to the ear? The small crack in time and space, which opens just enough to catch the most partial sight - the glimpse, like the blink implies there is always more than meets the eye. The glimpse happens while watching, like a seeing through seeing, an interruption to sight because of sight. I am looking at the trees when I glimpse the bird. I am listening to voices in the distance when I glimpse the words. The glimpse searches for meaning in movement but accepts the value of the momentary – the captured second of a sight or the sound in flux.<sup>42</sup>

Accepting the value of the momentary is to practice with the value of approximation, especially in practicing with sound. There will always be more than meets the ear, and it is the distance which apparently conceals what does not reach the ear of the receiver. And yet distance is not deceitful (deceptive maybe?) as it entertains and plays host to the actions of voice rather than acting upon it. This aural glimpse, the hearing through the act of listening, the focusing in and out is significant in terms of a materiality of voice. The partial and fleeting sound heard in the event of the speaking is a momentary act of containment, a small dissolving sculpture which as soon as perceived is gone, disappeared into the surrounding air-space.

What are these “small sculptures”, the inscriptions made into vibrations in the air? Could they be the sound caught in one ‘shell of air’ before moving on to the ‘next succeeding shell?’ Tyndall, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century physicist, in the series of lectures delivered specifically on sound I mentioned in the introduction, describes the portions of air sounds move through in evocatively sculptural terms, first as ‘shells’ then as ‘laminas’ which move the sound in waves.<sup>43</sup> Exploding a balloon and explaining how the sound blast is heard through a relay in the air, he describes how ‘the air, at a little distance, passed its motion on to the air at a greater distance, and came also in its turn to

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<sup>42</sup> To transpose a term for seeing into a term for hearing does not seem so strange considering the reliance on borrowing terms from the realm of the scopic in many descriptions and discussions of sound, for example that of the vocal image, the human voice operating as acoustic image, which I make note of above as discussed by Mills. Yet, while borrowed terms are very useful in certain circumstances, this study is as much concerned with the limitations of conceptualising the sonic like the scopic, as with what ideas the relationship gives life to.

<sup>43</sup> John Tyndall, *Sound: A course of eight lectures delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1867), 6. Tyndall describes a ‘lamina of air’ as *urging* ‘against its neighbour lamina.’ In medical terms, a lamina is a thin layer or plate of bone, which can be a part of a larger composite structure, for example as a part of the vertebrae.

rest.<sup>44</sup> He continues:

Thus each shell of air, if I may use the term, surrounding the balloon, took up the motion of the shell next preceding, and transmitted it to the next succeeding shell, the motion being thus propagated as a pulse or wave through the air.<sup>45</sup>

In this visualising of the motion of sound waves, the sound of the balloon radiates from its origin in a passage from air shell to air shell, passed through the air like the familiar ‘visual analog’ for sound as ‘concentric rings on the surface of water.’<sup>46</sup> This description however uses the image and shape of the shell to compartmentalize the flow of sound through space; the shell bounds a momentary act of containment, even as the motion of the sound passes to further radiating shells. The further the shell away from the origin of the sound, the quieter the sound heard, until the sound passed along is no longer audible. Tyndall approaches the teaching of acoustics using a conception of space where sculptural metaphors concretize the intangible. His lectures illustrate that sound is always acting, constantly in motion and that when words are inadequate; the performance of sound in the live (the exploding balloon) will radiate a singular experiential understanding in the moment and for the continuous.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Tyndall, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Douglas Khan points out however that this is a particularly popularised antiquated visualisation of the motion of sound. Regarding the development of inscriptive practices in the late eighteenth century loosening ‘the reliance of acoustics on music,’ Khan writes “There had of course been numerous means in the past to visualise sound, but the ability to make the invisible visible and to hold the time of sound still entered a new phase. The concentric rings on the surface of water that had since antiquity provided a visual analog in time for advancing spheres of sound within the air gave way in 1785 to the inscriptive stasis and intricacy of Chladni’s sound figures of sand on the surface of plates and subsequently to other instrumental means for tracking and trapping time’ (1999, 75).

<sup>47</sup> Developing my methodology for working with sound has relied on a similar learning through practice, in my own versions of “holding the exploding balloon” to approximate its effects. Making performance work in this way, I have set up experiments to illustrate or expand a theory, or advance new or different ideas, where rather than only finding out *something new*, I rely also on the value in finding out something old or something presumed to be common knowledge.

## Distant Voice

While the voice carried through distance in the live can be curiously imagined as a sound carried by shells of air to us and beyond us, constructing a dimensional framework of near and far air-space, we are as Dolar reminds us, ‘constantly exposed.’<sup>48</sup> Sound is more complex to distance from our body’s perception than sight, as we cannot close ourselves to the sense; we cannot close our ears like eyes. Within the performance of my voice and Roosevelt’s, distance was (in some ways) less complicated to establish, as the “speakers” were visible to the audience. However, while my body was live in the performance space, both voices were broadcast over loud speakers. My voice was never heard live unamplified, as a microphone swallowed my words and the sound system relocated my voice to the back of the audience, so as to be directed back at my body. In this way, my voice became a re-presentation of itself, its origin superimposed into a different part of the room.

To recall the earlier discussion of voice as “thing” as performance object or material, the voice reproduced through technological amplification became something ‘other,’ as being *of the body seen* and *not of the body seen* in the same instant. Dolar writes that if we want to localize voice, ‘we need to use the visible as reference’ and yet what happens to the visible body when we are amplified and electric speakers take our tongues?<sup>49</sup> What happens when the body disappears entirely from view? Keeping in mind the concepts I have discussed above on the subject of distance and of the voice as acting like a material object in this distance, I will address this with reference to my practical experiments that have concealed and revealed my body and speech, Ivana Muller’s *Playing Ensemble Again and Again* and Samuel Beckett’s *Eh Joe*.

The resonance between the two voices (my own and Roosevelt’s) in the performance space became a duet spanning time and space, but also a play with the dynamics of distant ventriloquism, where the speaker is imagined to be in two locations at once, a voice thrown to

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<sup>48</sup> Dolar, 78.

<sup>49</sup> Dolar, 79.

another object in the same room. Unlike near ventriloquism where the dummy on knee receives a voice in close proximity to the ventriloquist, distant ventriloquists can imitate the ‘modulation[s] that sounds undergo traveling between points of distance or through obstacles.’<sup>50</sup> Using the two opposed positions of the loud speakers, my performance engaged with a distant throw of the voice, albeit through technical means. However the metaphor of distant ventriloquism is useful here in discussing the voice’s relation to the space it locates itself in, especially when the body of the speaker is brought into question.

C.B. Davis writing about distant ventriloquism foregrounds human listening as markedly vococentric, as the ‘human voice structures the hierarchy of sounds in space.’<sup>51</sup> This alert listening seeks to ‘localize the voice as speaking agent,’ to give body to the utterance. This is complicated by space, and particularly by the distance between comprehending the voice’s source and the body’s site. As a result, ‘ventriloquism underscores the fact that the link between voice and identity is a fundamentally spatial concept.’<sup>52</sup> With both eyes and ears we locate the voice by searching for the visible source and locate our own bodies (as auditors) in space by comprehending our relation to that source.

As Sound technology throws voice to many speakers in our daily life, the astonishment at hearing the uncanny acousmatic voice has dulled (in some circumstances) to a knowing reception. With the radio, the telephone and the public announcements advising and informing every person on the move through the city, we are culturally accustomed to hearing voices with no sense of wonderment at the source. Familiarisation with methods and mediums for the transmission of sound has made the voice without a body a feature of everyday life. However, theatre space can host the reception of the illusion of disembodied voice, urging and encouraging curiosity to return to the minds and ears of the audience. As theatre stages live, moving bodies that speak, the empty stage filled with voice alone provides an audible spectacle of presence and absence, where

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<sup>50</sup> C.B. Davis, “Distant Ventriloquism: Vocal Mimesis, Agency and Identity in Ancient Greek Performance.” *Theatre Journal*, 55.1 (2003), 46.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

we look to find the body consciously or unconsciously.

I used the technological amplification and broadcast of my voice (in both the Roosevelt and Woolf performances) because of its ability to provide a sonic experience, as a device to listen to the texture of two voices from different time periods meeting in space, as I have discussed above. Furthermore, the amplification of my voice resulted in a similar material status as the old recordings of Roosevelt and Woolf, playing both at the same volume. My intention in leveling the sound of the voices was to make the listening experience as even (in loudness) as possible from behind and in front of the audience. Yet this familiar technology also interrogated the relationship between the voice and the bodies speaking, the presence of my body, the absence of Roosevelt's and Woolf's and eventually the absence of my own body from sight.

At the beginning of the Virginia Woolf performance the stage was bare, except for a solo microphone standing in a spot light at the very back of the stage, so that the light slipped slightly onto the black curtain behind. Offstage, I spoke a section of Woolf's essay *Craftsmanship*, broadcast on April 29 1937 in a BBC series entitled *Words Fail Me* into another microphone, while the stage remained empty. The voice from behind the curtain was projected to the audience from speakers behind them.

The acousmatic voice, the voice without perceivable origin or source, complicates the gaze of the audience, as the corporeal body is no longer present as object. When the body disappears and still speaks as a condition of a theatrical staging, such as Ivana Muller's absent bowing actors in *Playing Ensemble Again and Again*, the voices become the on-stage life, the material presence of the absence. However, the experience of the acousmatic voice is entirely shifted when the body of the voice speaking has never first appeared as a sight, as in the case of Pythagoras veiled from his disciples for up to five years (see below). When the body has been present as a sight and then speaks from offstage, it remains something more tangible to the audience: the body and voice can in effect be pieced back together, even if the body is half way out of the theatre. In Muller's work, the performers leave the stage moving in slow motion. Even though I listen to the



disembodied spoken lines, my listening is still in slow motion, paced with the imagined slow-moving bodies on the other side of the curtain. It is in some ways absurd and in many ways impractical to believe that the performers continued their prolonged actions of the curtain call while off stage, but the continuation of their voices playing kept the hidden movements flowing at the same speed in my imagination at least. The syncing rhythms of the visible moving bodies and audible voice from the outset of the performance provided a template or score (a pattern) with which to approach the voice once the performers were absent and only the voice was present.

The speaking body, which is invisible to an audience and has yet or never to be revealed, commands a different kind of attention as we have “always already” stepped behind the screen and encircled the enigmatic object with fantasy.<sup>53</sup> As alluded to above, Pythagoras taught his silent students, the acousmatics, from behind a curtain. Auditors to a master’s voice, his students were dedicated to accessing meaning above all. But additionally, as Dolar illustrates, Pythagoras’s voice acquired ‘authority and surplus-meaning by virtue of the fact that its source was concealed.’<sup>54</sup> The voice becomes ‘endowed with aura,’ until the moment of revelation when:

The aura crumbles, the voice, once located, loses its fascination and power, it has something like castrating effects on its bearer, who could wield or brandish his or her phonic phallus as long as its attachment to a body remained hidden.<sup>55</sup>

The loss of the ‘phonic phallus’ is to lose the authority engendered in the particular focus on the voice. When only the voice is presented, it has the potential to act almost like a strange body in itself, (as the only material presence of a body) which can elude the interrogation of the gaze, and practice its own unfixed autonomy. The disacousmatization, a term conceived by film scholar Michel Chion and likened to the act of striptease, as a body revealed from behind the vocal veils,

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<sup>53</sup> Dolar, 66.

<sup>54</sup> Dolar, 61.

<sup>55</sup> Dolar, 67.

serves to restore voice to voice-source.<sup>56</sup> However, as Dolar eventually reminds, we can never fully reveal the source of the voice, as the deep body space the voice originates within is an interior, beyond view.

Samuel Beckett in *Eh Joe* doubles the interior voice: the interior world offstage and interior headspace of Joe.<sup>57</sup> In the 2006 production at The Duke of York's Theatre, Penelope Wilton's voice as the disembodied female Voice spoke over the image of Michael Gambon as Joe. Originally intended as a play for television, for which Beckett provided the instructions that the camera must remain static when the voice spoke, the theatre production staged both Joe in the flesh, in his small room and a projection of his face on screen. When Wilton's voice played over the scene, the camera remained on Gambon's face, capturing in detail the *act* of listening, which translated into actions: physical facial responses. Joe registered the voice in screen close-up, providing a virtual portrait in motion, where the force of the voice heard materialized itself in the magnified movements of the listening face. In Joe's visibly physical reception of the voice, the audience was effectively hearing through two channels. As a member of the audience, I experienced listening through my own ears and through the sight of Joe's listening and responsive body – in effect through *his* ears.<sup>58</sup> The members of the audience were invited to become the auditors of Joe's interior voice, of the ghost that haunts him alone.

Billie Whitelaw, who played the part of Voice in 1989, describes the method in which she spoke the lines close-up into the microphone 'as if her voice is dripping into his head.'<sup>59</sup> The voice that

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<sup>56</sup> There is, of course, a rich discourse on sound and the voice in cinema, film and screen studies, where the already disembodied voice is often disembodied again – employed as the vocal compliment to the visual narrative, speaking over the image. I mention Michel Chion (author of *The Voice in Cinema*, 1982, translated into English 1999) as cited by Dolar for his term 'disacousmatization,' and while I do not discuss the relationship of the female voice in cinema within this thesis, the prolific field includes scholars who I do cite in this work, such as Jane Gaines, Laura Mulvey and Kaja Silverman.

<sup>57</sup> I move here to Samuel Beckett to reflect on my performance with Woolf's voice, not to leave the performance of Woolf in my turn to Beckett, but to emanate the theory that comes from the performances I have discussed.

<sup>58</sup> Thinking here of my position as an auditor to this production of *Eh Joe*, I am more forcefully reminded that my response as a listener, as well as a spectator is gendered, and I wonder if Voice does force all receivers to 'coincide entirely with another being' or if/how the gender of the receiver effects the ability to connect or coincide with the voice?

<sup>59</sup> Linda Ben Zvi, "Billie Whitelaw interviewed by Linda Ben Zvi." *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 7.

speaks then appears curiously as moving in opposing directions, being both from the head (an interior voice made exterior) and simultaneously directed (dripping) into the head (an exterior voice made interior). The voice of “the other” in relation to Joe’s body is fluid, shifting between internalized and externalized. But additionally, the voice has an effect on the bodies of the audience, on all listeners, as Rosette Lamont identifies:

Voice forces Joe to see – to envision the scene as though he had been there, as though he had been inside the young woman’s suffering mind and body. She forces the listener to perform that leap of the imagination which takes us out of ourselves, allows us to coincide entirely with another being.<sup>60</sup>

The listener *performs* because of the force of the Voice. Beckett wrote to Alan Schneider that Voice should be ‘Attacking. Each sentence a knife going in, pause for withdrawal, then in again.’<sup>61</sup> This visceral direction of the female disembodied voice is literally animated to penetrate bodily skin, to force beyond the surface. Voice is made material through its imagined ability to break through the corporeal material of the body. This is further emphasized in the stage directions that the camera should move incrementally closer to Joe throughout the play. This slow zoom in nine steps, this pervading of space, appears as if controlled by the voice, as voice becomes ‘a technical device, on a par with the dolly.’<sup>62</sup>

Lamont illuminates the significance of the ‘nine slight moves towards the face’ that Beckett wrote into the opening stage directions through drawing attention to the number’s association with death. As the camera draws closer to Joe’s face, his body is gradually absented from the frame: he is shifting away from the grounded corporeal world in ‘the process of leaving his life.’<sup>63</sup> The distance traversed by the camera is here equated with a process of dying. The voice, through

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<sup>60</sup> Rosette Lamont, “Beckett’s *Eh Joe*: Lending an Ear to the Anima.” *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives* ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 232.

<sup>61</sup> In a letter to Alan Schneider quoted in: Chris Ackerley, “Ever Know what Happened? Shades and Echoes in Samuel Beckett’s Television Plays.” *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 18.1-2 (2009), 158.

<sup>62</sup> Lamont, 229.

<sup>63</sup> Lamont, 233.

controlling the camera's advances, by extension controls Joe's (implied) gradual dislocation from the material world. The voice, in control of what the audience sees, reveals Joe in measured proximity and frames his body for an audience to creep up towards. Here, the female Voice fixes the male body in space and commands the distance between spectator and performer.

Furthermore it is the *sound* of Voice, which affects this distance, pushing the audience further into the image. And yet, inevitably, it is Joe's *thinking* the voice that makes it speak out loud, signaling the interrelation and shifting between the subject and object of command. The voice taunts Joe to speak in order to listen to his voice: 'no one'll hear you'/'listen to yourself.' Yet Joe remains the silent auditor throughout, perhaps aware that paradoxically if he were to speak he would only hear himself speaking, which is in some senses the act he is already engaged in.

In Beckett's *Eh Joe*, Voice never appears, is never revealed as a sight and metaphorically keeps the clothes she may have lost in the striptease of disacousmatization. Yet the enigmatic authority of the disembodied voice, in theatre at least, is complicated when another body is visibly present on stage. In this instance, we are compelled to ascribe the disembodied voice to the realm of the visible body's imagination, to their inner voice and voices. Using the semiotic framework of theatre, the offstage voice operates in some familiar constructions, with a propensity for wanting to assign a voice to a body instead of letting it float solo as sound-object. Dolar writes of the voice as 'the link which ties the signifier to the body':

There must be a body to support it and assume it, its disembodied network must be pinned to a material source, the bodily emission must provide the material to embody the signifier, *the disembodied signifying mechanics must be attached to bodily mechanics*, if only in its most intangible and "sublimated" form, the mere oscillation of air which keeps vanishing the moment it is produced, materiality at its most intangible and hence its most tenacious form.<sup>64</sup>

Dolar's formulation of this tenacious because intangible form: the form that shifts between the

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<sup>64</sup> Dolar, 59.

tangible and the intangible, the material and the immaterial reiterates the foundation of this study, where voice is identified as the site to build a theory and practice for female action and agency. I propose to ‘handle’ the voice as a theatre material not to make a commodity of the ephemeral, although the implications of the voice as object and stage prop are discussed later in the thesis, but rather to find imaginative ways in performance practice to understand how sound and voice perform and act between both bodies of performer and spectator/auditor.

Approaching the female voice as a material: the ‘texture of woman's voice as pure sound (as opposed to meaning),’ has a difficult history, with implications which Amy Lawrence draws attention to with reference to cinema.<sup>65</sup> Citing Silverman, while attending to shifts in speaking and singing which exemplify a female textural voice, she writes:

As Silverman notes emphasising the “grain” of the woman's voice, its physicality and material source, enables the classic text to “impart to [the voice] the texture of the female body.” In other words rather than the woman *using* her voice to communicate, the voice communicates the body as *object*, bypassing any attempts at female subjectivity or female control of signification.<sup>66</sup>

While Lawrence’s analysis relates to the voice on screen, and particularly those voices of early Hollywood Heroines, it is relevant for this study as a call to practice a vocality in which the body *and* voice resist objectification in relation with each other. The sonic texture of the voice projects an image of the body, whether the body is present or absent, and it is my contention that in performance practice, space and time, the sound material of voice can also serve to complicate the body as object. Under discussion in the following chapters are the possibilities of using the texture of the voice as an assertive resistant force – as a material, which might, through its continual movement, disrupt attempts at passively accessing the ‘texture of the female body.’

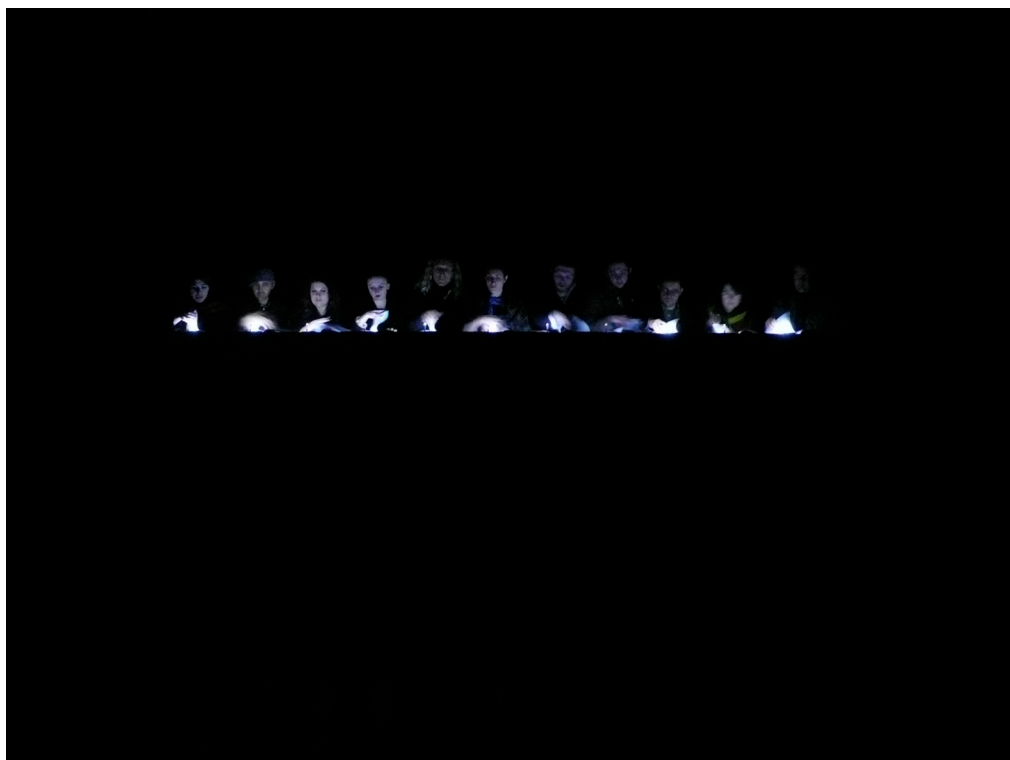
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<sup>65</sup> Amy Lawrence, *Echo and Narcissus: Women's Voices in Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991), 149.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 2

### Her Voice in Darkness



*Material Voice in Pitch Black, 2010. Photograph: Jem Finer*

The chapter you might have just read was performed live on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2010 with 28 different people giving voice to the citations and quotations of the artists and theorists whose words are part of my written composition. The performance called *Material Voice in Pitch Black* was staged in the dark, with only small lights illuminating the scripts. Conceived as a live recording, the performance of the reading now exists on four acetate dub-plates, as records of records of initial ideas.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I discuss the live performance of *Material Voice in Pitch Black*, offering a critical account of the polyvocal staging of scholarly text. New ideas and new questions occur in the wake of reflection, and so some of the main points of critical inquiry

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<sup>1</sup> A performance as the record of an idea is a concept that resonates with my discussion of ways to approach the voice's ability to make records of itself in the following chapter on the voice in reproduction. Within it, I argue that the voice can perform a type of live reproduction through sonic devices such as reverberation and echo.

through practice will punctuate the chapter, literally offering points to pause and examine certain trajectories.

Devised in order to theorise how audibility may perform re-figurings of the politics of visibility in sonic space, I examine how limiting the visual landscape of theatre space and how multiple bodies within it change the visibility of the speaking body, particularly the visibility of the female voice. To do this I must first define visibility as a feminist issue and illustrate my contention that female audibility, with its potential to grant a certain visibility (as agency, presence or profile), is a vital area for intervention in both feminist and sound studies.

### **A Brief Note on Visibility**

Visibility is never a straightforward term: to “have visibility” - which suggests visibility is an item to own - is not so simple as being seen, just as “having a voice” does not refer solely to the ability to talk. Both having visibility and having a voice are political positions of agency where, whether the seen or speaking body is present or not, that body and its voice is an acknowledged presence in the world. Addressing ‘the complex and changing relations between visibility and political power,’ John B Thompson writes that ‘prior to the development of print and other media, the visibility of political rulers depended to a large extent on their physical appearance before others in contexts of co-presence.’ Continuing on the historical trajectory to the advent of print and other medias, Thompson arrives at the age of mechanical reproduction when he suggests those in power ‘increasingly acquired a kind of visibility that was detached from their physical appearance.’<sup>2</sup> Visibility has thus become the terminology for practicing a certain presence in physical absence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John B Thompson, “The New Visibility.” *Theory, Culture and Society*, 22.6 (2005), 33.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to augment this by noting that the increasingly complex relationship between the affects of multiple forms of representation (textual, photographic, phonographic) and the senses of presence they offer gives rise to far stranger kinds of visibility that may not fit so easily into binarised terms such as present and absent. Indeed the subject of this study, the voice, is a live presence, which escapes definition within the binary of presence and absence, oscillating between and within both.

This negotiation between visibility and invisibility, makes the idea of visibility unreliable as an equation for agency for women artists. As Peggy Phelan asserts in *Unmarked*, ‘visibility is a trap’ and ‘there is a real power in remaining unmarked.’<sup>4</sup> She argues about the complexities of visibility politics, identifying the presumption that ‘increased visibility equals increased power’ is one that ‘bears further scrutiny.’<sup>5</sup> More recently Dorothy Rowe, writing about race, gender and performance, succinctly summarises the main contention with the visible (as posited by Phelan), when she writes: ‘the investment in the visible as a sign of the real, a sign of presence that has underpinned the philosophy of much of the identity politics practiced by sexual and racial minorities over the past few decades, is tactically problematic, because it relies for its effects on the very system of representation that it seeks to undermine.’

