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### A Space for Sound

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#### Résumé de l'article

Cet article a pour objet la pratique de la voix et le discours qu'on tient sur elle dans le contexte du théâtre occidental. À partir d'une conception de la voix comme trace du langage, notre intention est de mettre au jour des espaces de création vocale et de jeux sonores qui troublent la relation entre voix et langage. Notre argumentaire examine brièvement le passage de la voix déclamatoire à la "voix naturelle" dans la pratique du théâtre occidental pour illustrer comment, malgré ce déplacement vers une voix bien ancrée dans la spécificité du corps de l'acteur, on a négligé d'exploiter les richesses de la voix dans son rapport à l'oralité ou encore dans sa nature profonde comme sonorité vocale libérée de sa fonction communicationnelle. Ce qui nous intéresse est alors de montrer comment le lien qui a unit la voix théâtrale à titre de *logos* "dévoalisé" – au sens de Cavarero (2010) – à une conception textuelle du *logos*, telle qu'analysée par Habermas dans sa *Théorie de l'agir communicationnel* (1981), ne permet pas à la voix de transcender l'idée d'une représentation singulière fondée dans le langage.

# A Space for Sound

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This article is mute. It privileges the eye. It originates – in this iteration – in the silent space of thought; an ultimate ‘devocalization of logos’ (Cavarero 2005).

The intention, however, is to invoke sound. A deliberate evidencing of sonority, of vocality. And by unsettling the dominant discourse of voice to reveal the interstices that allow for the excavation, exposing and celebration of the sonorous being of the actor, I seek to redeem the actor as a source of and space for creative vocal play.

I refer to this iteration – the writing of this article – as having one kind of origin : the devocalization of logos as articulated by Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero (2005). Cavarero argues that Western philosophy has silenced the voice. Her interest is in authenticity and *who* is speaking, the latter resonating strongly with the notion of the ‘natural voice’ (Linklater 1976) which is a core motivating idea in the development of contemporary Western theatre voice practice. I use the term ‘theatre voice practice’ to distinguish the voice practices of theatre from those that might operate in similar ways but for different purposes, e.g. public speaking, speech therapy, singing and so on.

But Western theatre voice practice, essentially an oral practice, at the point of its transformation was already so closely bound to text that sound continued to manifest in only one authentic form : language. If Western philosophy silenced the voice, then the communicative rationality of language as proposed by Habermas (1981) constrains its practice, in effect constituting another silencing. Collectively this is the silencing of the possibilities contained within the voice’s essential

nature as a vibrating, sounding, melodious (or not) acoustic dimension of a creative being who is, in this instance, an actor.

Another origin of what is presented here lies in a personal narrative. This is also a narrative of practice, specifically the voice work that I pursued with actors in studios and rehearsal spaces in the 1980's. It was, for me, a depressing period of what seemed like endless remedial technical interventions whose primary focus was to ensure audible, clear speech for actors in performance contexts. The voice practitioner in my experience was clearly relegated to a service function in support of the apparently more elevated aspects of the actors' craft in the business of creating compelling theatre. The artistic sleight was made more acute by the fact that the actor's body was increasingly taking centre stage as a site of and for performance. The body was becoming the source of another creative language. If the actor could be simplistically divided into three performance categories – voice, body and emotional intellect – then it appeared as though real craft and the authentic realization of performance was only possible because the actor had a creative articulate body and a resourceful inventive imagination which was fed by an expressive emotional and intellectual centre. The third category, the actor's voice, seemed to have significance only in articulating this dynamic artistic package clearly and audibly. The content of what was uttered in a performance had been accounted for by an external author of an external text, and the apogee of vocal creativity was the realization of the particular semantic crafting embedded in the text. This last permissible domain of creativity, the interpretation of the text, was and still is the domain of a director.

This moment of creative and career frustration precipitated an exploration of voice as a site of creative theatrical play (Mills 1999). It resulted in a consideration of 'voice as material' (Mills 2008) and 'vocal mise-en-scène' (see Mills 2005) with ideas and practices for exploring an architecture of sound in the creation of vocal soundscape. The practice was theorized and the theory extended the practice. Throughout the movement between theorization and practice, the work revealed interstices which allow for another view of the voice, interstices which ultimately become spaces for creative play. In this article I will be exploring the revelation of such spaces as well as the shift in perspective made possible by these interstices.

