Women on the Verge, Sounds from Beyond: Extended Vocal Technique and Visions of Womanhood in the Vocal Theatre of Meredith Monk, Diamanda Galás, and Pauline Oliveros

by

Nicole Elaine Anaka, B. Mus., Mount Allison University, 2001

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

Women composers have not traditionally been at the forefront of genre development. Western classical musical genres and formal structures tend to operate by conventions codified by male composers of European and North American descent, and, accordingly, reflect patriarchal aesthetics and viewpoints. The nascent genre of vocal theatre, however, has been primarily defined by the works of women composer/performers. Artists Meredith Monk, Diamanda Galás, and Pauline Oliveros have created new modes of theatre for the voice; in their personal explorations of extended vocal technique, the female voice is used as a tool for discovering, activating, remembering, and uncovering a consciousness that is primordial, pre/anti-logical, and oracular. My thesis proposes that the vocal theatre of these women functions as musical *écriture féminine,* a term first introduced by French feminist theorist Hélène Cixous. As a theoretical framework, *écriture féminine* provides a particularly useful tool for interpreting these works, which, in the importance they place on openness, transcending language, embodied performances, and personal visions of womanhood, reveal aesthetic concerns that in many ways have more in common with the literary genre of *écriture féminine* than those of canonical Western art music. I argue that these works are important not only as musical *écriture féminine*, but as examples of an alternative, "feminine" compositional practice that prioritizes collaboration, improvisation, and intuitive modes of creativity. In doing so, they destabilize the traditional "maleness" of genre creation.

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I would like to express my gratitude to the House Foundation for the Arts for generously allowing me access to their files, recordings, and archival videos for both *Vessel* and *Education of the Girlchild.* Gordon Mumma shared his personal knowledge of Meredith Monk with me; his explanations of aspects of her creative process, as well as the House's methods of developing material for Part One of *Education of the Girlchild*, were extremely important to my thesis. My supervisory committee was extraordinary: Dr. Susan Lewis Hammond provided excellent suggestions, comments, and emotional as well as intellectual support when I needed it most; Dr. Sherry Lee gave me amazing feedback and encouragement; Dr. Dániel Péter Biró warned me when I veered into potentially problematic areas and suggested ways of graphically notating expressive elements of musical texts, and Dr. Lianne McLarty asked me illuminating questions about my work. Johnathan Munroe provided invaluable help with formatting, as well as the delicate art of graph-creation; I am eternally grateful for his assistance with these often-frustrating aspects of thesis production. Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support of my studies and for encouraging me to think "anaka"lytically.

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Introduction

Traditionally, women composers have not been at the forefront of genre development. Western classical musical genres and formal structures tend to operate by conventions codified by male composers of European or North American descent, and as a result reflect patriarchal aesthetics and viewpoints.[1] Histories and analyses of the symphony, string quartet, and opera make scarce mention of women as the composers of the first exempla of new genres. Scholars have argued, moreover, that sonata form is both a symbol and product of patriarchal eighteenth-century European values.[2] Marcia Citron and Susan McClary have both critiqued the gendered structures encoded in tonal compositions, demonstrating that even supposedly abstract instrumental works encode gendered structures that reinforce a "mythic narrative" of feminine subjugation and containment.[3]

The second half of the twentieth century, however, saw former compositional conventions weaken their hold in an explosion of stylistic and authorial diversity. More and more women entered the field, bringing with them their own stories and concerns. The second-wave feminist movement that took shape in the late 1960s played an important part not only in making sure that women's historic contributions to genre development were recognized, but also in heralding new work by women composers. Music and performance have similarly evolved, undergoing technological changes

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[1] Sally MacArthur. *Feminist Aesthetics in Music.* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), 8.

[2] A.B. Marx, for instance, described the gender coding entrenched in the earliest theories of sonata form.

[3] see Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge, England and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Marcia Citron, "Feminist Approaches to Musicology", in *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, ed. Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994); and Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings.* (Minnesota and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.)

duringtwentieth century leading to the development of previously unthinkable forms of music. New possibilities for feminist musical aesthetics emerge as new ways of creating music and performance develop in response to both social and technological changes.

In contrast to the masculine aesthetics that have characterized much of Western art music, the genre of vocal theatre has been primarily defined by the works of women composer/performers. Artists such as Meredith Monk, Diamanda Galás, and Pauline Oliveros have created new modes of theatre for the voice that expand the boundaries of vocalization to include non-verbal sounds expressing "feelings that we have no words for."[4] In their personal explorations of extended vocal technique, the female voice is used as a tool for discovering, activating, remembering, and uncovering a consciousness that is primordial, pre/anti-logical, and oracular. Fixed identity is exchanged in favour of a flexible voice capable of incarnating multiple personae. This is opera from elsewhere, including sighs, siren-sounds, screams, percussive consonants, nasal tones, circular breathing, and a palette of vocal colours that may then be further heightened or re-arranged by the use of electronics. The plotless, mysterious fables of Meredith Monk, spiral-shaped meditation operas of Pauline Oliveros, and Diamanda Galás's terrifying portraits of dementia find beauty in strangeness while celebrating differing concepts of womanhood.

In this thesis I propose that the vocal theatre of these women functions as musical *écriture féminine.* The concept of *écriture féminine* (loosely translated as "feminine

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[4] Meredith Monk, "Notes on the Voice" reprinted in Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Postmodern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 166. Monk's belief that vocal music can express things inexplicable in language recalls – and reverses - the 19th-century view of instrumental music as the ideal medium for expressing the ineffable. Her opinions regarding the expressive powers of non-verbal vocal music echo Kristeva's pairing of music with the non-signifying "geno-text", which is connected to the pre-linguistic infantile experience of the maternal voice (see Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, pp. 86–89.)

writing") was first introduced by French feminist theorist Hélène Cixous in her 1975 essay "*Le rire de la méduse*" (The Laugh of the Medusa) as a new philosophy of writing that enabled women to transform the way their stories were told. She begins the essay by inciting women to literary action: "Women must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement[5]". In this vastly influential essay/manifesto, Cixous encourages women to write themselves into texts, to incorporate the voices of their bodies and harness the power of the unconscious (subconscious) mind. These priorities are echoed in the "embodied voices" and non-linear forms of the works of Monk, Oliveros, and Galás. *Jouissance*, described by Cixous' colleague Julia Kristeva as poetic discourse beyond the masculine standards of reason and order, also finds a natural counterpart in extended vocal techniques that challenge *bel canto* assumptions about what women's voices should sound like[6].

My thesis examines *Crow Two* (1975) by Pauline Oliveros; *Vessel* (1971) and *Education of the Girlchild* (1973) by Meredith Monk; and *Wild Women with Steak Knives for Solo Scream* (1982-3) and *Vena Cava* (1992), by Diamanda Galás. These works are important not only as musical *écriture féminine*, but as examples of an alternative, "feminine" compositional practice that prioritizes collaboration, improvisation, and intuitive modes of creativity. In doing so, they destabilize the traditional "maleness" of genre creation.

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[5] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, 245 (New York: Schocken Books, 1981).

[6] Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 150.

Meredith Monk's *Education of the Girlchild* and *Vessel* and Pauline Oliveros' *Crow Two* are radical not only in sound, but in their reevaluation of the roles of performers and audience members. Monk and Oliveros both worked extensively with collectives of women while creating their early vocal theatre works - Monk with The House since 1968, Oliveros with [Woman Symbol] Ensemble since 1970. Monk has spoken frequently in interviews, as well as in her own writing about her collaborative practice with the House, and Oliveros has also addressed the collective nature of her work in her writings. These semi-communal communities of women worked and occasionally lived together, and supported each other personally as well as artistically. A sense of history is imbued in these collective works; the audience is meant to be aware of the personalities and pasts of performers.[7] Much of the material for group scenes was developed through a process of collective improvisation, a practice that challenges conventional distinctions between composer, performer, and audience. While creating Part One of *Education of the Girlchild*, for example, members of the House shared memories of key moments in their lives. These memories were exchanged among the group and used as the basis for vocal and movement improvisations that led to the creation of many of the tableaux and group scenes for Part One, although each performer created personal gestural and movement vocabularies for the work.[8] This strategy enriches the experience of the performer by weaving elements of her life and body into the fabric of the work, and also encourages diverse representations of womanhood in performance.

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[7] Kenneth Bernard, "Observations on *Recent Ruins*" in *Meredith Monk*, ed. Deborah Jowitt. (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 99.

[8] Leslie Satin, "Being Danced Again: Meredith Monk, Reclaiming the Girlchild" in *Moving Words: re-writing dance,* ed. Gay Morris. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 128.

While ultimately Monk and Oliveros retain compositional control over their works, their use of collective and collaborative forms of composition extend the concept of composition to include works conceived by a multiplicity of female voices. Simultaneously elevating performers and collective members to the position of creators and deemphasizing the importance of a single compositional voice, these works challenge assumptions of compositional authority. Material inspired by the lives and individual strengths of performers allows the audience to feel a more personal connection with the female personalities onstage. The performers also benefit greatly, working as (relative) equals with women from diverse backgrounds and imbuing their often archetypical and ambiguous characters with deeply personal performances informed by their own lives and beliefs. Liberating performers from the traditional role of interpreters and including them as collaborators, Monk and Oliveros stretch standard compositional method to suggest an emerging alternative or feminine practice wherein the process of conceiving and developing the work through experimentation and collaboration is valued equally with the end result. I suggest that this feminine practice enhances and makes possible musical *écriture féminine* by valuing the subconscious connections that come out of improvisation, and by weaving the lives, histories, and bodies of the performers into the work.

The role of the audience as passive receptor of performance and meaning has also been revalued in the works of these woman composers, and several of the works I examine involve audience participation. In *Vessel: An Opera Epic* (1971), a three-part work by Monk, audience members move between a parking lot, the Performance Garage, a more traditional theatrical space, and Monk's own loft. Oliveros includes audience members as "performers" in her meditation operas (such as *Crow Two)*, encouraging

them to meditate, chant, and fully open themselves to the transformative power of her ceremonial mandala pieces. Galás engaged in a less deliberate mode of audience participation in her early vocal theatre works, which she first performed for/with an audience of surprisingly responsive patients in a women's psychiatric hospital. The active role of the audience in these works enables and enhances the creation and audience understanding of musical *écriture féminine,* opening works up to the stories of others in a way not possible in more traditional musical practices.

Equally transgressive is the way works such as *Wild Women with Steak Knives for Solo Scream* (1982-3) and *Vena Cava* (1992), by Diamanda Galás, and Monk's *Education of the Girlchild* and *Vessel*, reverse the traditional status of the mentally and emotionally unstable female character in operatic performance. Male composers of opera since Monteverdi have presented female characters onstage in "mad scenes" in which the sight and sound of a woman in hysterics and her eventual control (musically represented by the triumph of diatonicism over chromaticism) and containment is presented for the enjoyment of the audience. Unlike the tradition of patriarchal composers projecting their own fantasies and fears of transgression onto women characters, these women enact their own emotionally, psychically, and vocally challenging works upon their own bodies. Additionally, these works do not merely introduce these states of instability and then re-impose control; instead, liminal states are explored not as something to be feared, but rather as alternative and potentially illuminating perspectives on life.

These works resist conventional musical analysis, as none of them employ traditional musical notation. Instead, these women use idiosyncratic forms of personal notation, video and audio recordings, and muscle memory to recall these works. Notating a work is not only a way to record and recall a work, however; it is also a symbol of

compositional control and fixedness, a perspective which clashes with the importance these works place on performers and audiences. Additionally, the interdisciplinary nature of vocal theatre, which combines elements of music, theatre, dance, and visual art, makes musical notation an impractical choice, as it is designed to capture only the musical elements of a work, and accounts for none of its gestural, visual, theatrical, or more abstractly sonorous elements. For all of these reasons, vocal theatre is resistant to the standard forms of musical analysis, yet it is still important work that deserves critical attention.

For my analysis I have relied primarily on my own close readings (or, to be precise, my own close viewings and listenings) of performances of these works, as well as the criticism of others. The resultant commentary aims to be something different – at once more and less – than an *éxplication de texte* of the kind once favoured in literary circles, which could never work for these works in any case, as they do not adhere to traditional narrative forms or produce unitary meanings. My intent with this analysis is to produce something in the spirit of *S/Z*, wherein Barthes writes of his reading of Balzac's *Sarrasine*.[9] Similarly, this is my writing of my experience of watching and listening to these works of vocal theatre; the associations called up are a product of my education, background, tastes, and political beliefs. While it may not produce definite, quantifiable meaning of the sort generated by harmonic or spectrographic musical analysis, a close reading enables me to identify the play of signifieds, meanings, and political implications the work evokes, and, in writing about it, to determine what the key signifieds are, which brings me that much closer to decoding its underlying structures. This approach is

[9] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, translated by Richard Miller. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975.)

strongly influenced by methods devised by Barthes originally for textual analysis, although he applies them to musical texts in *The Grain of the Voice*.[10]

My interpretation, however, is additionally informed by my search for correspondences between the concept of *écriture féminine* as expressed by Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva and elements of these works of vocal theatre which suggest the possibility of musical *écriture féminine*. This theoretical framework has been a valuable tool for interpreting these works, which, in the importance they place on openness, transcending language, embodied performances, and personal visions of womanhood, reveal aesthetic concerns that in many ways have more in common with the literary genre of *écriture féminine* than those of canonical Western art music. As I mentioned earlier, extra-canonical, interdisciplinary works such as these do not respond very well to traditional methods of musical analysis, which are the designed to explain the harmonic or structural content of a work. Harmony and structure are central to much Western classical music; however, elements such as the evocation of a wide range emotional and psychical states, multiple meanings created by the abundant presence of signifiers, and non-verbal vocal expression are far more important to the interpretation of vocal theatre. Using *écriture féminine* as an analytical method for uncovering meaning in these interdisciplinary texts allows the importance of these elements, as opposed to harmonic or structural aspects which may be of less interest in these contexts, to be emphasized. While my thesis only uses these parameters to examine works of vocal theatre, I feel that they could be useful for analyzing many extra-canonical musical texts, by men and women composers.

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[10] Roland Barthes, "The Phantoms of the Opera", in *The Grain of the Voice: Interviews 1962-1980*, trans. Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill and Wang, inc., 1985), 183-187.