Seeking strategies for political agency and artistic recognition, Rowe draws attention to how in recent artistic practice there has been ‘recourse to an extended sensual field as a means of disrupting the dominance of the visual within Western metaphysics.’ She also observes that ‘much aesthetic and cultural discourse is prompted by the desire to dislodge what Martin Jay has described as “the scopic regimes of modernity.”’<sup>6</sup> In this study I theorise the potential for a political *audibility*, in which the sonic property of the voice is investigated for its ‘ability to effect surprising forms of subversion’ to reiterate Bloom’s provocation. While sound is the key to this whole investigation, I do not attempt to order, or re-order a hierarchy of the senses, as to do so would be counter-productive. Rather my concern, and by extension my method, is to understand how sound operates within the sensual world, where sight, touch, taste and smell all play their parts in discussion, however large or small. In Martin Jay’s phrase ‘the scopic regimes,’ he emphasises the command the visible holds in modern Western culture and society. In order to subvert the ‘scopic regimes,’ it is vital to use them: to analyse them and understand their negotiation with (supposedly) less authoritative senses. As with phallogocentric texts (see

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<sup>4</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Oxon: Routledge, 1993), 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Dorothy Rowe, “Cultural Crossings: Performing Race and Gender in the work of Moti Roti.” *Difference and excess in contemporary art: the visibility of women’s practice*, ed. Gill Perry (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 148.



Introduction, p. 24) so with ‘the phallogocular visual field,’ which betrays aspects of power and matters of social inscription towards theorising and practicing the resistant strategies.<sup>7</sup>

Let us turn to a specific example of where the resistant strategies might be taking place. A considerable number of living female artists who are ‘visible’ in terms of recognition and success (however that is gauged) in the *visual* art world make explicit use of their own voice. Janet Cardiff’s audio walks; Georgina Starr’s personal archive of recorded sound; Laure Prouvost’s broken English voice-overs; Cara Tolmie’s vocal narrations of space: all use the artist’s voice as an integral component in the form and content of the work. But perhaps the most interesting case of the voice art-work, in the visual art world, is that of Susan Phillipz. When she won the Turner Prize in 2010 the media emphasised hers as the first sound work to be nominated for the award. *Lowlands*, a recording of Phillipz’s own voice singing the Scottish folk ballad *Lowlands Away*, was originally conceived for and installed under three Glasgow bridges on the River Clyde. The work, subsequently transposed to the Tate Britain for the Turner Prize show, exhibited the voice in an empty white room: a ‘typical’ gallery space. Where do such voice art-works belong and how should they be shown? The installation of *Lowlands* under the bridges not only provided a strikingly visual component to the work, but also sounded in the architecture where the acoustics of her voice resonated; the mediums of brick and water reflecting her voice. For example in one line in *Lowlands Away* the singer laments *His form had gone*, and I can’t help but wonder at the resonance between the line’s meaning and the actual altered acoustics of the voice that sings it after the work is reinstalled. And yet, this is part of the fascination of practicing with and thinking through the voice: its relocation in space can serve to alter its acoustic properties. This is perhaps obvious in terms of the recorded voice (and any sound), as the copy can be played repeatedly in different spaces and on different machines at different distances to recalibrate the acoustics of the sound, but the audible voice also relocates itself in the live. Indeed, travelling through the distance of the air from speaker to listener, the voice is in constant motion: relocating in waves. What the ears of the receiver *catch*, and what sound is perceived, will vary in pitch and volume depending on the distance the voice has travelled

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<sup>7</sup> Rowe, 148.

through, as well as the space it is sounding within (depending on how much of the sound is reflected or absorbed by the materials of the architecture), and the weather it is subject to.<sup>8</sup> It is this character of sound, as a continually varying entity, which lends itself as a medium to practice with: towards a theorisation of visibility in audible terms.

It is with these negotiations in mind that I focus here on sound and light: sound, which enables us to hear and light which enables us to see. In the writing that follows I shift between my own past performances, which exist in recent history, as well as acoustic worlds spanning from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century onwards. In particular, even if not explicitly referenced, the scientific discoveries, inventions and debates of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century have enlivened my own experiments. As this chapter debates with the dark (in which light is implicit) and as it plays host to the voice, from its corporeal inception to transmission, it is perhaps unsurprising that I am most drawn to the imaginative pedagogy of the physicist John Tyndall, and his lectures: on sound (1867) and on light (1870).

Firstly, then, I begin this chapter in the dark.

## **The Dark**

Beginnings often take place in the darkness, whether in the ceremony of immanence when house lights dim or in the metaphorical dark-lands of thought, where a light shines at *the end* of the tunnel. In these instances, the conditions of the dark provide a very particular space in which the promise of the future event is marked and/or manifested. While symbolically, “darkness” is full, inhabited by so many figures of alleged or actual transgression and superstition, physically it is the condition of lightlessness. As illumination fades, the dark can also appear vastly empty.

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<sup>8</sup> I consciously employ a gestural/tactile metaphor here for what ears do, describing the ears as able to physically “catch” a sound. As I noted in the last chapter, my practice with sound has produced the voice as a textural sound substance, which I reiterate again here in terms of my discourse below on the affinities between hearing and touch.

In *The Debate with Space*, the French playwright Valere Novarina follows his description of eyesight as ‘a development of touch’, with something like an opening act for the relations between touch, language and voice. ‘Everything commences in darkness, in the tongue’s subterranean work of touch.’<sup>9</sup> The action of the tongue’s work will touch voice as a sculpting tool, modelling shapes with which to make sounds. Within my theatre and performance practice, how voice is made in the cavities of the body and by the mechanics of the mouth plays an integral part in understanding the sounded voice as a material, and how the female artist can make use of this material. The dark interior spaces of the body make work with air. If the body and mouth sculpt voice, then air is the body’s raw material. As a female performer who handles the tools of sculptor/director/designer in order to ‘sculpt’ her own voice, I approach the darkened theatre space as a setting to perform this act of sculpting, experimenting with the dark auditorium as an atmosphere which gives particular attention to the sound of the voice. Once transmitted into air space outside the body, do the conditions of darkness provide a privileged stage for the audible? This stage offers the potential for making visions of voices, not solely of the eyes, but also through this ‘development of touch’, where what is heard takes on tangible material qualities. For, as Elizabeth Grosz defines within her discussion of the senses in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, ‘touch shares with hearing the successiveness of its impressions, their momentary impact.’<sup>10</sup> And voice too is made through successiveness, through its impressions crafted in the act of the body touching itself, the tongue against the teeth and palates; the lips meeting.

Voice, as sound, continues to be shaped by its transmission through the medium that carries it. In her writing on ‘words made of breath’, the flight and dispersal of voice in the air, Gina Bloom cites Sir Francis Bacon’s theory that the quality of night and evening air allows for better hearing, ‘as the thickness of the air at these times “preserveth the sound better from wast [e].”’<sup>11</sup> Although Bacon later refutes his unsteady claim, night-time has long served as a setting for

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<sup>9</sup> Valere Novarina and Allen S Weiss, “The Debate with Space.” *The Drama Review*, 45.1 (2001), 119.

<sup>10</sup> Grosz, 1994, 98.

<sup>11</sup> Bloom, 75.

altering or alerting the senses, with particular focus on the audible. Although, as A. Roger Ekirch writes, the night's 'moist air could have a damping effect' on sounds travelling through it, before electric lighting lit the dark hours, 'the reliance on hearing was so pronounced that in East Yorkshire the verb "dark" meant "to listen."'12

So too "Wuthering," an alteration of "whither" meaning 'to make a rushing sound...to bluster and rage, as the wind', emerged in the landscape and from the weather of Yorkshire. Descriptive of the stormy wind that roars across the moorland, "wuthering" was 'a significant provincial adjective' in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>13</sup> In Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), both book and dwelling are set within these moors: the land Cathy's voice haunts, where deep in the night she is heard as a phantom at the window. 'I'd lost my way on the moor!' her voice cries. It is finally after twenty years, in the *night*, that the voice finds her way, possibly propelled towards a listener in the dark.

"Dark" as a verb for the sense of listening makes an action of the condition of darkness. At a time and place when night appeared to literally fall on the land, this lending of agency to the dark is not so surprising. In an essay titled 'On nightfall, what it is, and whether it falls on us' the sixteenth century physician Laurence Joubert attempted to refute the 'popular cosmology' that night did not actually fall 'each evening with the descent of noxious vapours from the sky.'<sup>14</sup> Listening and falling, the dark acts *upon* as much as it is acted in.

Theatre darkness, though, does not fall like night. The ability for shade to be staged, timed and re-imagined with light in theatre space is fundamental in my investigation into how the conditions of darkness host the voice. As we know historically, the theatre auditorium was not plunged into darkness the moment a performance began. Instead, the auditorium remained lit during performances up until the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Functioning as a space to see

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<sup>12</sup> A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York: W.W Norton and Company, 2005), 132.

<sup>13</sup> Oxford English Dictionary definition.

<sup>14</sup> Ekirch, 12.

and more importantly ‘be seen’ in the Victorian West End, the nature of the theatre changed when lights went down. As Michael R. Booth contends this ‘may explain the hostile reaction to darkening the house during the first London stagings of Wagner’s Ring Cycle in 1882 and 1892...It may also explain the very leisurely adoption of the modern practice of virtually blacking out the auditorium while the play is in progress, a custom that did not become general in the West End until after the First War.’<sup>15</sup> Theatre’s long history playing host to the politics of visibility in terms of appearance, social status and class can be applied to lighting. Making the theatre dark paradoxically can control or emancipate an audience, as Booth continues: ‘It is difficult to be noisy in a dark auditorium or quiet in a bright one.’<sup>16</sup>

How do voices act in the dark? How might a “pitch black” sound through the voices which it carries or plays host to? Through an attention to the transmission of voice into the auditorium and it’s conditioning and calibrating through the distance and the darkness, I question what happens to the speaking body in the shadows or partial light.

*Material Voice in Pitch Black*, the staged reading of the last chapter *Material Voice*, explored how conditions of theatre darkness, and the *choreography of illumination*, might serve to reinforce the voice as ‘autonomous thing’.<sup>17</sup> I came to the word choreography, for the action of designing and placing light within the dark through the word’s associations with plotting and directing movement. ‘With its etymological routes in the Greek ‘choreia’ for dance and the French ‘graphie’ for writing’, the word shifted its emphasis from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: initially referring to the notation or scoring of dance, and subsequently the ‘actual invention and sequencing of movements.’<sup>18</sup> While both these meanings are useful to hold in mind (and certainly the acts of notating, scoring and writing for voice and dance are related in that they provide instructions for interpretation) I am interested here in how my “invention”, my direction, for and

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<sup>15</sup> Michael R Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 62.

<sup>16</sup> Booth, 83.

<sup>17</sup> See Jacques Ranciere’s conception of ‘autonomous thing’ in previous chapter on p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> Anthea Kraut, “Recovering Hurston, reconsidering the choreographer.” *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, ed. Alexandra Carter (Oxon: Routledge, 1998), 38.

of light as a 'sequencing of movements' related to the comparatively still bodies and voices on stage.

My experiences of Anthony McCall's solid light films *Line Describing a Cone* and more recently, the large scale *Vertical Works*, made me realize what I was doing with the choreography of light within the dark: using light as an element with which to sculpt the dark and define the dark in relation to the rhythms of the voices. McCall's *Vertical Works*: large scale conical light projections of approximately thirty feet in height cut through space and curtain portions of darkness within sheer light faces.<sup>19</sup> While formally there is no sound component to the work: no discrete soundtrack (or ornamental white noise), and apparently no projector noise, I think sound is implicit in the experience of stepping inside these light sculptures.<sup>20</sup> In the title, *Breath I*, and in his description of the cone's 'flattened sides...rhythmically expanding and contracting, like a lung', McCall draws attention to the bodily cavities and corporeal mechanism, which use air to make life, but also, voice. With reference to Quintillian's concern with the expression and quality of the voice through '*spatium*, with intervals timing and rhythm', Bruce Smith asserts that in managing rhythm, pitch and volume of voice, 'breath control is fundamental.'<sup>21</sup> Light is choreographed in the slow movement of McCall's hollow spotlights, as it mimics the choreography of breath. In *Material Voice in Pitch Black* I choreographed a series of synchronized actions between voice, body and light. I never intended for light to mimic voice,

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<sup>19</sup> In an interview with Jonathan Walley from November 2004 (In *Anthony McCall: The Solid Light Films and Related Works*, 2005, 156) McCall Describes the Vertical Work, *Breath I*: 'It has radiating, slightly flattened curved sides and an elliptical base. On each of the narrow sides there is a vertical aperture. The valve-like apertures are very gradually opening or closing as a result of the action of a single, slowly travelling wave that progresses continuously through the center. The wave divides the tent-like interior space into two distinct chambers whose volumes are constantly shifting.'

<sup>20</sup> In an earlier interview with Jonathan Walley from February 2004 (McCall, 156), McCall responds to a question about the difference in sound provided by film projectors and the comparatively 'silent' video projectors. He says 'Yes, that difference is significant. Digital projectors operate in sepulchral silence. It may seem incidental but I think that the rhythmic whirring sound of a film projector is important. If you go into a completely silent gallery room and you talk, it's a disturbance and you're self conscious, so talking is a hard thing to do in that situation. When you have a sub-audible soundtrack, which is how I describe the whirr of the film projector, there's a kind of cover, which I think gives individuals some privacy but at the same time allows them to keep in contact. I think that this is partly enabled by the sound of the projector.' As well as highlighting the noise of technology itself and the gradual silencing of "unwanted noise" from analogue to digital technologies, I also think the observance that sound can offer both a private and public/communal sense of space simultaneously is interesting to hold in mind while thinking of my performance with 28 different voices.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, 223.

but rather provide a marker of audibility in order to question the visibility of the speaking, sounding, breathing body. However, in the reflection of my practice, I am able to see more clearly how, while not explicitly adopting the character of the speaking voice (or breath), the lights marked a rhythm, a *spatium*, of the voice in the act of reading.

### **Material Voice in Pitch Black**

As I introduced this chapter, *Material Voice in Pitch Black (MVPB)* was a staged reading of an earlier draft of the previous chapter “Material Voice,” with the script of the thesis used as a score for many voices. I chose to make explicitly audible a type of writing, only received as an object in print to be read silently in this performance in order to shift attention onto listening-as-reading. I invented this experiment designed and directed to test how this writing might exist as both a live performance and as a document in sound (an audio-thesis), primarily as a live recording, with the audible presence of the audience in the space while we performed the work. Seeking ways in which to animate my own text as voice, alongside those voices of artists and thinkers who I cite in the body of my work, I asked twenty-eight people to give the sound of their voice to a document thinking out loud about the very actions they were making in participating.

In the Jubilee Theatre at Roehampton University, I set a high and long table at the very back on which scripts lay in a line in front of each speaker’s position. The table, a metal frame, would become nearly invisible in the blacked out time and space of the performance. In previous experiments I had held the performance script “in hand” rather than position it on the furniture of formal reading, for example the lectern, or music stand. In my performance with the voice of Eleanor Roosevelt, discussed in the last chapter, I purposefully held the paper so the audience could see it to contrast my actions to those of Roosevelt’s formal speech where she delivers it without text. As our voices were audible together in the theatre space, I chose to make mine not only an act of “hand-holding,” but also of making explicit the fact this was *not* my material: Roosevelt’s are not my words. So, in a position more akin to the read-through at a play rehearsal

(with Roosevelt's voice as director), I figured the holding of the script as a gesture of carrying another's words. Developing the methodology at work in this PhD, I considered my choices in the earlier performances when approaching the staged reading of my own critical theory and exploration of my subject. I wanted to provide a common surface (prop) for the scripts, so as to emphasise the body of work composed of many voices apart from my own, voices that helped me think through what is at stake for the female writer, the speaker, the materiality of voice in the practice in which I am continuously experimenting. Although the table was not wholly visible in performance, its height made the scripts look like they were almost hovering in front of their readers, a hovering that appeared as the theatre space filled with the dark and each speaker turned on a small light, attached to each script. For the audience entering the Theatre, they saw the outline of shaded figures appearing as if at a great distance, the bodies partially illuminated in the glow of lights on the blue side of white.<sup>22</sup>

I positioned the speakers, standing at the reading table, at a considerable distance from the audience in order to exaggerate the encircling blackness. Not only did I want the far-away lights and the shadowy busts they illuminated to hold darkness above and beside them, but I wanted the expanse of floor between speakers and audience to contribute to this framing by the dark that surrounded the talking heads, as if they were both emerging from and being submerged by the black.

The staging of *Material Voice* I devised not only to sharpen an understanding of the complications in seeing and in listening, but crucially also to attend to the performance of voicing between bodies making and receiving. The wide expanse between speaker and auditor created a distance far enough away for the audience to disappear, at least in visual terms, from the view of the speakers. On the other side of this gulf, the audience's perception of the dark space in between them and the performers provided a space in which the many voices could project and

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<sup>22</sup> In a later work of mine, *Constellation Piece*, discussed in Chapter 4, I again positioned speaking bodies as shaded silhouettes at the opposite end of the theatre, although this time high up near the ceiling.



pattern. With lights illuminating the scripts, the *pitch black* took up this distance: the dark space to pitch voice within and see, and *hear*, the results.

I did not amplify the speakers' voices; they carried through the theatre air to the audience, filling the spatial distance in between. In *The Production of Space*, while describing the characteristics of monumental space, Henri Lefebvre makes a link between space and acoustics that helped me in thinking about the motion of the voice from speaker to listener in architecture theory. Here Lefebvre summarises the capacity of the acoustic to fill space alongside its potential to bring bodies into relation with each other:

Architectural volumes ensure a correlation between the rhythms that they entertain (gaits, ritual gestures, processions, parades, etc.) and their musical resonance. It is in this way, and at this level, in the *non-visible*, that bodies find one another.<sup>23</sup>

Rhythms are actions, events, ceremonies, with bodies moving with them and in turn making them. In its function as the marker of time and timing, 'rhythm' constantly shifts to reshape 'architectural volumes': the markers of spatial dimensions. In *MVPB*, I realized how the motion of the voice between speaker and listener, across the distance of the theatre, appeared to be explicitly marked by time, rhythm between the two sets of bodies, and the four distinct 'sessions' of listening. Because I designed *MVPB* to be performed and recorded in four parts in succession, with the audience leaving the Theatre between each section, the sessions of listening were distinct. My use of the word 'across' above does not intend to limit the multi directionality of sound to a singular route, rather I use it in the spirit of the continuous present, thinking of a plurality of crossings and re-crossings, as it prompts me to consider what was happening —what I had devised to make happen— with the direction of sound in the performance. Taking place in an enclosed space, the performance offered the audience the experience of both direct sound and reflected sound, the sounds bouncing off the walls before reaching their ears. As a result, the

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<sup>23</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (Blackwell, Massachusetts: 2010), 225.

space offered two different “renderings” of the voice, the direct voice and the reflected voice. Although I took into account how the farther away I am from a sound source, the more reflected sound I hear, I wanted in this performance to investigate the effect of these distant sounding voices in the conditions of the dark.

The darkened auditorium, intended primarily to investigate spatial distance, offered in practice an equally complex negotiation with temporal distance. As the darkness appeared to dissolve any architecturally made limits, the steady reading rhythm of the voices (the timing and pacing of the audible reaching the audience) served to map the dimensions of the dark. To some members of the audience, the dark space appeared as if without limits, spilling space into further space:

‘limitless’. Space expanded paradoxically by cancelling out its visible contours, while time called forth a conscious understanding of the limits of the event. My act of darkening the auditorium resulted in making me aware of how absent visible architectural markers of distance do not cancel out architectural volumes. These volumes not simply perceivable through sight as Lefebvre acknowledges ‘arise from the visible-readable realm, but that it is first of all heard (listened to) and enacted (through physical gestures and movements).’<sup>24</sup> The audience conceived of the space of the auditorium by perceiving the voices sounding within it.

Something I had wanted to test practically in the performance was Gina Bloom’s assertion that through distance, the voice ‘is able to practice subtle but robust forms of vocal agency.’ Indeed, when sounds are carried far distances, higher pitches are filtered out, in effect the listener perceives a lower sound. In terms of how this worked in practice, the voice as Gina Bloom contends can ‘effect surprising forms of gender subversion.’ In *MVPB I* (and the audience members who responded) found certain speaking voices less easy to place as specifically male or female. Voice pitch is a significant marker of one’s gender, which if not conforming to the (not at all universal) categories of the higher pitched female voice and lower pitched male voice, can complicate fixing a pitch to one gendered body. The dark (partially disappearing the body) and

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<sup>24</sup> Lefebvre, 200.

the distance (filtering out high pitch) I created in practice destabilized the identification of gender by pitch, a result that informed my later experiments thinking about the sounding characters in performance, under discussion in Chapter 4.

The method I imposed on the reading of the writing (with other voices reading those voices cited in the text) created a rhythm particular to this polyphonic delivery. I read in my own voice the body of the writing I had composed, pausing at points where I cited a critic, artist, scholar's words. The effect of these voices entering in and out of the 'flow and thought of language' made me think of how Brian Massumi describes the compositional treatment of ('poaching') scientific concepts in his writing of 'Parables for the Virtual'. He advocates and illustrates a writing methodology connecting concepts, where the 'regularities of connection' between one concept and another is defined by its 'rhythm of arrival and departure in the flow and thought of language; when and how it tends to relay into another concept.'<sup>25</sup> I had in the practice created just such a 'rhythm of arrival and departure,' a particularly useful way of describing what was taking place in the shifts between vocal 'characters' in *MVPB*. The most difficult composition task for me was finding an intelligible way for the voices to arrive and depart in amongst each other. I directed each speaker in a brief rehearsal before the performance where we practiced vocal entrances and exits (timing) so that the language could flow through my voice, the speaker's voice and then on to the next voice in the composition. Almost as if in the ebb and flow, voices marked their time on shore, imprinting the dark sonically.<sup>26</sup>

As I noted I chose not to amplify the voices in performance: the only microphones in the space recorded the performance. Rather than their now customary work of transporting and giving volume to the voice in the time and space of performance, the microphones I used transported

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<sup>25</sup> Massumi, 20.

<sup>26</sup> In terms of the composition of my writing as the script for performance, I did not change the writing to make the vocal entrances and exits "work" once spoken out loud. Rather, I wanted to witness what would naturally occur in terms of the collective and individual vocal rhythms. Comprising a cast of so many speakers, I observed that the collective attuning to the space's acoustics and each other's voices was akin to finding something like a "concert pitch," an allusion to a shared sense of frequency, of finding the "right note" as an ensemble of different voices. While not literally finding a shared note, a common key, the voices playing voices did appear to practice a shared rhythm, as I mention earlier in the chapter, rather than pitch.

the voices to a record document in anticipation of the object yet to be made. This promise of the future document embodied in the presence of two recording microphones also prefigured another mode of performance, where the action of listening back to a record would spark new connections with the live event, bridging time and dislocating the voice from the once present body. I take up the nuances of the relationship between the recorded and live voice in a deeper analysis in the following chapter, but I include a short discussion here to remind the reader how the staging of the event as a live recording affected my design and direction in and of the theatre space.

For *Material Voice in Pitch Black* the 'act of recording' was intended as a framework for the event. Rather than solely providing documentation of the performance proceedings, my explicit experiment in this theatre event was to consider the recording as (a form of) performance. To this end, the audience would enter the space once the microphones were switched on, entering an auditorium in which all audible presences would be involved in making the sonic landscape of the recording.<sup>27</sup> The space of performance superimposed conventions of both a theatre stage and a sound stage (invisible to the eyes of an audience). With the bodies of the speakers positioned in front of microphones and audience in an 'end on' configuration, I created a formality of distance from the spectacle of the 'speaking sight' for the audience. The conventions of the sound stage, privileging the sound of the subjects of performance, were complicated by the fact that those spectating as well as those speaking were the sounding subjects of performance.

Furthermore, the sound of paper pages that were the scripts (often in dramatic readings constituting unwanted 'noise') I used as sonic materials themselves. The gesture of page turning punctuated the reading and recording, and the collective turning as a group serving to amplify the sound of cracking paper.<sup>28</sup> I wasn't aware that the paper turning, as a keeper of audible

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<sup>27</sup> While I thought everyone participating knew they were being recorded, for some speakers and especially people who walked in late to the performance, the microphones signaled amplifications. Although explicitly placed in the middle of the theatre, the microphones were hidden in darkness (as was the whole theatre) during the performance. More interesting though is the speakers who 'heard' themselves amplified and were then certain amplification was in use rather than recording. It was not my intention that the recording of the event should be in any way mysterious, on the contrary that the performance was also a live recording was an aspect I had wanted to be explicit.

<sup>28</sup> On the record, the page-turn also signals in sound how many speakers are still at the reading platform.

rhythm for speakers and audience would be so significant. For this unexpected result from a regular sound I find Meiling Cheng's phrase 'audible artifacts' – which she uses to describe certain technological sounds in Laurie Anderson's 1998 performance, *The Speed of Darkness* – a particularly good reminder of the "objectness" of non-vocal sounds created by bodies.<sup>29</sup> As well as the paper turning, the audience's movement, coughing and clapping travelled in the space: audible to the speakers, though muffled by the distance. The sound of the audience created a collective sound composition, unlike the composition being performed at the opposite end of the theatre. As unscored and undirected, the audience composed a reflective response in sound, ensuring that volumes of sound travelled back and forth through the theatre during the performance.

And yet, un-scored sounds also came from the speakers too, which in listening back to the recording I found surprising and useful in thinking about recording, later listening and the live. A condition of the event as a live recording meant that whatever had been recorded would be kept intact, with no 'cleaning' of the background noise, no correcting of mistakes in delivery. Coincidentally or maybe not, the section from the recording of *Material Voice in Pitch Black*, with the highest concentration of faltering voices is the section which discusses the potential of the voice to be conceived as an 'autonomous thing'.<sup>30</sup> Illustrating Jacques Ranciere's conception of the 'autonomous thing' as the 'distance inherent in the performance itself', this section demonstrates an uncanny meeting of the message and medium. The writing spoken out loud made another text: one of repeats, stutters, hesitations and inventions. Looking into the darkness surrounding them and then concentrating on the bright page, a speaker's attention and his/her voice became strangely split. The conditions of the staging, reading the gleaming page after eyes had adjusted to the dark, made reading *accurately* more difficult. As a result, in some cases the text was re-made in the speaking, modeled in the mouth, in the act of trying to discern alphabet characters on the page and translate them into voice. The high contrast between looking into darkness and then into comparatively bright light to read meant that the voice 'performing a

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<sup>29</sup> Cheng, Meiling, "The Speed of Darkness." *Theatre Journal*, 51.2 (1999), 201.