In a first consideration, I borrow from Cavarero's (2005) re-reading of the history of philosophy where she makes the case that philosophy silences the voice and, secondly, I consider Habermas's concept of communicative rationality (see Habermas 1981) as further explanation of how the voice is constrained in its own creative space of play. I then briefly examine the space of creative play and turn to psychoanalytic theory to open up this space, allowing a sense of the extended function of the voice as a site for creative theatrical play.

### The Silencing and Constraining of the Voice.

Although this first thread must lead to silence, as suggested earlier, this article is essentially an invitation to reconsider the voice. Voice is the human capacity for sound and sounding. It is the medium and the means of the acoustic dimension of being that connects human beings to each other as well as powerfully connecting the human being to itself. The subject experience of the sounding self is a visceral experience of vibration that embodies and emits note or sound. This is individual. This is private. This is public.

The vocal, as event, dimension or sphere, is quite independent of the visual experience which locates the subject in space and declares a corporeal solidity in an ever present now. Sound by comparison, while powerfully experienced, seems less readily determined, slightly less within the subject's control. It is immediate in utterance and just as immediately vanishes; the present as, or in, the past. Spatially, when produced it is both directed and undirected, and when received it places the subject in approximation to a source. As an activity it is seemingly sequential in time and the precise composition of its emission is possibly beyond the control of the subject.

But vocality defines being. Vocality defines the subject in a unique way : we do not share a voice. It is both the sonorous and acoustic presence of being. It is the originating orality of being that precedes language and that, as argued here, persists within language and beyond language.

In her book *For More than One Voice* (2005) Cavarero argues for the consideration of the voice *as voice*, as a “pure vocal”, “indifferent” to the signifying function of language (20). She argues for a primacy of voice and insists on a consideration of voice that transgresses the boundaries of our normal understanding of voice. It is a conceptual unsettling, as it were, that allows us to consider the voice in a new way. As mentioned at the outset, Cavarero's concern is with authenticity and with *who* is speaking, offering a re-reading of the history of philosophy that shifts the focus from what is said to *who* is saying it. My concern, however, is with the primacy of voice as a creative sphere for the actor and for theatre. I take up and appropriate Cavarero's terms of “pure vocal”, “vocality”, “voice as voice”, and the “unexpressed within expression” (2005 : 34) as descriptors that can stretch the imaginative grasp of voice, granting its multi-dimensional character and suggesting a range of creative possibilities. As will be explored later, the creative possibilities of the pure vocal only emerge when voice is free of the constraints imposed by the prevailing discourse equating voice with language.

Cavarero offers a detailed reading or tracing of how the voice is silenced, how “[i]n the Greece of the philosophers, there is no space for reflection on the voice as voice, no room for the reverberation of language

as the unexpressed within expression” (2005 : 34). Even as she traces how the voice recedes, her work powerfully asserts the presence of voice and sound and persuasively argues for the primacy of voice as voice.

Her examination of the classical thought that informs the Western philosophic and metaphysical traditions reveals what she calls the “devo-calization of logos”. As she states, the term logos is “the most important, and yet the most ambiguous, term in philosophy” (2005 : 33). Its ancient Greek origins are in the verb *legein* which means “speaking”, “joining” and “recounting”. These meanings refer back to the key functions and understanding of philosophy as discourse and as reason, discourse as the “realm of speech” and reason as the “realm of thought”. In discourse – the realm of speech – there is surely room for the possibility of a pure vocal, and in reason – the realm of thought – the voice, although literally silent, surely has an acoustic image. Logos as discourse and logos as reason, often used interchangeably, merge in speaking. Speaking is the joining together of words which equates logos with language. And although for Cavarero there should be the possibility of sound or “the reverberation of language as the unexpressed within expression”, logos as language loses its sonorous dimension when *what* is said – meaning – becomes more important than how it is sounded or who is speaking.