There are, of course, difficulties inherent in taking theories that were originally intended for textual analysis, such as Barthes' approach to close reading and French feminist literary theory, and applying them to multidisciplinary performance pieces. There are important differences between written texts and non-verbal vocal performances that are not notated in a conventional manner, although both have to do with communication and performance. For example, an important aspect of *écriture féminine* concerns the traditional "maleness" of writing; opening up this mode of communication to women and destabilizing its gendered associations is part of its positive political project. Conversely, vocal expression has been considered historically to be a "feminine" mode of expression, an opinion evinced in the writings of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva. It could be argued that vocal theatre, with its emphasis on non-verbal vocal communication, actually lends credence to essentialist stereotypes regarding women's "natural" strengths in vocal communication (and implied weakness in written communication.)[11]

Some of the goals of *écriture féminine* are easier to achieve musically than in writing, however. Incorporating the voice of the body into texts is less difficult in an interdisciplinary vocal performance context than it is while writing; the body of the performer is inherently involved in actualizing the text. This aspect of vocal performance makes music an ideal media for realizing the aims of *écriture féminine,* as it is an innately "embodied" mode of communication. Additionally, avoiding unitary meanings may be easier to avoid in vocal theatre, which allows for the presentation of many simultaneous signifiers, unlike written texts, which are limited by the sequential way we read words

[11] Similarly, Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva's conception of music as a feminine mode of communication that is capable of "expressing the inexpressible", pre-linguistic, and associated with the maternal may also be interpreted as supporting stereotypical understandings of women as emotional and ill-equipped for rational thought.

one after another. While some aspects of *écriture féminine* are more relevant for the analysis of vocal theatre than others, as a theoretical framework it provides an excellent context for understanding these unconventional interdisciplinary works. Ultimately, I believe that while musical, gestural, visual, and written texts are different in many important ways, they have much in common, as they all adhere to symbolic, semiotic, and generic codes, and they all emanate from the same place – the human body. As long as the unique aspects of each media are considered, I see no problem with co-opting and applying literary modes of analysis to multidisciplinary texts, especially as they are so well suited to uncovering the political implications of artistic products. This is especially useful when considering the feminist potential of works of art.

Since the 1960s, the most influential work to embrace the possibility of feminine aesthetics has been found in contemporary French feminist theory, particularly that of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Their work draws inspiration from the deconstructive literary theories of Jacques Derrida and the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan. Irigaray participated in Lacan's psychoanalytic seminars during the 1960s, and was a member of the *École Freudienne de Paris* (EEP), a school directed by Lacan, between 1970-1974. Her association with Lacan ended, however, following the publication of her second Doctoral thesis, *Speculum of the Other Woman,* in 1974, which addresses how women have been excluded from both psychoanalytic theory and philosophy.[12] *Écriture féminine* formed the "positive" half of a feminist critique of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory focusing on its negative constructions of feminine identity within a repressive patriarchal system of language. Cixous explains that *écriture féminine* must transcend such language, stating that "it is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up

[12] Luce Irigaray, *Speculum de l'autre femme* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1974).

the challenge of the speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence."[13]

Cixous has claimed that *écriture féminine* can never be defined, perhaps because she wishes to avoid a unitary conception of women's writing. There are, however, characteristics common to many works of *écriture féminine*, and these characteristics informed my choice of works of vocal theatre to examine in my thesis, as well as its organization. Each chapter describes manifestations of a single element or concern of *écriture féminine* in the genre of vocal theatre, as exemplified by my chosen works. This means that individual works are analyzed in more than one chapter; in some cases, particular sections are discussed more than once to reveal how they imply several simultaneous concerns. Organizing my thesis thematically, as opposed to according each work an individual chapter, additionally avoids unitary meanings and allows for a better overview of the genre by contrasting several works and composers in a single chapter. After assessing in Chapter One previous musicological attempts towards conceptualizing the possibility of feminine/feminist musical aesthetics, in Chapter Two I examine aspects of *Education of the Girlchild* and *Crow Two* that suggest the positive potential of women's solidarity. Affirmation of a positive collective identity for women is an important goal of much *écriture féminine*. In literature, this can be achieved through using "we" (*nous*) to include the reader as active participant. I will argue that collaborative compositional methods and audience involvement function in much the same way in vocal theatre. The pluralization of meaning allows writers of *écriture*

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[13] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 251.

féminine to construct feminine identity as multiple in opposition to the claim of patriarchal language to unitary truth. This is achieved through the use of metaphoric language that contains a multiple of meanings, and through sliding pronouns confuses the idea of a single identity. Vocal theatre often disrupts unitary notions of identity by the use of archetypical personae rather than specific characters. Extended vocal techniques, especially when used in combination with electronics, can be used to further disrupt notions of singular identity.

Chapter three discusses issues of temporality in *Education of the Girlchild*, *Vessel*, and *Crow Two*. The linear ordering of the temporal sequence is often denied in *écriture féminine* as part of its subversive practice aimed at undermining the underlying logic sustaining the present cultural order. One technique for doing so, employed in all of Cixous's writings, is a consistent use of the present tense. Vocal theatre often uses non-linear forms and collage techniques to impart a sense of being "out of time". In Monk's work *Education of the Girlchild*, for example, her fascination with simultaneity offers audiences the opportunity to choose their own focus, offering a complex experience where each layer informs and illuminates the next. Actions in this universe seem to have no cause and effect; we see them as demanding and beautiful tasks requiring the utmost concentration, liberated from past and future but intensely involved with variations in pulse, rhythm, and dynamics.[14]

In chapter four, I focus on the concept of "writing the body" into texts, another aim shared by *écriture féminine* and vocal theatre. Oliveros, Monk, and Galás all use "embodied" voices in their works, echoing French feminist writer's attempts to bring language close to the bodily materiality of emotion and capture in syntax the rhythm of

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[14] Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers*, 156.

the libidinal drive. Rhythm and sound patterns in *écriture féminine* convey a "sensuous tactile immediacy rather than a rational mastery over that which is other and separate",[15] a statement that could equally describe Oliveros' meditation operas or the vocal theatre of Monk and Galás.

Woman is denied presence in the phallocentric symbolic order of language – she is only a non-man, the negative "other" to the positive masculine subject.[16] This logic of sameness operating within the symbolic order makes it impossible for women to represent themselves: as the subordinate half of a binary opposition, woman is defined as absence or lack, allowing masculinity to acquire meaning as wholeness. *Écriture féminine* often evokes sense of overflow or boundlessness, conveyed in Cixous's writing practice through syntax that works accumulatively rather than hierarchically. Her sentences tend not to be structured by the standard grammatical logic of main and subordinate clauses; instead phrases and clauses are piled up until they spill over into the next idea: "Our glances, our smiles, are spent; laughs exude from our mouths; our blood flows and we extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing; and we're not afraid of lacking."[17] In chapter five, I examine the multiple nature of meaning in vocal theatre and *écriture féminine.* The abundant prose and stylistic excess of *écriture féminine* is echoed in the sonorous "excesses" of the extended vocal techniques employed by Monk and Galás. The interdisciplinary nature of much vocal theatre also imbues it with abundance similar to *écriture féminine.* Music, movement, and stage design can suggest multiple meanings;

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[15] Pam Morris, "Writing as a Woman: Cixous and Irigaray" in *Literature and Feminism: an Introduction.* (Oxford UK: Blackwell, 1993), 125.
[16] Pam Morris, *Literature and Feminism: An Introduction.* (Oxford UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1993), 114-115.
[17] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", 248.

visual and vocal metaphors are piled up like Cixous's clauses until they spill over into the next event. The creative abundance of woman suggested by the overflowing syntax of *écriture féminine* is equally evoked by the profusion of sonorous and visual events in, for example, Monk's *Vessel.*

The displacement of a male economy of desire for a feminine economy of pleasure and *jouissance* found in *écriture féminine* is also paralleled in the extended vocal techniques used in vocal theatre. In the last chapter of my thesis, I discuss *jouissance,* electronics, and extended vocal techniques in vocal theatre. *Jouissance* in writing takes place on the linguistic level of the semiotic, "between physiology and speech."[18] The wordless vocalizations of Meredith Monk aim to convey emotions that are inexpressible using language, functioning in much the same way. *Jouissance* is also boundless, transcending the limits of male rationality much in the same way that extended vocal techniques transcend the limits of *bel canto* vocal aesthetics. The primal urge of Diamanda Galás's screams, whispers, and growls in *Wild Women with Steak Knives* and *Vena Cava*, whether signifying rage, pleasure, or pleasure at expressing rage, embodies principles of *jouissance* vocally.

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[18] Arleen B. Dallery, "The Politics of Writing (the) Body: *Écriture Féminine*" in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, Alison Jagggar and Susan Bordo, eds. (New Jersey and London: Reutgers University Press, 1989), 56.

Chapter One

Writing (music) as a Woman: *Écriture Féminine* and Feminist Musical Aesthetics

> The codes marking gender difference in music are informed by the prevalent attitudes of their time. But they also themselves participate in social formation, inasmuch as individuals learn how to be gendered beings through their interactions with cultural discourses such as music. Moreover, music does not just passively reflect society; it also serves as a public forum within which models of gender organization (along with many other aspects of social life) are asserted, adopted, contested, and negotiated.[1]

The idea that art can express a specifically female perspective has a history that predates the second-wave feminist movement that began in the 1960s. For example, in her 1929 essay "Women and Fiction", Virginia Woolf suggests that there is such a thing as a "woman's sentence," to be found in the writing of women modernists such as Dorothy Richardson.[2] Such examples are few and far between, however, and it was not until the 1960s that the idea of feminist aesthetics, or at least the idea that writing is sexually specific, was expressed in the criticism of French feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. The concept of *écriture féminine* was influential in furthering discourse on the possibility of feminist aesthetics in other fine arts; for example, Janet Wolff notes that in the visual arts, the painting of artist Nancy Spero has been discussed as an example of *la peinture féminine.*[3]

Music, however, has been slower than the other fine arts to take up the idea that women's music employs different aesthetic strategies than men's music. Part of the problem stems from the understandable reluctance of many women composers to have their music categorized as women's music. Sally Macarthur argues that the label of

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[1] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings.* (Minnesota and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 7-8.
[2] Virginia Woolf, "Women and Fiction", *Collected Essays* vol. 1 (London: Hogarth Press, 1966) **pg**
[3] Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences: Essays on Women and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press in assoc. with Basil Blackwell, 1990), 68.

women's music is problematic because it implies that women's music exists in a different world than men's.[4] Even more troubling is the one-sided nature of this gendered musical categorization: the term "men's music" is rarely, if ever, used, and it could be argued that the term is not used because "men's music" is simply music; women's music, it follows, must be something else, perhaps not music at all.

Another problem with the category of women's music is that it involves a division between men and women, reinforcing the binary divisions of opposing terms (night/day, active/passive, man/woman) that form the foundation of Western culture. Elizabeth Groz asserts that the problem inherent in these binary divisions is their sanctioning of one term in defining the other through its negation.[5] Creating a binary division between men and women's music, according to this line of thinking, could only have damaging consequences for women, the negative half of this pairing. Men's music has always been highly valued; women's music has been defined in relation to men's and has been devalued. Merely reversing the terms and considering women's music as normative and men's as something else is not only simplistic but counterproductive, and does nothing to support the autonomy or difference of women's music.[6] I agree with both Groz and Macarthur's assessments of the implications of the category of women's music; however, for me, the emphasis on the sexually specific nature of musical products and aesthetics that such a category provides outweighs the risks that are involved with binary gender divisions.

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[4] Sally Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 2002), 2.
[5] Elizabeth Groz, *Sexual Subversions* (Sydney; Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1989), xvi.
[6] Sally Macarthur, 3.

Without feminist aesthetics we are left with the myth of a universal, gender neutral aesthetics, which are actually patriarchal aesthetics.[25] Part of the difficulty music has had in embracing the possibility of feminist aesthetics stems from a continued widespread belief that music is the most abstract of the arts. Viewing music as "abstract" and autonomous is a Romantic idea that divorces music from its social context; however, it was not until the 1980s that the idea that meanings having to do with the sex of the composer are embedded in compositions was given any serious consideration by the musicological community.

In her essay in the 1985 book *Feminist Aesthetics,* musicologist Eva Rieger points out that women have contributed in ways different from men to the various aspects of musical culture, primarily as performers and teachers, although their contributions have changed over time.[26] If women's roles in music have been different, it follows that their compositions, which constitute part of their contributions to musical culture, must also be different, an argument which implies the existence of feminine/feminist musical aesthetics. In a more recent article, "I Recycle Sounds: Do Women Compose Differently?" Rieger argues that there are many similarities to be found in the music of twentieth-century women composers, even taking into account the specific historical and social contexts in which these works were created. She proposes that the works of many contemporary women composers evince the following characteristics:

1. Many women composers have a special ability to create a maximum amount out of a minimum of material, a sort of "restricted aesthetics"
2. Many have a special preference for functional music

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[25] Silvia Bovenschen, "Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?" in *Feminine Aesthetics,* ed. Gisela Ecker, trans. Harriet Anderson (London: The Women's Press, 1985), 30.

[26] Eva Rieger, "*'Dolce Semplice'?* On the Changing Role of Women in Music", in *Feminist Aesthetics,* ed. Gisela Ecker, trans. Harriet Anderson (London: The Women's Press, 1985), 135-149.

3. Communication is of primary concern to them
4. Women composers are more interested in constituent substance than in compulsive innovation
5. They often strive to overcome binary contrasts
6. The aspect of *Ganzheitlichkeit* means that they which to combine not only various fields of art, but also the whole human being, body and soul, Mankind (or Womankind) and Nature.
7. They relate closely to their own bodies and the human voice.[9]

Rieger provides historical justifications for each point, arguing in support of her first claim that although women have composed in all genres of music, their social status in the nineteenth century was such that they were largely confined to writing parlour music. As a consequence, women composers became skilled in writing music that can be easily performed, such as songs, piano, and chamber music, and developed a tradition of making the most out of limited circumstances, which gave rise to a "restricted aesthetics."[10] Rieger suggests that a number of twentieth-century women composers have been perhaps subconsciously drawn towards this same restricted aesthetic, citing as evidence the music of Pauline Oliveros, Annea Lockwood, and Joan LaBarbara. Rieger's claims are well supported, but her list is problematic, as there are many male composers who also exhibit the same characteristics with their music.