<sup>30</sup> Hear Endnote 1. The Endnotes can be found with the back material.

speaker's will' was compromised, particularly because in some cases the lights, with batteries losing will, faded faster. These little aids to sight created a chance direction of the bodies reading because the dulling beams forced eyes and sounding voice nearer to the page being read.

## **The Light**

Returning to listening and falling as actions of the dark, or more specifically the attention to listening that the dark provides, and the appearance of falling it occasions, what does the element of light do in the dark to the voice? *Light* in some senses breaks the fall, providing moments of luminescent suspension in space. In the theatre, light suspends an object in darkness with the instrument of the spotlight, where the borders of the beam hold the image captive. Thinking in this mix of sound and light, while the audible voice carries itself in waves outside the confines of the spot, if it emanates (radiates) from the space of light within dark, both light and voice influence each other with consequences for the agency of the speaking body. To think alongside *MVPB* (the voice in the dark) I analyse two examples in performance, where the female body has been the focus of light within darkness on stage. These two distinct stagings of the body/voice relationship offer comparison between very different instances of authorial control, and therefore contrasting conditions for female agency and subjectivity. In each case the author of the words also designed the stage directions: both directions for voice and light appear in the same performance scripts, one by a man and one by a woman.

The iconic image of Mouth in Samuel Beckett's *Not I*, that which literally held Billie Whitelaw's body captive in 1973, appeared as both vision and a voice in the light, both 'absorbing and being absorbed' by the beam directed at it.<sup>31</sup> Appearing, according to Linda Ben Zvi, as 'miniscule and helplessly dangling against the blackness of the stage...[as] a metonymic icon for the otherwise

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<sup>31</sup> Linda Ben Zvi, "Not I: Through a Tube Starkly," *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 243.

invisible speaker,<sup>32</sup> Mouth is not only literally a suspended image, but an image that broadcasts a suspended voice, at once attached to the body, and not. In her essay on *Not I*, Ann Wilson cites Knowlson and Pilling's attention to the distance implicit in the staging of the piece. Noting that while in a large theatre 'the human dimension' is lost, as 'mouth becomes little more than a distant speck of light in darkness,' in a smaller space, mouth becomes 'too precisely anatomical.'<sup>33</sup> Measuring the distance between speaking spectacle and spectator, the director must not only take the image into consideration, but also the spatial dimensions the voice is given to move within. Although in Beckett's directions, Mouth is granted an 'invisible microphone,' the immersive darkness still hosts the amplified voice, albeit from electric speakers. In the case of Mouth, the light cuts through darkness to locate the voice-source. The light reveals voice through voice-source, as the vigilant relentless nature of the beam reflects and inflects in Mouth's speech pattern and sounding. '...and the beam...' is repeated four times by Mouth, beating time in the monologue as do the four stage directions of 'pause and movement', or the four references to the 'tiny little thing.'<sup>34</sup> The beats are most explicit in the exclamation 'what?...who?...no!..she!,' where monosyllabic words count time through the voice. Casting the voice out 'into this world,' Mouth is a beating instrument in the beaming light.<sup>35</sup>

Discussing the fourfold movement in *Not I* and the negation of the first person pronoun, Harry White emphasises the fine edge on which the intelligibility of Mouth balances, as the delivery 'threatens intelligibility, and is yet made bearable by virtue of sequence.'<sup>36</sup> The four pauses contain space for physical movement on the part of the Auditor, and offer 'vital caesurae' in

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ann Wilson, "Her Lips Moving." *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 196.

<sup>34</sup> One of these references is 'tiny little girl' instead of 'tiny little thing,' a moment in Mouth's speech when the thing becomes not only gendered, but specifically aged.

<sup>35</sup> Both Mouth and Vera Mantero (who I will presently discuss) speak in fragments, which leads me to wonder how the fragment performs and lends itself to the dark space, and also about the fragmented sound in negotiation with the fragmented body or identity. Peter Gidal reads Mouth's refusal to implicate herself in the patriarchal language of the Father, as feminist, in that Mouth's 'fragmented identity (both aural and visual) protects her from appropriation by the viewers and subjugation under the tyranny of their desire for meaning.'<sup>35</sup> However, as Ann Wilson points out, the 'rhetorical strategies of Not I' are more complex and can also 'effect the denial of women by establishing a textual economy within which feminine sexuality is erased.' (Ann Wilson, 196).

<sup>36</sup> Harry White, "'Something is Taking its Course": Dramatic Exactitude and the Paradigm of Serialism in Samuel Beckett.' *Samuel Beckett and Music*, ed. Mary Bryden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 169.

speech for Mouth: the cuts, the breaks, which offer reflection on the meaning of her words. The use of the term ‘sequence’ brings us back to choreography, as a ‘sequence of movements,’ and the ability for the voice to be choreographed as well. However, the agency of the voice and its body depends on *who* is doing the choreographing and authoring the movement.<sup>37</sup>

The contentious character of the often absent Auditor<sup>38</sup> and the four movements made in acts of ‘helpless compassion’ are theorized by Enoch Brater two years after *Not I*’s completion in 1972, as ‘not so much thematic and symbolic as...literal and visual.’<sup>39</sup> A technique or device, therefore, to allow a shift in looking so as to ‘refocus’ one’s vision. Brater writes that ‘the refocusing is essential, for if we concentrate too steadily on Mouth we begin to discern in the stage darkness the actress behind the Mouth.’<sup>40</sup> One of the reasons the presence of the Auditor might be so difficult to place is that she/he repetitively re-establishes Mouth’s dislocation from a body, while simultaneously performing the role of prompt for her to reclaim the use of first person: the grammar through which she would grant herself a body. The Auditor’s four movements come just before each ‘vehement refusal to relinquish third person.’ Drawing visual attention away from Mouth, the Auditor literally ‘re-focuses’ eyes on the illusion of disembodiment: both voice from body and “I” from the text.

The Auditor in *Not I* is, then, a figure destined to expose illusion in the very act of trying to maintain it. Of course, as Elin Diamond reminds us, ‘the visual logic that governs the theatre is a logic that theatre can expose.’<sup>41</sup> This dynamic of theatre has offered a space historically for radical action: razing the fourth wall and ‘smashing representational fixity’ in order to ‘alter spectatorial passivity.’<sup>42</sup> However, the figure of the Auditor, intended to perform a mediating role akin to ‘that isolated listener’ Beckett observed in North Africa is useful to the staging, in

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<sup>37</sup> Whether this can to a certain extent be complicated by mimesis, for example in the act of reproducing or critiquing another author’s work, is under consideration in the following chapter.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel Beckett found the Auditor hard to place in the staging of *Not I*, and so left the figure out of the production. However the Auditor exists in the text.

<sup>39</sup> Enoch Brater, “The “I” in Beckett’s *Not I*.” *Twentieth Century Literature*, 20.3 (1974), 195.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Diamond, 114.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* I should note here that postmodern performance does not depend on the fourth wall framing.



theory, as an emblem of attentive listening. Proving a more obtrusive presence in practice, the Auditor was unable to be lit to Beckett's satisfaction.<sup>43</sup> For rather than making the mechanisms of the staging explicit, the visual aesthetics of *Not I* do the dramatic opposite. Instead of casting light on "offstage" areas, or making performers of stage-hands, *Not I* takes a theatrical plunge into darkness in its most exaggerated form. The darkness hides all framing references, so that 'the means of theatrical production are invisible', and focuses all undivided attention on Mouth.<sup>44</sup> To place the Auditor between audience and Mouth (even if offering eyes a shift to refocus and aide the illusion of disembodiment) breaks the expanse of darkness. Breaking this darkness is to break illusion and in turn the theatrical distance. The presence of the Auditor may prompt the audience to listen and to see better, but also through performing this role of conduit, confuses and undoes the distance.<sup>45</sup>

The dark distance holds up the visual illusion that Mouth exists alone in space: a relic of her fragmented tale. Using the darkness as a scenographic device, covering both stage and auditorium, renders invisible the borders of the stage platform. The 'fourth wall' then is not so much broken, as flooded. For rather than being drawn attention to, the framing boundaries of the proscenium stage are washed from sight altogether. Both contextual frames of reference, Theatre and Body effectively disappear, at least from sight. In order to make the Auditor visible, more light must be cast, but in doing so may expose more than it intends.

To become aware of the body making the voice is also to become aware of the context/situation in which that body is speaking. The agency of the speaking body on stage is affected by several factors, which include who reveals the body, by what mechanics the body is revealed and the position of the body when revealed. In the case of Mouth, the Auditor's role is in part to keep

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<sup>43</sup> Enoch Brater's observation as quoted in Wilson, 194.

<sup>44</sup> Wilson, 198.

<sup>45</sup> In *Material Voice in Pitch black I* I proposed that the sound engineer, Sam Willan, take the position of an Auditor-type character, punctuating not with physical gestures, but with the reading of the endnote numbers spread within the text. This reversed the Auditor's intentions in *Not I*, not attempting to remind me to take up the first person pronoun, but instead drawing attention to the references to other's voices and the sources of quotations. As he persistently enacted the role of the third person in the text, the third person always counterpointed my first person, constantly reminding me of the multiple other voices in relation to my own. In Chapter 4 the character of the Auditor in my own work is the subject of further analysis.

her suspended, so that the illusion can be maintained: on the one hand committing her to eternal suspense, on the other saving her from the eyes of the audience perceiving too much of her literal bondage, as eyes adjust to the dark. Mouth's agency is in constant and complex negotiation with the other figure of the Auditor on stage, whose character seemingly controls yet ultimately remains helpless to control how Mouth is framed. Mouth does not control the light beam, the beam controls her, making her intelligible to an audience where before in the dark (behind the curtain) she was not.<sup>46</sup>

Vera Mantero's dance, *one mysterious Thing, said e.e.cummings*, reverses the dynamic of light illuminating voice. For and inspired by the African American dancer Josephine Baker, it is voice that reveals light, or at least prompts light to appear. In Mantero's performance, described by Andre Lepecki as a 'choreographic séance'<sup>47</sup> her voice, emanating from darkness seemed to bring light, and the illumination of her body into being. Beginning in total darkness, Mantero's vocal fragments floated through the pitch black of the Purcell Room, Southbank (September 2010)<sup>48</sup> - broadcasting to an audience invisible to her and each other. Acting like electric flashes to expose space without illuminating it, her voice did not emerge from any light, but from the very depths of darkness.

Soon though slowly, exposure became visual, as blurs in the distance shaped themselves into forms half perceived and half imagined. Mantero's face pushed through the blackout like a dull smudge, her whole face suspended in the darkness, ripping through the atmosphere with jerks and turns, like the radical cousin of the comparatively still and suspended spectre of Mouth.

Lepecki writes that 'the spot light that first illuminated only her face and then, in a 20 minute

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<sup>46</sup> Mouth does not have agency either through bodily movement or through her monologue, which refuses to use the first person, despite the Auditor's attempts to compel her to do so. And yet I can't help but wonder what experience an audience would have had of the *sound* of her voice: the persistent fragmented rhythm, the percussive force of exclamation and pause, in which her refusal of first person might be forcefully heard as her own decisive vocal control.

<sup>47</sup> Andre Lepecki, "The melancholic dance of the postcolonial spectral: Vera Mantero summoning Josephine Baker." *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 120.

<sup>48</sup> It is important to note that whereas I have witnessed Mantero's performance in the live, my access to *Not I* is through the play-text and written accounts and criticism. I have purposefully avoided referencing the film version, as even though it is a document of the performance of sorts, it is an entirely different direction of the piece, with Mouth a large-scale, moving image.

fade-in, gradually reveals the rest of her body, creates a reverse effect of illumination.’ Mantero’s body, coloured black, complicates the “clarity” of her identification once exposed in the light. Lepecki continues that ‘the more light that is shed on Mantero’s body, the less we are able to see her, the less we see Josephine Baker...’<sup>49</sup> Having shape-shifted in the dark, Mantero now eludes being “seen” in the light, and instead ‘what fills our sensory is sweat, tremor and mostly her voice.’<sup>50</sup> Mantero’s agency is manifest in her use (or at least the appearance in the staging) of voice to command light, which in turn controls the revelation of her naked body.

Mantero moves, albeit restricted by heeled hooves strapped to her feet. And while she has authored and designed this strange setting for her dance, she focuses attention gradually, like the action of the light, on the conditions of her self-imposed bondage. In using her authorial control as choreographer of her body, voice and light, Mantero draws stark attention to the confined conditions for an African-American woman at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, alive to colonialist history.<sup>51</sup> Unlike Mouth, Mantero makes her own moves, but makes the chorographic decision to move while still in one position: the physical restrictions mimicking the social restrictions imposed in gendered and racial terms. Lighting here illuminates more than Mantero’s body: it exposes the conditions in which women can become visible, the problem of what features of our biology make us visible, and for what reasons. Visibility can also be restrictive, reductive and possessive over any body, even those who have the right to their own autonomy. Voice *sounds* gender and race and class, but not always, and not in ways so immediately apprehended by the other. In this way, voice can complicate assumptions made of the body speaking in ways which can subvert easy access to any controlling gaze on that body. Can the voice break the gaze? This question underpins the practical experiments I make in this thesis, and while such a complex question produces a host of answers, one way *MVPB* inspired the performances in the following two chapters was in its demonstration of the long distance

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<sup>49</sup> Lepecki, 120.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> ‘The European fascination with Josephine Baker’s body and voice,’ (Lepecki, 112) granted her more freedom of movement as a prominent performing “star.” It is this fascination with Baker’s body that Mantero challenges in summoning her back to the stage in a new generation, making us aware to our assumptions as an audience now.

between speaker and listener re-composing the voice. This patterning of the voices through distance so that they sounded differently was one tangible way I could see the voice complicating listening or looking passively. Working to apprehend and discern different voices, and maintain concentration with the pace of speaking, the audience became as much an active body in making the meaning of the performance as the speakers.

The phrase ‘the gaze’ as we know originates in the film theorist Laura Mulvey’s essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), where she famously problematised the positioning of the female body as a site onto which male desires could be projected in her theorizing of the ‘male gaze’:

Woman...stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning.<sup>52</sup>

Mulvey herself revised this analysis, and there has been almost continual critical discussion of the gaze, for example in the work of Ann Kaplan’s challenge to the gaze as male, and Bell Hooks’s focus on black female subjectivity. However, in my work as a practitioner of sound, I play with giving voice to ‘the silent image of woman.’ While I am tempted to propose that simply the act of speaking will grant the silent image autonomy and agency, silence is equated with passivity, and with an absence of action, all too quickly. Living bodies are never silent as John Cage’s often cited experience of hearing the two bodily sounds: one high and one low in the anechoic chamber at Harvard University tells us.<sup>53</sup> Silence is full of sound, or ‘noise’, and so rich with audible action. In my earliest performance as part of this research (as mentioned in Chapter 1), I sat on a

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<sup>52</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (Oxon: Routledge, 2003), 44.

<sup>53</sup> John Cage writes in “Composition as Process”: THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SILENCE. GET THEE TO AN ANECHOIC CHAMBER AND HEAR THERE THY NERVOUS SYSTEM IN OPERATION AND HEAR THERE THY BLOOD IN CIRCULATION. John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (London: Marion Boyars, 1995) 51.

theatre stage in front of an audience speaking through copper piping, which bent around my head to funnel the sound of my voice back into my ear. In aural terms, I was silent (inaudible) when in visual terms I was seen to be speaking. In this way, from the perspective of the audience, voice became tangible solely through vision: specifically through the sight of a mouth moving. Members from the audience could take a position on the stage next to me and listen in on what I was speaking, through another opening in the piping. Once a body joined mine on stage that body became an actor in the performance, implicit in the staging and observed by the rest of the audience. In effect, the spectator was made active and complicit in the making of meaning through audition: on entering the frame of the performance and becoming its subject alongside me.<sup>54</sup> This performance most clearly demonstrated the complexities of an aural equivalent of the gaze and how is it complicated by the silence and/or audibility of the speaking body.

Returning the gaze, not being complicit in the projection but counter to it, has been a well-documented strategy in the History of Art, where women in both paint and performance have 'looked back' at those looking at her. What is the equivalent to this, I wonder, in aural terms? An echo, returning back the sound of an other's voice? To answer this, I am putting the question of an aural gaze into practice, as it is my contention that sound, and the sounded voice, can re-problematise what the female performance artists of the 1970s radically shifted in terms of female subjectivity and representation, the codes and strategies of which are now so well known and repeated. Although in practice, in a physical proximity with a body prompting eye-to-eye contact, the passivity of the gaze is palpably broken, it is my contention that politically this action has become a trope rather than the charged action it once was, especially in performance. The sound of the female body, her voice, I believe can intervene in 'the debates within feminism concerning the representation of the body by women performers' which is split as Lynda Nead illustrates 'between those who fear the inevitable recuperation of the female body to the patriarchal spectacle of woman and those who see its potential as a way of building a new cultural

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<sup>54</sup> Furthermore once an audience member joined me on stage and listened, they could no longer see the spectacle of me speaking, and so it was impossible to both listen to me *and* see me simultaneously. Once listening, the audience member became an explicit part of the spectacle, made of two bodies rather than one.

presence for the female body by reversing the gaze and enabling women to become the speaking subjects of discourse.’<sup>55</sup>

### **Long Distance Gazing**

How might distancing the gaze complicate the acts of looking and listening? In *The Explicit Body in Performance*, Schneider draws attention to the gaze in space, the act of looking at, or from, a distance in relation to perspective and ‘perspectival vision,’ arguing that the gaze ‘is subject to and constituted by propriety and anxiety about space.’<sup>56</sup> Just as ‘the scopic field lays before the gaze but secret(e)s within it a point of vanishing,’ so too does the aural field surround our ears focusing and obscuring certain details depending on our proximity to the sound as auditors.<sup>57</sup> I am interested in finding out what happens in practice at the point of near vanishing to the aural gaze, and as such this has been the reason I have staged many of my performances with long distances between the audience and performer(s). I will end this section with my observations about the effect of the distance on the voice, but first let me illustrate an instance of long distance gazing, as I have found through Tyndall’s experiments that the very far away sight of stars in the night sky (those far away objects) make almost imperceptible movements, resisting fixity through long-distance movement. I offer an account of “star gazing,” an act of telescopic looking, reflecting on the illusory and actual movements of the light in the dark.

Billie Whitelaw, recounting audiences’ experiences of watching her mouth in the dark, recalls ‘a lot of people thought that I was pacing up and down, that the mouth was moving. It’s like looking at a star: after a while it seems to be moving about.’<sup>58</sup> Writing about the singing flame, the sonic effect (causing ‘the flame to burst spontaneously into song’) which occurs when ‘a gas-

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<sup>55</sup> Nead, 1993, 68.

<sup>56</sup> Rebecca Schneider. *The Explicit Body in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1997),62.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Linda Ben Zvi, “Billie Whitelaw interviewed by Linda Ben Zvi.” *Women in Beckett: Performance and Critical Perspectives*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 7.

flame is simply inclosed within a tube,' John Tyndall describes how the quivering, 'twinkling' motion of the flame is akin to that of the stars:

The fixed stars, especially those near the horizon, shine with an unsteady light, sometimes changing color as they twinkle. I have often watched at night, upon the plateaux of the Alps, the alternate flash of ruby and emerald in the lower and larger stars. If you place a piece of looking-glass so that you can see in it the image of such a star, on tilting the glass quickly to and fro, the line of light obtained will not be continuous, but will form a string of colored beads of extreme beauty. The same effect is obtained when an opera-glass is pointed to the star and shaken. This experiment shows that in the act of twinkling the light of the star is quenched at intervals; the dark spaces between the bright beads corresponding to the periods of extinction.<sup>59</sup>

There is still movement, whether potential or in process, implicit in what seems to be suspended. Brian Massumi describes the act of 'suspension' as 'potentialising', establishing 'a space of transformation' and offers suspension as an idea or a state of existing made of potential motion, without simply reflecting on motion.<sup>60</sup> Massumi makes note of at least two ways of conceptualising 'suspension', not as contradictions of each other, but rather 'as a positive capacity for variation' making clear the singularity of every application of the concept.<sup>61</sup> While suspension also implies an entrapment of sorts, a fixing in time and space, Massumi's attention to at least one definition of suspension implies there is motion in the act of staying still: as a transformation cannot occur in a state of complete stasis.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Tyndall, 221.

<sup>60</sup> Massumi, 268.

<sup>61</sup> Massumi, 269.

<sup>62</sup> Lynda Nead's attention to the relationship between light beam and the female body as image in *The Haunted Gallery* (2007), has led me to think more on light's role in the context of women as makers of meaning. Writing that 'rays of light, borne by allegorical female figures were ubiquitous in the electrical and optical cultures of the fin de siècle', she illustrates the 'iconographic significance of the conical beam of light' alongside the advent of cinema. What is most resonant here is that the graphic illustrations Nead provides of floating figures holding lights up to signage show women in states of suspension. In these instances, light does not act on the body to suspend it, but the woman's body itself appears to suspend the light. Although fulfilling a largely decorative role as poster-girls, embellishing of commercial prints, these women who hold the light but remain outside of it are suspended as actors, directors of that which makes meaning through casting light on it.

In the performance of *Material Voice in Pitch Black* I saw however that the voice has the ability to make bodies move (even if apparently still) in more tangible ways. The talking heads in my performance appeared as if suspended, while the sound of their voices moved their presences to other parts of the room, so that even while looking at the voice source, the assignment of a voice to a particular body could only ever, it seemed, be partial. To pitch voice within the conditions of the dark and the distance is to allow sound to practice its own autonomous activity in space, but also critically to investigate how the voice's autonomous existence as sound negotiates with voice as an extension (the audible marker) of the existence of the speaking body. I will end thinking about pitch and the relation between the voice and body in the darkness. Bruce Smith explicates:

If volume is a measure of space, pitch is a measure of time. In physical terms, the perceived pitch of a sound is a function of its frequency, of how long it takes the displaced air molecules to return to the point of stasis from which the sound wave began<sup>63</sup>

Taking into account the physical terms in which pitch functions, it is curious that in Western cultures the language of musical pitch is defined in spatial terms, on a vertical spectrum between high and low. While high pitches are created by fast moving frequencies, and low pitch by slow moving frequencies, the metaphor of pitch characterised as high and low may have some basis when approached from the perspective of sounds made in the body:

The relationship between the VERTICALITY schema and our characterization of musical pitch with reference to the spatial orientation *up-down* is fairly immediate: when we make *low* sounds, our chest resonates; when we make *high* sounds, our chest no longer resonates in the same way, and the source of the sound seems located nearer our head.

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<sup>63</sup> Smith, 227.



The "up" and "down" of musical pitch thus correlate with the spatial "up" and "down" — the vertical orientation — of our bodies.<sup>64</sup>

So pitching voice begins in the body, and it is then recalibrated through the variable conditions of its transmission (distance/architecture/weather). The voice, a sonic force can perform solo in space without its body which lends to it the sense of the uncanny, a source of fascination throughout the centuries. Yet, as a sound made of and within the body, voice will always carry the promise of a body with it, and as Bloom and Duncan argue carry the materiality of the body in the voice too. As voice is only apprehended as sound, as audible communication, once in the ears and body of a listener, in its lifetime it is embodied at least twice. That the voice is effectively made/materialised in two bodies lends to it a unique position, shifting between the subject and object of the exchange. The implications for a feminist practice of audibility through the voice, and this concept of the twice-embodied voice will be discussed further in Chapter 4 (in relation to my making of the space in-between the speaker and the listener “vocally embodied air”). In the next chapters I investigate what changes in the sound of the voice between the two bodies of speaker and listener. *Material Voice in Pitch Black* demonstrated examples of audible transformations, and one in particular that I knew in theory, but played out in practice, that *pitch* changes between the two bodies: speaker and listener. Through distance, higher frequencies are stripped away, so that the listener hears a lower pitched version of the sound, however slight that shift is. As longer distance makes for a greater difference in perceived sound, the further away the speaker and listener from each other, the more the voice is able to practice its ‘speaker’s will.’ In *MVPB* voices altered their acoustic properties in the long space of transmission. In the next chapter I elongate the time and space between the original instance of speaking and the moment of listening by turning to the voice on the record, while attending to the material re-patterning of sound in the re-recording of it.

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<sup>64</sup> Lawrence M. Zbikowski, “Metaphor and Music Theory: Reflections from cognitive science.” *The Online Journal for the Society of Music Theory*, 4.1 (1998). [http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.98.4.1/mto.98.4.1.zbikowski\\_frames.html](http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.98.4.1/mto.98.4.1.zbikowski_frames.html) (accessed on January 15<sup>th</sup> 2011) Capitals in original.

## CHAPTER 3

### Her Voice in Reproduction

In the last chapter I questioned how theatre darkness might grant the voice its own particular autonomy through transmission in a live spatial and temporal distance. This chapter extends, in some senses, the event of the dark. Like the dark, which has the potential to conceal a body that might otherwise be visible, the record of a voice also marks the live corporeal body as absent. The record of a voice also impresses distinct and complex distances in time, for while the voice heard marks for the listener time passing so palpably, in the recording process the conscious speaking to the future is always implicit. As a result, I continue to interrogate voice transmission over spatial and temporal distances in this chapter, not only with reference to the mechanical record of the voice, but also the practical question of how one might make reproductions (returns) of one's voice in theatre: both through its distinct temporality (part of what Diamond calls its 'representation apparatus') and also through its architecture. Diamond's *Unmaking Mimesis* acts as a catalyst throughout this chapter for thinking how the voice can unmake mimesis in the temporality/temporalities of theatre.