Sound, which seems so present in “speaking” and “speech”, actually recedes as meaning comes into focus. Sound is simply the voice vocalizing concepts; it has no reality beyond the signification of the concepts it vocalizes. Thus, in the Western philosophical tradition, voice is silenced by speech. Aristotle defines logos as *phone semantike* (Cavarero 2005 : 34), that is, a sound or voice that signifies; and he elaborates by making a distinction between man and animals precisely through *semantike*. Animals also have voices or sound, *phone*, but only man has *phone semantike* – the signifying nature of sound or the capacity for reason. As Cavarero argues, this binding of voice to the semantic, to the signifying aspect of language, makes voice dependent on the signified. It subordinates voice to idea.

In the philosophic and metaphysical traditions, an idea has no acoustic representation; it is silent; it is “an object of thought that is characterized by visibility and clarity” (Cavarero 2005 : 35). Idea is a mental image which is visible in the mind and thus it privileges the eye. As Cavarero asserts, it is a defining moment of the ocular and semiotic aspects of Western thought : “the fundamental gesture that locates the principle of the system of signification, of the signified, in the visual sphere” (2005 : 35). She continues :

By capturing the phone in the system of signification, philosophy not only makes a primacy of the voice with respect to speech all but inconceivable; it also refuses to concede to the vocal any value that would be independent of the semantic. (2005 : 35)

It is not just language or the link between sound and voice, *phone*,

and the signified, *semantike*, that robs the voice of its essential, more complex acoustic sphere; rather it is the whole ancient philosophic enterprise which is fundamentally concerned with truth. Truth for the Greeks is called “*aletheia* – a term that literally means that which is not hidden by any shadow and is therefore resplendent in the full light of day” (Cavarero 2005 : 36). Truth and reason are consigned to the visual sphere as objects for the eye or for the mind, and when *logos* as language becomes text and then represented by print, the voice’s dependence on visual representation seems assured. In spite of the vibration of the sounding self, it becomes increasingly difficult to grasp the pure vocal, to recognize or imagine the orality which is the essence of voice as voice and to hear the “unexpressed within expression”.

Cavarero’s interest in a pure vocal and voice as voice is, to the contrary, powerfully present in the early texts which she examines. She is concerned with both Greek and Hebrew texts as the originating impulses of philosophic and metaphysical thought, noting that many cultures have myths about their origins which reflect an acoustic sphere or pre-linguistic vocalization of a divine presence. In the Hebrew tradition, for example, the world, as in many other traditions, originates in the divine presence of God. Here God is present in both the Hebrew words *ruah* or “breath” and *qol* or “sound”. While *qol* can also be translated as breath, it is distinguished from *ruah* by the concept of sound. It is not only God’s breath that creates the world and man in the world, it is also God’s voice or sound that creates, harbors power, and communicates with the world. Cavarero explains :

Even when it is explicitly voice, *qol* [...] distinguishes itself from speech and is independent of it : a pure vocal, indifferent to the semantic function of language, which takes various forms of sonorous manifestation. (Cavarero 2005 : 20)

God is breath and God is voice in the most ancient form of the Hebrew religion, but God is importantly *not* speech. When God communicates with man it is through the medium of man’s language in the mouths of the prophets. In this scenario what is present in the language – man’s medium of communication – is God’s voice which transcends language but is also what Gershom Scholem calls the “sonorous material” at “the base of every language” (cited in Cavarero 2005 : 21).

This assertion of sound, albeit through divine presence, is a transcendent power, and as a creative force provides an inspiring and imaginative dimension to the consideration of voice as pure vocal or voice as voice. It re-imagines sound or voice in a realm of sonorous and acoustic possibility that is not contained by reason or reduced to the general belief that the “essential function of speech is to communicate a given content”, that which Cavarero reminds us Walter Benjamin “ironically calls [...] the ‘bourgeois conception of language’” (cited in Cavarero 2005 : 21).

