

“Voice and Place”: a choreographic theatre FORUM

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Original article sent with
Pantheatre's Season's
Greetings, December 22, 2005:

“plot and place
pot and pace
spot and space
... and a merry Xmas to you !”

This is an enlarged and
commented version

Plot and Place

“If you find your place you will find your voice”

*“If you find your place you will find your voice”*¹ has been the maxim of choreographic theatre for some time now. As is stated in the colour brochure of PANTHEATRE ACTS, finding your place (therefore your voice) is a matter of **genius**² (luck, trick and “knowledge” – see the article below), the genius that allows you to make the right or ‘right wrong’ move and “spot the plot”. It requires an eye and ear that figures out who happens to be the *genius loci* about to host you – whose plot you are you moving into? This is the genius that will let you “nose” what you are into. “Plot” is a great word: notice how it moves from patch and spot through map and motif, to plan and setup, and all the way into story and fiction³ – and all this probably thanks to the conspiracy of “complot”. Plot makes the move from place to fiction and back, which is where choreographic theatre is moving at the moment. One could extend the maxim to: *“If you find your place you will find your voice - and the plot, i.e. the meaning of your ‘lines’.”*

This way of envisaging “finding one’s voice” also affords an alternative life and ownership to the voice, especially to those voice practices where you can only “find” or “place” your voice inside those two mythical totemic tabernacles that rule our times: “my body” and “my self”. It deliteralizes these devotional and

¹ The title and contents proposed for the CPR / Aberystwyth, Wales, April 2006 workshop during the « Myths of the Voice » *Giving Voice* conference are based on this theme. See below, page 5.

² The exact quotation is : “**Voice performance training** involves a dynamic blend of technical finesse and expressive risk. It also seeks the affirmation of **personal genius** - character and musicality - and a commitment to the relevance of what one has to voice, be it in speech, song, scream, silence, image or movement – or their synthesis in **choreographic theatre**.”

To see the brochure online : http://pantheatre.free.fr/pages/paris_acts_brochure.htm

³ A note from Richard Talbot, from Triangle, Coventry, UK: “Funny - I was just reading *Dumbstruck* this week - you must have read my mind. I love Connor's descriptions of the comings and goings of the voice, the way the voice places or imparts the person 'out to the front' (and the Pantomime joke of the chatterer who is oblivious to the Baddie creeping up behind them). I like his images of hardness: the naughty adolescent who is the archetypal model for the ventriloquist's dummy: a precocious little hard-nut; and the mute who, having lost his voice, appears to be closed-up, hardened to the flow of conversation. Now following your clues...perhaps in this sense the person who *can't* find his voice nevertheless still finds a place: one which is turning into a plot (in the sense of an allotment, a grave) with an ambiguous ending; the story of oblivion.” <http://www.triangletheatre.co.uk>

possessive attitudes, opens the personnalistic trapdoors and lets the voice fly out and fly in to and from other mythical sources. A case in point is the much used definition “the voice is the muscle of the soul”, originally from the American romantic poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (“The human voice is the organ of the soul”) which referred to the *poetical* voice and not to the literal, physiological, personal voice.

For some years now choreographic theatre has been flirting with and learning much from mantics and the poetics of divination, especially in the sources and structures of fabulation, narrative, dramaturgy, and writing in general. Stephen Connor’s book “Dumbstruck: a cultural history of ventriloquism” (Oxford University Press, UK, 2000) was a stunning landmark in this ongoing affair between mantics and theatre - and music, especially now that we are asking the question “*Who is the music?*” – i.e. whose voice is it? Stephen Connor’s book, as the title implies, is centred on the ownership of the voice, on the question of authorship. Pantheatre’s most important laboratories in these areas, from the vaticinations in Umbria, to the gossips in Ireland or the politics in Granada, have been closely observed, advised and inspired by our diviner in Copenhagen, Stephen Karcher, who must be mentioned here.