Susan McClary's 1991 book *Feminine Endings* is perhaps the best-known work of North American feminist musicology. Susan Cusick notes in her essay "Gender, Musicology and Feminism" that *Feminine Endings* has been conceived of as the central text of feminist musicology primarily by those who find such a concept threatening:

> One symptom of the extremely high discomfort which traditional musicologists feel at the prospect of such a 'game' gaining prominence within the discipline has been to limit discussion almost entirely to the ideas presented in one book proclaimed by its enemies as its 'fundamental

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[9] Eva Rieger, "'I recycle sounds': Do women compose differently?", *Journal of the International League of Women Composers* (March 1992), 22-23.
[10] ibid, 24.

> text', Susan McClary's 1991 collection of essays entitled *Feminine Endings*...McClary's collection was not conceived to be a single fundamental text. Rather, it was meant to exemplify some ways in which a particular political, multivocal, boundary-refusing musicology – one feminist musicology among many – might construct arguments about the relationship between musical pieces and cultural ideas of gender and sexuality.[11]

Feminine Endings brought feminist concerns to the attention of the larger North American musicological community, but many failed to note that the work, far from constructing a unified, central argument for feminist musicology, in fact explores a wide range of feminist musical inquiry, including musical constructions of gender and sexuality, gendered aspects of traditional music theory, gendered sexuality in musical narrative, and how tonal music encodes the values of the dominant (patriarchal) social class. McClary does close readings of a wide range of music, covering most of the significant historical periods in Western art music as well as some popular representations and contemporary art music, and shows how values are inscribed in music that is taken to be absolute or value-free. Although *Feminine Endings* does not specifically propose feminist/feminine musical aesthetics, it does argue that music is inherently involved in gendered discourse and performances, a necessary precondition for any explicitly gendered musical aesthetics.

Although the final essays of *Feminine Endings* assess the potentially feminist musical practice of women composers and artists such as Laurie Anderson and Madonna, most of the work examines canonical compositions by male composers, a choice which implicitly asserts the primacy of the (primarily male) musical canon.[12] Marcia Citron's *Gender and the Musical Canon* (1993) asks why so little of the music women write is

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[11] Susan G. Cusick, "Gender, Musicology, and Feminism", in *Rethinking Music,* Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, eds. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 486-487.
[12] ibid, 490.

included in the standard concert repertory. This omission has disturbing consequences for women composers, as canons are self-perpetuating: once excluded, a form of music or a composer may be forever trapped outside of the process of canon formation, limiting their chances of being performed in the concert hall, analyzed in journals, or taught in the universities.[13] Citron argues that parties interested in preserving phallocentric culture have consciously constructed the musical canon, and that music is a gendered discourse, ideas which imply the possibility of alternative feminine aesthetics in music.

In her 2002 book *Feminist Aesthetics in Music,* Sally Macarthur analyses the music of a number of nineteenth and twentieth century women composers in order to "show how understanding actual music provides insights into the social world that it inhabits."[14] While emphasizing that there is no single, universal set of aesthetic standards for women composers, she attempts to identify feminist musical aesthetics, which she defines as the different aesthetic criteria that inform women's music.[15] Macarthur exhibits an extraordinary sensitivity to the problems inherent in discussing women's music, such as celebrating difference without implying inferiority, and the resistance many women composers feel towards drawing attention to their gender. She moves beyond Citron's argument that women composers should be included in the musical canon, demonstrating that the sex of a composer influences both the production and the reception of their work. She asserts that women's music has been discriminated against for not conforming to the aesthetic standards established for men's music, while noting that both male and female composers may transgress these norms. Additionally, she notes that female composers

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[13] Marcia Citron, "Canonic Issues," in *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge, England and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 15-43.
[14] Sally Macarthur, 2.
[15] ibid, 5.

may (and do) access musical genres and forms that support a patriarchal perspective, effectively choosing to compose in drag. While stressing that feminist musical aesthetics are necessarily resistant to definition, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music* demonstrates that it is possible to talk about this music in a meaningful way by "asking different questions in order to arrive at different kinds of conclusions."[16]

In the final chapter of her book, Macarthur notes since the 1970s, a number of women artists have challenged the boundaries that separate genres, citing American artists Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, Pauline Oliveros, and Diamanda Galás as examples. She views the work of these women as having exciting ramifications for the emergence of feminist aesthetics, proposing that "with the emergence of these new genres in music there is an almost self-conscious attempt by these women composers to write deliberately (from) the feminine (body)."[17] This statement, which she does not pursue any further, sparked my explorations of the vocal theatre of Monk, Oliveros, and Galás.

My thesis takes Macarthur's proposition as a starting point and examines vocal theatre as a potential source of new feminist aesthetics. As exemplified by the works of women composer/performers such as Monk, Oliveros, and Galás, the genre of vocal theatre embraces non-verbal vocal expression that transcends language, shows a preference for flexible identities, multiple personae, mosaic and collage forms, and re-evaluates the traditional roles of performers, composers, and audience members. As I researched, watched, and listened to these works, it became clear that they transcend

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[16] ibid, 176.
[17] ibid, 181.

traditional musical aesthetic norms, suggesting instead the deeply personal and deliberately multiple strategies of *écriture féminine.*

Chapter Two

I Belong in the City of Women: Vocal Theatre and Collective Feminine Identity

> *Woman for women.* - There always remains in woman that force which produces/is produced by the other – in particular, the other woman. *In* her, matrix, cradler; herself giver as her mother and child; she is her own sister-daughter....Everything will be changed once woman gives woman to the other woman. There is hidden and always ready in woman the source, the locus for the other....It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself is given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was "born" to her. Touch me, caress me, you the living no-name, give me my self as myself.[1]

In "*Le rire de la méduse*" (1975), Hélène Cixous urges women to construct a joyful sense of feminine identity to counteract what she sees as centuries of deadly brain-washing in which women have been taught to hate themselves. One of the aims of Cixous' *écriture féminine,* expressed in the above quotation, is the creation of a positive collective identity for women, in part through texts that feature diverse, supportive relationships between women. A new kind of revolutionary text, the work of a poet-intellectual aiming to incorporate the bodily signifiers of feminine erotic drives into the texture of writing, "*Le rire de la méduse*" celebrates woman triumphant, imbued with sexual specificity and solidarity.

Critics of *écriture féminine* have argued that attempts to establish a collective identity for women élide the very real differences – racial, economic, cultural, religious, and sexual – amongst those whose anatomy designates them female. While critics such as Toril Moi accuse Cixous of veering dangerously close to essentialism, I feel that Cixous's positive depictions of collective female solidarity in works such as "*Le rire de la*

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[1] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", translated in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. and trans. (New York: Schoken Books, 1981), 252, italics in source.

méduse" should be considered in light of the alternatives available to women at the time.[2] While defining femininity may be incongruous with contemporary understandings of gender as flexible and performative, I believe that most people would agree that such definitions are better if they are at least made by someone of that gender – in other words, the very real risk of elision that any definition carries is outweighed by the negative consequences arising from a definition of womanhood established by the patriarchy. Cixous, however, seems conscious of the wide range of people the term "woman" encompasses, writing in the first section of "*Le rire de la méduse*" that a collective identity for women must necessarily embrace such differences:

> ...there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman. What they have *in common* I will say. But what strikes me is the infinite richness of their individual constitutions: you can't talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes – any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another.[3]

Her position – that a collective identity for women can be flexible and reflexive of the diversity the term encompasses – seems both tenable, and worthwhile. While feminist gender theorists "understand gender...to be (a) social and historical process that creates multiple meanings in multiple sites"[4], the fact is that despite these revelations gender exists in the world and people oppress other people for no reason other than gender itself. In *My Gender Workbook,* Kate Barnstein includes quotations from a wide variety of people asked questions about how gender impacted their lives. Despite having differing

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[2] see Toril Moi *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen Press, 1985). Additionally, Judith Butler argues that categories of gender, sex, and the self do not reflect a subject's body or inner nature, but are rather the results of socially governed performances in her books *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Elizabeth Spelman highlights the difficulties of reconciling theory based on sex/gender with the differences between women of different races in her *Inessential Woman: problems of exclusion in feminist thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

[3] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", 245-246, italics in source.

[4] Johanna Foster, "An Invitation to Dialogue: Clarifying the Position of Feminist Gender Theory in Relation to Sexual Difference Theory", *Gender& Society* 13/4 (August 1999), 434.

experiences and theories of gender, the respondents unavoidably encountered gender in the social realm:

> For me, gender has always been a social thing, not so much a biological thing or even a psychological thing. When I'm by myself my gender goes away, especially if I'm immersed in something like work or a book or household chores. But put us together, be you the closet of friends or the most anonymous and silent of passing strangers, and my gender engulfs me. It's Who I Am in the world, it's an expectant look in your eyes and all your assumptions; it's my need to satisfy those expectations:[5]

Despite the efforts of gender crusaders, gender simply *is* a part of society. Women continue to be thought of as a group, and a collective identity created by women for women can only improve upon the identity phallocentric cultures have created for women. The aim of creating a positive sense of collectivity for women is not, however, to define who is a woman and who is not; rather, it is about creating an inclusive vision of what women collectively value.

Part of the positive political impact of texts such as "Le rire de la méduse" lies in the multiple ways women are represented as connected to their bodies and each other. At the same time, these works refute limiting understandings of Woman as lack or Other, replacing them with descriptions of woman's sexual pleasure, metaphors of maternity, and giving, supportive sisterhood.[6] Women have been betrayed by patriarchal societies: they have seen their histories neglected and distorted; they have been isolated from each other. Phallocentrism, Cixous claims, has "made for woman an antinarcissism" and led them to be ashamed of their strength.[7] Cixous's use of language in "Le rire de la méduse" highlights womankind's connection to each other, a necessary pre-requisite to the

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[5] Sharon Minsuk, as quoted in Kate Barnstein, *My Gender Workbook* (New York and London: Routledge Press, 1998.

[6] Woman's sexual pleasure, or *jouissance,* merges with metaphors of maternity in Kristeva's description of *la mère qui jouit* (the mother who has sexual pleasure) in *Des chinoises* (Paris: des femmes, 1974).

[7] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", 248.

creation of a positive group identity, while her characteristic, overflowing syntax endeavors to represent collective feminine identity as spacious, generous, and beneficent.[8]

In this chapter, I examine musical, dramatic, and gestural elements of *Education of the Girlchild*, by Meredith Monk and the House, and *Crow Two,* by Pauline Oliveros and the [woman symbol] Collective, that suggest the positive potential of woman's solidarity. These two early, genre-defining works of vocal theatre suggest positive models of collective identification for women in their portrayals of tightly connected female communities. These works emphasize female solidarity and suggest new possibilities for woman's collective identity while celebrating existing familial and societal connections between women. Both *Education of the Girlchild* and *Crow Two* were created with the help of performance collectives consisting entirely of women. Like consciousness-raising groups, an important element of second wave feminism in North America and Europe, these collectives encouraged the type of woman to woman exchange Cixous advocates in "*Le rire de la méduse*": "It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself is given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was 'born' to her."[9] In celebrating women's relationships with each other, these works ultimately encourage women to celebrate themselves.

In her 1973 work *Education of the Girlchild*, Monk and members of her performance group, the House, depict a vivid, expressionistic world populated by a society of women hero-figures. *Girlchild* is divided into two sections: Part One is a forty-five minute series of tableaux and scenes, while Part Two is a marathon half-hour solo

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[8] Pam Morris, "Writing as a Woman" in *Literature and Feminism: an introduction.* (Oxford, U.K., Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993),121.
[9] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", 252.

performed by Monk. Sharing some of the same concerns as *écriture féminine,* this work explores the female consciousness and shows the positive potential of the creation of supportive communities of women. Portraying a questing fellowship of six women companions - a female Knights of the Round Table - Monk and The House create a magically real universe that explicitly unites the tropes of individuality and collectivity within the framework of gender.

The central theme of *Girlchild* involves the psychical and emotional journey of a company of women hero-figures who negotiate obstacles together and partake in stages of the enigmatic ritual of the Girlchild. The piece presents women as fellow travelers in a world on the borders of time who undergo, in Monk's words, "transformations and adventures having to do with growth, journeying, coming of age, and rights of passage."[10] Dance scholar Leslie Satin has identified "the poetic time-travel of the individual"[11] and the collective self as two of the principal thematic concerns in Monk's oeuvre. She interprets *Girlchild* as a self-representational work which foregrounds the concept of community while simultaneously envisioning the powerful individual who emerges from within that collective. Confirming Satin's assessment of the importance of community to the work, while emphasizing the importance of temporality to its interpretation, in a 1994 interview Monk identified the central themes of *Girlchild* as "growth, change, life cycles, and community"[12] – the process of 'education' or growing up, alone and/or with a group. Deborah Jowitt points out in her introduction to the

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[10] Meredith Monk, as quoted in Marianne Goldberg, "Personal Mythologies: Meredith Monk's *Education of the Girlchild*" in Deborah Jowitt, ed. *Meredith Monk.* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997),51.

[11] Leslie Satin, "Being Danced Again: Meredith Monk, Reclaiming the Girlchild" in *Moving Words: re-writing dance,* ed. Gay Morris. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 122.

[12] Meredith Monk, "Ages of the Avant-Garde" *Performing Arts Journal* (January) 1994/1:12-55.

anthology *Meredith Monk* that community is idealized in Monk's work as a locus for the expression of her faith in the ability of myth and dreams to join individuals across cultures. [13] Community, and by extension the positive potential of communities of women, is certainly a crucial aspect of *Girlchild*, allowing Monk to experiment with alternate concepts of identity which question, rethink, or displace individualistic models of selfhood. Her expression of the self as an entity inextricably linked to others is a political gesture that situates identity and its representation as both active and interactive, emerging from relationships with others – in this case, other women.