## Intersecting Theatre Voice

The Western philosophic tradition, as argued here, has progressively silenced the voice through its focus on *phone semantike*. By contrast, the history or development of contemporary Western theatre voice practice, which is the primary concern of this article, reveals a loosening of bonds or constraints on the voice as voice, particularly those imposed through adherence to a single aesthetic practice, *i.e.* the declamatory style of acting of the late 19th century.

As a separate discourse and documented practice, theatre voice is a young art form which began to map itself as an oral tradition in an era when people went to the theatre to hear and not just see a play. The early 18th and 19th century manuals on voice reveal the highly stylized and codified vocal and gestural performance forms preferred in the theatres of Europe and the West (see Darnley 1995). Domestic traditions of reading aloud in the drawing rooms of bourgeois homes lent added focus to how a text was spoken, and actors were increasingly viewed as experts on the art of speaking in public. The idea of a vocational practice of voice and of a voice teacher or practitioner separate from the onstage apprenticeship tradition of learning acting (a predominantly vocal art), arose through a need identified in both the social sphere of life and the artistic world of the theatre.

The 20th century theatre's predominant focus on the 'natural voice' (see Linklater 1976) was precipitated by the radical paradigm shift in both theory and practice brought on by the modernist explorations of realism. Stanislavsky's work (1968 and 1980) on theoretical practices for the actor's preparation and craft gave actors agency in both acting and voice for the stage. The "natural voice" was a voice that gave sound to the artistic conceit of being "real" on stage for realist performances, but it was also a way of accessing the person of the actor and the individual sound that is the vocal imprint of the actor. The exploration of techniques flourished and similar but also very different and highly sophisticated practices of embodied sound emerged to support the actor's work onstage. These practices developed in the spaces between more formally circumscribed disciplines, borrowing and inventing content that was always focused on theatre while simultaneously referencing in its own terms various bodily modalities, medical practices, linguistics, music and so on.

In terms of the argument developed here, this move to a natural sound and a focus on the individual would seem to offer the possibility for considering the voice as voice, as pure vocal. Theatre voice certainly existed and continues to exist in the sonorous reality of the actor's sound, and its critical paradigm shift to the "natural" or individual voice of the actor was realized in the acoustic sphere of its own art form along with the actor who embodies and gives voice to that art form. But voice as voice and a pure vocal were never considered. Breaking



a mould of performance, that of the declamatory voice, and focusing on the person of the actor, was not enough to extend the imaginative reach of the practice. Theatre voice, even in its early phase of operating primarily as an oral tradition, had shaped its practice as tied to text. Aristotle's *phone semantike* was not only language which signifies but a signifying language that had found form as text and, in theatre, was located in what was essentially a prescriptive language in the form of a prescriptive dramatic text.

I mentioned in the introduction that the measure of good vocal work onstage rests in the vocal interpretation of text, an interpretation that illuminates the *semantike* in and through the *phone*. And the *semantike* is tied to concept and reason as words are joined, recounted and spoken as language.

Interestingly, the word 'language' is commonly and easily applied to a number of spheres that evidence or require a 'grammar' of their own. By way of example, as the actor's body gained prominence as a site of creative expressivity, reference to a language or languages of the body could imaginatively invoke a range of possible physical expressions with varied kinds of articulatory. Thus, the terminology or language of language is used to define and redefine the scope of the creative enterprise. Not so with voice, however, whose language does not embrace a "language of voice" or an "articulatory of voice" beyond what has become circumscribed by Aristotle's *phone semantike*.

What is it about theatre voice whose sonorous and acoustic sphere does not allow it to loosen the grip of *phone semantike*? What is it about theatre voice whose enterprise is giving sonorous and acoustic life to the theatre text which is always in the first instance offered for interpretation, again not allowing it to loosen the grip of *phone semantike*? The theatre is a creative space; each new production is in essence a project of possibilities. The invitation for creative inventiveness in and through the artistic product of theatre rests in theatre's core function : interpretation. In other words, meaning is yet to be made, the languages of expression must be explored, selected, defined or even composed.