Let me now share an extract from a book on oracles titled “The Road to Delphi”, by Michael Wood (Picador, USA, 2003) – with special thanks to Nick Hobbs who sent me the London Review article on it. I am about halfway through the book, so critical commentaries are premature – but I am enjoying it enough to send you these notes as a Christmas present! It makes for a very amusing and clever mirror to our work in choreographic theatre, and to the references we make to mantics (including the “ro-mantics” of Longfellow as quoted above...) The book is about oracles – especially the great Greek ones, Delphi and Dodona in particular. Michael Wood attempts a very open minded, if slightly tongue in cheek, rational poetics of oracular divination – he sounds something like a post-Wittgenstein mathematician (!)⁴ His terrain remains prediction and certainty, which are certainly not our main concerns in choreographic theatre (these are more related to “contra-diction” - against authorial ‘dictions’.) An yet, “prediction” could be seen as a part of “writing” and as part of the genius that “makes moves”. In our work, for instance, “prediction” is often the capacity to catch (“figure out”) a passing fantasy and to act it out. The spirit of inspiration is at work: “prediction” can be heard as the voice of an imp in our definition of improvisation: “imps at work”...

I let you enjoy and be intrigued (very much a part of “plotting”!) by some of the lines below (my underlinings), especially those concerning place and plot...

Bon Noël !

Enrique Pardo, Paris, December 22, 2005

Extract from

“The Road to Delphi”, by Michael Wood (Picador, USA, 2003.)

P. 35

...There are, I think, only three ways of accounting for my success as a magician, if I have it. One is an extraordinary lucky break, or pair of lucky breaks. This is a possible explanation but not really a plausible one, since most people would say that such a degree of precision in the completed prediction would rule out chance. In plagiarism cases, for instance, the crucial thing is to prove that the resemblance between two texts or two tunes cannot be accidental, and this is usually established by the detail, the sheer local specificity of the resemblance.

Second, my magic may just be a trick of some kind, an engineered appearance of successful prediction. I could have used a hidden rain machine to simulate rain; I could have looked at the hospitals accounts over several months, and known the surgeon personally. Even then I would need a bit of luck with the timing.

And finally, I could just have known the future - I really did know, and the event proves it. That is, I not only successfully predicted a particular future, as I would have, or could have, on the basis of an informed or even uninformed estimate, I actually knew all along. There are two corollaries of this possibility, one taking us further into magic and one pulling us back out of it. If I really know the future, then the future must already exist in the present. Time will need to be not only linear but also symmetrical; it will have to be a temporal form of

⁴ Later on... having read through Michael Wood’s book, I am impressed and will comment it more in depth, and revise these rather light comments. I am writing an article: “The Road to Delphy... includes a descent to Hell.”

space. The future will stretch out before us as the past stretches out behind us, and although harder to know, it is knowable for the same sort of reasons: it is finite and fixed, all dice are thrown. We often picture this condition as the already-composed book of destiny, and the philosopher Gilbert Ryle describes our plight with admirable English nonchalance: "A thing's actually taking place is, so to speak, merely the turning up of a passage that has for all time been written. Things just turn up, like a lost quotation or unexpected (but foreordained) visitors. The other corollary of my successful foreknowledge, if I have it, is that although I as a magician may know the future in this way, most people are not magicians, and no one else will know that I was right until the event has occurred, the rain has fallen or the procedure has failed.

With this thought we find ourselves quite suddenly in new territory: no longer that of magic or prediction but that of storytelling. Or to be exact, we find ourselves, as I have already suggested, in a place where predictions have to become stories, where the prediction depends on its place in a plot, acquires its final meaning only because of that placing. Whether we think of Macbeth or Oedipus or the dark stranger the gypsy had in mind for us or the horse we just knew was going to win the Derby, these events are confirmed by the time we talk about them - that is to say, they have entered into stories, they are stories. This is not to prejudge the actual validity or authenticity of the prediction itself. It could be god-given or cooked up after the event; in either case, it is only after the event that ordinary mortals will know that it is true. Actually, in human time, even the gods will know that it is true only at that moment; until then they will have known merely that it was going to be true. A man in England is said to have dreamed, well before September 11, 2001, that a plane crashed into the twin towers of Manhattan. We don't have to doubt the truthfulness of the dreamer or the reality of the prediction. But slightly better security at Logan airport in Boston, or better coordination among American intelligence services, would have turned this eerie forecast into just one more dream, a prediction with no relevant outcome.