While most fictional journeys – and most canonical musical forms - have a linear, goal-oriented thrust, questing in *Girlchild* is inclusive and open-ended, a process of continual discovery and communication. As Leslie Satin explains, the journey is the point of this quest: obstacles are "fields of potential interaction rather than conflict: selfhood is a matter of pleasurable interdependence."[14] The fact that the first section of *Education of the Girlchild* emerged from a tightly knit community of women with shared concerns may also explain its positive representation of collectivity. When Meredith Monk and the House began work on the first part of *Girlchild* in 1972, most of the performers had been with Monk for about four years. The House played an integral role in the creation of the work, as much of the material for group scenes evolved through improvisation. At the time, the whole group shared a fascination with ancestry and mythology. Members of the House exchanged and remodeled memories, and personae emerged during rehearsals from elements of the private lives and personalities of performers. These elements were translated by the performers into specific styles of movement, characteristic objects or

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[13] see Deborah Jowitt, "Introduction" in *Meredith Monk*, 15-16.
[14] Leslie Satin, "Being Danced Again: Meredith Monk, Reclaiming the Girlchild" in *Moving Words: re-writing dance,* ed. Gay Morris. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 125.

pieces of clothing, and modes of performance. Rather than specific fictional personae, they became 'enlargements' of themselves onstage –a choice that emphasizes the presence of the performer, making the spectator simultaneously aware of both the actual and the fictional. In a 1975 interview Monk explained that "the interior richness of each performer contributes to the making of sequences and I want the audience to have a profound relationship with their female personality. Each woman uses her own familial, childhood, social, and ethnic backgrounds."[15] Liberating performers from the traditional role of interpreters and including them as collaborators, Monk stretches standard compositional methods to suggest an emerging alternative or feminine practice wherein the process of conceiving and developing the work through experimentation and collaboration is valued equally with the end result.

The first scene of *Education of the Girlchild* shows all of the companions gathered around a kitchen table in an intimate, domestic tableau.[16] The wooden table, and the heavy clay pitcher and tumblers set upon it, seem handmade; the women wear simple clothes in pale colours and natural fibers. The bleached-out palette of their clothing gives them an otherworldly aura – they could be goddesses, or ghosts – and visually displays their connection to each other. At the first scene change, Lee Nagrin gets up from the kitchen table and moves towards the darkened part of the space, with Monica Moseley following her. Nagrin picks her up and slings her across her broad back, and continues to walk across the space, her back bent as if carrying a burden. This simple, yet powerful gesture demonstrates that these women quite literally support each other on their journey,

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[15] Interview with Philippe de Vignal, 1975, Monk clippings, Lincoln Center Dance Collection, New York City.

[16] My observations of Part One are based on the video of the 1982 performance of *Education of the Girlchild* (House Foundation, New York City).

giving strength to help each other along.

At the same time, in the lit area on the other side of the stage, Meredith Monk and Coco Pekalis sit at the round kitchen table, facing each other. They take turns singing a gently undulating, folk-like phrase on the vocables "ah" and "hoi"; they look into each other's eyes, focusing intently. When they have taught the tune to each other they sing it together, harmonizing, overlapping slightly on entrances; because the melody is simple, the results are harmonious. Although they are seated, eyes locked, their bodies are not still: they lean in the direction of the melody, or shape a line with their hands, and their breathing is both deep and visible. This beautiful, intimate moment illustrates their profound connection. They are at once giving each other this song and giving themselves to each other, their ecstatic exchange demonstrating the generosity Cixous claims as an essential element of a positive collective identity for women. Monk has commented on the joy that singing with other people brings her; poetically stating "it's a way for people to touch souls."[17] Alone in a musical world of their own creation, Pekalis and Monk certainly seem connected; the twining of their melodies and their open, receptive physicality are not just intimate, but erotic.

The "traveling" section in Part One reveals particularly well the relationship of the individual to the collective in *Education of the Girlchild*. As the playing area is bathed in warm light, the women enter one by one, each holding a "signature" object that represents an aspect of their lives or personalities. Moseley has a globe, signifying her love of travel; Nagrin has a spray of branches, representing her connection to nature; Cummings, who comes from the southern United States, holds a stuffed alligator;

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[17] Meredith Monk, Artist's talk at Ironworks Gallery, Vancouver, BC, November 11, 2005.

Harrison swings a scythe from her farm in upstate New York; and Monk carries a miniature model of her home on her head. Traveling is represented by a repeated bouncy marching step performed in place; it is clear that they are all basically doing the same steps, although each woman executes the movement in her own way; for example, turning the steps from side to side on the diagonal, or adding a circling motion with the downstage arm. These individual variants on the group marching movement, as well as the signature objects held by each companion, simultaneously emphasize their connection to each other and the uniqueness of each performer.

The companions are perceived as a collective unit that marches in the same procession, and each woman sings wordless, lilting "traveling music"[18] over a simple organ ostinato. Monk has the first vocal solo line, which emphasizes the open vowels of vocables such as "ah" "ee" "(h)ai" and "hey" and the glottal break. Each companion enters the song at her own time, and with her own melody, yet the result is harmonious, not chaotic, as all of the melodies fit together. In this city of women, collectivity does not equal the negation of the self; members of this community both retain and actively perform their identity- or identities - while clearly sharing a commitment to the relational life uniting them. Psychoanalytic theorist Nancy Chodorow has suggested that the individuation process is different for men and women, positing that "the basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, (whereas) the basic masculine sense of the self is separate."[19] Meredith Monk and the House demonstrate a collective, harmonious sense of identity for women in this scene, yet through their individualized marching movements,

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[18] "Traveling Music", a song on Monk's 1980 album *Dolmen Music*, features the organ ostinato heard in this scene, as well as vocal material seemingly taken from this section of *Girlchild*.

[19] Nancy Chodorow, as quoted in S.S. Friedman, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice" in S. Benstock (ed.) *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 40-42.

signature objects, and solo vocalizations they retain a uniqueness that seems just as fundamental to each woman's sense of self.

Crow Two (1974-75), a ceremonial meditation opera composed by Pauline Oliveros and the Woman Collective, similarly explores the concept of the self as a non-autonomous entity, while celebrating the potential of female relationships and valuing qualities, such as intuition, generally thought to be feminine.[20] During the early 1970s, her interest in North American and Australian aboriginal cultures and Eastern religions led Oliveros to create works that combine meditative improvisation within larger ceremonial forms. Oliveros chose the mandala, which she was familiar with as a method of cultivating visual awareness, as the structure for her ceremonies, incorporating them into her pre-existing theories of sonic awareness.[21] The mandala is a circular image used as a meditation object in Tibetian Buddhism and other religions and cultures. Mandalas were also important symbols for Jung, who considered the mandala as a cryptogram of the multiple active processes of a single being; the circular form represents harmony and integration, and the inner configurations reveal the deep levels of the inner self.[22] These inner configurations are modular, resulting in many simultaneous events when the mandala is used as a ceremonial form.

According to Hedi von Gunden, who studied composition with Oliveros, the modular aspects of mandala form also influenced the structure of her collaboration with others. The central idea of the composition was determined by Oliveros and her

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[20] Oliveros notes in "The Contribution of Women Composers" that the "oppression of women has also meant the devaluation of intuition, which is culturally assigned to women's roles." Pauline Oliveros, *Software for People: Collected Writings 1963-80* (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1984), 135.

[21] Hedi von Gunden, *The Music of Pauline Oliveros*, (Metuchen, NJ, and London: Scarecrow Press, 1983), 122.

[22] Carl Jung, *Mandala Symbolism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), v.

collective; the task of designing visual and gestural elements was delegated to talented friends.[23] As in *Education of the Girlchild*, the central themes of the work were developed by a collective of women, and the resulting work features a group of women as its emotional centre. The score of *Crow Two* is written entirely in prose, with a single drawing of a mandala figure outlining the physical layout of the space (see page 36.) The centre of the space is occupied by the Crow Poet. Oliveros does not specify a gender for the role, but she does note in the score that the role was played by her friend the poet Margaret Porter for the first performance. At the cardinal points of the circle sit the Crow Grandmother, Crow Stepmother, Crow Godmother, and Crow Mother. Oliveros states in the score that "their meditation is simply being. They personify the natural order."[24] The placement of the specifically female characters at the centre of the mandala, considered the source of its spiritual power, visually represents their importance to the work. Additionally, the circular shape of the mandala itself may be interpreted as a "logo of feminine consciousness."[25]

The inner circles of the mandala are occupied by the crow matriarchy, who are associated in *Crow Two* with the natural and intuitive. Countering the maternal, feminine energy of the inner circles are three crow Heyokas, "sacred clown-like figures from Sioux Indian rituals."[26] Oliveros does not specifically designate a gender for the Heyokas, but the score notes that they were played by men in the first performance. In his analysis of *Crow Two*, Timothy Taylor points out that "the attributes that Oliveros assigns the Crow Heyokas correspond to attributes that some feminists code as masculine in Western

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[23] ibid, 122.
[24] The score of *Crow Two* is reprinted in Walter Zimmerman's *Desert Plants* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Aesthetic Research Centre Publications, 1976).
[25] Hedi von Gunden, 94.
[26] Hedi von Gunden, 123.

culture: aggressiveness, violence, disruptiveness."[27] Their job is to test the meditators with distracting and exaggerated movement and sound. They are eventually lured away by a shiny Mylar totem, and do not succeed in distracting the women from their meditation.[28] The failure of the Heyokas to distract the meditators is a crucial element of *Crow Two*. The male interlopers do not destroy the "feminine" meditative energy created by the inner circles, and the work as a whole celebrates values associated with women and suppressed in patriarchal societies.

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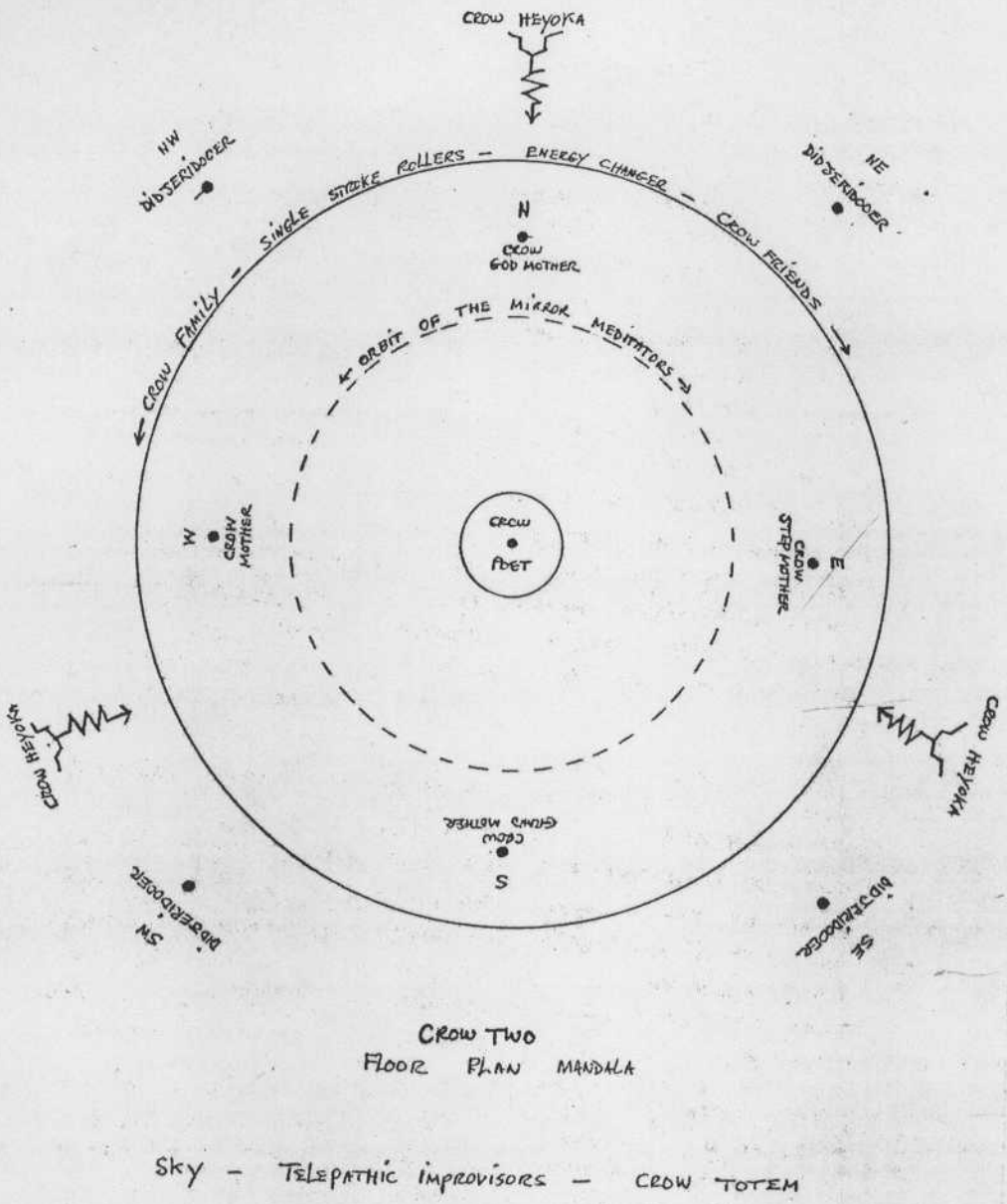
[27] Timothy Taylor, "The Gendered Construction of the Musical Self: The Music of Pauline Oliveros", *The Musical Quarterly* 77/3 (Fall 1993), 391.

[28] Oliveros reports in the score that "the meditators survived the tests of the Heyokas and continued some ten minutes or so after their exit."



Mandala for *Crow Two,* reprinted with the kind permission of Walter Zimmerman; the diagram originally appeared in *Desert Plants* (Vancouver, B.C.: Aesthetic Research Centre Publications, 1976), 171.

Crow Two and *Education of the Girlchild* both celebrate the positive political potential of supportive female communities, which form the emotional centre of these works. In doing so, they encourage women to connect with each other, to learn each others stories, and to be there for each other, goals which are concomitant with those of many feminists. Yet these works simultaneously account for the individuality of women, depicting a collective feminine identity that embraces difference and the unique perspective of each woman. Perhaps this can be credited to the fact that these works both emerged from collectives of women, and as such represent a multiplicity of female perspectives rather than a single authorial voice. Their collective origins enhance their positive representations of women's solidarity by weaving the unique lives and histories of their female creators into works that offer multiple perspectives on womanhood.