As already stated, a piece of theatre is always in its conceptualizing and rehearsal phase a project of possibility; a consideration of a range of artistic and aesthetic choices is necessary across a number of design mediums (choreography, set, costume, lighting, sound, to name the obvious) within the medium of theatre. The theatre product is ultimately the satisfactory interaction or relationship of these design mediums in an agreed articulation that is aesthetically and emotionally-intellectually pleasing, even challenging. The actor is the principal player in this artistic enterprise, the one who embodies the meaning and who performs the architecture of the articulation of the work's conceptual and aesthetic realisation. The actor could thus be considered as another "design medium" in which his/her voice, in particular, is of interest here.



It should also be evident that I am at pains to avoid reducing the complexity of the theatrical enterprise by reference to its many component parts, for one cannot ever hope to fully unpack the multi-layered, multi-vocal reality of its aesthetic. What is central to my argument is that, in the creation of a theatre product, each component part is open to a re-imagining, that is, to a sensory aesthetic exploration in the realization of the interpretation of the whole. Theatre artists ought to be prepared to unsettle the agreed realities of the component parts or languages of theatre. In this way the art form challenges its own boundaries and forges new aesthetic elements. It could even be argued that with the more deliberately exploratory pieces, the base condition for working is a useful assumption of aesthetic forms, creative languages and possible textual products as being unstable. Indeed, we could ask what enables a visual artist to imagine a white square on a white canvas, as Kazimir Malevich did with *White on White* (1918), or music as apparent silence, as with John Cage's *4'33"* (1952), if the rules of an art form are not only not prescribed but also *utterly irrelevant*?

The actor, considered somewhat crudely and mechanically as a "design medium", has a voice to unsettle and destabilize so as to allow for a re-imagining or re-sonorising that could make the exploration of Cavarero's "pure vocal" and "unexpressed within expression" possible. Theatre insists on creativity but the voice remains constrained by language. Why?

In working out an answer, let us turn to Jürgen Habermas's extraordinarily dense *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), a vast intellectual work ranging across philosophy and sociology. A fundamental key to his theory is what Honnath and Joas describe in their commentary as "an indestructible moment of communicative rationality [that] is anchored in the social form of human life" (1991 : 1). This notion of some indestructible moment linked to Habermas's concept of communicative rationality operating in the social sphere offers an explanation of why the voice, even in the creative sphere of theatre, rarely manages to transcend its mono-vocal representation in and as language, viz. language as language.

Habermas's work speaks directly to philosophy and more particularly to sociology, but its usefulness to theatre voice is that it allows for a mapping of an embedded function within language. If theatre voice understands this mapped function and more generally accepts that it is, in essence, an oral tradition described by a set of relationships, only one of which is with language, then it could begin to hear and feel the vibration of spaces or interstices for creative sonorous play within its practice. Other possible relationships are as follows : the relationship between voice and sound; voice and the acoustic dimension; voice and the pure vocal; voice and the 'unexpressed within expression'; and voice and language. The constraint on the creative project is that at every

point voice is collapsed into a single relationship, the relationship with language, and even then the interstice that is possible in an understanding of the voice *in relation to* language is lost because that relationship is further collapsed into a single view of voice as language.

The function mapped by Habermas's theory is one of a fundamental agreement between speakers and of the consequent communicative validity claims that are part of this agreement. The Greek *phone* described the voice as the means of communication and *phone semantike* elevated the function of *phone* above that of animals into the realm of a particular kind of communication connected to concept and reason. Habermas's theory places the focus of *phone semantike* on its operation in the social contexts of human interaction. The focus on language shifts to how it functions as the making of meaning between people, beyond the making of meaning in how words are strung together. Speaking is an interpersonal activity of the voice and Habermas's rationality is a lived rationality in the 'lifeworld', which is his term for domains of action dependent on consensus of meaning.