The many temporalities theatre contains (frames) creates a multi-layering of histories and potential futures that can't help but condition the performing voice. Stein identifies the syncopated temporalities of the audience and performer as 'something that makes anybody nervous,' but narrative or dramatic theatre also produces the temporality of the play's fictive past and future – the narrative back story before the curtain rose, and what continues when it falls - reverberating in the continuous present.<sup>1</sup> As Diamond reminds us this reverberation is still happening in 'alternative theatre and performance since the happenings of the 1960s,' although moved beyond 'the signifying space of a "dramatic world."' and 'the extensions and contractions of stage space in its measured coordination with stage time.'<sup>2</sup> This signifying space of a dramatic

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<sup>1</sup> I should make the distinction here between the play's fictive past and future contained within its finite duration and the play's fictive past and future which is the past that happened before the play begins and the continuation of the narrative after the formal end point of the play.

<sup>2</sup> Diamond, 144.

world lingers on though (in varying shades) in the formal framework of alternative theatre and performance. In the last part of this chapter I address the way theatre's palimpsestic temporality (which Diamond defines through its 'shifting time-sense') *and* theatre architecture can propel the voice into unmaking itself, producing altered copies of the "original" utterance (the definition of which is always context-, and site-specific).

The theatre is not only a metaphorical echo chamber where voices from the past, from theatre's multiple temporalities, may be prompted to return in the bodies on stage or in the audience.

Theatre's architecture also returns voices by making literal echo chambers, where the voice reverberates in the depths, heights and hollows of the building, reconfiguring the original vocal utterance through its motion in space and in turn *representing* the body who speaks. I propose that the theatre can act as an analog reproduction technology, which can make copies of the voice derived from but separate from an original utterance, and I analyse how this return of the voice complicates the identification of the vocal body. As I will show, the echoic voice reverberates *what is out of time in time*, as the sound must first be carried away in order to return again. While the motion of the physical echo in space is familiar to us, Schneider calls this motion the 'ghost note,' the sound that temporally resounds, the historical note that counterpoints, or more appropriately syncopates, the live theatrical note.<sup>3</sup> Tuning in to the 'jazz poetics' of Suzan-Lori Park's *Topdog/Underdog*, Schneider observes that:

In jazz, one cannot accurately say that a tune is *misplayed* by the riff. So too history is not *mistold* via the riff by which Parks retells it. In fact, playing in difference might be one way to get those notes right. That is, something of the history is sounded in not being sounded directly.<sup>4</sup>

The syncopated 'ghost note' in which something 'is sounded in not being sounded directly' reverberates with Diamond's patterning of 'difference into sameness.' As Schneider writes,

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<sup>3</sup> Schneider, 2011, 64.

<sup>4</sup> Schneider, 2011, 65.

‘playing in difference might be one way to get those notes right.’ Playing in difference with the voice in the theatre might also offer a way of challenging the representation of the speaking body using the very framework of *representing* and *reproducing*.<sup>5</sup>

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Elin Diamond’s lyrical metaphor from her introduction to *Unmaking Mimesis* makes a moving image of the doubleness in classical mimesis, where ‘both the activity of representing and the result of it’ are simultaneously implicated in its meaning: ‘The stake and the shifting sands’ are what, she argues, feminism must ‘embrace’ as ‘an evolving movement that self-consciously theorizes its practice.’<sup>6</sup> For Diamond, it is the echoed condition of the space-time of performance as also ‘a thing doing and a thing done’ which lends its particular stage(s) and temporality to the practice of ‘mimetic thinking – what Benjamin calls thinking in “similarities,” in sensuous relation.’<sup>7</sup> Through bringing ‘the past and present into collision’ Diamond argues that the postmodern performance practices of Peggy Shaw, Robbie McCauley and Deb Margolin construct ‘dialectical images’ which ‘turn performance time into a now-time of insight and transformation.’<sup>8</sup> All three performance artists under discussion in Diamond’s last chapter create on stage multiple temporalities, summoning narratives and characters from their personal and socio-historical pasts. Through dressing in the uniforms of military fathers (Shaw and McCauley) or scat-singing to ‘pointedly mime the dissonance of one of the musician’s jazz phrasing,’ (McCauley) these women performers construct ‘a moment of mimetic apprehension.’ In this moment of apprehension (similarly fugitive as Skantze’s sensual apprehension, and not unlike Massumi’s reckoning with a mode of suspension offering a form of transformation), ‘the commoditized images embodied and destroyed by these women performers suddenly illuminate

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<sup>5</sup> While the sound of the voice (as discussed in the last chapter) is noticeably transformed through physical distance, the theatre space can also further complicate the representation of the body through character, which is developed in the next chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Diamond, v.

<sup>7</sup> Diamond, 143

<sup>8</sup> Diamond, 149.

the crises of the present.’<sup>9</sup>

Practicing a ‘mimetic apprehension’ in this case is to inhabit, expose and challenge the representation simultaneously – to be of both bodies and both times. To approach Diamond’s metaphor I began with differently: what theatre temporality offers is the performance of the shifting sands (the activity of representing) while always keeping pace with what is *at stake* in the representation. For this reason, theatre is a vital space to practice how mimesis can ‘pattern difference into sameness’ and in doing so make complex what that *different* and that *same* might mean for a feminist agenda. In relation to my practice Diamond’s investigation of Brechtian and Feminist theory aids me posing my questions relevant to this chapter (and resonating in the next). Brecht and Feminism foregrounds (and historicizes) theatre space as that capable of revolution, and resistance, on and off the stage. As Diamond writes in her introduction to *Performance and Cultural Politics*:

Feminists have wondered whether performance can forget its links to theatre traditions, any more than, say, deconstruction can forget logocentrism. As Brecht understood, theatre’s representation apparatus – with its curtains, trapdoors, perspectives, exits and entrances, its disciplined bodies, its illusorily coherent subjects, its lures to identifications – might offer the best “laboratory” for political disruption, for refunctioning the tools of class and gender oppression.<sup>10</sup>

In this study as a whole I am using ‘theatre’s representation apparatus’ as a “laboratory” space offering me a distinct framework for practicing how the voice can ‘unmake mimesis,’ and what this means for the speaking body on or off stage. For example, and to put it simply, the condition of the dark theatre space, as addressed in the last chapter, complicated assigning voice to body, and so the voice heard became an unstable representation of the body speaking. Before questioning how a voice might practice its own reproduction through a negotiation with the

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<sup>9</sup> Diamond, 180.

<sup>10</sup> Elin Diamond (ed.), *Performance and Cultural Politics*. (Oxon: Routledge, 1996) 1. All other references to Diamond are from *Unmaking Mimesis*, 1997.

complexities of theatre time and space, I turn to the turning record. Within this chapter I investigate the recorded and live sites that host the voice, beginning with the record and ending with the theatre, as technologies of reproduction which I will argue resist the production of exact copies in order to keep composing in the continuous.

### **The Aura of the Aural**

Compelled and confounded by the distance between the speaker and receiver in early telephonic communication, an anonymous reporter of the *Scientific American* called it 'an airy nowhere, inhabited by voices and nothing else.'<sup>11</sup> Conceiving spatial and temporal distances as areas, which can host the event of the voice, this section attends to the voice on the record as a particular example of transmission into the airy nowhere. I explore how reproduction complicates the distance the voice performs in and through, experimenting with how the material of the record might make the voice more material in its sounding, I question how the record of the voice has its own 'auratic' presence in the instance of its replaying.

I will refer to another of Georgina Starr's works called *Mum sings Hello*, a recording of Starr's mother singing over her telephone answer machine and re-recorded from tape to tape sixteen times. I analyse this work with regard to the recorded voice and its transmission through the distance between "speaker" and listener, and with attention to Walter Benjamin's description of distance with relation to the "aura" of the work of art.<sup>12</sup> Benjamin proposes that the reproducibility of art in modern societies is destructive of its aura: its distinct presence in time and space. The context and unique time and space of Benjamin's writing, when Hitler was coming to power in 1933, influences how he considers the loss of the aura as also making possible a political use of art which could promote socialist revolution. Feminist performance artists

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<sup>11</sup> Anonymous reporter as quoted in Barbara Engh, "Adorno and the Sirens: tele-phono-graphic bodies." *Embodied Voices: Representing Female Vocality in Western Culture*, eds. Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 122.

<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).

working in the 1970s and 80s had similar concerns, ‘attacking the auratic body’ in order to complicate the presence of the female performer, her representation and subjectivity.<sup>13</sup> Diamond draws attention to the body under attack with reference to Benjamin’s distinction between the stage and screen actor and how ‘he saw the film actor as dispersed and divided by technologies of reproduction, while the stage actor’s “aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica.”’<sup>14</sup> In Diamond’s analysis of feminist performance art of the 1990s, however, solo female performers make conscious use of the auratic body (again) to effectively shift the distance between their bodies and the audience. I want to think about this shifting distance here in terms of the voice, to examine how the auratic voice might practice and for what effect.

Returning then to the anonymous reporter of the *Scientific American*, who with poetic clarity went on to describe the strange conditions of speaking over the phone lines:

Between us two there is an airy nowhere, inhabited by voices and nothing else –  
Helloland I should call it.<sup>15</sup>

Helloland imagines a place of the vast space of nowhere: an invisible landscape contoured by travelling voices. To call this distance between speaker and listener ‘a land’ is to think in terms of defining a site, mapping somewhere within nowhere to play host to the event of voice. The land called ‘hello’ holds a specific purpose too, as voices reach to fetch a receiver, so that routes can be drawn in the air between two bodies.

This description of Helloland introduces a conception of distance as an acoustic space, in which voice hovers in the expanse until ‘picked up.’ The moment a voice is heard in a specific time and space is a moment distinct from that in which it is expressed. The distance mediates between these two moments and operates as a rich ground for voice to practice a peculiar autonomy, at once of the body, and outside the body. In theatre space, and within my research as a whole, I am

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<sup>13</sup> Diamond, 151.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Anonymous reporter as quoted in Engh, 122.

concerned with practically exploring how the voice may be approached as a theatre material, a substance which may be sculpted both by the body who speaks and the distance which it projects into. Within the practice developed in correlation with this chapter, I focused on how the dynamics between the recorded and live female voice in the event of theatre serve to complicate both spatial and temporal distances and the speaking body located within these distances. In what follows here, I concentrate on the recorded voice, suggesting how its transmission as a reproduction might be approached in terms of Benjamin's definition of the aura as 'the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be.'<sup>16</sup>

Telephonic technology plays tricks with the distance between speaker and listener into scaling down by a false immediacy, as the electric wires mediate the distance instead of breath and air, dismantling perceptions of space. The advent of the new telephonic technology in 1876, Emily Thompson writes 'immediately reconfigured traditional relationships between sound and space.' The illusion of closeness the telephone enabled was celebrated, 'heralded for "annihilating" space and time, by effectively eradicating the distance between people who wished to communicate.'<sup>17</sup> The new found ability to compound space saw telephone lines spread gradually over longer and longer distances, which along with the construction of telephone booths would allow the speaker to become more detached from the environmental or architectural sounds around her. The telephone could transmit a voice, acoustically located in a nowhere, somewhere.

Before advances in the technology of the phonograph allowed sounds to fill spaces, it began as a weak transmitting signal, and, like the telephone, was best heard through headphones or even thin tubes offering for the listener an intimate proximity to the sound in the headset. These close first encounters of hearing voices detached from the bodies who made them must have been all the more fascinating for their direct and solitary experience of listening. Writing about the advent of recording technology making it possible 'to build a mausoleum of sound,' John Durham Peters mentions Charles Cros, Thomas Edison's 'major French competitor for the title of inventor of

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<sup>16</sup> Benjamin, 243

<sup>17</sup> Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2004), 236.



the phonograph' who 'called his version a paleophone, a term suggesting a kind of telephone which calls out of the past.' Like the photograph, the phonograph preserves the "portraits" of the dead or those far away. This illusion of closeness to the very material of the missing body, makes these reproductions so seductive as links to otherwise untouchable pasts. While Benjamin's essay on *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* makes only fleeting reference to sound with brief mentions of the phonograph, it nonetheless offers a useful way of analyzing the strange presence of the voice in the distance, which in practice remains, as Benjamin describes the auratic object, 'distant, however close it may be.' What happens to the auratic, unique, "original" voice in reproduction?

While in this discussion I am situating the live utterance of the voice as the "original," and the record as reproduction, my work as a whole is not concerned with locating and claiming any utterance as "original." The more I practice with sound, the more productive the uncertain and/or plural beginnings are. With the live voice, as I have shown and will show, any claim to the original will continually shift and the reproduction serves to complicate this shifting again. For example, early phonographs and recording technologies have their own claims to the position of the "original," not unlike Benjamin's example of the photographic negative becoming another layer, or work of art, from which to reproduce:

To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense.<sup>18</sup>

The reproduction of the reproduction (and on) is the subject of Starr's *Mum Sings Hello*, where reproduction is used as a process for continual transformation of the material and the incremental destruction of the sense. Starr describes the work as the 'recording left on my telephone answer machine by my mother in 1993. Her voice has been re-played and re-recorded from answer-tape

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<sup>18</sup> Benjamin, 224.

to answer-tape sixteen times.’<sup>19</sup> As a result of the repeated re-recording, the voice is gradually lost within the sound of the material’s own reproduction of itself. Starr’s record challenges fidelity, unmaking mimesis, as it is acoustically scarred by its own technical possibilities. The recording from answer tape to answer tape repeats the lines of ‘Hello,’ but rather than the repetition making the voice more present, as “repeat” often strives to do, it distances the voice from the listener, until the medium of the tape itself is the only sonic presence we can hear. In this way Starr’s record displays a reversal of the great gift of recording technology to bring voices closer to the ears of the listener, or in Benjamin’s terms to bring the reproduction of the artwork closer to the beholder. Benjamin writes of the desire of ‘contemporary masses to bring things “closer” spatially and humanly,’ to close the gap between the time and space of the original artwork and the time and space of the beholder, auditor, consumer. With Starr’s record, the gap between voice and listener is not closed, but systematically widened, filled with sounds which first distort and then destroy the voice altogether.

The utterance of the human voice makes the original tricky to identify or apprehend, as the task would be to identify one part of a live production where the voice recomposes itself continuously in the journey from the body that made it, through its transmission, to the body of the listener. Each medium the voice travels through could share a stake in originating aspects of the sonic quality of the voice. However in the context of the voice’s reproduction, the record takes the place of the listener (in the equation above) on the other side of the transmission of the voice, ready to materialise the sounds, not in a body but in a machine. ‘Technical reproduction’ Benjamin writes ‘can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself’ enabling ‘the original to meet the beholder halfway.’<sup>20</sup> The second part of this chapter explores this (re)placement of the “original” utterance in relation to the live and recorded voice.

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<sup>19</sup> Description of *Mum sings Hello* and sound file: <http://georginastarr.com/georgina-starr-mums-sings-hello.htm>. This work is (as are most of Starr’s sound works) accessible online, but it is also often played in gallery spaces. Starr told me in conversation that *Mum Sings Hello* is one of her most exhibited works.

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin, 220.

Although a virtual location in this discussion, Benjamin's notion of "halfway" and meeting halfway by way of technology helps me think through the complexities of what happens to the voice in distance. With the record and the listener, the meeting halfway is at least twofold: there is the meeting between the imagined body of the recorded voice and the listener, where the record itself is the mediation, the halfway point, of that temporal distance. Then there is the meeting between the voice on the record and the listener in the live airwaves, where the air is the mediating material. In the case of Starr's record, she removes her mother's voice further and further from the halfway meeting point of sonic decay towards total saturation.

Maybe now the meeting point can no longer hold, as what happens is a movement from the halfway point of comprehension and intelligibility where the words become sounds that squeak and scratch so that meaning is abstracted too, past recognition. If that 'which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art,' then does the aura wither too when the "original" voice is reproduced from its own reproduction? In his essay on the malfunctioning of technology, music scholar Martin Dixon notes with reference to Benjamin's essay: 'Our usual appraisal of the technological is that which banishes the cultic, destroys aura and reconfigures the real; all of which, if true, is only true insofar as technology behaves "properly" (as we intend it to), insofar as it *works*.'<sup>21</sup> However, when technology malfunctions, either by itself or is made to malfunction by a human, it shows itself as the imperfect reproduction, and in Dixon's terms is haunted by 'an auratic dimension.'

Starr's re-recordings force malfunction to take place, but in doing so she also creates a "work of art," a consciously designed sound work that exists as such in the fine art world. In contrast to the engineers of early telephonic and phonographic recording who aimed for and obsessed over the clearest cleanest sounds in an attempt to absent the "waste" sounds of the machine, today many artists and musicians working with technology are less concerned with fidelity, as with

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Dixon, "The Horror of Disconnection: The Auratic in Technological Malfunction." *Transformations*. 15 (2007). [www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue\\_15/article\\_06.shtml](http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_15/article_06.shtml) (accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2010).

ways to make technology perform itself. Russell Ferguson, writing about artist Christian Marclay asserts that in performance ‘the records he plays *sound like records*’ before quoting Marclay:

I want to disrupt our listening habits. When a record skips or pops or we hear the surface noise, we try very hard to make an abstraction of it so it doesn’t disrupt the musical flow...the recording is a sort of illusion while the scratch on the record is more real.<sup>22</sup>

The records are artefacts whose surfaces can affect their own performance. Marclay’s art objects operate within a similar sphere - with sound technology performing itself as a sculptural artefact: a gramophone horn becomes the mold for a wax candle and lengths of the Beatles recordings on tape become a crocheted pillow.<sup>23</sup> The reproduction technology becomes the “work of art”, still silently performing itself.<sup>24</sup>

If, I mention above, the material reproduction of the sound can become “the work of art” from which further copies are made, this is especially true of the vinyl record, the most collected and coveted sound object. A rare LP can be treated as the “work of art,” treasured more than the live sound from which it is made. Jacques Attali has written that ‘for those [singers, recording artists] trapped by the record, public performance becomes a simulacrum of the record: an audience generally familiar with the artist’s recordings attends to hear their live replication.’<sup>25</sup>

For my purposes I distinguish between the “work of art” as object imbued with aura as a condition of its unique position in time and space, and the theatre where the work of art presented as a live moving performance travels through many overlapping temporal and spatial

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<sup>22</sup> Russell Ferguson, *Christian Marclay* (Los Angeles: Steidl/UCLA Hammer Museum, 2003), 41.

<sup>23</sup> This work is reminiscent of the “audible artefact” discussed in the last chapter.

<sup>24</sup> However, Starr’s mother’s voice performs itself out loud, and the malfunctioning of voice performs differently to the malfunctioning of other sounds. Although Dixon’s thesis suggests that noise and distortion serve to create a sense of aura in the sound recording, I apply this carefully when approaching the voice with a consciousness of what might be at stake in decomposing the material of someone’s voice. As the voice is attached to a body (whether present or not), there is also an ethical question prompted by manipulating the sound of the voice to distort and decompose. The voice is always someone’s voice, and so other peoples’ manipulation of this voice will have an impact on the representation of the body from which it came.

<sup>25</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 85.

positions.<sup>26</sup> Again Stein's essay 'Plays' informs my research since she suggests that the audience and the performance they are watching are operating in different time frames, the audience in 'emotional time' and the performance in 'syncopated time.' The audience, always either 'behind or ahead of the play' whether catching up emotionally with an event which has passed or thinking ahead in anticipation of what is to come, thus suggests the audience and performers cannot share a presence in time.<sup>27</sup> The distance or delay in time when attending to an artwork mirrors the condition Benjamin attributes to the aura itself. When the artwork and its beholder are far away from each other, the reproduction attempts to close this distance, to bring the auratic object nearer to the beholder 'spatially and humanly.' The theatre, then, in resonance with Stein's site of 'conflicting temporalities,' I argue is the site of the continuous making and unmaking of the auratic voice, as it shifts in the distance and in its proximity to the spectator/auditor.

Benjamin's 'phenomenon of distance' appears in his identification of the aura in natural objects, specifically a 'mountain range' he imagines while 'resting on a Summer afternoon.'<sup>28</sup> That the aura should appear for Benjamin in the distant natural object, as well as the unique Historical object, is useful in proposing an auratic voice as one which, while being neither of these objects entirely, is nevertheless characterised by both. Sound performs through a natural distance, while remaining historically linked to its unique time and place of production.<sup>29</sup> Voice inevitably follows the same motion, although crucially voice differs because of its unique time and place of making in a specific body. Considering the three performance practices of Shaw, Margolin and McCauley, Diamond suggests that the performer's body can bring the past into 'wild collision' with the present in moments of 'mimetic apprehension.' Can sound practice moments of

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<sup>26</sup> This reflects my research methodology of composing in the continuous, a practice engaged with the transmission and reception of overlapping, overlaying time frames, with voices animated by other voices.

<sup>27</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Plays." *Look At Me Now and Here I Am, Gertrude Stein: Writings and Lectures, 1909-1945* (London, Peter Owen Publishers, 2004), 61.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin, 223.

<sup>29</sup> As a counterpoint to the sight of the distant auratic mountain in aural terms, Douglas Kahn describes an occasion in which the far away Saddleback Mountain returns the voice as music: 'While on a geological survey of Maine, Dr. Charles Thomas Jackson tested the echo of Saddleback Mountain, as it stood covered in snow behind a large swampy area; all shouts and noises were returned as music. "A fierce Indian war whoop was returned to us in the softest musical tones, not one of the discords being heard.'" (William R. Corliss, *Handbook of Unusual Natural Phenomena*. (Arlington House New York, 1983) 397) as quoted in Kahn, 1990, 6. As a result of this, Kahn goes on to envisage carefully constructed musical pieces made to sound back in echo equally composed answers, for example 'one could devise a special series of musical sounds whose echo might lead a listener to think he or she had heard the response in spoken language.'

‘mimetic apprehension’ where instead of images bringing past and present into collision, voices do? I have already defined how the comprehension of sound might be better expressed by Skantze’s term ‘apprehension,’ creating a shared method for receiving the sound and the mimetic. Might an aural moment of ‘mimetic apprehension’ manifest itself in overlaying voices from the present and the past? McCauley’s scat-singing and speaking between microphones in Diamond’s examples does bring sound into question, and pointedly so in relation to the ‘commodification as well as...communal inspiration’ of Jazz.<sup>30</sup> My project here, however, is to experiment with how the speaking voice, as distinct from the voice in song or music, can mimetically apprehend.

It is not only the listener/auditor (another body) who can only ever apprehend the voice. The recorded voice cannot contain or fix all the sounds of the live. In practice playing and listening to the sounds of voices on the material record calls into question the control of sound as ‘the substance, which cannot be controlled.’ In *The Phonograph and its Future*, Thomas Edison wrote that the phonograph made possible ‘the captivity of all manner of sound waves heretofore designated as “fugitive,” and their permanent retention’<sup>31</sup> The captivity or containment of the voice on the record exists in stark contrast to the mechanics of the human voice and its transmission into airspace. Starr’s record is an example of how the recorded voice can be made fugitive even within the bounds of the record, as the very technology that made the voice appear and reappear eventually makes the voice disappear. Acetate records, like the ones I have used to make dub-plates of my work (including the recording of *Material Voice in Pitch Black*), erode after too many plays: the sound quality becomes poor, the records hiss, definition is lost. Eventually, I suppose, the voices on these records will be lost too. The further into the static the voice recedes, the more the material of the tape, the vinyl or acetate record consumes the material of the voice. This silencing of the voice, and the sonic traces it helps shape through its own disappearing is always in process, as the material reproduction erodes at a rate determined by its material properties. In this way the mechanical reproduction presents an alternative approach to

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<sup>30</sup> Diamond, 170.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Edison, “The Phonograph and Its Future.” *The North American Review*, 126.262 (1878), 530.

the recorded voice (as that which simply fastens the fugitive voice to solid permanence). Rather, the reproduction can continually create new presences in time and space for the voice to exist in, a de-composition, a playing out of its own finite existence in the world.

### **Acoustic Properties 1**

The impermanence and eventual decay of the record does not translate across all reproductive forms, for example the digital reproduction – while dependent on the existence of the means to play it – does not erode so tangibly. The acetate dubplate records, containing the sound works I have been making alongside this thesis exist in other material forms, including the digital. Quite early on in this study Stephen Connor, an eminent academic in this field, asked me if I was deleting the digital sound files of my work as I made them into records. My answer was that I was not, or I hadn't yet, but in fact I never have. Inevitably now the digital files have become the “originals” as the master records from which to make new reproductions. Unlike analysing Starr's *Mum Sings Hello*, where I situated the live voice as the “original” and the record as the reproduction, in this case the role of the “original” shifts to the first recording of the live event. I repeat Benjamin's observation here (which he relates to the photographic negative) that ‘to an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility.’ I now more fully understand my ambivalence about destroying the digital audio files as I wanted these works to reproduce in multiple forms, to transfer onto various materials and exist for renewed and different purposes through time. As technology evolves so quickly, the digital file, now serving its time as the “original” copy of my performance, will at some point become obsolete and have to be transferred to another ‘container technology for recorded sound.’<sup>32</sup> In fact, the digital files of much of my work have been transferred once already, from mp3s to .wav files. And so the “original” – if taken to be that from which we make copies – keeps shifting containers, passed on in an attempt to keep it remaining in some form, even if several times removed from its moment of making. The continual re-composition of the sound as it

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<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Sterne, “The mp3 as Cultural Artefact.” *New Media and Society* 8.5 (2006), 825.

moves from sonic object to sonic object is what compels me to hold onto the digital files: I do so not as an act of preservation, as I am in some sense dedicated to the potential to recompose, but as a paradoxical fixing holding on to the sound files as they exist now in order to let go again and again.