Chapter Three

Women Out of Time: Vocal Theatre and Temporality

Most conceptualizations of reality are related to time. Temporality is one of the unavoidable parameters of all performance-based arts – a performance may consist of anything; be done anywhere, and yet it cannot escape the boundaries of time. In its simplest form, performance is an exchange between spectator and performer that is ephemeral, existing in its physical presence only during a fixed point in time. Although our measurements of time in Western civilizations are both conventional and arbitrary, they form part of a space-time configuration designed according to the scientific and personal experiences of members of the patriarchy. These supposedly universal methods of interpreting reality in fact bear the sexually specific signature of their (male) authors. Kant conceived of space and time as *a priori* categories that the subject must impose on the world in order to perceive it.[1] In *Éthique de la Différence Sexuelle*, Luce Irigaray discerns an underlying association with the binary male/female division in the manner in which relations between space and time are conceived: "time is the projection of a (masculine, divine) subject's interior, while space is represented as the exteriorization of a (feminine) subject."[2] Irigaray concludes that the ways in which space is commonly perceived is reliant on the quantifiable nature of time: it is the subject's projection of a

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[1] See Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Pure Reason,* translated by J.M.D. Meiklejohn. (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1955).

[2] Irigaray, Luce. *Éthique de la Différence Sexuelle* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1984), 15. Translation of this passage found in Elizabeth Groz, *Sexual Subversions* (Sydney & Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 173.

sequential, temporal, 'one after the other' relation outside of himself that designates time as a measurable field stretching from the smallest imaginable point to infinity. Within this system, Irigaray argues, women have no place of their own, but are viewed as the space or place wherein man can locate himself and determine his position, the corporeal horizon of his existence. The possibility of woman determining such a position for herself within this system does not exist (this configuration of space and time, designed according to male experience, cannot accommodate her as subject); she *is* place/space/home, and as such has only herself. With no home of her own, she is readily assimilated to the status of 'thing.'[3]

In *Éthique de la Différence Sexuelle,* Irigaray expresses both a negative concern with combating predominant (phallocentric) presumptions of universality and a positive commitment to, among other goals, creating a space-time framework specific to women. She asserts that there is no 'human' or 'universal' neutral set of interests, values of perspectives at work in culture: there are always at least two, it is just that one set (the masculine) has thus far taken it upon itself to represent the other (the feminine). While far-reaching social changes are required before all women may escape the pseudo-representation of the masculine, performance is a space where it is possible to explore alternate notions of time. Particularly in their early vocal theatre works, Meredith Monk and Pauline Oliveros's use of non-linear forms and collage techniques refute conventional conceptions of temporality. In Monk's *Education of the Girlchild* (1973), theatrical time is stretched, interrupted, fragmented, and reversed in a prismatic series of glimpses into the mysterious rites of a city of women. In *Vessel* (1971), a three-part

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[3] Irigaray, Luce. *Éthique de la Différence Sexuelle*, 17.

"opera epic" performed in Monk's loft on Great Jones Street, the Performance Garage (home of Richard Schechner's Performance Group), and a large parking lot near the Garage, Monk contrasts her filmic manipulation of theatrical time with the 'real' passage of time that occurs between sections of the work.[4] Setting the dream-like pace of Monk's carefully constructed fantasy world against the propulsive/compulsive rhythms of downtown Manhattan, *Vessel* embraces the resulting disconnect, encouraging spectators to expand the scope of their awareness of time and their environment. All elements of Pauline Oliveros's *Crow Two* are resonant with the circular mandala designed by the composer; she has designated it a "ceremonial mandala piece", and this concept extends to the way time is perceived during its performance. Hedi Von Gunden, a former student of Oliveros, explains the concept of "mandala time" in her monograph on the composer: "Mandala time is based upon the principle of synchronicity: events do not develop in the Western sense of linear cause and effect."[5] The modular aspects of mandala form are echoed temporally in *Crow Two*'s slow, spiraling pace and meditative repetitions. The discontinuous approaches to temporal sequencing used in these works evokes a world outside of time, recalling Cixous's insistent use of the present tense in novels such as *Dedans* and *Souffles*, a technique which creates an endlessly shifting parade of present moments rather than the traditional novelistic sense of past, present, and future.

The Eternal City of Women: *Education of the Girlchild*

When Monk moved to New York in the mid-sixties, some of her first

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[4] Monk employs flash-forwards, flashbacks and film editing techniques in her large interdisciplinary pieces. In a 1972 interview, Monk refers to *Vessel* as a "live movie." [Brooks McNamara; Meredith Monk. "*Vessel:* The Scenography of Meredith Monk. An Interview. *The Drama Review: TDR* 16/1 (March 1972), 103.]

[5] Von Gunden, Hedi *The Music of Pauline Oliveros* (Meutchen, NJ and London: the Scarecrow Press, 1983), 122.

performances were in the Happenings of Fluxus members Al Hansen and Dick Higgins. The creators of these events came from visual arts and literary backgrounds, and as such had few preconceived notions of how time should be ordered in live performance. Her participation in these events may have strengthened an interest, already discernable in her early choreography, in portraying a freer, more flexible conception of time than the conventional linear narrative presented in mainstream theatre.[6] In *Education of the Girlchild*, Monk treats time as a sculptural, fluid medium, something that can be compressed, extended, interrupted, or twisted to transport both spectator and performer out of mundane temporal modes of experience.

As is frequently the case, Monk plays the central figure in this work – a young woman becoming herself through the passage of time, traveling through a mysteriously familiar world alone and in the company of women. This journey is structured as a collage, each scene a mosaic built of movement and sound motifs that are fragmented and arranged to parallel the character's inner worlds. What little narrative there is unfolds episodically, with long pauses interrupting movements and sequences. While most fictional journeys have a linear, goal-oriented thrust, questing in *Girlchild* is inclusive and open-ended, a process of continual discovery and communication. In "Being Danced Again: Meredith Monk, Reclaiming the Girlchild", Leslie Satin suggests that the journey

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[6] In *Sixteen Millimetre Earrings* (1966), one of Monk's first live performances to make use of film, images projected on a paper globe placed over her head, her body, and a flat screen evoke an incessant, on-going investigation/negative engagement with the self. I interpret the exterior projections as representative of a pervasive interiority, an intense awareness of self that is ever-present and in the way of any real engagement with the present moment.

is the 'point' of this quest: obstacles are "fields of potential interaction rather than conflict: selfhood is a matter of pleasurable interdependence."[7]

Actions in this universe take a long time to unfold; the effect is that the prolonged time-sense of dreams seems to share the stage with 'real' time. The "traveling" section in Part One is an excellent example of Monk's employment of a dream-like time-sense and imagery: each woman, holding a signature object above her head, performs a bouncy marching step that is repeated over and over again in place. The objects link each woman to her life outside the work: Monk has her "House", a miniature version of her loft (the original performance space for *Girlchild*), Moseley has a globe, Nagrin has a spray of branches, Cummings has a stuffed lizard/alligator, Pekalis, a folded wooden chair. Lanny Harrison, moving back and forth across the downstage area in front of the others, swings a scythe while making hyper-expressive, silent film-star faces. The scythe that she swings is one that she has used on her farm in upstate NY, where members of the House gathered around the kitchen table, discussing what would eventually become Part One of *Girlchild*. This scene draws heavily on the type of richly symbolic 'inner landscape' imagery encountered during dreams; its primary visual metaphors (the objects transported by each woman and the way the companions march but never get anywhere) provoke multiple interpretations. They carry domestic items, household treasures perhaps linking them to an earlier life, a time when there was no exploring or traveling. The static nature of the procession could be read as indicative of its futility, or as another dream-like element situating these women in a wholly liminal universe. Their traveling suggests both the consistent passage of time – marked by the repeated marching steps of the

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[7] Leslie Satin, "Being Danced Again: Meredith Monk, Reclaiming the Girlchild" in *Moving Words: re-writing dance,* ed. Gay Morris. (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 125.

companions – and its obliteration, as no linear, forward progress is made. Similarly to the way that items often 'stand in' symbolically for people and concepts in dreams, the object that each woman holds above her head additionally connects her to her personal life outside of this theatrical universe, adding yet another autobiographical element to each woman's onstage persona.

Contrasting with the horizontal, collage-like structure of the first half, the second half of *Girlchild* moves in a linear, although backwards, direction. An ancient woman, performed by Monk, reverses chronology in a long solo, tracing her life as she moves very gradually to the front of the stage, becoming younger with each step. As she moves down a sheet of unbleached muslin, she goes through three different stations of this woman's life -- old age, middle age, and youth. Questing backwards to find the roots of what she has become, her life is ritualistically conveyed through gesture and vocal sound.

Monk started the process of creating the solo by working with the Old Woman character, creating stripped down, archetypical gestures. She then began to work on the voices for the old woman in much the same way. Her intent was to show the female voice in all of its aspects: "the voice of the 800 year old woman... The voice of the 80-year-old woman… The voice of the oracle, and the voice of memory." These voices, floating above an austere keyboard substructure, create a darkly personal, deeply textured soundworld. In this marathon solo, changes of time are represented through gesture and vocal sound. In an interview with Edward Strickland, Monk states that "I thought of the opening section as a dirge, then towards the end the young girl's voice comes in…I saw it as a dialogue of her selves."[8] Her voice at first is low and wavering with a dark, haunting

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[8] Edward Strickland, Meredith Monk. "Voices/Visions" in *Meredith Monk,* ed. Deborah Jowitt. (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 147.

quality that suggests the pain of a lifetime. As she grows younger, moving through middle age, her voice recalls moments of anguish and times of quiet contemplation. By the end of the path it is pure and bell-like, light, the voice of the Girlchild. Additionally, the passage of time is implied by performing the same gestures at all three stations along the stream of her life. In combination with the way her voice transforms as she moves along the path, actually seeing how age changes the gesture-- the subtle variations of the same gesture performed by the old woman, the middle-aged woman, and the young woman – makes it clear that what we are seeing and hearing is a ritualistic evocation of one woman's life.

In this reverent procession through a lifetime, from ancientness to middle-aged womanhood to virgin or saint, from remembering to knowing to wondering, Monk explores the span of a woman's life. At the end of the solo, she is the Girlchild from part one, completing the accordion-like structure of the work. There are elements of spiritual communication in this solo, and in all of *Girlchild.* Monk and members of the House have suggested that audience members prepare for the work by cultivating "openness, a meditative presence, and a willingness to suspend usual constructs of space, time, and structure"[9], encouraging the audience to receive the work at an emotional and psychic level.

Vessel: Visions and Voices

In her 1971 work, *Vessel*, problems of time, space, and focus are solved by Monk using techniques more filmic than conventionally theatrical: scenes are interrupted, theatrical time is slowed down and sped up, and other filmic devices such as flashbacks,

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[9] Marianne Goldberg, "Personal Mythologies", in *Meredith Monk,* ed. Deborah Jowitt. (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 52.

flash forwards, and montage are employed.[10] Throughout this three-part work, Monk's filmic or theatrical manipulation of time in performance is deliberately contrasted with the real time that passes between sections of the performance. This structural manipulation of temporality is only one of the ways in which Monk plays with time in *Vessel* – setting an imagined medieval past against the obtrusive present of downtown Manhattan gives a sense of a world 'outside' of time while highlighting its incessant flow in the real world, while the oracular protagonist (Joan of Arc, played by Monk) transcends temporality through communication with the divine. *Vessel* exhibits to audiences the hallucinatory, revelatory consciousness of the artist-as-shaman, breaking down the boundaries between reality and artifice and in turn becoming a metaphor for the transformative power of opening up to new ways of perceiving, thinking, and experiencing.

Like all of Monk's work, *Vessel* is enormously complex and dense, with layer upon layer of images, sounds, and sensations structured into shifting, enigmatic live mosaics. One of the most impressive features of Monk's site-specific pieces is her ability to completely transform real environments into collages of the transmundane. Like her previous epic, *Juice*, produced in 1969, *Vessel* is in three related parts, which happen in three different spaces. Also as in *Juice,* the same or closely related characters and actions take place in each of the three parts; each time grouped differently in regard to time and space.[11]

Vessel begins with a journey into Inner Space – a dimly lit and slowly paced taste

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[10] Brooks McNamara; Meredith Monk. "*Vessel:* The Scenography of Meredith Monk. An Interview." *The Drama Review: TDR* 16/1 (March 1972), 88-89.

[11] Deborah Jowitt, "Even the bushes are not to be trusted" (review of *Vessel*) *The Village Voice,* November 4, 1971, p35.

of things to come designated as "Overture: Open House."[12] This section, performed in Monk's living space, was simultaneously an opportunity for spectators to enter the site of the artist's daily reality and an introduction to her elaborately designed fictional world. In an interview with Brooks McNamara, Monk explains her decision to use her own home for the first part of *Vessel*: "Since the nature of my work has a lot to do with unconscious imagery and fantasy, I'm very interested in grounding it in what I call 'reality space.'...The piece here in the loft is grounded in reality, but the images and figures are strange. Because of the grounding in reality, the effect is surreal."[13] Situating fantasy in a reality space makes the fantasy even more otherworldly by grounding it in the ordinary. In this section of the work, spectators were not only invited to tour Monk's reality – to walk across where she stood, to layer their presence over her past in this room- but also to experience her inner world, expressed through performance.

Part one of *Vessel* has the poetic time-sense of dreams, proceeding by association and accretion of layers instead of along linear paths. Points of light illuminate a single image at a time in the long, dark space, beginning with Lanny Harrison as the Old Woman, who recites a surrealistic speech in melodramatic *Sprechstimme.* A match flares in the darkness as Monk lights a candle, seated at her organ console; she plays a sequence of repetitive, syncopated chords. After playing the sequence on its own for about five minutes, she begins to vocalize, repeating a high note in a complementary rhythm, staring straight ahead and rocking from the base of her spine. Her song is wordless, otherworldly – there is no language for Joan's voices, described by critic Arthur Sanier as a "crotchlike

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[12]Arthur Sanier, "In the Merry Monk of October" (review of *Vessel*), *The Village Voice,* November 4, 1971, p57.
[13]Meredith Monk, as quoted in Brooks McNamara, p90.

sound."[14] As ugly as that phrase is, it does convey something of the fundamental nature of Monk's vocalizing in this section - its profound connection to her female body; the way it seems to emanate from somewhere – someone? – hidden deep inside of her.