The notion of "consensual meaning making" shifts *phone semantike* to something more than voice, locating it in the realm of concept or reason. Speakers are tied together by an assumed and agreed reasonableness in the act of sharing language. They can assume a rationality within *phone semantike*, a reasonableness that is possible because of a rationality embedded in language. In other words, the original mode of language is an agreement of meaning that makes it communicative. This means that speakers are relieved of having to create understanding over and over again in the act of speaking. Language by its very nature is shared, it functions as a communicative act between speakers. Even when one speaker vehemently disagrees with or opposes the views of another, there is an implied agreement or shared understanding of what is said in the disagreement or opposition. A speaker assumes an understanding of what is being said in the speech act itself. As already suggested, this is not the attempt of the speaker to connect words in a reasonable way, rather this is an assumption of shared reasonable meaning or rationality with other speakers in the act of communication. As I speak I assume that you share the meaning of what I say, and vice versa. Language is thus fundamentally tied to a consensual rationality.

The possibility of developing discourse, of pursuing argument or of engaging in any process of meaning making through language assumes an agreed rationality or shared meaning among speakers, for it is this agreed rationality that allows for the challenging of views, the refutation of argument and the reconsideration of meaning. And if, as Habermas proposes, language is bound by reason and reasonableness – the rationality of language – then speakers are equally bound by reason in the act of communication. In the creative context where meaning is being forged and often forged anew, where the aesthetic conditions of an art

form must be put out of balance so as to explore what is possible, the artist must surely stay his/her course through that creative process for the simple reason that language is reasonable, even artistic languages. Because language provides a necessary basis of rationality, it suggests that the creative players are in agreement on some level regardless of how unconventional or abstract the artistic work may be, thus allowing the participants to arrive at an agreed artistically rational product, even when the artwork itself is not exactly “rational”.

This connection between people, the interpersonal link through language, when transposed to sound and voice as a shared rationality between speakers leaves little room for the utterance of pure vocal and voice as voice. If Habermas’s theory is worth keeping then pure vocal and voice as voice must be founded on an agreed rationality. But pure vocal has no permanent signified, nor has voice as voice, for these are personal events which are both public and ephemeral. While a sense of communicative possibility may be shared, to a large extent pure vocal remains radically affective and individual.

There is no obvious way to enter the space of the sonorous or to collectively give it validity when it operates outside of the consensus expectation of how meaning is made when mouths open and sound takes form. Equally, a place of sonorous play cannot adopt the rationality of language which is a different representation of sound, although language might be used to refer back to the sonorous event or describe it.

To return for a moment to Cavarero’s consideration of the voice of God in the ancient tradition of the Hebrew religion, she notes that in the Hebrew script God’s voice, *qol*, has no sign. The text itself is written only with consonants and later versions have diacritics inserted to denote the vowels. As a result, in its permanent written form *qol* still only finds voice or sound in the actual act of speaking as the reader lends his/her voice to God. It is a tradition that preserves vocalization or the operation of voice as sound in a space of its own. God’s voice cannot be represented in print but neither can God’s subjects who carry His sound as part of the base material of their own unique sound. Cavarero’s “expression within the expressed” is illustrated through the Hebrew tradition yet applies to all speakers, to everyone in sound. Voice as voice and pure vocal defy the sign, the signified imperative of the language of *phone semantike*, and the communicative action of Habermas.

### The Space of the Pure Vocal and the Sonorous Reverberation of Being

In the rehearsal spaces and studios of my voice practice, the actor enters the sonorous reverberation of being, immersed in sound events and sensitive to the sonorous dimension of self and others. *Phone semantike* has no place and neither does the communicative rationality of Habermas, but relationships do emerge as shifting dynamics and cadence create patterns which lend the experience familiarity. The self

is sounded. The self is silent. The space is charged with sound image (both sonorous and acoustic) and with silence.

In my voice practice I have explored, theorized and developed techniques for working creatively with sound, actively proposing a view of “voice as material” in which the sonorous can be experienced as event and through which the actor has access to working creatively with an architecture of sound. The notion of “vocal *mise-en-scène*” not only speaks to the vocality that allows for the crafting of a sonorous landscape, or in Shaffer’s terms a “soundscape” (1994), but also provokes a broader creative impulse demanding that theatre practitioners (directors, actors, vocal coaches and sound designers) actively consider *how a production will sound*.