Holding on, though, in this instance is also an authorial move. I was asked the question about whether I would let go of the original recordings by someone for whom the playful erasure of his property would not result in its disappearance. What this question provokes me to foreground here is how my destroying of the original sound files, while maybe of passing interest as a note in this thesis, would be no radical move on my part. In fact it would perform quite the opposite effect, as the artwork would be disappearing without noticeable trace – the work would not reverberate in other places, for example in a wider audience’s memory or discussion of the work. Debora Halbert’s essay, which made me rethink ‘women’s interests in property,’ (and particularly the complex negotiations in claiming authorship or ownership over work), offers a feminist interpretation of intellectual property in the age of copyright and patent law:

Women’s interests in property can be viewed as seeking to avoid becoming the object of property and instead retaining the subjectivity to own property. This deontological position translates into the world of intellectual property. Subjectivity as a *potential* property owner must be acknowledged.<sup>33</sup>

She continues analysing Foucault’s author function, deconstructing the author as “authority.” In doing so she identifies two feminist readings: one which welcomes the decentering of the ‘monolithic “self”’ and the other which is ‘less willing to eliminate the concept of the author because female standpoints and subjectivity...express important aspects of women’s experience that could not otherwise be articulated.’<sup>34</sup> It is, however, beneficial in dealing with ‘the clash between the death of the author position and the need for autonomous feminist agency’ to resist

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<sup>33</sup> Debora Halbert, “Feminist Interpretations of Intellectual Property.” *Journal of Gender, Social Policy and The Law*. 14.3 (2006), 458.

<sup>34</sup> Halbert, 453.



creating a binary of these motives.<sup>35</sup> The “clash between” - resonating in both positions - offers the difference as a meeting place for discussion rather than a project to “solve.”

In advocating women finding a ‘balance between rigid ownership and total lack of control,’ Halbert echoes the pattern in my methodology of composing with voice in the continuous, and of simultaneously holding on and letting go. In practice, working with the voice one must continuously let go, which is why it is the subject of my analysis: through this journey I am discovering how the sound of the voice can continually shift the body’s subjectivity and representation. Through attending to the “spaces” I have chosen to host the voice, and provide conditions for its staging: the dark, the record and the character, it is my aim to highlight these shifts between voice and body, because it is in the act of the voice and body meeting and detaching from each other (again holding on and letting go) that resistant practice can take place. While in the next chapter I address the voice as a shifting property between bodies and the stage space, as an “acoustic stage prop,” I continue here with an analysis of how the acoustic properties of the voice on the record are temporally composed.

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One act of reproducing my work annotates this chapter in the form of a flexidisk record. These thin flexible records were most commonly found inside magazines in the 1950s as a means of including music before the flat and lightweight Compact Disk was invented.<sup>36</sup> I use the form here primarily because the flexidisk was invented to augment the materiality of the paper document, as a sonic document invented to “fit” inside the aesthetic form of printed matter. But there is another reason that the flexidisk resonates within this chapter: the narrative history of its form as

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<sup>35</sup> Halbert, 458.

<sup>36</sup> As with the other *Endnotes* included at the back of this thesis on CD, also accompanying this chapter is *Endnote 2* on CD, because the material properties of the flexidisk provide a very different kind of listening experience from the digital version. As I have noted, the flexidisk is an unpredictable format with poor reproductive quality. As this sound work is annotating specific points I make within the chapter, it is important that the audio is both intelligible as well as communicating the distinctive sound properties of the voice in mechanical reproduction. My hope is that in knowing you can listen to the digital file for clarity of content, the record can be appreciated for all its sticking or skipping, and that any incomprehension can offer potential points of interest rather than a search for clarity. I examine this need for intelligibly communicating the matter of sound in scholarly work in the final part of this thesis.

an audio document illustrates how those producing flexidisks were much less concerned with the archival preservation of the sound (including its fidelity), and more concerned with the immediate and wide dissemination of the sound, i.e. that the sound could move. The flexidisk as a form emerged in some contexts as an ideal method for mass reproduction because of how cheaply and quickly it could be made. As a result, very often the material of the disposable plastic form would obscure or transform the sonic material it was designed to hold. The likeness of the original was compromised as a result of its large rate of reproduction, which rather than de-aestheticising the original (as Benjamin argued) gave the sound a new aesthetic authority. This is evident too in the flexidisks made for this thesis: their distinctive sound - that of the record unmaking itself as it plays - is one of the reasons I chose the form here: reflecting the task of the voice unmaking itself in theatre space, an unmaking also effected by the materials (the wooden stage and the airy auditorium for example) in which it sounds.

Eduardo Cadava, speaking in a lecture about his book project *Music On Bones*, describes a particularly powerful manipulation of the flexidisk form that emerged in the USSR in the 40s (and continued through the 50s and 60s).<sup>37</sup> At this time a practice developed where crude phonographic recordings of Western Music were pressed onto discarded X-ray film. Known as “Jazz on Bones” and “Rock on Bones,” these poor quality records would circulate discretely and cheaply, the sound reproduction impressed on the photographic reproduction. Imagine these records made from the inside images of anonymous bodies holding only the sounds etched onto them for about two months. Then consider how Schneider relates the flesh that does not remain (in the archive) to the bone that does in *Performance Remains*. Disappearing from the X-ray records sound like the flesh, gradually ‘slips away’ from the document made of photographic bone. And when the sound-flesh has decomposed, the bones still remain to ‘speak the disappearance of the flesh, and to script that flesh as disappearing.’<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Eduardo Cadava, *Music on Bones: Salvatore Puglia & the Ruins of History*. Talk given at Slought Foundation at University of Pennsylvania on December 06, 2001. Can be accessed at: <http://slought.org/content/11054/>

<sup>38</sup> Rebecca Schneider, “Performance Remains.” *Performance Research* 6.2 (2001), 104.

The material impressed with the recorded voice lends its own acoustic properties to the sound quality. The X-ray records are a vivid example of the material lending symbolic meaning to the sound, not only through the explicit imagery of skeletons, but also through their past lives as medical props. Bearing the historical materiality of the flexidisk form, the “*Endnote*” accompanying this chapter is pressed on clear polycarbonate; paradoxically a group of materials most often used in architecture and engineering of buildings for their excellent sound proofing qualities. In my own use of this durable material, I offer a different kind of “sound proof:” a record document of the work under discussion in this chapter. In fact, all four *Endnotes* in this thesis are records by name *and* by nature, as documents of performances formally presented in the theatre and on the radio. Existing as proof and evidence that the performances took place at all, these *Endnotes* are also new iterations of the original performances, *re-sounding* the work as it originally took place, re-modelling the shape of the sounds in a new material form, and a new environment for its playing: whichever space you, the listener, are in when you listen – your space is recomposing the performance again anew.

After making the acetate dubplates of *Material Voice in Pitch Black*, I was struck in listening back how strongly they reproduced a certain time and place, as evidence that bodies once shared a room and speaking space together, and so very distantly related to the time of playing back.<sup>39</sup> In the wider context of this thesis, this observation is neither a revelation (as many people experience the uncanny, the deadly, the ghostly in listening back to audio recordings) nor a dismissal of the artwork that is the record itself. Rather, I note my response as it produced new questions regarding the sound of the recorded voice in relation to the live voice. During three years of my PhD I had been taking the acetate dubplates of *Material Voice in Pitch Black* with me to include in talks about my work, “dropped in” to the spoken papers I was delivering. The intermixing of the two temporalities of the live voice and the recorded voice, seemingly so attached to the present and the past respectively, led me to develop a new piece of work in which the live and the recorded voice would exist together in the shared temporality of performance,

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<sup>39</sup> It is important to note here that as I was present for the performance of *Material Voice in Pitch Black*, concurrent with my act of listening was my act of *remembering* the bodies speaking.

where both voices would be dependent on animating each other. I asked the practical question in making this work: Whether and/or how I might confuse both voices' temporalities? Using the live voice as an interlocutor with the record, could I activate a version of Diamond's 'shifting time-sense'?

I say "version," as Diamond's examples of feminist performance artists who 'transform performance time into temporality' are of artists who explicitly employ images of personal experience in their work (the military costume/the scat singing), to produce what she identifies as 'a force-field of conflicting temporalities.'<sup>40</sup> These elements, like the military costume, resonate through their mimetic reconfiguration of past historical moments and as such are discussed alongside Brecht's *gestus*, his term for the stage sign 'that reveals historical relations' and Benjamin's more ambiguous *dialectical image* which, developed in his Arcades Project, activates a meeting of the past and present through what Diamond interprets as 'a montage construction of forgotten objects.'<sup>41</sup> Rather than try and create moments of 'mimetic apprehension' through the time travelling of images, personal or otherwise (which is a more resonant theme within the next chapter) I wanted to observe how specifically the sound of both the recorded and the live voices arranged in conversation with each other might serve to shift the time-sense in performance: in the simple act of past and present speaking from the same script. The resulting work, *Playing Host* is a performance score for three voices: one on the record and two in the live.<sup>42</sup>

I wrote the script of *Playing Host* as a conversation in which voices question the spaces that play host to them, these being the record, the air and the mouth. Making the record a "player" in performance as a character alongside live voices, I recorded the voice parts for the record with spaces left for the live voices to speak within. As my own reading pace determines the length of the spaces on the record, when other voices have interacted with it in the live they have variously overlapped in speaking at the same time as the record, or finished long before the record sounds

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<sup>40</sup> Diamond, 149.

<sup>41</sup> Diamond, 146.

<sup>42</sup> Hear *Endnote 2*.

*Endnote 2* is included on both flexidisk and CD. Please cut the flexidisk out to play record.

again. This is most evident on the record included in this thesis, as I had consciously not rehearsed the performance in order that the timing of voices would not be pre-determined to neatly “fit in” as they had done in previous iterations. *Playing Host* has been performed four times to date: twice in galleries, once in a theatre and once on the radio. The version accompanying this thesis is the only time I have performed one of the live voices alongside my own recorded voice. As a consequence of my doubled voice in conversation between two temporalities it is this version, which I believe most acutely activates listening to a ‘shifting time-sense.’

In his discussion of the increasing drive for fidelity in the evolution of recording technologies, Don Ihde describes ‘a kind of auditory “Turing test”’ staged in ‘early public relations performances of “high fidelity,”’ where the musician and recorded musical pieces would be alternated behind closed curtains.<sup>43</sup> The radio performance of *Playing Host* with both my live and recorded voice activates a similar listening project. Significantly what does separate the two voices is the sound quality in aurally discerning the live from the reproduction. The sound property of the recorded voice, (especially as a reproduction of a reproduction here on the flexidisk record), is blurrily distant where the live voice is comparatively more defined. The recorded voice also observes a pace and prosody which relates a kind of solitary speaking (where you can almost hear the internal beating – keeping time), not in conversation with another body, nor either in relation to a listener or respondent. In contrast, the live voices are responding not only to the recorded voice, but also to each other so that the relationship between bodies sharing and speaking in the same space is audible in the voice.

While critics often attribute listening to audio documents as a backwards move, *listening back* to that past point in time, I noticed how the inclusion of the recorded voice as a keeper of time in *Playing Host* prompted a necessity to listen forward, to anticipate the arrival of its speaking again. The action of listening forward is given space and time in the longer gaps after a live voice

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<sup>43</sup> Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice, Phenomenologies of Sound* (Albany: State University of New York, 2007), 259.

has spoken. This happened in the performing of the work, as well as in the listening back. In performance (evident in the resulting sound), Robert Jack and I attune our voices to the pace and tone of the record, so that we “match” the voice we hear. As we had not rehearsed the timing of our speaking, what I hear is how we were practicing assimilating (into) the temporality of the record – composing the sound of our voices in the present through listening to sound past. To practice as an auditor-composer, as I discovered in my experiments with this work, I must be very aware of what auditory space one’s voice takes up, both in the specific spaces designated for it to speak, but also (and importantly) in those spaces that are not.

The physical effects of echo and reverberation delay the voice out of time, and have the potential to make the voice traverse its formal “entrances” and “exits” in performance. For this reason the final part of this chapter argues for the theatre space as a unique site of live vocal reproduction, that can make voice repeat, but repeat differently. I take on and give action to Diamond’s project of a ‘feminist mimesis,’ in which the relation to the real is ‘geared to change.’<sup>44</sup> If we combine Schneider’s investment in the ‘curious inadequacies of the copy, and *what inadequacy gets right*,’ with Diamond’s closing paragraph of her introduction to *Unmaking Mimesis* these theorists help me to an alternative way of thinking Benjamin’s auratic object and its reproduction:<sup>45</sup>

A feminist mimesis, if there is such a thing, would take the relation to the real as productive, not referential, geared to change, not reproducing the same.<sup>46</sup>

Martin Dixon’s claim that the imperfect audio reproduction, bearing the traces of its making and unmaking, is still haunted by ‘an auratic dimension’ is lent renewed force by Diamond’s provocation: what if the reproduction, rather than losing the auratic presence of the “original” gains an altogether more radical presence, one ‘geared to change’ rather than ‘reproducing the same’?

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<sup>44</sup> Diamond, xvi

<sup>45</sup> Schneider, 2011, 6.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

## Theatre as Reproduction Technology

Observing how sound moves in recording technology helped me return more complexly to thinking about how sound moves in the live, and particularly in the temporality of theatre. For all recording technologies' overstated claims to fidelity, to mechanically reproduce the material of live sound, as I have shown, is inevitably to alter it. The theatre, as a type of reproduction technology itself, also values "fidelity" (faithfulness to reproducing an exact copy - classical mimesis) as tricky to maintain in the live as it is on the record, i.e. maintaining the same sound of what is said to what is heard. I have discussed how the transmission of the voice alters the voice's sound in relation to Bloom's theorising the 'distance between' performer and auditor as the space where the voice can work subversively on behalf of the speaking body. Now I suggest the practice of the voice in the distance focuses on the return of the voice, and how it is reflected back to its speaker and other bodies as a result of echo and reverberation. For, it is in the *return of the voice* (both in theatre architecture and theatre's temporality) that the sound of the voice can be recomposed, potentially activating an aural moment of mimetic apprehension - subtle but audible.

Briefly let me define the acoustic characteristics of echo and reverberation in order to apply the method of their movement in this section. Categorised under the 'elementary' sonic effects in the acoustic sourcebook *Sonic Experience*, the effects of echo and reverberation are 'concerned with the sound material itself...that is, the mode of propagation of the sound.'<sup>47</sup> Both echo and reverberation are types of delay 'between the emission of a sound and its repetition,' where reverberation can be understood as the superimposition of echoes on top of one another. As a result an echo returns a clearer representation of the sound emitted than reverberation, in which multiple 'reflections of the sound on surfaces in the surrounding space are added to the direct signal.'<sup>48</sup> The sound returned when speaking in a large enclosed space like a Cathedral produces a classic performance of reverberation. The effect of a resonant overlap of the sound emitted,

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<sup>47</sup> Jean-Francois Augoyard and Henry Torgue (eds.) *Sonic Experience: A Guide to Everyday Sounds* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>48</sup> Augoyard and Torgue, 111.

reverberation can be used to enrich sound production, especially in the context of the musical performance, where for example Gregorian chant ‘uses the long reverberation effect of abbeys to produce a virtual polyphony.’<sup>49</sup>

In my investigation using Diamond’s *Unmaking Mimesis* I examined how these acoustic and temporal effects of echo and reverberation provide ways of unmaking voice while in the process of reproducing it. In order to activate a ‘feminist mimesis’ in aural terms, where the ‘relation to the real’ is ‘geared to change’ it is necessary to identify that the voice can make copies of itself in the architectural space of theatre, with varying degrees of correspondence between the original utterance and what is eventually sounded back. As the voice leaves the body, it travels through airspace and re-composes its acoustic properties within the built structure of the theatre. In the context of early modern auditoria, Smith writes that the South Bank amphitheatres were thought of as ‘sound-devices’: the ‘instruments for producing, shaping and propagating sound.’<sup>50</sup> His detailed analysis, including annotated architectural diagrams, of the way sound moved through the space of the Globe Theatre and the Blackfriars Theatre shows how the round and rectilinear shapes hosted sound differently. Not only shape but material played its part in composing the auditory space. Smith describes the primarily wooden material of the Globe’s construction as able to ‘return to the ambient air a high percentage of the sound waves that strike them.’<sup>51</sup> Very much like an instrument, the wooden beams and boards had sufficient air behind them to act as resonators, so that the stage of the Globe operated ‘as a gigantic sounding board.’<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Augoyard and Torgue, 116.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, 206.

<sup>51</sup> Smith, 209.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Another striking acoustic observation in Smith’s work is regarding the sound of the voice and how ‘the higher the frequency, the greater the absorbency.’<sup>52</sup> As I have been interested in how pitches are altered through distance, Smith’s observation is important to note here. Although the absorption of the adolescent male voices’ higher frequencies in ‘the arras, the surface of the yard, and human bodies’ would have been more significant than for the lower frequency masculine voices, the perceivable effect would have been mitigated ‘by the size and shape of the Globe.’ When combined with Smith’s further point about the higher frequencies fading faster than the lower frequencies in the area ‘to a speaker’s sides or even to his rear’ a case begins to build around the disappearance of the boy player’s pitch, and by extension the female character’s pitch. (Smith, 211). This further identifies the theatre space as one that recomposes the acoustic properties of the voice. With certain materials in the theatre’s structure (including clothed human bodies) effectively stripping away the higher frequencies, the voice could be perceived as a lower frequency the further away from its point of utterance.



The sound that is not absorbed in the theatre is reflected back into the auditorium. Although both echoes and reverberations return the sound to the speaker/listener, the difference between the two can be understood through the amount of reflected sound they “throw back.” The echo, characteristic of sound reflections over long distance, returns a distinguishable sound after the silent delay of its return journey.<sup>53</sup> This journeying of the echo was the subject of an illustration by Athanasius Kircher in 1673, whose “Speaking Statues,” designed to funnel sound from outside to inside, I mention in Chapter 1. In Kircher’s drawing, reprinted in Bloom’s chapter on *Echoic Sound*, the voice of the speaker is returned through echo, systematically breaking down the initial utterance into smaller and smaller component parts. At a nearer distance to the body the word is still intact, but the further away the voice travels ‘the sounded word “clamore” is shown to break down by degrees, with each produced sound uncannily resembling a comprehensible word (“amore,” “more,” “ore,” “re”).’<sup>54</sup> Kircher’s illustration makes graphically evident that the echo recomposes its transmission and its return. Furthermore the example of a word returning new words at increasing distances shows the potential for distance to reproduce not only an altered sound of the voice, but also an altered meaning. However improbable this neat dissection of words is in practice (as Marin Mersenne’s early 17<sup>th</sup> Century project of ‘echometry’ served to demonstrate), the echo does leave what Kahn calls ‘trailing fragments.’ In fact Kahn’s analysis of the echo supports Kircher’s phonemic decomposition (while also showing that the direction of unmaking can be reversed - this time from the tail-end of the word/utterance):

Depending upon the duration of speech and where the speaker is standing the echo will breakdown the tail end of the utterance to smaller and smaller, syntactic, morphemic or phonemic elements.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Also pertinent here is the echo’s physical time and space travelling: that the echo can *take time* to return, and that time delay maps the distance in space. Distance can be scientifically calculated through multiplying the return time of an echo by the speed of sound. This returns me to the gaps between speaking and listening in *Playing Host*: I think of them as akin to the delay spaces of echo: those gaps between speaking and waiting for the return of the voice. Like calling ‘hello’ into a cave or canyon and waiting for the sound to bounce back, so the live voice waiting for the record to speak listens forward for the return. But before the returned voice, there is that space – a space of time – in which the sound travels, absorbs and reflects, determining that the repetition is never the same as what was first called out.

<sup>54</sup> Bloom, 178.

<sup>55</sup> Douglas Kahn, “Acoustic Sculpture, Deboned Voices.” *New Music Articles* 8 (1990) 3-7, 6.

The pluralising echoic voice makes audibly evident the return of the same but different utterance. The speaking body's project (with the audience) then is to pattern this difference into sameness (to work out how the voice reattaches to the body) – the vital equation in Diamond's moment of 'mimetic apprehension.' Or could it be that the aural 'mimetic apprehension' can't help but pattern difference into sameness into difference into sameness... the project of the forever looping continuous composition?

The return of the voice in theatre's temporality, the historical echoes that come to reverberate within its representational framework, presents a way to think through these questions more clearly. The echoes that manifest themselves in this way – the 'ghost notes' - do so similarly to those that are sound, as they return to the stage something correlating with other temporalities 'where one time sounds an other time.'<sup>56</sup> The motion of the echo in this sense patterns difference into sameness: to overlay different temporalities, different bodies, different agendas into a moment of strange sameness – a moment of 'mimetic apprehension.' These echoes of the memory return to the stage something even less tangible than sound: a form of experiencing Benjamin's "sensuous relation" between past and present. But, what happens after the audible patterning of these different contexts restores into a brief experience of sameness? Does the "sameness" then pattern itself into "difference" (and on and on), as the practice of the physical sonic echo?

Kahn writes that 'since classical times, if not before, echoes have aspired toward the ability to sustain the return, the lasting of the leaving, enjoyed by phonography.'<sup>57</sup> Theatre's temporality plays host to 'the lasting of the leaving,' an expression which resonates with the motion of the continuous present, and attempts to make sense of what lasts in the (long) act of disappearance. Part of this making sense is to do with the returns that are not, or cannot, be tangibly made on the stage: those that resonate elsewhere, in the wooden boards, in the air, in the voice of the bodies on stage. In the next chapter I use these questions as inspiration, thinking how character

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<sup>56</sup> Schneider, 2011, 65.

<sup>57</sup> Kahn, 1990, 6.

plays its part in the discussion. Smith's definition of character as 'located not in the actor on stage, or even in the audience's imagination, but somewhere between the two – in the air, within the wooden [o:]'<sup>58</sup> makes of character a shifting stage property bound to the motion of voice. As I have shown above, the voice is lent character through the medium it travels through, from the re-recorded tape of Starr's singing mother and the malfunctioning character of the X-ray flexdisk record, to the pitch-stripped character of the Globe's reverberating wooden walls. Voice is primarily defined through its character and significantly (for a project concerned with the auratic) *its own* unique character. Yet, once on theatre's stage, multiple characters collide as temporalities do, complexly co-existing patterning difference into sameness into difference into sameness... in time out of time in time out of time...

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<sup>58</sup> Smith, 280.

## CHAPTER 4

### Her Voice in Character

In this chapter I focus on the multiple characters and characteristics that attend the voice on stage, and develop and illustrate my definition of character, which is interpreted *through sound* and particularly the voice. Over the course of this research I have practiced more and more in hearing and discerning the subtle movements in single voices and where they might sound like themselves and sound like others in the same utterance. I have found in practice that the voice makes audible shifts in character, closer to an *incarnation* or *inspiration* of a performer's body than a *dramatisation* of it. And yet, as I will show, dramatisation has played an integral part in illuminating some complex affects of vocal character. If we were to apprehend Dolar's 'infinite shades' of a single voice and hear those shades as layers and layers of present and cross-temporal sounds we would be getting close to hearing the complexity of character through sound. Over the course of this chapter I will illustrate how in performance, character and voice move in a similar way – in motion with each other through bodies, times and spaces – animating multiple voices in a single voice. And so my interpretation of character necessitates an 'affective engagement,' with what is sounding in many places at once.<sup>1</sup> Schneider cites Teresa Brennan's definition of the 'transmission of affect,' a version of the 'way affect jumps between bodies,' which is an appropriate phrasing for thinking through the journeying of sound in the air as palpably taking up time and space.<sup>2</sup> While the character's voice on stage inevitably enters into semiotic space, a widely theorized form of analysis for reading character as a stage sign, my interpretation of character through voice resists this framework.<sup>3</sup> My definition of character exists not as a sign,

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<sup>1</sup> Schneider, 2011, 36.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Analysing character, as this chapter illustrates, is in no way straightforward. A semiotic analysis, as one way to approach a reading of the complexities of the stage character, also demonstrates the multitude of layers to take into consideration in any single study. Elaine Aston and George Savona make this evident in their attention to Character in *Theatre As Sign-System: A Semiotics of Text and Performance*, which meticulously charts the various ways in which character's relation to text, to psychology, to the frame and to the actor can make meaning of the sign. As well as Aston and Savona's own diagrammatical explanations for semiotic theatre analysis, the book includes Anne Ubersfeld's comprehensive grids are included. Also in the book is Patrice Pavis's questionnaire, which provides a similar grid-like system, where data can be inputted and results formulated and performance is also deconstructed into its component parts. (footnote continues on next page...)

but as a complex amalgam of affective vocal matter including bodies, air, walls – an energetic volatile mass which is always changing, crossing times and spaces and vibrating between bodies.

Smith writes that ‘the object the audience [of a performance] hears in a human voice is character.’<sup>4</sup> What, then, is this affective object? Through my staging of vocal characters I have come to practice with the voice as a type of volatile ‘stage prop,’ which as Smith writes exists ‘in the air’ as well as in the bodies of speaker and auditor<sup>5</sup> The character-object also exists across many temporalities, as Andrew Sofer makes clear through his analysis of the physical objects in *The Stage Life of Props*, where the objects are mediated not only by the body of the performer/actor who “handles” them, but also by the ‘horizon of interpretation available to historically situated spectators at a given time.’<sup>6</sup> As an audience’s interpretation of character largely develops through the sound of the performer’s voice (identified by Smith), sound space offers the scope to characterise voice, and investigate how interpretation is arrived at through sensual apprehension.<sup>7</sup> Gaining an understanding of character this way –through an audience’s apprehension of acoustic properties of the voice – can, as I have found, produce versions of Diamond’s ‘mimetic apprehension,’ where ‘a wild collision of past and present’ can be perceived by ear.<sup>8</sup>

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(...) In this chapter I am attending in part to the relation between character and its appearance as a type of complex stage object, which inevitably brings up the stage object as a sign, especially as I cite Andrew Sofer’s work on the stage prop, which deftly illustrates how reading the theatre stage as sign-system makes everything a significant object of analysis. Sofer writes ‘If all that is on stage is a sign, it becomes very difficult to decide what on stage isn’t “an object.”’ Crucially Sofer also illustrates how these props are always in motion and exchange, in stage space and through historical time. Sofer’s reminder that ‘a single material sign-vehicle can convey an unlimited number of meanings’ (alongside his approach concerned with ‘the temporal and spatial dimensions of the material prop in performance’) complicates the stage object as any stable, easily locatable sign (8). As a result, in my interpretations of character through voice and voice through character I provide readings, which exist in relation to, but distinct from, semiotic analysis. For it is in the wider un-gridded world of Pavis’s question 13, where this research into voice takes place: “What cannot be put into signs...(and why?)”