More lights come up, revealing a group of people dressed in black seated casually around Monk's living room. These people are members of the House, Monk's performance group, adding yet another layer of reality to the evening's fantasy. At this point, the actors seem like themselves, but the actual and the illusory rapidly become conflated as the piece goes on. This 'double presence' (performer as herself transparently layered on top of performer acting as psychologically motivated character) would have been especially noticeable to members of the audience who had attended Monk's other works featuring the House, as they would already be acquainted with the performers outside of this context. The House people begin to make miniscule gestures with their hands, breaking the space with truncated movements, some arc-like, some jagged. As the lit area expands, a naked couple with long frizzy hair seated at a kitchen table becomes visible. They sit, or sometimes slump, facing the audience. A host figure moves around the room, momentarily lighting different areas of the loft. The whole space is never visible at once; the effect is fragmented, cryptic. Another figure, his back constantly to the spectators and holding a lighted lamp, inches his way over the course of the performance towards the opposite end of the loft – a visual reminder of the real time passing during performance.

In the next section of Part One, House people leave the living room and return in costume, introducing the roles they will play for the next two sections of *Vessel*. In an

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[14] Sanier, p58.

interview with Brooks McNamara, Monk refers to this as the "flash forward section", as during this time spectators are given a glimpse at the characters that will appear in Part Two.[15] Once they have changed, the former denizens of the living room come out one at a time to perform a short scene that broadly introduces their role and foreshadows the sort of activities they will perform in Part Two. These short scenes are like coming attractions for a film, but they also serve as a sort of audience-wide premonition of what is to come, extending Joan's oracular vision to all those present.

Throughout all of this, the figure of Monk remains more or less stable, shattering the stillness occasionally with Joan's voices. At one point, she moves to the far end of the loft, where she stands and very simply and coolly recites Joan's scene five monologue from Shaw's *Saint Joan.*[16] When she is finished, she repeats the same speech in a whisper. Monk's 'cool' presentation is deliberately removed from the passionate nature of the text, suggesting perhaps her dissatisfaction with the inability of language to effectively convey the nuances of emotion.

By the end of the first section, the figure with the lamp has finally reached the back of the loft, where he opens the door exposing both the night outdoors and an apparition – "the white lady." From the darkness outside, a bushy-haired girl dressed in white peers in at the loft as if trying to understand its interior, and it is at this point that a strange thing occurs. Arthur Sanier describes it as follows: "It is as if the loft has

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[15] McNamara, 94.

[16] "France is alone; and God is alone; and what is my loneliness before the loneliness of my country and my God? I see now that the loneliness of God is his strength: what would He be if He listened to your jealous little counsels? Well, my loneliness shall be my strength too; it is better to be alone with God: His friendship will not fail me, nor His council, nor His love. In His strength I will dare, and dare, and dare until I die. I will go out now to the common people, and let the love in their eyes comfort me for the hate in yours. You will all be glad to see me burnt; but if I go through the fire I shall go through it to their hearts forever and ever. And so, God be with me!"
George Bernard Shaw, "Saint Joan", *Three Plays.* (The Franklin Library: Franklin Center, Pennsylvania, 1979), 436.

suddenly reversed its nature, transformed from some positive interior to a negative interior, the white lady is real, the tangible world, and the interior with its figures becomes the apparition. And we are also transformed from peering spectators to apparitions within the darkness of the loft."[17] What had been up to this point fantasy played in reality is now, momentarily, a hallucinatory space, a fantasy of some other reality. Recasting Monk's loft as a surreal projection of the interior world of Joan of Arc, the "white lady" calls into question assumptions regarding interiority and exteriority, presence and illusion, and above all the nature of reality.

Continuing their journey, spectators are now transported on a bus to Performing Garage for Part Two.[18] Instead of lights framing a living area, windows frame the industrial area whipping by outside. In some ways, this trip is Monk's way of welcoming audience members to the rest of her world, a continuation of the "open house" theme of Part One. Monk explains that "one level of *Vessel* has to do with people opening their eyes to New York…Our economic level, our life style, has to do with complex interior spaces and bleak outdoor spaces."[19] Coming directly after the vision of the "lady in white", New York might feel like a dream, or realer than ever. Without a guide to direct their focus, spectators are free to broaden or narrow the scope of their perception at will, picking out what they wished to see from an endlessly changing environment. Although this bus ride serves the practical purpose of moving spectators from one performance area to another, it also highlights the special nature of time in the imaginary world that they have just left. Traveling between sections of the work, spectators cannot help but be

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[17] Sanier, 58.

[18] The Performing Garage is a former truck garage on Wooster St. in SoHo (NYC) used primarily at this time by Richard Schechner's Performance Group.

[19] McNamara, 100.

aware that the time between sections of performances is 'real' time, linear and measurable. This realization sets off the "otherness" of the dream-like space that they have just left: time there is flexible; it leaps forward, moves slowly and quickly, freely and incrementally all at once. By contrasting the multiple nature of time in her loft with its usual passage during the bus ride between Parts One and Two, Monk makes it clear that *Vessel* is a vision not of life as it takes place in reality, but as we feel it vaguely in our dreams and moments of spiritual revelation.

While Part One of *Vessel* flashes forward, extending to audience members the oracular consciousness of Joan of Arc, Part Three sees Monk layering past against present in the same space, creating yet another hallucinatory, dream-like environment. Part Two took place in an entirely constructed environment; Part Three sets pageant-like activity and large-scale group movement in a decaying urban landscape. Monk chose to set Part Three in a parking lot about half a block away from the Performing Garage, a block-wide space situated between the Canal Lumber Company on one side and a church (St. Alphonsus) on the other.[20] Monk's decision to use this lot had much to do with the way it conveys the industrial atmosphere of her life in the East Village and Soho neighborhoods of 1970s New York.[21] What occurs in this lot, however, is definitely not in sync with its modern setting. An army of peasants, dressed in blue (not professional costumes: archaic/rough/workmanlike clothing) and playing kazoos, charges at a pennywhistle army dressed in red. Pioneers light fires and prepare food. A trio of phantoms, the three patron saints that communicated with Saint Joan: Saint Catherine,

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[20] McNamara, 100.

[21] Due to the gentrification of Monk's East Village and Soho stomping grounds (areas that were not too long ago part of New York's decaying downtown core) a 2005 production of *Vessel* looking to express the specific ambiance of the area would more likely be set in a Marc Jacobs boutique.

Saint Margaret, and Saint Michael, cross the parking lot. Later, they appear on the lit-up portico of the church across the street, waving to the motley crew of people in the lot (including the spectators) like old friends. The living room of Monk's apartment, where the House people sat in Part One, has been transported to the lot and the House people continue their enigmatic domestic gestures, seemingly unperturbed by the move. A homemade monster (last seen in *Juice,* Monk's 1969 three-part epic) makes a path through the crowd; an army of motorcycles roar into the lot, circle the crowd five times, and leave, the performers chasing after them.[22] There are an excess of signifiers in this section of *Vessel* – images are collaged together and fade into each other, with results that frequently destabilize temporal stability. The anachronistic effect of setting pioneers in a parking lot in downtown Manhattan is heightened by the clearly modern roar of the motorcycle army, destabilizing any chance for spectators or performers to become absorbed in a theatrically presented past. References to Monk's earlier works (*Juice* and *Needlebrain Lloyd and the Systems Kid*), as well as Part One of *Vessel,* which would have taken place the night before this performance, allude to Monk's recent creative past, elements manifesting like recurring presences in dreams. This rub of past against present is one of the primary means by which Monk challenges linear models of temporality in this work, creating for the spectator a hallucinatory environment where before and now occupy the same space.

As Joan, Monk sings an "epic song" and a "Sybil Song", accompanying herself on electric organ. In both of these solo vocal he organ tone is sustained, and Monk plays

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[22] Although much of this description comes from repeated viewings of the House Foundation's archival video of Part Three, some details come from Monk's notes on Part Three of *Vessel* (published in *Meredith Monk*).
Meredith Monk "Notes for *Vessel*, Part Three, 1971), in *Meredith Monk* (Baltimore and London; The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 41-43.

a simple melodic cell which she repeats, varying slightly, for minutes at a time. These repeated patterns form a base from which her voice is free to fly over, play against, or weave through. Her instrument is modern, but her voice(s) sound alternately ancient and supernatural, emerging from the core of her body. Her body rocks slightly from the spine, sympathetically, emphasizing what she refers to as "the body of the voice/ the voice of the body."[23] During "Sibyl Song", Monk becomes a vessel for the voices of Joan and her divine communicants, using her voice to incarnate their spirits, a sort of Sybil's Sybil (or Sybil once removed – what is it called when the spirits you channel come with spirits of their own?) The piercing, crystalline sounds of the supernatural are in this context the sounds of the future, or of some liminal space where time does not exist. While producing such physically demanding, virtuosic vocalizations, Monk does not display, as she ordinarily would, the effort required to sing at the top of her range for a sustained period. Rather, she remains intensely still; she seems to be listening to/receiving the voices with her entire body. Structurally, her vocalizations evoke both an oracular consciousness and the timeless quality of the spiritual realm. Neither of the songs adhere to generic forms or develop in any traditional way; their climaxes are multiple and they abandon progressive linearity in favour of discursiveness.

Crow Two: Mandala Time

Like Monk's *Education of the Girlchild* and *Vessel*, Pauline Oliveros's ceremonial mandala piece *Crow Two* (1975) avoids linear modes of organizing time in performance. While Monk presents fragmented narratives pieced together into enigmatic mosaics and

[23] Meredith Monk, "Notes on the Voice", in *Meredith Monk* (Baltimore and London; The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 56.

uses filmic devices such as flash forwards to expand the perceptive capabilities of her spectators, Oliveros expresses a ritualized, synchronal, and cyclical understanding of time in her early works of vocal theatre. In 1973, Oliveros was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship, which she used to study myth and ritual, focusing on the writings of Eliade, Jung, and Campbell as well as Rothenberg's anthologies of "primitive" poetry. She also composed *Crow Two* during her year away from the academy. Her earlier Sonic Meditations demonstrated Oliveros' interest in ritual and ceremony, and this research helped Oliveros to further her understanding of the function of both. From this point forward, she avoided using the term "ritual" to define her sonic meditations and vocal theatre, as the term connotes a system of established myths maintained by a belief system, preferring to situate her works as ceremonies, a less structured form that still involves prescribed actions. Oliveros's mandala ceremonies make use of her personal visual and sonic imagery and iconography, encourage audience participation, and may be performed by amateurs or nonmusicians.[24]

Instead of structuring performance by means of a linear plot or using "real time" to give the work boundaries, Oliveros decided to create her ceremonies in the form of a mandala, a circular image used as a meditation object in many religions and societies, although it is perhaps mostly associated with Tibetan Buddhism. According to Jung, who studied mandalas as a visual form, the main form of the mandala, a circle, represents harmony and integration of the entire being. Although the exterior of a mandala is always a circle, the interior can be arranged in many different ways: it is often a series of concentric forms, and sometimes it is divided into quadrants (this is referred to by Jung as

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[24] Hedi Von Gunden, *The Music of Pauline Oliveros,* 121.

a psychological viewfinder). Most important is that the centre of the design attracts attention, as the centre of the mandala forms a point where "attention and awareness come to perfect balance."[25]

The mandala determines both the physical and the temporal structure of *Crow Two.* In their book on mandala images in visual art, José and Miriam Argüelles discuss the modular characteristics of mandala form, explaining them as "exhibiting principles of…resonance and synchronicity".[26] One of the ways that Oliveros expresses synchronicity in *Crow Two* is by having multiple mediations layered on top of each other – for example, meditators concentrate on "Energy Changes" while flute players telepathically improvise and drummers perform single stroke rolls. The principle of synchronicity is the basis of mandala time, and Oliveros structures the work by layering energies rather than applying Western principles of linear cause and effect.

Both Oliveros and Monk transcend the linear ordering of time in performance, instead crafting personalized temporal structures that speak to the content of their works. In their challenges to the normative mode of organizing theatre and reality, they encourage performers and spectators to expand the boundaries of their perception by opening themselves up to other levels of consciousness, such as those experienced in dreams, moments of religious ecstasy, or meditation. Rather than positioning themselves within a masculinist temporal frame in which they have no function except to serve as the bodily horizon of man's journey, they create their own forms which revision reality as a rich palimpsest of histories and presences.

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[25] Hedi Von Gunden, *The Music of Pauline Oliveros,* 94.

[26] José and Miriam Argüelles, *Mandala.* (Berkeley, California: Shambala Press, 1972), 19.

Chapter Four

The Singing Body/The Dancing Voice: Embodied Voices in Vocal Theatre

> I shall speak about women's writing: about *what it will do.* Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement.[1]

In the above quote from her hugely influential 1975 essay "Le rire de la méduse" (The Laugh of the Medusa), Hélène Cixous encourages women to write themselves into texts and incorporate the voices of their bodies into their individual expressive practices. Eschewing the traditional Western mind/body schism, Cixous argues that the body has a logic and intelligence of its own that has been suppressed in conventional writings. Cixous claims that this is especially problematic for women's writing, as "(m)ore so than men who are coaxed towards social success, toward sublimation, women are body."[2] Yet, despite their identification with the corporeal, women have been turned away from their bodies; taught to ignore them or regard them with shame in the name of sexual modesty. As a result, men have largely controlled the textual representation of the female body, and Cixous states that there is much about women's own relationships to their bodies that has yet to be written: "about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain miniscule-immense area of their bodies; not about destiny, but about the adventure of such and such a drive, about trips, crossings, trudges, abrupt and gradual awakenings, discoveries of a zone at one time

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[1] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", translated in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds. and trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 245, italics in source

[2] ibid., 257.

timorous and soon to be forthright."[3] Cixous does not suggest that women need to be understood solely as sexual, physical bodies; rather, she argues for the inclusion of the corporeal in written texts.

Cixous and other writers of *écriture féminine* attempt to bring language close to the bodily materiality of emotion, and in this chapter I suggest that Meredith Monk and Diamanda Galás similarly emphasize connections between the singing voice and the physical body in their works. In the first section of the chapter, I will examine Monk's concept of the singing body and the dancing voice, and discuss how Monk uses dance-like, physical movement to shape, respond to, and outline the contour of her voice while singing. In making explicit the connections between her body and her (musical) text, Monk's vocal performance functions as musical *écriture féminine*. Using her body to physically materialize what she is singing, in works such as *Education of the Girlchild* (1973) Monk exemplifies Cixous' description of the bodily nature of women's expression in "Le rire de la méduse":

> Listen to a woman speak at a public gathering (if she hasn't painfully lost her wind). She doesn't "speak", she throws her trembling body forward; she lets go of herself, she flies; all of her passes into her voice, and it's with her body that she vitally supports the "logic" of her speech. Her flesh speaks true. She lays herself bare. In fact, she physically materializes what she's thinking; she signifies with her body. In a certain way she *inscribes* what she's saying, because she doesn't deny her drives the intractable and impassioned part they have in speaking.[4]

I will also address how Galás's fully embodied singing technique, derived in part from the *moirologica* tradition, conveys the physical and emotional effects of dementia, rage, and grief in *Plague Mass* (1986), and *Wild Women with Steak Knives for Solo*

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[3] ibid., 256.