Such a theatrical space is brought into being by the sound event. The sound event cannot be repeated and is forever lost when finished, but it has a power to suggest itself in the sonorous and acoustic imagination of the actor who performs as well as to inspire the acoustic palette of the actor who hears. It is a space of extreme creativity demanding commitment to sound and sounding without the assurance of a grammar of meaning. It is a space that allows a sense of where the edges of creativity lurk without the actor being sure of what might emerge beyond that edge. It is this space that, in the context of theatre voice, allows the vocality or sound of Cavarero’s “pure vocal”, and that also allows me to hear the “unexpressed in expression”.

While this space has invoked my particular practical creative response to and through sound for the actor, it is the discourse of philosophy that has allowed me to appropriate terminology and argumentation, to articulate this space to others in a way that might register its possibility without them being present.

I declared this article mute at the outset and have tried to infuse it with the acoustic image of sound : not of the words as recounted or strung together to make meaning or shape concepts, nor as an echo of speaking this text aloud, but rather as the reverberation that might be awakened by the reader imagining the pure vocal, imagining the imprint of the sonorous and feeling the arousal of cells or of cellular memory through the embodied knowledge of the self in sound, reverberating with his/her own sound both known and not yet imagined. This is an intensely creative space that awakes to its own creativity as the individual sees fit.

The space of sound exists in the interstices of how the self knows (and is yet to discover) itself through sound. It connects to Cavarero’s observations of the early Hebrew texts in which *qol*, the sound of God or God’s voice, is present in the act of creating the world or is present as creation. The actor in this space of play is a particular kind of creator with a particular task in mind. The actor is the permanent residue of the creative process of making theatre, one who replays the creation of the artistic product until its demise when the curtain falls. The actor

is the one who creates onstage, and the suggestion here is that in the creative context of theatre there is more to the voice than a brilliant execution of *phone semantike*.

I have suggested that philosophy has helped me to articulate this space or rather these spaces, especially through the use of the term interstice. I refer to it interchangeably as a space that allows for the shifting of perspectives that can open up to the imagination the possibility of pure vocal or vocality. In the absence of a grammar, in the absence of a consensual “lifeworld”, these interstices prize a sense of open meaning and allow the actors to occupy a space of multiple views of sonorous reality. Once again it is the appropriation of understandings from other disciplines that allows for an amplification of this space or for the revelation of the interstices that access the space, extending an understanding of the function of the creative moment which belongs to the actor who is centre stage. It is with a pleasing return to language and the function of language, this time from a psychoanalytic point of view, that this space is given further form in a sonorous being.

Darian Leader (2008) in his carefully considered exploration of mourning, melancholia and depression refers to Freud’s psychical systems of representation, viz. word representation and thing representation. This is of course Freud’s description of the operation of thought, memory and language, and the two systems of representation – word and thing – are tightly bound together. As Leader describes, it is a psychoanalytic understanding of *phone semantike* :

Thing representations consist of collections of memories and traces derived from these, while word representations are made up of the acoustic and semantic aspects of language that become linked to the thing representations . (2008 : 189)

Leader’s interest, borrowing from Freud’s model of language (Kristeva 1994), is in the arrest of the movement from thing representation to word representation, which led Freud to ascribe the melancholic’s condition to a difficulty with language and systems of representation. As Leader says : “The problem here is the basic impossibility of making words touch their referent”, which he later describes as the impossibility “*to find words to say how words fail*” (Leader 2008 : 190-191. Author’s emphasis.).

While this is a clinical concern for Leader with respect to his patients and their difficulty with articulating experience, if appropriated for theatre voice in the context of pure vocal and vocality it offers a constructive way of understanding not only a language process but also a sound process for theatre voice. The possibility of two systems of representation loosens voice from its conflation with language. Theatre as an art form is intrinsically connected to metaphor and, in my opinion, the experience of good theatre is most satisfying when words do fail and when it is impossible to express completely what the experience has been. It is a moment of knowing that the experience is greater than the

sum of its parts and is beyond what is possible to express. However, the experience is viscerally present and is, borrowing from Freud and Leader, located in the space of thing representation where it completely resists being reduced to words but is no less potent or significant.