The whole language of truth is strange in this connection. We say generally that prophecies come true or don't come true: we say more specifically that interpretations of oracles are right or wrong. We are not going to change these usages, since we know perfectly well what we mean by them, but we could be a little stricter now and then. Prophecies are neither true nor false at the time of their utterance. They are awaiting confirmation; they are checks that still have to clear. Prophecies are fulfilled or not—or more precisely, are deemed to have been fulfilled or not. Someone, priest, judge, layperson, a whole culture, has to declare the result, or to use a different metaphor, to say whether the ball was in or out and when the game is over. And the prophecies oracles deal in, as I shall suggest more fully later, are always fulfilled, unless they are refused altogether. The question is not which interpretation is right, since many interpretations could be that. The question is which interpretation counts once the results are in.

Links and reminders

January 2006 see AGENDA on <http://pantheatre.free.fr/pages/agenda.htm>

- Thurs 12, 14h30 to 17h : presentation of the Wolfsohn / Roy Hart voice legacy, by Linda Wise, Liza Mayer & Enrique Pardo.
- Friday 27
 - 10h to 13h : lecture by Vicente Fuentes
 - 14h30 to 18h : lecture by Nick Hobbs, followed by a round table
- Sat 28, 17h to 20h : Nick Hobbs, lecture continued.

April 2006 : http://pantheatre.free.fr/pages/works_GV06_wales.htm

- 4 to 9 avril, « Myths of the Voice » organized by CPR à Aberystwyth, Wales.

May 2006 : <http://pantheatre.free.fr/pages/symposium.htm>

- *Simposio sobre la Voz - Para Profesionales de Habla Hispana*. Malérargues, Centre Roy Hart. Mayo 2 a 20, 2006.

July 2006 : http://pantheatre.free.fr/pages/MV06_homepage_gb.htm

- Summer University 2006, on Myths of the Voice, asking the question : « Who is the music ? » Malérargues, Centre Roy Hart. July 1 to 14 juillet 2006.

MYTHS OF THE VOICE

Aberystwyth, 4 - 9 April

The ninth edition of Giving Voice; Wales' International Festival of the Voice: a compendium of inspiring workshops, stirring performances, talks and presentations, with artists from Senegal, Poland, the United States, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Wales and the UK, Giving Voice is a glorious feast of song, music and performance from around the world.

Proposed by CPR collaborator, Enrique Pardo of Pantheatre, the theme of Giving Voice 2006 is Myths of the Voice and the festival will trace the important transformations of notions of the voice, exploring notions of the 'true' and 'original' concept of voice, teasing out sources, roots and myths - from pagan oracles to protestant singing, from ventriloquism to contemporary myths of the soul...the power of myths and archetypes in vocal development, therapy, and practice; the role of the voice within the great myths of the world; myths and truths in voice practices and understandings; the somatic voice; the listening voice; the storyteller, the shaman and soul-singer; singing as personal transformation.

The workshop proposition

Placing the Voice

A voice and choreographic theatre workshop

Enrique Pardo, director

Nick Hobbs, music *ex machina*

Sharon Feder, assistant director *in situ*

Caterina Perazzi, assistant director *ex centrum*

Multiple plots:

1. Ensemble work: plot, place and context - the "ecology of imagination"
2. Right and wrong moves: spotting tacit voices
3. Hearing voices ("dropping eaves"): panic oracles, echolalia and sybilline ro-mantics
4. Bringing wild voices home to roost
5. Allowing texts a say (at the witness box)
6. Giving music the benefit of the doubt (i.e. divine status)
7. Verdict: "*If you find your place you will find your voice - and the plot, i.e. the meaning of your 'lines'.*"

Bring a working text learnt by heart; some 250 words, any genre, contemporary please (Enrique says he does not speak fluent Shakespeare. English, French, Spanish, Italian welcome.)