[4] ibid., 251, italics in source

Scream (1981-83). This visceral vocal expression combines with Galás's powerful physical presence in performances to create transgressive musical/visual texts that propose a decensored relationship between women and their bodies.

Meredith Monk: The Singing Body and the Dancing Voice

A determinedly interdisciplinary artist, Meredith Monk creates "works that thrive at the intersection of music and movement."[5] Her lifelong interest in the expressive potential of the singing body may have been sparked when her parents enrolled her in Dalcroze Eurhythmics (a method of learning music through movement) at the age of three, hoping to improve her poor co-ordination, the result of a visual dysfunction. Upon graduating from Sarah Lawrence College in 1964 (where she majored in performing arts, studying with Judith Dunn and Bessie Schönberg) she moved to Manhattan, where she continued to choreograph and dance in her own compositions and performed in Happenings, off-Broadway shows, and other dance works.[6]

At this early stage of her career, Monk was mainly considered a dancer/choreographer; she had attempted singing and dancing at the same time in some of her pieces at Sarah Lawrence, but she found she was not physically strong enough to do both to her satisfaction.[7] Two years after her arrival in New York she began doing vocal exercises again. Monk found that her increasing knowledge of her body influenced her explorations of her voice:

Monk:...I'd be doing movement, and then I'd sit down at the piano

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[5] Meredith Monk/House Foundation for the Arts website, "biography" http://www.meredithmonk.org/monk/index.html, accessed February 3, 2006.
[6] Sally Banes, "The Art of Meredith Monk" *Performing Arts Journal* 3/1 (Spring/Summer 1978), 4.
[7] Carole Koening, "Meredith Monk: Performer-Creator" *The Drama Review* 20/3 (Sept. 1976), 53.

> afterwards and make up crazy voice exercises, trills, slides, glottal breaks, to produce vocal sounds that I liked. I had done the movement first so my body was really warmed up and I was really connected to my gut. I had this flash, a complete revelation, that the voice could be as flexible as the body. It could be like a spine or a foot and have that kind of motion and impulse. That was a complete breakthrough for me, and I started working on the voice from that point on.[8]

The discoveries she made while vocalizing became central to her artistic development, allowing music to become a co-equal element in her works and enabling her to begin to create a textless musical vocabulary based on her own vocal instrument in the same way that she had worked to build a personal movement vocabulary based on her own physical rhythms and impulses. Voice and body complete each other in Monk's works; in her "Notes on the Voice", she makes reference to "(t)he body of the voice/the voice of the body", and her conception of "(t)he dancing voice...the voice as flexible as the spine."[9] Her concept of a reciprocal relationship between voice and body – one that includes, but exceeds, the multiple physical processes needed to produce sound – has informed her creative practice since the late 1960s. Monk has repeatedly emphasized that she does not use movement to translate or interpret sound, stating that her use of gesture is "dance-based, not like pantomime. The movement that I have has a *quality* of gesture, but they are not specific, one-to-one, referential, pantomimic gestures."[10] By not reducing bodily movement to illustration and employing it to add layers of ambiguous, personal,

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[8] Meredith Monk, "Meredith Monk: Invocation/Evocation, A Dialogue with Liza Bear." by Liza Bear, in *Meredith Monk*, ed. Deborah Jowitt (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 81-82.

[9] Meredith Monk, "Notes on the Voice", in *Meredith Monk*, ed. Deborah Jowitt (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 56.

[10] Meredith Monk, quoted in Carole Koening, "Meredith Monk: Performer-Creator" *The Drama Review* 20/3 (Sept. 1976), 54.

responsive meaning to her musical texts, Monk directly involves the expressive power of the body in her vocal theatre.

Her conception of a mutual relationship between voice and body is especially evident during moments in her vocal theatre where Monk's performance is the sole focus, such as Part Two of *Education of the Girlchild*, a thirty-minute solo. While the first half of *Education of the Girlchild* is a collage of tableaux and short scenes, the second half focuses on a single idea: an ancient woman, performed by Monk, reverses chronology in a long solo, tracing her life as she moves very gradually to the front of the stage, becoming younger with each step. As she moves down a sheet of unbleached muslin, she goes through three different stations of this woman's life -- old age, middle age, and youth. . Questing backwards to find the roots of what she has become, her life is abstracted and essentialized through gesture and vocal sound.

Part Two of *Education of the Girlchild* opens on Monk, sitting in character as the Old Woman on a stool on top of a small platform placed at the upstage end of the muslin path, which recalls both a road and a river. The piece (which began for Monk at the end of Part One, when she changed into her costume and took her place on the stool, where she would meditate during intermission) begins with Monk breathing deeply, her hands in her lap, her spine arched and her head drooping, gaze directed towards her hands. Her focus is directed inward, and she projects a meditative, contemplative energy. By simply allowing the audience to focus on her visible, rhythmic breathing before any other planned sonic events begin, Monk directs their attention towards her vulnerable, human body, which will be the vessel conveying all of the gestural and sonic images in this text. The natural motion of the breath through the body (the lungs and chest expand and

release forward as air is taken in, and contract as air is being pushed out) is additionally the motivating force behind many of the more Graham-like movements[11] in this solo, and establishing the breath as a central bodily movement at the start of the work highlights the connection between later abstracted, breath-inspired movements and their roots in the natural movement of the body.

After establishing her breathing, she begins to roll up through her spine, coming up further with each deep breath. When her head is up, she faces the audience, scanning them with searching eyes. A thunder-like sound is heard from upstage and she contracts, her gaze returning to her lap and hands. She tentatively extends a hand and arm forward, following its trajectory with her eyes and gradually expanding through her chest, then tremors her hand back down to her lap, drawing in on herself again. A recording of a piano playing a simple I-V-I vamp begins, and she sways, her head bobbling loosely as if remembering an old tune that she loved when she was younger. Smiling to herself, she mimes playing along with the piano, her body swaying with the contours of the melody. She extends her right hand forward, thumb and middle finger joined, and flicks her fingers open when her arm is fully extended in a repeated gesture that suggests sprinkling water or scattering seeds. Her left arm moves into a modified *bras bas*[12] about a foot above her lap, while her right hand reverently strokes a small, invisible object held in her left hand. These three gestures, which she presents before beginning to sing, are repeated in each section of her solo, subtly varied to show time's backward progression as she moves from old age to maturity and youth.

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[11] Martha Graham (1894-1991), one the most influential and prolific composers of North American modern dance in the 20th century, created a dance technique based on her study of natural human movement that has been compared to ballet in its scope and magnitude. The elemental breathing movements of contraction and release form the foundation of Graham technique.

[12] A ballet position where the arms are curved towards the centre of the body and held low near the lap.

She begins to sing a circling, repeated pattern, and her voice is dark and covered, heavy, laborious sounding, like it is emanating from a place deep within her. Sitting upright, her entire body assumes a quality suggestive of extreme attentiveness - elbows bent, both palms facing outward, about six inches apart, held horizontal and in front of the chest. Slowly, her hands and arms, moving in opposite directions, sweep open to the horizon as her body rotates on its vertical axis in a contained circling motion, echoing the movement of her voice. At the same time, her circling posture connects with her gesture, which, as Carole Koening notes in her analysis of Monk's gestural vocabulary, evokes multiple meanings but is in actuality non-specific.[13]

Monk eases her way up off the stool and stands, knees bent, contracted through the torso but gazing out at the horizon. The piano accompaniment stops, and she changes to a new set of vocables (eeee-aaaaaay), which sound painful and ghostly, and sings a cramped, circling melody, her voice warbling, threatening to break, and sliding into the cracks between pitches. Her movement seems to affect the whirling contour of the melody she sings as she turns in circles, her hands facing each other, held at collarbone height. Stopping her spinning and vocalizing, she curves her spine and bends her knees, rolling down to the platform floor. She lays on her side in a modified fetal position, her legs pressed together and raised off the floor and her head dangling off the low platform. This sequence of bending, lowering to the ground, and ending in a fetal position is also repeated at each stage of her life; it evokes her 're-birth' and ceremonial journey through her lifetime. Propping up herself with her upstage arm, she continues her pained,

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[13] Carole Koening, "Meredith Monk: Performer-Creator" *The Drama Review* 20/3 (Sept. 1976), 55.

swirling, circular, dark vocal sounds while rising to a seated position, where she performs a variant of the earlier stroking motion and sings a warbling high note.

***Education of the Girlchild* (Part Two) Meredith Monk as the Old Woman at the beginning of her procession.** Photo by Monica Mosely, 1974. Reprinted with kind permission of the House Foundation for the Arts.

At this moment the piano enters again, playing the same simple I-V-I progression from the start of Part Two. The piano's entrance signals the start of a new section; as it begins, Monk raises to her feet, legs splayed and knees bent, her right arm pointing straight up and her gaze ecstatically focused skyward in a pose suggesting a moment of enlightenment or discovery. She removes her wig, signaling her transformation into the middle aged woman, and then steps off platform and onto the muslin path, again lying down in a modified fetal position on her side. Raising herself up to standing, she repeats her smoothing hand gesture, and then begins to take small, sideways shuffling steps out of the light and down the muslin path. As she travels, she

begins to sing a new melody, on the syllable "na"; her voice is light, sweeter, and noticeably younger sounding. The melody has the gentle, private character of a lullaby, suggesting intimacy, closeness, and vulnerability.

After covering a good chunk of the path, she stands, her arms crossed over her chest, confidently looking up; after holding the pose for a few seconds, she mimes walking in place, symbolically continuing to travel. When she stops walking, she begins to sing on the syllables "dai" and "um" in the middle of her range, her voice shaking, playing with the glottal break. The melody is wild, fierce, pained-sounding, suggesting rage and frustration. When she is finished, she bows, curving her spine in a contraction, her knees bent. She repeats this gesture to the four corners of the space, and then performs a crisp version of the earlier smoothing gesture to all four corners. From there, she goes into a Graham fall, landing in an abstracted version of the earlier fetal positions, then pushes her upper body up to a seated position and falls again. She repeats this rising and falling sequence several times, perhaps in reference to her multiple transformations throughout the course of this solo.

Remaining on the floor, Monk sits with her legs spread; her knees are bent and her feet are firmly planted on floor, and her hands resting on her knees. Thus grounded, she begins to sing on the syllables "nai", "zié", "noy", "neeah" and "ohh", which combined with the dark, covered tone of her voice and her wide, warbling vibrato evokes the sounds of uncontrolled sobbing. Raising her legs and upper body into a seated V position, she contracts her torso and circles her arms, gestures with implications of a sorrowful and cyclical nature. She then removes her glasses, takes off her apron, and shakes her hair out of its braid, transforming into the Girlchild from Part One.

As she baby-steps down the muslin path, she takes up the accompanying melody (the sweet, lilting one sung on the syllable "na"), her voice sounding even younger, its tone light, breathy, scarcely supported. Almost at the end of her path, she stops to sits on a stool, her hands on her knees, legs splayed, torso and shoulders circling, she raises her hands from her lap slowly, as if summoning energy from her core. Next she clasps her arms in front of her chest, directly over her heart chakra, and opens them towards the horizon, implying expansiveness, perhaps even a generosity of spirit. She then does the smoothing gesture while circling her torso; stopping, she touches her face and traces with her fingers down her chest to her stomach, delighting in her own body. Moving onto the floor, she goes into her modified fetal position, followed by a variant of the earlier V balance with bent knees. Again circling her torso, she places her arms in front of her heart chakra but clasps them in a prayer position; she extends her arms out towards the horizon and then raises them gradually above her head, combining cyclical movement with the joy and expansiveness suggested by the upward and outward motion of her arms.

Rising to her feet, Monk continues to move her torso in circles and begins to sing an energetic, looping, arpeggiated melody on an "ah" syllable, her voice again breathy and bright. The cyclical nature of the melody and her movement could refer to cyclical, repeated aspects of this woman's life. She then frames her face with her hands, fingers splayed, palms facing outwards, continuing with the bright, breathy, circling melody; her hands move slowly inwards, cupping her mouth. Stopping her vocalization for a moment, she bends her knees and raises one arm skyward, her index finger extended; as she picks up the circling melody again, she moves her index finger in circles, then freezes in the same pose she held as an old woman, her mouth and eyes wide open in ecstatic surprise.

Aside from her costume, which, along with her character of movement signifies the varying ages of the protagonist, Monk does not refer to anything directly in this work. Instead, her voice and the movements of her body suggest multiple images and themes – flashes of this woman's life arranged together in a single abstracted, ritualistic performance. Her body physically materializes what she is singing in a non-specific way, adding layers of meaning to her musical text. The respect for the logic and memory of the body, and its potential for adding another level of truth to an existent text, shown in Monk's Part Two solo in *Education of the Girlchild* echoes Cixous' goals of a literary practice which includes the body and its significant role in communication

Diamanda Galás's vocal theatre derives much of its visceral, focused intensity from her characteristically aggressive physical presence. In works such as *Plague Mass* and *Wild Women with Steak Knives* Galás's virtuosic vocal performance combines with the directness of her physicality in a sonic and visual display of her political and social outrage. Galás confronts audiences with her body - in performances of *Plague Mass* she covers her face and bare chest with stage blood, reminding them of their status as voyeurs, and she brandishes her multiple microphones like weapons while she stalks the stage in *Wild Women.* Her extroverted, menacing physicality refutes traditional operatic depictions of femininity, instead suggesting the female body as a site of strength and rebellion. In "Le rire de la méduse" Cixous describes the need for women to harness the power of their bodies in their texts, stating "(a) woman without a body, blind, dumb, can't possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being the servant of the militant male,

his shadow. We must kill the false woman who is keeping the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman."[14]

Galás situates her work in the Greek tradition of women singers of *moirologica,* dirges and lamentations that express not only the mourning of the family but – more importantly – the anger of the deceased, sometimes calling for vengeance.[15] Singers of *moirologica* will tear at their hair, beat their breasts, and rent their clothing, their physicality and unrestrained vocal performance momentarily disrupting the traditional silence of women in Greek society. In *Plague Mass*, Galás's bare, bloodied chest recalls the transgressive physicality of women singers of *moirologica,* which was intended to incite audiences to physical violence. Linking female voice and performance to anger and politics, Galás's revisioning of *moirologica* circumvents cultural codes, giving voice to those who are traditionally silenced in cultural discourse, including people with AIDS, women, homosexuals, and the mentally ill.[16]

Meredith Monk and Diamanda Galás both fuse vocal and physical expression in their vocal theatre, re-valuing woman's traditional association with the corporeal by using their bodies to add layers of meaning to their musical texts. These multidisciplinary texts envoice the female body and utilize its communicative power in ways not possible in writing, realizing Cixous's goal of an artistic practice incorporating the voices of women's bodies.