<sup>4</sup> Smith, 245.

<sup>5</sup> In one such reading of how Smith’s character-object in the voice might relate to the auratic object, my attempts turned into the kind of equation that returns the result of  $\pi$ . I say this here if only to demonstrate one of the moments in the process of this research, where balancing actual (objects) with virtual (objects) has hovered precariously between nonsense, fantasy, and revelation. While I do address the auratic object in relation to the character of the voice later in the body of the text, my initial rehearsal of the relationship of the character-object to ‘auratic object’ returned, as I say above, the  $\circ$  as  $\pi$ .

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Lie of Props* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 61.

<sup>7</sup> The sound of the performer’s voice in developing character is of course made up of the acoustic properties and the language content carried in speech.

<sup>8</sup> Diamond, 181.

The personas of the Auditor, The Invisible Woman and Echo each mark parts of this chapter to perform their own methods of vocalisation, each a variation of the auditor-composer, she who speaks through audition. Through these personas and my experiments staging versions of them (or attempting to “listen back” to them in the case of The Invisible Woman and Echo), I analyse the uncertain characteristics of character *by ear* and how a singular body can be affectively remixed through giving voice to multiple characters.

### **Acoustic Characters**

I came to this investigation of character as a result of working with the recorded voice, which developed its own character in my work. My writing, performing and listening to *Playing Host* - developed in practical work with the vocal materials of “past” and “present” in the form of the recorded voice and the live voice - proved that there are certain audible characteristics that mark the temporal location of the voice. My attempts to pattern the live and recorded into a shared temporality delicately exposed the nuances of both materials’ audible expressions of time. What are the acoustic characters of the “past” and “present”? As I have found, the recorded voice can sound the past through characteristics ingrained in and on its material. The older the record gets, the more attenuated its hold on the phonographic inscriptions, with each play of the record the listener hears every scratch and dirt-filled groove in sound. The recorded voice is discerned as “past” not only because of its accent or diction, but crucially because the aged material (of the record) translates, once played, into the sounded traces of past existence. These scratching, cutting sounds confusing the voice on the record produce the aural equivalent of sheer curtains obscuring the detailed features of a body behind them. Thus the voice on the record speaks through the curtains of sounded time, filtered through swathes of noisy material. Projects such as Starr’s *Mum Sings Hello*, and Alvin Lucier’s influential 1969 soundwork *I am sitting in a Room* deliberately make the medium perform its existence, producing sounds urging us as listeners to experience material decomposition as the composition of discrete times coinciding. The noisy material these artists produce *reveal* the sound of the “past,” while in the explicit process of

concealing the comparatively clearer sound of the original live recording.

The record in *Playing Host* produced a character of the past through its blurry edged words and its remote speech, as a lone solitary and distant speaker pausing for live intervention. Many years from now this record will respond differently as a result of its material degradation (and to new or aged live voices). For this study I wanted to make a piece of work, substituting the record for a live vocal character who could not only respond differently in every performance, but also speak in intervals designated as her own speaking space and lasting whatever duration her own pace determined. Experimenting with how “past” and “present” might sound through a live character’s voice, I wrote a script for live voices in which one character would act as Auditor to three other voices, responding to what she had heard at designated points during the performance. The resulting work, *Constellation Piece*, is therefore both script and score. Three characters: Estella, Boy and The Aviatrix are scripted parts, while I instruct the Auditor to respond in the time and space of performance to the three characters’ questions. My initial intention for this work - to discover how the mix of live scripted voices and a voice composed (improvised) in the live would shift an audience’s experience of temporality through different manners of speaking - in practice did not play out as I had intended. But, the *not playing out* demonstrated the Auditor’s vocal shape in the interstices of what I expected. The *not playing out* illuminates something else of the Auditor’s character, something of her vocal multiplicity, which I focus on here for the compelling presence of the personal voice within the voice of the persona.

As the Auditor’s character played out differently I experienced an audible vocal haunting. The unique character of one’s own voice haunts the performance of any dramatic characters and visa versa, so that on stage many characters accumulate in the singular speaking voice. Marvin Carlson, whose concepts of ‘haunting’ and ‘ghosting’ provide a foundational reading of theatre’s temporality for many of the theorists I cite within this work, reminds us of the audience’s stake in perceiving different times in the present time of dramatic performance:

There appears to be something in the very nature of the theatrical experience itself that

encourages...a simultaneous awareness of something previously experienced and of something being offered in the present that is both the same and different, which can only be appreciated by a kind of doubleness of reception in the audience.<sup>9</sup>

As I have found this ‘doubleness of reception’ does not just hold true for familiar dramatic characters’ reappearances on stage in each new production (for example when one has over time witnessed several different actors playing Hamlet and they all reverberate in the staging of the *Hamlet* one is watching *now*). The Auditor’s character in *Constellation Piece* - herself a character whose role it was to dedicatedly listen in order to respond - also demanded a listening from the audience which could negotiate hearing her own voice through its dramatisation. I thought that providing the Auditor with a score (offering instructions for interpretation), rather than a scripted part, would result in a vocal performance improvised *in* the performance. Yet while I had imagined the Auditor would respond “in the moment,” she had in fact prepared her responses to perform in advance, so that she was not the informal live respondent I first considered, but a dramatic character of her own making, drawn from her own life experiences. In effect she responded to my script by writing her own script. I am indebted to the brilliance, dedication and generosity of voice teacher and actress Maggie Pittard who took the role of Auditor and made it her own, as working with her provoked me to understand the voice differently again. I recognised that Pittard’s Auditor, practicing in and out of the character, materialised a compelling doubleness in her voice, hard to ever apprehend as either her own or a character’s voice, as though she was *playing her own voice*.<sup>10</sup> Pittard’s Auditor did not practice a manner of speaking composed in thinking out loud with all its breaks and tangents, as the motion of thought patterns the sound of the speech. Instead she provided a manner of speaking that did

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<sup>9</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003) 51.

<sup>10</sup> At the same time as working on *Constellation Piece*, I was concurrently performing in P.A. Skantze’s live radio play, an experiment in physical radio, *All That Fell*; and Marcia Farquhar’s *The Common Room*, a radio play recorded in the (now closed) library at the Byam Shaw School of Art. I was aware that the way I was practicing with voice in these two artists’ work was having an effect on the way I was making *Constellation Piece*. Having worked closely with Farquhar and Skantze for over ten and five years respectively, I saw their influence on my performance as integral, especially in relation to performing in and out of characters and “one’s own voice.” Even though not explicitly on stage for *Constellation Piece*, Farquhar and Skantze were in the constellation nonetheless, and so I produced a partner work to *Constellation Piece*, called *Companion Piece* with extracts of writing by all the people (consciously and unconsciously) inspiring my own voice.



something stranger than exposing thought through speech. Pittard performed a character she had composed for herself, *of herself*.



*Constellation Piece*, 2011. Photograph: Sam Willan.

After providing her with my script, Pittard and I maintained a long correspondence about the role of the Auditor, who I explained should be an intermediary between the three other characters and the audience, acting as both a character and an audience member simultaneously. The script of *Constellation Piece* left the space for the Auditor to respond, and Pittard wrote notes during our conversations, which eventually became her own script. The Auditor in *Constellation Piece*, modelled on Beckett's Auditor in *Not I*, responded to three suspended characters, whose bodies like Beckett's Mouth were placed high above the stage floor, marked out as dark silhouettes against a backdrop of stars. While the three suspended characters (Estella, Boy and The Aviatrix) were placed high up near the ceiling of the theatre against a star cloth, the Auditor sat half way between the elevated characters and the ground of the stage in a single spotlight. The scenography of *Constellation Piece* reflected the Auditor's position as belonging to both the stage and the audience. I made a conscious decision not to place the Auditor *in* the audience, as I

wanted her to retain a certain suspension in space, of being simultaneously both speaker and listener, and also the performer of her own distinct monologue.

As Schneider argues, theatre is ‘a medium of masquerade, of clowning of passing and not passing, the faux, the posed, the inauthentic, the mimetic, the copy, the gaffe – all given to interruption and remix.’<sup>11</sup> Theatre’s logic acts on any body or any thing put in its frame, especially when dealing with the doubling, or even multiplying, of a body through character. As Pittard’s Auditor in *Constellation Piece* demonstrated, the character of a singular body’s voice is continually given to ‘remix,’ an appropriate word for thinking through the way sound is composed and re-composed in relation to voices past. In musical terms the ‘remix,’ configures material already composed to create a new composition, derived from the original, yet distinct in its sound. As with the reverberating voice, which patterns itself anew in theatre’s material and temporal framework, the composition of the remix is different; the remix is composed differently. And yet in the composing, the remix inevitably handles elements of what once was, touching material of another time, so that ‘everything is the same except composition and time, composition and the time of the composition and the time in the composition.’<sup>12</sup>

My hypothesis was that it would be the three elevated characters that would provide more information about this remixing of temporalities through the voice, as I had written their characters as constellations of various historical and literary personas: for example in Boy’s character, the voice shifts between speaking as a post pubescent boy player, singing David Bowie riffs and responding to Estella as Charles Dickens’s Pip from *Great Expectations*. And yet, the Auditor (through the script she wrote in response to mine, and through my positioning of her in the ‘in-between’ space) did something to the voice that made it nearly impossible to comprehend her speaking as either herself or her character, making much stranger the relationship of her body to her voice through speaking herself as character. I had thought that the three characters above would project complex voices made dimensional in reading their scripted parts (characters made

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<sup>11</sup> Schneider, 2011, 89.

<sup>12</sup> Stein, “Composition as Explanation,” 2004, 27-28.

up of many other characters), but the way Pittard's voice transcended her scripted character cast the other voices as simpler than I had expected. In my thinking through the two elements that made the Auditor's vocal character so compelling, I realised that both the Auditor's spatial positioning between the stage and audience, and her doubled voice speaking between her own voice and that of her persona, are both forms of speaking *in-between*. Pittard's scripted responses to my own writing tell of her personal experience working with her own and others' voices in her professional and personal life. In the extract of *Constellation Piece* included with this writing, Pittard responds to my question 'How do voices take their time?'<sup>13</sup>

The answer (to the question above) is the last of three speeches that Pittard's Auditor delivers, and here the dramatisation of her own voice is particularly audible. Although I directed all three suspended characters' to speak in their "own voices," as speaking voices without formal vocal training they provide a counterpoint to the sound of Pittard's. A trained vocal actress, Pittard's "own voice," conditioned by its years of work shaping the sounds of words in her body means that she changes the character of her voice through holding her body differently. Pittard's Auditor sat still in the performance of *Constellation Piece*, the character of her voice determined not by the movement of her body, but by her own breathing and pacing of her speech. In my directions for the Auditor I asked Pittard to remain as still as possible, like a speaking portrait or statue, making all movement through her voice. And so when she says 'voices do take their time, consciously mapping, routing, the arc of a performance' she signals that a way voice *can* move through space is to take up time, to take their time, just as she takes *her time*. The content of Pittard's final speech describes vocal lessons across times, and generations, where 'the past affecting the future' happens not only in performance, but spills into life: 'You have something to say. Say it. You have something to sing. Sing it. Voice through the noise. Even that in your own head.'

Speaking her own experience through the character of Auditor, Pittard's voice complexly oscillated between what belongs to her body, her history and her life and what belongs to the

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<sup>13</sup> Hear Endnote 3.

character, the performance and the stage. Pittard's urgency about how voice matters thus merged *both our senses* of how voice matters, a result of our detailed discussions beforehand, and her wish to reflect the tone of my writing in her own. I named *Constellation Piece* after Benjamin's concept of the dialectical image that flashes up when 'what has been' coincides with the 'now-time.' In my staging of multiple similar characters meeting in singular bodies I imagined I might constellate the voices of both bodies and characters in what Diamond describes as 'a singular sensuous moment of discovery.'<sup>14</sup> In practice though, Pittard's fusion of the voice speaking from life experience and its dramatic delivery constellated body and character differently - not so much to host a 'singular sensuous moment,' or a moment of 'mimetic apprehension,' but rather to offer a successive sensuous experience of a body simultaneously speaking in and out of character.

As well as creating a voice moving between her own personal experience and the responding persona of Auditor, Pittard's body was positioned in-between the stage (the platform for the three suspended characters) and the audience. The spatial marking of the location of the Auditor as the 'somewhere between' identified by Smith where character materialises, I also intended to be the vital space - identified by Schneider in her response to Duncan's theorising the resonant voice - that carries the traces of the body in the voice, as 'embodiment does not stop at the skin but pierces the air between us, and punctures the time separating us.'<sup>15</sup> It is in 'the air between us,' in 'the spaces we generally understand as between bodies' that the body *and* the character of the body can be located.<sup>16</sup> Through performing the character of her own voice, I hear Pittard's voice in *Constellation Piece* as claiming its double existence in the air, as her voice carries the traces of both her body and her theatrical character in its delivery.

Let me meditate briefly on this twice embodied theatre air, which hosts both body and character through voice, before I turn to what happens when an object, a stage prop, is staged to embody the voice of the performer.

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<sup>14</sup> Diamond, x.

<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Schneider, "In Response, A Call." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16.3 (2004), 309.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

## Character, Body and the Air In-between

Smith writes that character is located somewhere between ‘the actor on stage’ and ‘the audience’s imagination,’ – and that the ‘somewhere between’ is ‘in the air.’<sup>17</sup> Drawing attention to how the body is lent character through the motion of the voice, Smith reminds us that it is ‘through sound,’ that character as *persona*, *per-sona*, *per-sonare* is produced. Connor further acknowledges that air and sound exist in mutual relation:

Air is the body of sound, in the sense that it is the occasion, medium or theatre of sound. But sound is equally the body of air - air gathered into form, given itinerary, intensity and intent.<sup>18</sup>

Through this exchange of sound and air, character materialises. As I have found, though, anything materialised by, or in, or with, air is unstable and unpredictable, and as my practice has proved, character is no different. In fact, what we might understand as the unique character of someone’s own voice is a particularly unstable character, especially when staged. Character hovers in Smith’s theatrical ‘in between’ for just this reason - constantly shifting through: 1) acoustic properties collected not only in its spatial itinerancy, but also in its moments of temporal return, and 2) the audience members’ imaginative identification of the voice with other voices or sounds. I placed the Auditor in this in-between in order to emphasise her place in the space that integrates both the actions of listening and speaking, as a character who helps locate the characters of others’ voices as a physical go between. More significantly, as I have articulated above, her positioning in-between echoed her simultaneous speech as a character (*Auditor*) *and* as herself (*Pittard*).

If the air is the place where character materialises (Smith), and the body leaves its traces (Duncan) does the air host the intermingling, the confusion, of the voice of character and the

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<sup>17</sup> Smith, 280.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Connor, “Sound and the Pathos of the Air.” Birkbeck University of London, <http://www.stevenconnor.com/pathos/> (accessed on February 24th 2010).

voice of the performer? In theory, according to Smith and Bloom, air does play a subtle but vital part in the formation of characters. In practice, then, what is the role of air in making character?

Significantly, Schneider finds a ‘kind of affective remain’ in an instance of embodied air in her analysis of ‘Hodge’s bloat,’ – the air filled body of ‘Robert Lee Hodge – an avid Civil War enthusiast’ whose notoriety stems from his convincing simulation of ‘a bloated corpse’ in historical reenactments.<sup>19</sup> Simultaneously attempting to breathe life *and* death into the character of a civil war corpse, Hodge provides an extraordinary example of Diamond’s ‘mimetic apprehension.’ Appropriately this mime can only ever be apprehended rather than clearly comprehended or even ended, as *playing* dead can only ever be a temporary act. Eventually Hodge’s body filled with air has to expire its stored breath, in order to breathe again, to live again and die again. It is ‘Hodge’s bloat’ that so emphatically characterises the body as corpse. Even while (presumably) in civil war costume, and ‘lying prone,’ Hodge’s character is most strikingly convincing as a result of his impersonation of *air*. Producing a temporary body modification, ‘Hodge’s bloat’ as Schneider emphasises is for enthusiasts of the reenactment movement ‘evidence of something that can *touch* the more distant historical record.’<sup>20</sup>

Air is the material that, once pushed through the vocal folds, makes voice. Before lending the air the character of the body it is made in, it is, as Stephen Connor suggests, ‘neither on the side of the subject nor of the object.’ Air has no ‘single form of being, manifesting itself in a multitude, and never less than a multitude, of traces and effects.’<sup>21</sup> As a result the air contained in Hodge’s bloat, once returned to the air will manifest itself in many other sites of elemental motion, for example as Connor suggests in ‘the hiss of a tire’ or in ‘the vortex of leaves on a street corner.’<sup>22</sup> Connor shows how air recycles, and through doing so how it can *touch* other times. Is it too far a stretch of the imagination to wonder if traces of ‘Hodge’s bloat’ were in Starr’s whirling eddy? While this is completely out of the realm of proof (and neither am I trying to suggest that

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<sup>19</sup> Schneider, 2011, 101.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Connor, “Next to Nothing: The Arts of Air.” Birkbeck Univeristy of London, <http://www.stevenconnor.com/airart> (accessed on February 24th 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

‘Hodge’s bloat’ could be air recycled from the seventeenth century battlefield), it nevertheless locates ‘Hodge’s bloat’ as just one of the manifestations of air, one of its ‘traces and effects.’ As a result, Connor’s contestation cited in my introduction, that ‘to work with air, is to wish to become it,’ is resonant in such a handling as Hodge’s. For, whether consciously wishing to become air or not, inevitably Hodge’s bloated character cannot help but act *like* air, resisting a clear reading as subject or object while also participating in the production of recycled time.<sup>23</sup>

The air is the medium where character and body imaginatively and complexly meet, where they might infuse, confuse and diffuse each other. As the host of the in-between air Pittard’s Auditor combined both actions of listening and speaking in one body, and so in effect she became the medium herself.<sup>24</sup> A character as conduit, Pittard’s Auditor recomposed the questions of those characters above her into answers always directed to the audience. In this way voices passed on, were relayed from the back heights of the theatre, through the Auditor, to the audience at the opposite end. Dramatising her own voice, Pittard played the Auditor with a doubled voice, one which carried the material of both her body and the script within it. Witnessing this patterning of body and character in a singular voice led me to further investigate those acoustic properties of the voice we claim to be our own, and how the sound of the unique, auratic voice cannot escape character once on the theatre stage.

## **Acoustic Properties 2**

In the last chapter I focused on two applications of “property” in relation to the live and recorded

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<sup>23</sup> In *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, Marvin Carlson refers to the ‘recycling of material’ in dramatic theatre including the recycled text and the recycled character: ‘In the case of recycled characters the audience is expected to bring to its experience not a knowledge so much of such a specific narrative line, but, rather of the character traits of one or more familiar figures, who continue to demonstrate those already known traits with changing situations.’ (44).

<sup>24</sup> Pittard’s expert handling of air is also a result of her vocal training, and in learning how to work with air and breath. The skilled vocal actor, as Cicely Berry illustrates, is trained to adapt voice to different acoustic spaces. While ‘extra force is needed to fill a theatre’ and ‘very particular control is needed in a studio’ what Berry’s vocal exercises significantly foreground is that to resonate with distinct architectural spaces, the vocal actor must learn to use the resonant spaces in her own body. Depending ‘on the resonating spaces for the quality of sound,’ the actor must learn to breath internally in order to learn how her breath takes up space externally. From Cicely Berry, *The Voice and The Actor* (London: Harrap, 1973), 19.

voice. Here I turn again to acoustic properties with two intentions: 1) to offer a brief example of how character is identified by the acoustic properties of the voice, and particularly the properties of the voice that might be characterised as female; and 2) to consider a specific instance in which the female voice is treated as an acoustic stage property in relationship to a ventriloquised object, and more crucially, as an acoustic “prop” in and of itself. In “listening back” to the spectacle of *La Femme Invisible*, one of the preludes to Robertson’s Phantasmagoria show of 1798, and in the light of what I have discovered in my own contemporary practice with voice in and out of the body, I show how voice can practice a vital “appearance” as both disembodied and embodied: as a shifting property in the theatre air.

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Acoustics can ‘give voice away’ – we can identify spaces through their distinct acoustic characteristics and their effects on the voice: imagine the voice in the swimming pool, the supermarket or the busy roadside. But we can also be tricked by acoustics: even if we don’t believe someone is trapped underground, we might say ‘you *sound like* you are at the bottom of a well.’ This is part of the fascination with listening to the voice: its relocation in space completely serving to alter its acoustic properties. While obvious in terms of the recorded voice (or any sound for that matter), as the copy can be played repeatedly in different spaces and on different machines at different distances to recalibrate the acoustics of the sound, the audible voice as I have shown also relocates itself in the live. However, the voice that performs in the live comes to the stage already characterised, already bearing acoustic properties (pitches, volumes, accents, inflections), which have been culturally and socially identified. Of course defining the character of the voice happens in the ears of the receiver. As I will show below, discerning the character of the female voice is tied to seeing or imagining the image of her body. When that body is absent, or when it is not ‘ideal,’ the voice too can stray from what might be characterised as ‘female.’

The characteristics of voices are often defined as sounding *like* something else, whether taking on the acoustic properties of the space they are in, or igniting a version of ‘mimetic apprehension,’ in



which a mother's voice might be heard, or that of a well-known historical persona. The voice even lends itself to stranger similarities, such as Gertrude Stein's 'laugh like a beefsteak,' which as Carson deftly identifies leads to a case of cannibalism when 'artfully confused' alongside the factual information that 'she loved beef.'<sup>25</sup> Stein's voice like meat is of course imposed on her – as the definition of how someone else hears her. Carson goes on to describe in Ernest Hemingway's quick escape from Stein's household 'because he could not stand the sound of her voice,' an escape betraying the shock for the receiver of women's voices when they stray from sounding like someone's (and Hemingway's in particular) traditional expectation of the sound of a female voice.<sup>26</sup> Adorno's often cited dissatisfaction with the 'shrill' female voice on the record is described as the absence of 'body as complement.'<sup>27</sup> He wrote in 1928 that: 'the female voice requires the physical appearance of the body that carries it' without which it sounds 'needy and incomplete.' Perhaps four years prior to the publishing of Adorno's "Curves of the Needle" Hemingway had also heard the voice without a body in a similar register? As if the female voice without a visible body projects a character that shares a common difficulty in comprehension, let alone apprehension?

While the disembodied voice Adorno refers to is singing on a record 'needy and incomplete,' Stein's speaking voice (as Hemingway hears it from downstairs) is (quite *uncharacteristically*) 'pleading and begging.' These interpretations are of course always according to the interpreter so we reproduce them as interpretations, and in Stein's case we will never know what she sounded like in the moment of Hemingway's hearing. While it appears that neither the singer nor Stein is totally conscious of the live exchange with their auditor, both these voices are characterised not only by their lack of body, but also by their lack of apparent composure.

These two examples suggest that the female voice without body is impossible to apprehend, albeit in two distinct contexts. While the sound of Stein's voice provokes Hemingway's retreat,

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<sup>25</sup> Carson, 121.

<sup>26</sup> Ann Carson, "The Gender of Sound." *Glass, Irony and God* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1995), 121.

<sup>27</sup> Theodor Adorno, "The Curves of the Needle," trans. Thomas Y Levin, *October*, 55 (1990), 54.

distancing himself further from both voice and body, the singing voice on Adorno's record causes his desire to get closer to the voice, to witness the voice as embodied. For Adorno, the body the gramophone eliminates is female, where the male bodies (with voices 'reproduced better') Barbara Engh suggests are 'identical to the body of the apparatus.'<sup>28</sup> While men sound as compliment to the machinery of the gramophone, Adorno fantasizes about meeting a mythical body that would clarify the sound of her voice. In contrast Hemingway runs from a present body he could encounter uncomfortably, as Stein's vocal liveness proves the forceful proximity of her body. Both Adorno's and Hemingway's reactions to two different vocal characters not only imply that certain characteristics in the voice draw the listener closer, while others physically repel, but also suggests that the *character of the live voice* has more agency than the recorded voice in speaking the force of the body's close presence (even when invisible). Of course the voice in song has a large part to play in the historical seduction of ears, but as Engh concludes 'in any woman's disembodied voice one sees immediately a reflection of one's own self-desiring glance – *or not*.'<sup>29</sup>

Depending on our subjective connections to a single voice, the sound of the voice can physically *move* us as listeners. Our perception or apprehension of characters in the voice as listeners also complicates the subjectivity of the speaker. *To sound like* is, of course, to act mimetically, an act full of the complexities of sounding *like*, but not *as*, so that hearing and identifying characters in the voice *distances* the voice from the subjectivity of its speaker. And yet, the characters that appear in the voice practice the shifting patterning of difference into sameness, unmaking mimesis while in the mimetic act, never fully characterising the voice of another. While skilled actors produce vocal characters who can cause an audience to temporarily transform *sounding like* into *sounding as*, outside of dramatic theatre, characters always shift in the voice of an other. As I will show below with reference to *The Invisible Woman*, pinning a voice to a sound source is as impossible a task as attributing any single character to the speaking body. In a similar but inverted act, I will show that audiences can not only apprehend multiple voices in a single body (as with Pittard's Auditor), but also apprehend a particular solo voice in multiple bodies, *and*

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<sup>28</sup> Engh, 129.