In other words, I am arguing that there are referents which speak to experience, the reverberation of sound, and that do not function in the symbolic system of language but rather may function in the pure vocal or as an acoustic image of the pure vocal. Freud's notion of "thing representation" lends a concretization to the argument for a space of sound proposed here. For Leader, thing representation (tantalizingly also described as "traces") has no connection to the acoustic, which he links with word representation. In respect of a sonorous space of theatre voice, the possibility of thing representation is the possibility of an acoustic representation that need not find a semantic referent in the tradition of *phone semantike*.

Generally, in psychoanalytic models of language, as already suggested above, there is a notion of the "pure vocal" but it is usually linked to the child in the pre-language phase and as such represents a pre-maturation phase of language en route to having language. The phases of language acquisition are important only in terms of their relationships with language itself, which is its intent. This is simply a re-confirmation of the importance of *phone semantike*, the state at which to arrive, as the term pre-language suggests even though it acknowledges a time, space and sound of vocality that is not language. In acquiring language the possibility for pure vocality is, of course, not lost but becomes reduced to expressions of sound in unguarded moments of sudden or extreme feeling, or in moments of "vocal gesture", for example non-semantic noises or sounds that pepper expression like the clearing of the throat, a snort of delight, a sigh of pure pleasure and so on. Thus the space of sound, of sonority, takes form in ways that are not described by levels of maturation or by clinical conditions because the sonorous is present as the reverberation of being; it is expressive, linked to acoustic images of self or other and charges the imagination and the space of the one who vocalizes.

In conclusion, to step into the space of vocality is to embrace the sonorous material of Cavarero's "unexpressed within expression". It is also to understand that the pure vocal of the pre-language phase of early childhood is more than just the process of maturation towards language; rather it is the ongoing presence of the sonorous and acoustic dimension of the self. And to inhabit the self in the reverberation of thing representation is to evoke acoustic mental images as well as to sound the self, free from the binding rationality of language. All of this is simply the human condition in and through sound. But for the actor it is both the source of and the creative space for artistic expressions and transformations in the theatre.



Perhaps now the space of the pure vocal is felt; perhaps this article even sounds.

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## Abstract

The focus of this article is Western theatre voice practice and discourse. With the voice conceived as the trace of language, the main intention is to reveal interstices for creative vocal or sonorous play by unsettling the relationship between voice and language. The project references the shift to the 'natural voice' in Western theatre voice practice and how, in spite of this shift to sound that is strongly located in the person of the performer, voice does not exploit the riches of either its originating practice in orality or its own essential nature as sonorous vocality. This article proposes that Western theatre voice's strong link to a devocalized *logos* as argued by Cavarero, and *logos* as text informed by Habermas's concept of *communicative rationality*, do not allow the voice to transcend a single representation rooted in language.

**Keywords** : Theatre Voice; Pure Vocal; Devocalization; Communicative Rationality.

## Résumé

Cet article a pour objet la pratique de la voix et le discours qu'on tient sur elle dans le contexte du théâtre occidental. À partir d'une conception de la voix comme



trace du langage, notre intention est de mettre au jour des espaces de création vocale et de jeux sonores qui troublent la relation entre voix et langage. Notre argumentaire examine brièvement le passage de la voix déclamatoire à la “voix naturelle” dans la pratique du théâtre occidental pour illustrer comment, malgré ce déplacement vers une voix bien ancrée dans la spécificité du corps de l’acteur, on a négligé d’exploiter les richesses de la voix dans son rapport à l’oralité ou encore dans sa nature profonde comme sonorité vocale libérée de sa fonction communicationnelle. Ce qui nous intéresse est alors de montrer comment le lien qui a unit la voix théâtrale à titre de *logos* “dévoicalisé” – au sens de Cavarero (2010) – à une conception textuelle du *logos*, telle qu’analysée par Habermas dans sa *Théorie de l’agir communicationnel* (1981), ne permet pas à la voix de transcender l’idée d’une représentation singulière fondée dans le langage.

**Mots-clés** : Voix au théâtre; vocalisation pure; dévoicalisation; raison communicationnelle.

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