<sup>29</sup> Engh, 131. [Italics mine].

objects.

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I have found (specifically in my work with *Constellation Piece*) that the voice in performance becomes an acoustic stage property where the voice is in continuous exchange between character and performing body, and also between this doubled body (of character/performer) and the audience.<sup>30</sup> Bloom's project foregrounds that voice 'has a history of production, ownership and exchange':

Whereas literary critics have tended to conceive of voice as language, equating it solely with aesthetic and textual concerns, early moderns considered the spoken and heard voice, on and off the stage, to be a substance with economic, theatrical and mechanical dimensions... Like props, voices are often imagined as unmanageable, beyond the control of those who ostensibly operate and "own" them.<sup>31</sup>

Oratory, considered the science of mastering the voice, had to contend with the voice and the impossibility of the speaker's total control. This practice of oratory demonstrated the voice as a sound 'substance' in early modern England. Skantze suggests the voice could be used for its rhetorical force in public speech making as affect, a persuasion without record:

A form of performance employed to persuade in sound, oratory influences as it disappears into the air, not available for later analysis unless the listener has a perfectly retentive

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<sup>30</sup> In *Constellation Piece*, not only were these two kinds of exchange activated, but the three elevated characters and the Auditor exchanged questions and answers. As none of the characters spoke simultaneously or over one another, the audience's attention shifted from speaker to speaker, so that speaking space also became the property of the character. How the voice takes up space has become an important consideration within my work, especially as traditionally the way women take up sound space is through excessive forms of speech, deemed too loud, too fast or too emotional. The female hysteric, for example, is characterised by the unrestrained sounds she makes, while the nymph Echo, whose character I discuss at the end of this chapter, is punished for her garrulity. These types of speech exceed the boundary lines marked for women in a speaking space.

<sup>31</sup> Bloom, 6.

memory.<sup>32</sup>

Through my practice with the speaking voice as an artists' material and as a stage material, I have considered the complex relationship between manners of speaking and the listener's comprehension. For this reason I chose to use Roosevelt's speech as script, and listen to our differences in vocal delivery while our voices made patterns around, atop and over each other. When words can be carried away in the voice without record, vocal meaning can be hard to apprehend for long, and sometimes defies comprehension. As Skantze's description of oratory suggests, the live voice without record has to become the property of memory if the listener wants to return to it. Voice can be retained in the bodies of skilled listeners, but however brilliant at remembering the listener is, holding the voice as embodied property over time will inevitably alter it. In contrast to speech-making, the voice in theatre demands a different kind of attentive listening, 'a doubled reception' (Carlson) to what is always (at least) a doubled voice. Rather than holding on to the sounds of speech, in theatre we let go continuously of what we have heard in order to receive more, in order to move with the pace of the play, or Stein's time of performance, where the time of the spectator is made auditory. And so voices materialised in the bodies of the theatre audience are the momentary property of these bodies.<sup>33</sup>

Voice belongs to many bodies in theatre and also to the stage: to the temporality of the performance arc and duration. While impossible to own this shape-shifting, body-hopping property, the making material of voices as Jane Gaines argues in *Contested Culture* encounters problems in technological documentation:

The increased scientific precision as well as the increased availability and prevalence of audio recording and transmitting devices have produced the voice as something susceptible to proprietarial claims because it is less and less material illusion and more and

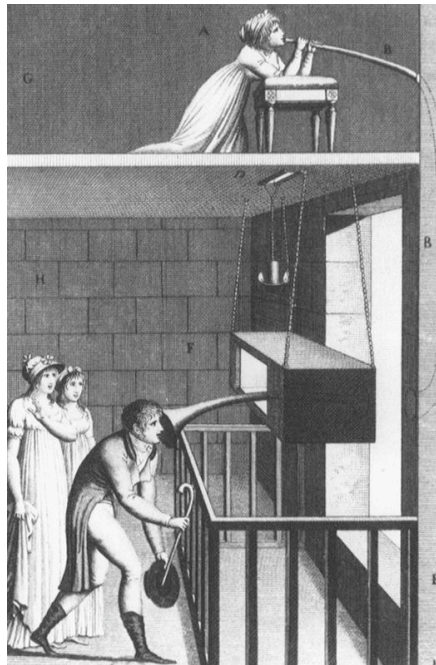
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<sup>32</sup> Skantze, 98.

<sup>33</sup> Of course sound memory is also retained after the performance too. After the event, our memories to an extent remix what sounds are remembered into a composition of embodied experience.

more material attribute.<sup>34</sup>

While sound cannot be bound to the stage in the same way a physical object can (it can neither be tangibly placed nor easily located), the play between what is seen and what is heard and how they are connected can offer methods to destabilise any easy ‘proprietary claim.’ In my practice I have been directing voice to appear as both *illusion* and *attribute*, as a rich subject and object, a shifting property (of shifting acoustic properties), which can challenge in its vital “appearance” as simultaneously both disembodied and embodied. Because primarily ‘the visible sign systems of ventriloquism... serve to misdirect the audience to the ostensible source of the sounds or voices,’ the voice must also be considered in terms of what is seen, what is visible on stage, be that a body, an empty stage, a microphone (or in the “illusion” of *The Invisible Woman*, a suspended glass ball) in order to negotiate *how* it is being heard.



*The Invisible Woman*

One of the preludes to Robertson’s Phanasmagoria show in 1798, *The Invisible Woman* (La Femme Invisible) suspended a glass ball (sometimes two) from the ceiling of a contained room

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<sup>34</sup> Jane Gaines, *Contested Culture: The Image, the Voice and the Law* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 119.

and from a set of tubes emanated a woman's voice, fostering a strange 'acoustic presence.'<sup>35</sup> Jann Matlock, in her essay on this acoustic magic act, describes the way spectators would transform into auditors on entering the spectacle:

Spectators were herded into a room containing an elaborate contraption supposedly conducting sound from the glass ball (or box) hanging from the ceiling. A chosen spectator was invited to converse with the girl whose bodiless essence was claimed to reside in the suspended container. To the amazement of all onlookers, the unseeable woman could describe spectators, name objects held up below the glass, and even make her breath felt through the tubes.<sup>36</sup>

In the picture of the illusion (on previous page) the woman, whose voice so intimately engages with the spectators, is hidden in a room above. Able to observe the people below, the invisible woman could then hold her audience captive listeners, as they wondered at the ability of a disembodied voice to see so clearly. With no body in sight, the glass ball, in effect, became the source of the voice, as if the stage prop produced the voice travelling through the tubes. The suspended glass ball was given voice by a speaker whose capacity to speak came from her capacity to see, to watch her audience's movements and gestures. That people held up their personal objects to the glass ball suggests the audience assumed the ventriloquised object had the capacity to see, hear *and* speak all at once. Other senses of the audiences came into play because the glass ball was only one part of a larger set of apparatus, including the tubing through which 'her breath could be felt.' The glass ball acted as a singular stage prop, within an elaborate set of instruments, all combining to channel different elements of the woman's voice to the different receiving senses of the spectators.

When the spectacle moved to North America renamed *The Invisible Lady* and displayed in various forms 'most frequently during 1804-1805,' spectators were encouraged to seek out the

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<sup>35</sup> Jann Matlock, "The Invisible Woman and her Secrets Unveiled." *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 9.2 (1996), 176. Image of *The Invisible Woman* from Matlock.

<sup>36</sup> Matlock, 175.

source of the voice, to piece back voice with body.<sup>37</sup> Wendy Bellion describes how in the American exhibitions, *The Invisible Lady* ‘paradoxically enabled its own disempowerment.’ For while realising ‘the possibility of a “female gaze”’: a disruption and an inversion of the hegemonic “male gaze” of power...the exhibition helped assuage and even deflate concerns about gender and (in)visibility by encouraging spectators to interact with and ultimately locate the concealed speaker.’<sup>38</sup> Remember how in Chapter 1, I cited Dolar who warns of the ‘crumbling of the aura’ in the location of voice source, as the acousmatic voice ‘loses its fascination and power’ and its ‘charismatic character.’<sup>39</sup> But Dolar also draws a paradoxical conclusion, in that ‘the source of the voice can never be seen.’<sup>40</sup> To seek out *The Invisible Woman* and make her visible is thus an impossible act of disacousmatization, as ‘every emission of the voice is by its very essence, ventriloquism.’<sup>41</sup> While objects, such as the glass ball, can be placed as stand-in sources, imagined to be the origin of the voice, Dolar suggests that we ourselves mimic these ventriloquised objects, detached from our own voices, as ‘the voice can never be pinned to a body without a paradox.’<sup>42</sup>

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the paradox that the voice can never ‘match what we see’ is continually negotiated and challenged in the theatre, as the staged disembodied voice is lent the visual properties of what is seen. The ventriloquised stage object demands a different attention to listening in correlation with a tangible visual focus, an object of focus with visible dimensions and surfaces, which then translate into the sound of the voice. Ventriloquising by way of a visible stage prop not only offers another method for lending the voice dimension but also a way in which to emphasise the strange impossibility of ever completely attaching a voice to a single sound source. While impossible to hold as a property for long in any receptive body, Dolar reminds us how difficult it is to ever assign the voice as someone’s/something’s with complete certainty, as ‘like a bodily missile,’ the voice both leaves the body and ‘points to a bodily interior,

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<sup>37</sup> Wendy Bellion, “Looking for the Invisible Lady.” *Citizen Spectator: Art, Illusion and Visual Perception in Early National America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 234.

<sup>38</sup> Bellion, 234.

<sup>39</sup> Dolar, 67.

<sup>40</sup> Dolar, 70.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Dolar, 197.

an intimate partition of the body which cannot be disclosed.’<sup>43</sup> The audience of *The Invisible Woman* participated in assigning voice to the “origins” of the glass ball and tubing, and in the later iterations of the spectacle in North America (where the woman is revealed) the performance depended on audience willingness to accept an illusory voice source. From preserving the mystery of the glass ball to the subsequent versions of *The Invisible Woman* where the speaking woman was revealed, the woman’s voice in both instances is attributed to what an audience can (or is offered to) physically and visibly locate.

As a version of the auditor-composer, *The Invisible Woman* is perhaps more accurately described as a spectator-composer, watching in order to reflect back what is visible to her through vocal description. In this illusion, the female voice practices a continual exchange between the bodies of both performer and audience as well as the objects that belong to the illusory stage space (the glass ball and tubing) and the audience’s own property (held up to the glass ball for the invisible woman to describe). Never still, the voice is a property that reverberates in the body and out of it, in the object and out of it, and furthermore, like Massumi’s bouncing of the self-relating echo, my representation of voice bounces against objects, while also being one.

### **Echoes after Echo**

Both as an acoustic phenomenon and the reverberating repetition of an idea or feeling, echo and its capacity to make sounds return to the listener is integral to my practice with sound as a performance material. After the imposed delays between speaking and listening in *Playing Host* and the staged delays between the three elevated characters and the Auditor in *Constellation Piece*, I wanted to hear the delay not through silent gaps, but through voices speaking out of time, voices on top of each other and inside each other. Everything I had previously staged preserved a kind of formal conversational framework in “taking turns” to speak. *Material Voice in Pitch Black*, *Playing Host* and *Constellation Piece* all had scores/scripts from which to perform,

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<sup>43</sup> Dolar, 71.



and my direction of the voices followed the direction of the text, where Character A speaks, and Character B speaks below, and on *down* the page. I became aware how at the points of either a mistaken or a conscious overlap of voices, the patterning of both voices while obscuring each other's words, created something like an acoustic depth of field in which listeners heard sound move in and out of certain and uncertain forms: from words to sounds and back again.

The performance of *Like sweet bells jangled out of time*, the last piece of practical work I made as research for this thesis, developed out of my desire to collide voices, to syncopate two unique female voices animating two Canonical characters' voices. I had already found through Pittard's vocalising of the Auditor that her personal (auratic) voice combined with her dramatic delivery resulted in the compelling simultaneity of de-personalising and re-personalising her own voice. For *Like sweet bells jangled out of time* I asked two women, who like Pittard have practiced with their voices professionally for many years - artist Marcia Farquhar, and singer Debsey Wykes - to speak two speeches from *Hamlet*.<sup>44</sup> Although both Farquhar and Wykes have different training and relate to their own voices as instruments in different ways like Pittard, they perform with their own distinctive voices in their practice. In the performance I created for them I wanted to observe how they might speak in and out of both their own vocal characters and the canonical characters of Hamlet and Ophelia. *Like sweet bells jangled out of time* depends on the manipulation and creative use of echo, sounding a series of echo effects; I will analyse these effects with the aid of Bloom and what she calls 'the compelling legacy' of the character Echo.<sup>45</sup>

The mythical character Echo and the action visited upon her as eternal punishment personifies the echo and the way it performs. That the acoustic echo bares the name of the classical female

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<sup>44</sup> While I asked Marcia Farquhar to perform in my work in her own right as an artist who has practiced with her voice for many years, I must add here that she is also my mother. The mother and daughter relationship is never explicitly the subject of our working relationship, and is neither the subject of the work under discussion here, but nevertheless I should make the relationship explicit in order for it to remain implicit.

<sup>45</sup> In my own investigations imposing a long and wide expanse between the performer and audience in the theatre I have been attending to what sounds of the voice reverberate and return. While this is not an attempt to replicate the experimental acoustic architectures and propositions of the early modern sound theorists (including Kircher, Bacon and Marsenne), their methods of thinking through sound as material has been vital in my practicing with the voice as a performance material. Significantly, these methods come to me through a generation of theorists working now (including Bloom, Khan, Smith and Skantze) who have opened up the spaces for applying such experimental sound work in artistic practice today.

character is important to expand upon here for three reasons in relation to *Like sweet bells jangled out of time*: 1) because Echo's disembodied voice cannot help but haunt the airwaves in any discussion of acoustical echo; 2) because Echo is a female character who practices with sound and animates a specific vocal practice in which she is both speaker and listener; and 3) because literary interpretations of the Echoes after Echo provide her character with new methods of vocal invention, methods I have investigated in the work mentioned above.

My subtitle "Echoes after Echo" suggests that there is an original character from which to depart, but as John Hollander comprehensively illustrates in his study on *The Figure of Echo*, before her appearance in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* as the nymph Echo, 'we first hear echoes in Homer as reverberations and amplifications of battle noise or falling trees.'<sup>46</sup> Echo could not have come into being without identifying characteristics of the acoustic world, and now the acoustic world cannot forget her. The repercussion of this origin story born out of the mutual relation of sound-effect and character ensures the reappearance of the mythic persona of Echo through association, as in Hollander's example of Lucretius hearing the 'effect of a six or seven-fold echo' and as Lucretius continues, 'echoes such as these cause imagined nymphs and satyrs to come into being.'<sup>47</sup> Let me give a short review of the interpretations of Echo in literature to chart subtle adjustments in her character, adjustments that I then use to offer methods for interpreting Echo and echo in performance.

Ann Carson writes in *The Gender of Sound* of 'the haunting garrulity of the nymph Echo' who is 'described by Sophokles as "the girl with no door on her mouth."<sup>48</sup> Carson's subsequent reminder that 'putting a door on the female mouth has been an important project of patriarchal culture from antiquity to the present day' casts the girl with doors flung wide as a vocal disturbance to the silencing authority of patriarchal culture. Once doomed to repeat the trailing remnants of others words, however, can Echo no longer disturb? Echo as mythic character is, as

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<sup>46</sup> John Hollander, *The figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: Univeristy of California Press, 1984), 6.

<sup>47</sup> Hollander, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Carson, 121.

Skantze rightly describes, ‘a female voice who through perpetual motion sacrifices invention of ideas for elegiac repetition.’<sup>49</sup> Echo eulogises her own disappearance until she is a voice alone, but her disappearance is never complete. As a character too Echo endures, and through her literary afterlife as a character returned to and translated she begins to find her own methods of invention and intervention as a ‘disembodied and uncontrollable voice.’<sup>50</sup>

In Bloom’s analysis of ‘seventeenth century poet, traveller and mythographer’ George Sandys’s translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, she details the ‘eerie possibility’ that Echo’s might be a ‘volitional voice.’<sup>51</sup> Even though Sandys’s translation ultimately casts Echo’s power of self-expression as ‘immoral,’ Bloom identifies ‘how compelling Echo’s legacy can be for contemporary feminist theories of agency.’<sup>52</sup> A significant part of that legacy is evident in Echo’s vocal practice, as Bloom writes:

Whereas Ovid’s Latin poem merely suggests that echoic sound can constitute voice, Sandys’s translation more clearly represents aural reverberation as Echo’s self-expression. Perhaps most tellingly, Echo’s first word in Sandys’s translation is the pronoun “I”

In a literal act of translation, Echo is granted her own subjectivity to speak her own words. In a new author’s hands she is reinvented, and however slight the interventional “I” might appear, Echo’s character begins to claim agency in speaking for herself. As a character whose destiny (and trait) is to return only the last words or syllables of another’s speech, significantly she begins to construct the emphatic *beginnings* of her own. As we saw in the last chapter, Khan clarifies how the acoustics of a physical echo can return the beginnings as well as ends of speech depending on the ‘duration of speech and where a speaker is standing.’<sup>53</sup> The differently positioned speaker, who causes an echo to reflect the beginning of her speech can be compared to the differently positioned author, who causes Echo to claim her own assertive first word. Speaking from

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<sup>49</sup> Skantze, 69.

<sup>50</sup> Bloom, 161.

<sup>51</sup> Bloom, 164.

<sup>52</sup> Bloom, 185.

<sup>53</sup> Khan, 1990, 6.

different locations in space and in time composes the character of voice anew using the materials of the past: whether the materials are the altered sounds of an echo in different landscapes, or those literary materials altered in a new generation's approach and application.

More early modern moves in Echo's evolution can be seen through Bloom's analysis of the Duchess's echo in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, and her reminder that Echo's character in Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, 'speaks about forty independent lines' as a monologue.<sup>54</sup>

Although not the character of mythical Echo per se, these Echoes after Echo cannot help but become attached to her legacy, cannot help but resemble and haunt (Carlson) her in character. The Echoes after Echo will always be Echo and not Echo in the way that characters return in different texts, different stagings, different bodies. And what appears in these instances is a type of citational echo, a spectre of past Echoes. In analysing a dramatic character very much a spectre of past Echoes, a form of phenomenal return, Schneider makes evident the multiple returns implicit in a staging that reverberates. Drawing attention to how the staged spectre (the actor playing the disembodied persona of Hamlet's father) might make shifting temporalities appear from the sight of one body, she identifies a community of correlating "characters" attending to the live actor who is already 'behind the spectre's visor:'

For if behind the spectre's visor may be a live actor, certainly behind (or to the side) of the actor may be a spectre – of other actors, other spectres, other faux fathers, other scripts.<sup>55</sup>

Where the Echoes after Echo differ from Echo's first incarnation as a doomed repeater make that "the girl with no door on her mouth" reappear with a vengeance. Her new-found agency to speak differently, to compose differently, is all the more forceful because of her (non) narrative past. Rather than repeating history, the Echoes after Echo make new interventions using language to identify their own subjectivity in subtle, but significant ways. In Bloom's

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<sup>54</sup> Bloom, 242.

<sup>55</sup> Schneider, 2011, 110.

configuration of how Echo, ‘constitutes her personhood through the words which are available to her’ – those sounds she has heard, I would argue that Bloom describes the practice of the auditor-composer. As I suggested in the beginning of this study in thinking more complexly about how Ophelia practices composition, like Ophelia, Echo recomposes what she hears and as a practiced listener is ‘ready to await the sounds.’<sup>56</sup> Gradually though, through time, Echo appears as a character who not only listens to other’s voices, but more importantly composes the sounds of her own. Giving Echo the autonomy to speak her own lines decentres the symbolic trait of her character, because she finds her own vocabulary and/or she artfully discerns what words to repeat. The autonomy granted the echo’s character in *The Duchess of Malfi* is significant, because her responses are formed as knowing answers. On hearing the echo near the Duchess’s tomb in Act V, Scene III, Delio encourages Antonio to make of it what character he will, but ultimately the echo determines her own character:

Delio: I told you t’was a pretty one. You  
may make it  
A huntsman, or a falconer a musician,  
Or a thing of sorrow.

Echo: *A thing of Sorrow.*<sup>57</sup>

Bloom observes how ‘the echo throws sounds back to their producer, creating what appears to be an independent vocal act’ and I would suggest this is as much a mark of the physical character of Echo as it is of the dramatic character. Echo is both listening subject and speaking subject:

The echo’s capacity to “speak” is precipitated by its capacity to “hear,” as hearing and speaking become two sides of the same disembodied vocal process, virtually indistinguishable from each another.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Bloom, 171.

<sup>57</sup> Webster, John. *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. Leah S. Marcus (London: Methuen Drama, 2009), 325.

<sup>58</sup> Bloom, 161.

Khan identifies the acoustic phenomena of the echo as ‘the only pre-phonographic method to hear one’s own voice,’<sup>59</sup> but in relying on a reproduction of one’s voice, bounced back from a reflective surface, the sound will always return altered. This important practice of speaking in order to listen again differently to that speaking is part of Echo’s compelling legacy *and* how she can participate in the project of Diamond’s ‘feminist mimesis,’ which ‘would take the relation to the real as productive, not referential, geared to change, not producing the same.’ Echo and echo offer a way of *unmaking mimesis* but not only through practicing with recomposing the physical properties of sounds heard.<sup>60</sup> While Echo can and has been used simply as the vessel and carrier of other people’s words the Echoes after Echo demonstrate that re-writing, re-staging, re-interpreting characters through time recomposes the character in each “new” appearance. Furthermore, the farther away the legacy of the distant and impossible “original” Echo (or any legendary or popular character), the more of her versions attend the character we witness now. Echo’s ‘compelling legacy’ for feminism is present in her vocality ‘geared to change.’ Like Ophelia, who in my reading practices with echoic re-phrasing, Echo’s mimicry is never simple. As Ophelia confuses her traditional positioning as deferential to Hamlet’s words, so to does Echo in her conscious editing of other’s sentences.

I applied this method of subtle rearrangement to my own experiments in practice with the performance of *Like sweet bells jangled out of time*, in which syncopated acts of speaking and listening in singular bodies and between bodies would give voice to characters from the past. Provoked by *Playing Host* to think of the spaces not formally designated for speaking within (the delay space in echo), I made a piece of work juxtaposing both Hamlet and Ophelia’s most canonical speeches (*To be or not to be* and *O, what a noble mind is here overthrown!*), and composed the voices speaking in delay, so that in effect the second body (Wykes) performed the echo sound of the first (Farquhar). I directed Farquhar and Wykes to perform the characters in their own voices, but not to act them. Between the two speeches, I asked Wykes to sing a part of Ophelia’s ballad, and to compose the tune in the act of singing it. Ophelia’s ballads have remained with me

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<sup>59</sup> Khan, 1990, 6.

<sup>60</sup> Diamond, xvi.

as significant instances of Ophelia's recomposing in every new staging of *Hamlet* I have seen. Ophelia's singing voice is recomposed and re-tuned in the body of each new actor who plays her, the most recent instance involved a composition by well-known musician PJ Harvey for Vinette Robinson's Ophelia in Ian Rickson's *Hamlet* at The Young Vic (London). For many directors Ophelia's singing grants an opportunity to *pre*-compose her song, and so reversing this I asked Wykes not to rehearse for her singing interlude, but to improvise the tune, composing the song in her own time.<sup>61</sup>

*Like sweet bells jangled out of time* was played in the stairwell of the Jubilee Building at Roehampton University, playing from inside a cupboard, with the sound source invisible. For some people, it was Wykes's singing that most haunted the stairwell, as it moved, carried away into the nearby spaces.<sup>62</sup> While the song was an important part of the composition of *Like sweet bells jangled out of time*, the two speeches either side of the singing materialized compelling effects in relation to the two voices speaking in echoic delay.

As both Hamlet's and Ophelia's characters are played by the same two women's voices the only distinction between Hamlet and Ophelia is the words they speak – their doubled voices sound in the same tone and the same pace. Sounding the same, the two speeches either side of the singing also echo each other, strangely patterning Hamlet's words into Ophelia's words *through their sound*. This effect is compounded when certain words or phrases across the two speeches reverberate with each other, for example Hamlet's 'Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer'

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<sup>61</sup> Hear Endnote 4.

<sup>62</sup> I received a written response the evening after the work had played from a fellow student at Roehampton University, Austin McQuinn, who said he was compelled to write because the work had been haunting him. The voice singing from under the stairs had particularly resonated with certain personal histories of his own. He wrote 'how easily some voices become locked away - or preserved - or how others become lionised and even fetishized - and how the most precious are lost' and that still remaining with him was 'an indelible image of the lock on the door of an un-used cupboard under the stairs and the music of made-up singing, of a voice amusing itself, a complex enchanting siren, and a history of under-heard voices.' This response re-emphasised for me how personal and subjective the listening experience is, and that in apprehending, we hear what we choose and what we are able to. Furthermore it strikes me there is a gendered nature to this response, in the hearing of a siren in the female voice – and I wonder would a woman hear the siren too? As I am often reliant on my own experience as auditor to my work, responses such as the one above are important not only in augmenting my understanding of the audience reception, but also to illuminate the very distinct and personal "pasts" that resurface in the present moment. A moment of 'Mimetic apprehension' will occur differently for each audience member, and not necessarily in the places a director or performer might intend for the similarities to make a constellation.

finds its echoic bounce in Ophelia's first line 'O, what a noble mind is here overthrown!'

Adding to the resonance between the two speeches, Farquhar's and Wykes's voices speaking the words practice a time delay, which at points naturally synchronises and then falls out into delayed syncopation again. In my listening, this patterning in and out of each others' speech materialized a rolling time and space in which the rhythms of listening and speaking occurred in Stein's continuous present. Instead of the echo being produced by the architecture within which the initial sound is produced, the echo in this work becomes a character herself, someone who re-sounds through listening. The character Echo is summoned to "appear" within the work, as the methods of her character are used in the delayed repeated voicing. And so the character of Echo haunts Ophelia and Hamlet, while in sounding the same Ophelia and Hamlet also haunt each other's voices.

In this already reverberant echo chamber, there are also the doubled voices of Farquhar and Wykes, animating characters through their own characteristic voices.<sup>63</sup> When I first heard the two women's voices come together again after Wykes's singing and speak Ophelia's final words, I experienced the closing lines with renewed force and meaning. Where the two voices speak 'like sweet bells jangled out of time' they are characterised again in resonant relation with bells sounding in delay. To be out of time is of course in another way to be glaringly present *in time*, to break any passivity in listening, as attention is made sharper by what sounds off the beat or discordant. Significantly, the Shakespeare editors have variously changed the line to 'sweet bells out of *tune*.' Out of time and out of tune, resistant voices must practice outside of harmonic orders, as those unstable sounds demand a different kind of listening - an attuning to the productive potential of listening to all temporalities at once.

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<sup>63</sup> Of course my familiarity with both voices means that to a certain extent "character" is what I hear as a result of my relationship with these women. However when I speak of the character of their voices in the context of this work, it is for the acoustic properties of their voices: their tone and timbre, their delivery, accent, pace and measure. Unlike Pittard in *Constellation Piece*, the script from which Farquhar and Wykes speak is not their own composition, therefore whereas Pittard's personal vocal character "appeared" through her speaking from experience, I approach Farquhar's and Wykes's vocal characters here in relation to their sound quality.



## ENDING...

### Listening Out

Continuous present is one thing and beginning again and again is another thing. These are both things.<sup>1</sup>

Composing in the continuous does not save the composer from making endings – without endings how could we ever ‘begin again’ to use Stein’s other distinct, but related methodological approach to ‘a continuous present’ in *Composition as Explanation*. Through my practice, especially the close work I conducted with echoic sound that I discussed in the last chapter, I have come to understand that *ending* again and again is as valuable an action as beginning again. Rather than suggesting that sounds disappear in the end, I suggest that sounds reverberate on, playing out their lasting endings by bouncing off of other surfaces, patterning other spaces, and in doing so beginning again. While for many people coming to an endpoint that stays put is important, in my practice spanning performance studies, sound and feminism, I am endlessly inspired by theorists of motion and returning. I specifically use Stein’s writing as a model for theory, as in her work the motion of the everlasting is perpetually changing, gaining energy and renewed purpose in the act of sustaining itself. For this reason I have used “moments” quite particularly in this thesis as a measure of time describing the temporary apprehension of sounds, because “a moment” connects the sense of a brief and exact period of time with the sense that it is *in momentum*. And so, I do not intend this ending to close or conclude what each chapter begins again and again to explore, but to present some of my collected thoughts about the female vocal body in performance, thoughts which have been gathering momentum in the moments of composing the arc of this thesis.

Having said this let me offer a few full stops before continuing, orientating to my work in the chapters one more time so that you have the research I have built through them in mind. As each chapter is a model for stopping, so too do they feed into one another, and while assumptions

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<sup>1</sup> Stein, “Composition as Explanation,” 2004, 25.

might not be disposed in one chapter, they live in a different way in the ones following. The model of the auditor composer quite explicitly reverberates throughout the whole thesis and does so again further on in this ending. Outlining the auditor-composer in detail in the Introduction, I connected two time zones (from Elizabethan England to now) to observe how differently and similarly a woman using her own voice in 2012 composes. I identified that between the two times one of the main areas of difference is the control the female auditor-composer has over her own compositions, her speech, her artwork – a theme that returns through the chapters, especially in the two sections discussing the varied possibilities of ‘Acoustic Properties.’ In Chapter 1 then I took up the challenge of articulating how voice can be understood and used as a material. In my wide-ranging reading for this contextual discussion, the voices developing the conversation were many. In my initial draft of *Material Voice*, 28 voices (including my own) were part of this poly-vocal chapter. *Material Voice* proved to me not only that Voice as a subject is a large and interdisciplinary field with a host of contesting and correlating definitions, but also that one of the true intents of this work is using “channeling” as a method. Listening to others voices in order to practice an appropriate appropriation of others’ work, to turn language into action, led me to my live staging and recording of the first chapter, which Chapter 2 then discusses. From Chapter 2, on the voice in the dark, I established my interest in, and investigation of, the long distance staging where the performer and auditor are far away from each other in time and space, and Chapter 3 takes up this productive distance again investigating the space and time between the recorded voice and the live, finding the echo in particular a way to practice both audible and affective ‘returns’ of the voice in theatre. Through my practice in Chapters 2 and 3 I found that the voice’s strange ability to echo and reverberate is also part of defining the multiple *characters* of voice. Alongside Chapter 4 I staged two performances to test my theories of character through sound, finding (in a kind of cyclical return to the auditor-composer) that my staging of the Auditor (in-between the audience and performers) most affectively practices with many voices in her own voice. As a result Echo ends the chapter as a character I identified as one practicing speaking many voices in her own, and finding that repeating, but repeating *differently* is a strategy which gives action to Diamond’s project of a feminist mimesis in aural terms.

I come to this ending then realising that one of the contributions to knowledge I can begin to take from this research is in the form of the methods and tools of the notion of the auditor-composer, as the application of the auditor-composer could launch other questions when applied in other realms, for colleagues working in music or the history of art for example. In any extended discussion of the aural, we will often travel through many disciplines to make sense of sound. The chorus of other people's voices within *this* work as a whole – in quotations, citations, on records and in the live – prove again how far and wide sound ranges. I brought together the cast of theorists, fine artists, performers, inventors, scientists, playwrights, actors and dancers attending this work to show how related these seemingly singular figures are *through sound*. For these voices all share a common practice engaging with the performance of sound. In most instances the practice is explicit, as in Samuel Beckett's staging of disembodied female voices, or Gina Bloom's theorizing of the materiality of the female voice. In other examples the performance of sound might be implied as in Anthony McCall's gigantic light sculptures named *Breath* or John Tyndall's descriptions of gazing at seemingly vibrating stars. Crucially, while not recognized as "theorists of sound," Elin Diamond, Elizabeth Grosz and Luce Irigaray have in their own ways vitally *provoked* me to practice with the performance of sound as a resistant, feminist material, providing theoretical methods to translate into, and understand through, vocal practice. In my performance practice many voices from different times and spaces of making collide, and so too have voices collided *here*, in the writing accompanying the work I have made in the theatre. Through practice, most particularly with Pittard's Auditor, I found that what we hear in the theatre, especially the sound of the voice, is nearly always perceived as polyphonic, composed of more than one singular voice or "signature sound," and so it makes sense to me that this writing should host such a correlating collective of individual voices. Schneider writing about *hearing* the "solo" in collectivity and collaboration observes that

often a "solo" artist performs as if alone or singled out, only to perform a kind of echo palette of others, a map of citations and a subjectivity so multiply connected as to be

collective.<sup>2</sup>

The oscillation between one's own subjectivity and collective subjectivity in speaking has been an important practice within my work. Even when multiple bodies have been on stage, they have practiced as themselves *and* others, with their own voices *and* the voices of others. I would even suggest that the sound of the singular voice is always performing a plural 'echo palette,' the discernment of which (the colours and 'the infinite shades of voice') depends on *who* is listening and *how* they are listening.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Pittard's Auditor I positioned a performer to dedicatedly listen to the sounds around her, which produced a kind of multiplication in Pittard's voice, as she responded to calls from the characters above in the collaborative act of speaking and listening. Schneider's description of 'call and response' indicated in jazz and blues provides a comparable illustration of the patterning in and out of speaking and listening that becomes such an intricate composition:

Solos, in jazz, cite each other, bleed into each other, react to each other, re-enact each other, and perform an entire cross-hatch of work in which the "solo" quality of any one action becomes profoundly riddled with the echoes of precedence and the fore-cast echoes of future response (as one waits for the response after a call, mishearing that response in the call, before a response is even uttered).<sup>4</sup>

Without attempting to disentangle the sounds that have already been played or been spoken, I have willingly listened to the momentum of confusion as a productive form of reception. I have found that listening closely and thoughtfully to voices means letting go of any project whose perfection lies in extricating every layer of sound and analysing it as if the voice were an artifact found on an archeological dig. The voice resists observation through attempts at preservation. Rather than fixing or keeping sound, moving with it emerges as a productive way of listening, 'to

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<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Schneider, "Solo Solo Solo." *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance*, ed. Gavin Butt (London: Blackwell Press, 2004), 36.

<sup>3</sup> Dolar, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Schneider, "Solo Solo Solo," 2004, 37.

become by motion aware' as Skantze proposes, to what else we might have access to through hearing if we *perceive in motion*.<sup>5</sup> The practical and theoretical methods I have developed investigate how sound can move and be made to move as a performance material in motion within and between bodies on stage and in the auditorium. Practicing with sound exposes how these movements can be delicate to detect, perceived by ears able or willing to listen out for them. Using the voice as a material, I have developed my capacity to listen to – and to understand – the subtle changes in the voice's texture as I have directed it to perform in different times and spaces and bodies. Thinking through what I hear, I listen out for the sound, and all its reverberations, even those I imagine. Erlmann's project in *Reason and Resonance* focuses on 'the materiality of perception – that is, on such things as air, water, bones, membranes and the like' through foregrounding the physicality of the ear, and its possible role as 'something we think with.'<sup>6</sup> Thinking with one's ears reminds me of the practice of the auditor-composer, and I am able to understand at this point how close I am in this study to her. In the spirit of the auditor-composer, she who speaks through listening, I have been talking about what I have heard – and how I have heard – so as to compose my experience of listening into speaking through writing. Through attending to my own audition of the performances I have designed and directed I have discovered how practicing this doubled action in performance produces compelling moments of making material, where melding the time-senses of speaking and listening have focused my attention to the complex relationship between female voice and body. As an auditor of my own work I have been composing the meaning of what I have heard in this writing, valuing the approximation of sounds heard in order to translate the sounds into understanding something of how the female voice becomes material.

When I began this thesis four years ago, listening, although an implicit part of my project was not under specific investigation, but now that I have made these experiments I understand listening to be a vital tool of exploration and discovery and one of the most important practices for *both* the performer and the audience. I ended the last chapter demonstrating how a resistant

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<sup>5</sup> Skantze, P.A. "Shift Epistemologies: Gap Knowledge." *MisPerformance*, ed. Marin Blazeovic (forthcoming), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Erlmann, 17 and 24.

voice might productively practice in and out of time and tune in order to sharpen the attention of those listening, and further I suggested how this resistant voice might focus attention through encouraging an audience to listen ‘to multiple temporalities at once.’ Let me explain here how I have developed this listening practice, this auditor methodology, firstly through attention to how the design of my performances using the female voice have shaped as well the action of “the auditor,” both on stage and in the audience.

The relationship of the performed voice and the audience has been investigated in every performance I have produced during this study, reverberating through all the chapters, producing multiple versions of the auditor-composer, an idea I outlined first in my introduction. In all the performances I have discussed at length, I chart an evolution in the practice of the auditor-composer. In *Material Voice in Pitch Black* I was listening to 27 other voices while speaking, in *Playing Host*, I was listening to the record while speaking, and in *Constellation Piece* I finally witnessed another body practicing as the auditor-composer in the character of “Auditor.” Pittard’s Auditor listened to others’ voices, but also vitally listened to her own. In practicing a plural listening to herself and to others, not only was Pittard listening to multiple voices, but as I illustrated in the last chapter, she was speaking them too. A cyclical practice occurred, the cycles creating a pattern with her listening into her speaking into her listening. Furthermore, in the transmission of her voice to the audience, her cyclical speaking established another pattern, this one made with/for the audience listening. Pittard materialised in the live what I had theorized with Ophelia in the introduction, as I experienced her *letting sound in*.

Outside of the theatre as everyday auditors (or what Ihde calls ‘ordinary listeners’) we listen to multiple temporalities at once, whether we are conscious of our practice or not.<sup>7</sup> Not only might our auditory memory pattern other times and other sounds into what we are hearing now, but we are also continuously hearing sounds that have physically travelled long distances, travelling as well over long periods of time. From the faraway to the intimately close, our sound worlds are always overlaying times and spaces. *Listening now as I write I can hear the sound of a plane like a*

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<sup>7</sup> Ihde, 7.

*heavy backdrop behind distant cars, close cars, a clock ticking, a noisy insect, these letters typing, my own breathing. And hearing the plane I think of the time when the air filled with glass from a volcanic ash cloud and planes were grounded and the sky was strangely loud in its unusual quietness. I remember my mother's voice on the phone from Berlin, one of many people stilled in transit, while listening to the sound of a soundless sky and thinking it is not a small world after all.* In this small exercise concentrating on the sounds I am surrounded by right now, I perceive the layers of the live sound overlapped again with associated sounds, played back in my memory. Listening constellates the sound of times, spaces and contexts, marking similarities and significant differences in the act. This thoughtful attentive listening to the complexity of correlating times gives rise to the theories I offer in this study about voice, resistance, motion as well as becoming a developed method, which I have been exploring in my performance practice over the last four years. Working in performance spaces, with fine artists, in galleries, in this research I demonstrate how the theatre provides an affective airspace where an audience is encouraged to “tune in” to the sound of the voice carrying through the live. As such my directing and designing the voice to perform multiple temporalities has demonstrated a collaborative practice between the bodies speaking and the bodies who are listening.

And yet (in what might *at first* seem like a swift dismissal of the important role of the auditor in my work) my practice has led me to theorise the continuous performance of sound even in the absence of any near-by auditor, so that regardless of the presence of ears in the wake of its happening, sound continues to perform. Let me then propose that these sounds taking place without witness also vibrate on, travelling through time and space and perhaps even a part of the soundscape I just took a moment to listen to. When a tree falls in the forest and there is no one there to hear it, it *does* make a sound. As cultural historian Hillel Schwartz writes in his recent book *Making Noise*, rather than performing for no one, ‘the tree resounds’ and then ‘far away, someone catches wind of something unidentifiable, a very quiet noise, or feels a tremor underfoot.’<sup>8</sup> The performance of sound is apprehended in its wake at varying proximities, from

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<sup>8</sup> Hillel Schwartz, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang and Beyond* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 29.

the very close to the far distant, to the furthest limits of imagination. This long (and longing) listening is Schwartz's project, as he listens back to 'the intensity of sound as the intensity of relationships: between deep past, past and present.'<sup>9</sup> As such, his book begins in the very deepest past, in the myths of creation and re-creation stories and our 'newest versions of creation,' where science explodes matter into vital new forms:

Before thunder, before planets and suns, before light itself, we have the astrophysicists' Big Bang. A figure of speech meant sixty years ago in mockery, the Big Bang has become the popular emblem of a prevailing cosmology, putting a loud exploding at the start of time and the heart of matter.<sup>10</sup>

'It is not possible to begin quietly' Schwartz argues and yet this demands *listening back* on an epic scale, an imaginative listening to the time before 'the start of time,' dreaming up the noisy beginnings of our universe and putting faith in listening not only to a sound of the very deep past, but to a sound with no body present to perceive it.<sup>11</sup> But the fact that traces of the early universe can be heard in the white noise of a detuned radio is extraordinary evidence that sound does "reappear," returning through deep time.<sup>12</sup> Whether or not we 'apprehend' this sound in

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<sup>9</sup> Schwartz, 20.

<sup>10</sup> Schwartz, 20.

<sup>11</sup> In many informal and speculative discussions with my father, Jem Finer, I have developed a curiosity about how outer space might also be an auditory space. My father is a musician and mathematician who has long been concerned with deep time and space enquiry. As an artist in residence at the Astrophysics Department at Oxford University in 2003 he discussed the possibility of sound in space with the faculty cosmologists. He noted a conversation in October 2003 with Greg Bryan (referred to as GB, now Professor of Astronomy at Columbia University) in his online record of the two year long residency: 'Went to see GB. Before he got to show me some of his simulations he told me about modes of vibration in stars. Caused by fluctuations in the equilibrium between gravity pulling inwards and pressure pushing outwards they vibrate in different planes - modes. So they must make a 'sound'. Whether one can hear it or not is another matter. So there's something to follow up, helio seismology, the study of pulsations of the sun. He explained how a black hole made a sound. I'd been wondering how you could have sound in a vacuum but of course it's not. The black hole is in the centre of the Perseus cluster, a vast cloud of hot hot gas (density, a few 100 atoms per cubic meter, i.e. not very dense). Hit the cluster and it will "ring." The black hole does the hitting by spewing out plumes of gas. We worked out that the length of time for one cycle of the low low B flat is around 20 million years!' While my father considers, metaphorically, the universe as a resonant space, his understanding does not discount the obvious fact that as space is a vacuum it is therefore silent. However he suggests that sound could possibly exist in gas clouds, because then there is a medium that can vibrate - although of such long wavelengths (as in GB's example of a black hole), that the human ear couldn't hear them, even if a human ear was there. (All references from <http://cosmolog.org.uk/archives/002549.html>.)

<sup>12</sup> In the book accompanying the programme for the BBC television series *Wonders of the Universe*, (continues on next page...)



actuality or in imagination, does it matter if we cannot fully comprehend what this material (white noise static) is or means? Rather than obscuring some vital communicative information, I argue the idea that the material of sound *is* the vital communicative information and in the research from my practice this is borne out.

But while the material of sound *does* carry meaning, I have found in certain contexts where the voice is relied upon explicitly to perform meaning (such as an academic paper) that the material of the voice can confuse and even diffuse the argument of the work. I introduced this thesis illustrating how the motion of sound, the vibratory movement of matter through space and time, is the performance of sound, and that as auditors we can ‘apprehend’ moments within sound travel, but apprehending the sound of the voice does not necessarily translate neatly into hearing what someone is saying. While Bloom’s work in early modern culture provoked me to work with inaudible and unintelligible voices, with even silent bodies as ‘eloquent and subversive,’<sup>13</sup> I have found that asking an auditor to listen hard to make out what a voice is saying is not always a productive way to communicate the necessity to listen carefully. My growing understanding that investments in listening change depending on the context of the listening and the type of information being communicated, effected the way I developed the form of the PhD document. I had initially proposed that this thesis would be submitted as an audio document, an audio-thesis to be listened to in full (with endnotes and bibliography), rather than read from the page, as is now the case. Very early on in my research of this work I imagined this writing you are reading completely in sound, literally and physically demonstrating the action of the voice in relating both the linguistic meaning of the thesis alongside the meaningful material in the sound of the spoken words. I had intended that the words as written, *these words*, would provide a script or score for voicing the words out loud, and as such *Material Voice in Pitch Black* was amongst other things a “demo” for a future intended recording of the whole thesis. However, during these four years I have become acutely aware of the difficulty in practicing extended listening in our

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(...) Professor Brian Cox and Andrew Cohen write that in the static of a radio, 1 percent of this sound is ‘stretched light that has travelled from the beginning of time. Deep in the static is the echo of the Big Bang. These radio waves were once visible light, but light that originated 400,000 years after the Big Bang.’ (68)

<sup>13</sup> Bloom, 223.

present moment (post a traditionally oral culture), and especially when a listener wants to understand the meaning of the paragraphs (what the voice is saying) rather than the materiality of the production (the sound of the voice). Certainly for some people, listening to the recording of *Material Voice in Pitch Black* has been challenging to the point of frustrating, precisely because the recording does not *intelligibly* communicate the wider argument, or significance of the work no matter how careful the listening or listener. Even though this study as a whole advocates a sensuous reception of vocal materiality, this experiment showed me that listening to both materiality and meaning, or meaning through materiality is a practice not everyone can, or wants to, participate in. Dolar argues that once we become familiar with a voice, and ‘accommodate’ to ‘its particular qualities, its colour and accent,’ we ‘concentrate only on the meaning that is conveyed.’ The voice is then

the instrument, the vehicle, the medium and the meaning is the goal. This gives rise to a spontaneous opposition where voice appears as materiality opposed to the ideality of meaning. The ideality of meaning can emerge only through the materiality of the means, but the means does not seem to contribute to meaning.<sup>14</sup>

But surely this is a question of who and how someone is listening? ‘The materiality of the means,’ as I have argued *can* significantly produce meaning. Dolar describes the voice as ‘the means,’ the medium that carries the meaningful message. I have shown how the medium performs its existence, whether the record, the air, the architecture, or, vitally, the body – and that the voice as medium is similar. The materiality of the voice contributes to meaning vitally, for in listening to speech we hear the material of the body – we can attempt to discern and understand certain characteristics of the body through the material of the voice.

My practice in this study has demonstrated that the discernment of body through voice, or the piecing together of the body and voice, proves a productive challenge for the auditor. My choice not to record this work then was one I carefully considered and decided against because of a

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<sup>14</sup> Dolar, 15.

particular respect for our academic habits of reading, and wanting the subject matter to communicate as efficiently as possible in the circumstances. For this reason I offer the points of listening within reading so that the subject moves in text *and* sound, and hope that between these two practices, the materiality of the speaking body is heard.

Within something like the criss-crossing confusion of call and response cited above, voices and bodies can lose each other and even find new partners. In the recent production of *Desdemona*, a performance playing out the relationships of *Othello*'s tragic heroine Desdemona, Othello and her maid, Barbary directed by Peter Sellars, with spoken words written by Toni Morrison and lyrics written (and performed) by Malian singer and songwriter, Rokia Traore, the performance moved from song to speech to song. Desdemona, played by Tina Benko, and Traore (simultaneously herself and Desdemona's maid) vocalised an afterlife in which characters returned to the theatre stage through two women's speech and song. In one scene, Benko's body as Desdemona's body fascinatingly hosted her mother's voice and Othello's mother's voice in ghostly conversation, so that Benko/Desdemona appeared to *hold* the two speaking bodies in conversation. On the stage as afterlife, many voices were performed in Benko's body, so that her vocal body always patterned the speech of the others she channeled, most acutely when she deepened and accented her voice to accommodate Othello's character and then slipped into her own voice again. For the auditor it became difficult to discern whether she, Desdemona, or Othello was speaking.

In her book *Operatic afterlives*, Michal Grover-Friedlander writes how 'singing lingers on, death no longer functions as a limit, climax and endpoint.'<sup>15</sup> In Morrison's text for *Desdemona* she also treats the afterlife as a lingering vocal space, as a 'privileged position in timelessness.'<sup>16</sup> The words I heard voiced in Benko's body as Desdemona alongside Traore's speech made this vocal coupling more than a duet. Together these two female bodies produced an ensemble of voices, summoning not just people through the sound of their speech, but countries and customs and

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<sup>15</sup> Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Operatic Afterlives*. (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 21.

<sup>16</sup> Toni Morrison, *Desdemona*. (London: Oberon Modern Plays, 2012), 56.

barbaric pasts. Near the end of the performance, when Desdemona meets her maid in the afterlife, Traore stops singing to speak in response to Desdemona's calls of 'Barbary! Barbary.' Turning simply to face Desdemona, Traore says 'you don't even know my name. Barbary is what you call Africa. Barbary is the geography of the foreigner.'<sup>17</sup> Morrison gives the maid her name, Sa'ran, so that this theatrical afterlife of *Othello* produces the stage to recompose the characters. In their position in timelessness (on stage and off - in their literary afterlives), these characters have time to speak and sing to each other, vocalising their co-existence as continuous presences.

In performance, these characters vocalising their afterlives – female voices recomposing the historical material of *Othello* through speaking and listening– were most intensely alive. Any ending then, must enact the move to the 'privileged position in timelessness,' where voices might repeat, and *repeat differently* in new times, new places and new bodies...

And it is necessary if you are to be really and truly alive it is necessary to be at once talking and listening, doing both things, not as if there were one thing, not as if they were two things, but doing them, well if you like, like the motor going inside and the car moving, they are part of the same thing.'<sup>18</sup>

The practice of the auditor-composer actively participates in this continuous ending, as it is she who listens to the past in order to vocalise her material voice for the present and the future, as a voice intertwining multiple temporalities, from a body, 'truly alive.' I have found the air truly alive in the theatre, the air that carries and mixes multiple times, the air that patterns difference into sameness, the air that confuses bodies and voices, and the air that the auditor composer embodies in the action of listening and speaking – *like a motor going...*

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<sup>17</sup> Morrison, 45.

<sup>18</sup> Gertrude Stein, "Portraits and Repetition." *Look At Me Now and Here I Am, Gertrude Stein: Writings and Lectures 1909-1945*, ed. Patricia Meyerowitz (London, Peter Owen Publishers, 2004), 102.

## **Endnotes**

Endnote 1 on CD

An extract from *Material Voice in Pitch Black* (3:40)

Recorded at Jubilee Theatre on 21 November, 2010

Ella Finer with the voices of Chiara Ambrosio, Matthew Fink, Maggie Pittard, and Sam Willan.

Endnote 2 on Flexidisk and CD

*Playing Host* (4:15)

Radio Broadcast on Resonance104.4fm from Raven Row on 2 June 2011

Ella Finer with the voice of Robert Jack.

Endnote 3 on CD

An extract from *Constellation Piece* (4:09)

Recorded at Jubilee Theatre on 29 June 2011

Ella Finer with the voices of Finn Andrews, Flora Pitrolo, and Maggie Pittard.

Endnote 4 on CD

*Like sweet bells jangled out of time* (5.24)

Recorded at Leighton Grove, London on 12 February 2012

With the voices of Marcia Farquhar and Debsey Wykes.

## Appendices

- i. *Playing Host* Script
- ii. *Constellation Piece* Script

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