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[14] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", 250.

[15] Rebecca A. Pope and Susan J. Leonardi, "Divas and Disease, Mourning and Militancy: Diamanda Galás's Operatic Plague Mass" in *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference,* Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997),321.

[16] ibid., 325.

Chapter Five

Abundance and Overflow: Layering Metaphors and Media in Vocal Theatre

Some of the most contentious aspects of Cixous and Irigaray's feminisms, especially as expressed in their early works, include the emphasis on biology, the body, and the sexual organs. Irigaray sparked a great deal of controversy during the 1970s with her influential and provocative books *Speculum de l'autre femme* and *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un.*[1] In these early works by Irigaray, her post-Freudian, post-Lacanian feminist philosophy is based on, among other things, the body, especially on women's genitals, which continually embrace each other, as she explains in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*:

> Thus, for example, woman's autoeroticism is very different from man's. He needs an instrument in order to touch himself: his hand, woman's genitals, language – And this self-stimulation requires a minimum of activity. But a woman touches by and within herself directly, without mediation, and before any distinction between activity and passivity is possible. A woman "touches herself" constantly without anyone being able to forbid her to do so, for her sex is composed of two lips which embrace continually. Thus, within herself she is already two – but not divisible into ones – who stimulate each other.[2]

Irigaray's metaphysics of 'self-touching' emphasizes openness and a continual process of becoming. Phallic hierarchy is subverted and replaced with processes of reciprocity and circularity.[3] Irigaray is not simply replacing the penis with the vagina, which she feels has been silenced, negated, and written out of mainstream (patriarchal) culture. The phallus/penis is venerated as a symbol of presence, while the vagina is all

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[1] The title of *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* is a pun: within the Freudian paradigm, women's sex is not (*n'en est pas)* a sex; within Irigaray's paradigm it is not one (*n'en est pas un),* but rather multiple, plural.

[2] Luce Irigaray, "This sex which is not one/Ce sexe qui n'est pas un", from *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977), translated in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981),100.

[3] Kelly Ives, *Cixous, Irigaray, Kristeva: The Jouissance of French feminism* (Kidderminster, Worcester, England: Crescent Moon, 1996), 62.

absence, and it is this denigration of the womb/vagina that Irigaray seeks to counter by exalting the labia, and more generally women's (typically latent) all-over eroticism.

One problematic aspect of this line of reasoning is the way it implicitly restricts male eroticism to a single site (the penis), when obviously so many other parts of the body (the lips, the hands, the mouth, the tongue, the anus, etc.) contribute to male sexual pleasure. Writing about male sexual pleasure, however, is not part of Irigaray's political project, and she might argue along with Cixous that although much (everything) has yet to be written and/or spoken about men's *actual* sexuality, it is up to men to do it themselves. Additionally, the body is only one element of sexuality, male or female; fantasy, imagination, class, religion, culture, and any number of other elements certainly have a role to play in the construction of a sexual identity.

Although there are obvious problems with taking Irigaray's labial philosophy too literally, as a metaphor, her philosophy/psychoanalysis of the continually embracing lips is an empowering response to the patriarchal view of women as 'three holes.'[4] Rather than situating women as absence or lack, her writing attributes to women a sense of boundlessness or overflow, as seen in the following example from Irigaray's essay "When our lips speak together":

> You speak from everywhere at the same time. You touch me whole at the same time. In all senses. Why only one song, one discourse, one text at a time? To seduce, satisfy, fill one of my 'holes?' I don't have any, with you. We are not voids, lacks which wait for sustenance, fulfillment, or plenitude for another...
>
> Kiss me. Two lips kiss two lips, and openness is ours again. Our 'world.' Between us, the movement from inside to outside, from outside to inside, knows no limits. It is without end. These are exchanges that no

[4] Kelly Ives, 64.

> mark, no mouth can ever stop.... You kiss me, and the world enlarges until the horizon vanishes.[5]

Irigaray's poetic language in "When our lips speak together" is rich with multiple meanings; she "peel(s) the dead skins off words and ... (uses) them as consciously chosen analogies for female experience."[6] In her system of two-lipped-togetherness, touch becomes infinite, the lips enabling an expansion of movement that is unlimited. Her use of the second person conveys the intimacy of this seductive text, which uses a dialogue between two (female) lovers as a framework for an investigation, through language, of the connections between female sexuality and the representation of meaning. Thus, in "When our lips speak together" Irigaray not only describes the dynamics of lesbian eroticism, but also illustrates alternatives to phallocentric methods of representing and conceptualizing the world around us. These processes embrace the boundlessness and potential for multiplicity that Irigaray attributes to women: openness replaces reductionism, and diversity is favoured over hierarchy.

Similarly, Cixous's *écriture féminine* attempts to counteract the equation of women with absence by creating a sense of boundlessness or overflow through syntax that works accumulatively rather than hierarchically. Her poetic feminism privileges a sensual, hyper-lyrical response to the world; her words caress the reader. While Irigaray seduces the reader with intimacy in "When our lips speak together", Cixous entices with utopian visions of woman's potential for limitlessness in early works such as "Le rire de la méduse" and "Sorties". Unlike Derrida, who founded his metaphysics of writing on

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[5] Luce Irigaray, "When our lips speak together" trans. Carolyn Burke. *Signs* 6/1 (Autumn, 1980), 73. "When our lips speak together" is a translation of "Quand nos lèvres se parlent", which was previously published in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977).

[6] Carolyn Burke, "Introduction to Luce Irigaray's 'When our lips speak together'" *Signs* 6/1 (Autumn, 1980), 66-67/

absence and replacement, "Cixous casts aside the notion of art based on 'lack' and goes for abundance."[7] In "Le rire de la méduse", Cixous ascribes to woman that same abundance, along with an endless potential for transformation:

> (Woman's) libido is cosmic, just has her unconscious is worldwide. Her writing can only keep going, without ever inscribing or discerning contours.... She lets the other language speak – the language of 1,000 tongues which knows neither enclosure nor death. To life she refuses nothing. Her language does not contain, it carries; it does not hold back, it makes possible. When id is ambiguously uttered – the wonder of being several – she doesn't defend herself against these unknown women whom she's surprised at becoming, but derives pleasure from this gift of alterability. I am spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human, but alive because of transformation.[8]

Both Cixous and Irigaray envision women's writing as multiple, always in the process of becoming and full to the point of overflowing with meaning. In this chapter, I propose that collage techniques, horizontal layering of sonic and visual events, and the simultaneous presentation of diverse media creates a similar abundance of meaning in works of vocal theatre, using Monk's *Vessel* and *Education of the Girlchild* as my primary examples. These works eschew hierarchical modes of presentation, instead conveying multiple fragmentary meanings through collage forms, stream-of-consciousness monologues, quotation, evocative non-linguistic vocal sounds, simultaneity, and richly suggestive yet ambiguous movement. *Education of the Girlchild* and *Vessel* are dream-like interdisciplinary works "full of mysterious metamorphoses and apparitions", complex with multiple meanings and dense layers of imagery.[9]

Part One of *Education of the Girlchild* presents the lives of six 'companions' -- a female Knights of the Round Table -- in an hour-long collage of ensemble vignettes and

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[7] Kelly Ives, 47.

[8] Hélène Cixous: "The Laugh of the Medusa", in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schoken Books, 1981),259-260.

[9] Deborah Jowitt, *Meredith Monk* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 14.

tableaux. These disjunctive, startling episodes show flashes of everyday life in this city of women, transparent layers of ceremonial activity deepening into rich, multilayered metaphors for teaching, learning, building communities, and making art. While Part Two of *Education of the Girlchild* concerns itself with a single image – an ancient woman (Monk) reversing chronology in a long solo, tracing her life as she moves very gradually to the front of the stage, becoming younger with each step – Part One is fragmented and episodic, filled with mysteriously evocative images which go by at a dream-like pace; long pauses interrupt movements and sequences.

The work opens on the companions (Meredith Monk, and members of her House collective: Lanny Harrison, Lee Nagrin, Monica Moseley, Blondell Cummings, and Coco Pekalis) sitting around a circular wooden table.[10] The round table not only recalls King Arthur's round table, where he sat with his companions; it also refers to the kitchen table in Lanny Harrison's farmhouse in upstate New York, where the women of the House gathered to discuss plans and the results of rehearsals for *Girlchild.*[11]This is only the first example of the way in which elements from the daily lives of the performers are layered onto the fictional theatrical world of *Girlchild*, transforming the details of personal experience into performance. By creating intimate connections between the characters in *Girlchild* and their everyday lives, Monk and members of the House foreground their individual personalities and histories, weaving them into the web of meaning the work evokes. Lanny Harrison begins to speak, asking tentatively "...or should I?", at which point the women get up from their seats and gather behind the table, freezing in a tableau

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[10] My description of Part One of *Education of the Girlchild* refers to the 1982 version edited for broadcast on Japanese television that is available for viewing at the Lincoln Center Dance Collection, New York City. Meredith Monk and the House have mounted nine productions of *Education of the Girlchild* since 1973; all of the productions have had the same cast (except for minor roles) and the same 'script.'

[11] Deborah Jowitt, 14.

and looking out towards the audience warily. The tight group that the women form suggests a formally arranged group portrait, as does the way the light focuses in on them. This tableau establishes the women as a cohesive group, and the formality of their presentation makes it clear that they are to be the focus of the work.

Monk's vocal theatre is full of disjunctive images that are dense with symbolic meaning, although they may appear suddenly and be gone just as quickly. The first such occurrence in *Education of the Girlchild* follows the initial vignette and tableau: a light focuses on the area next to the table, revealing a woman wearing a gray, full-skirted dress, holding a baby. The women hold their tableau, and do not look at or react to this maternal figure. Their lack of reaction to her sudden emergence, as well as the old-fashioned look of her dress, suggests to me that the woman in gray is not an actual presence, but is perhaps a representation of a female ancestor. She may also represent maternity in a more general sense. If that is the case, then the image is significantly free of the saccharine or saintly overtones that often accompany artistic representations of motherhood. She is not haloed with soft light; the companions do not react to her appearance with awe or adoration. She is presented as a symbol inherently tied to gender and sex and one curiously free from value judgments – positive or negative. The ambiguity of this figure, which does not return and is never explained, is characteristic of the open-ended nature of the imagery in *Girlchild,* much of which evokes multiple connotations. In a 1974 interview with Linda Winer, Monk explains her preference for enigmatic symbols:

> I always want my work to have a clarity and a logic – a luminosity from lucidity – but I also want the audience to have enough room to be able to

> move around within the level of connotation and meaning. I give them evocative nuggets of information that radiate.[12]

Monk's desire to create works that resonate with multiple meanings recalls Cixous's descriptions of the abundance of *écriture féminine* in "The Laugh of the Medusa." Cixous calls for women to write in a manner that expresses the boundless nature of their unconscious, and to embrace ambiguity and "the wonder of being several."[13] Although expressing multiple meanings in a written text is different than creating multi-layered visual or sonic images, a similar aesthetic of abundance is evident in "The Laugh of the Medusa" and *Education of the Girlchild.*

In her account of Monk's choreography and vocal theatre, Sally Banes observes that "(i)nside the magically real universes that Monk creates within the borders of theatrical space...simple and familiar things accumulate into dense, resonant, fabulous images."[14] These images often are domestic, but the domesticity that is evoked is far from the 'angel in the house' or 1950s North American housewife variety. Rather, domestic life is represented as communal; home and hearth symbolize community and a safe space for women to gather rather than female servitude. When they execute chore-like activity, such as when they move the round table across the stage at the start of the next scene, they do it together, for their mutual benefit. Once they set the table down they sit around it, each woman holding a spoon. The spoons are not used to eat; instead, they each begin to make small exploratory gestures with their utensils. Monk pulls out a glass jar, and sings a long, drawn-out aaaaa, accompanying herself by dragging her metal spoon around the rim. Lanny Harrison, holding her spoon like it was a microphone or a hand mirror,

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[12] Interview with Linda Winer, 1974, Monk clippings, Lincoln Center Dance Collection, New York City.
[13] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", 259.
[14] Sally Banes, "Meredith Monk: Homemade Metaphors" in *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980), 149.

begins to speak in a crazy slow motion *Sprechstimme,* stretching her words to the point of near-indecipherability while making hyper-expressive faces like an actress in a silent film: "going away…" "I was all packed and ready for adventure, when suddenly there appeared to me that one with a belly, a witch." She contorts her face grotesquely while pronouncing the words. Her gestures are abrupt and unpredictable - she hits each woman on the head with her spoon, then she bangs on her glass with her spoon. When she arrives at the word 'witch', she lets out an inhuman growl, then begins to hyperventilate, which she transforms into a long 'aaaah' sung using ingressive (inward moving) and egressive (outward moving) airflow. Harrison's odd statement conjures up a wealth of images; the first half establishes the idea of journeying or questing, which is central to the work. The second half of her statement brings to mind more gendered interpretations starting with "that one with the belly", which suggests a pregnant woman, perhaps the woman we have just seen holding her baby. Of course, witches are women too, and they were an important symbol for many second wave feminists and the burgeoning women's spirituality movement of the 1970s, representing "a medieval embodiment of the Goddess power gone underground, so to speak, and now attacked by a patriarchal society."[15]

Harrison's near-hyperventilation after pronouncing "witch" indicates that witches are powerful in this world, but it is unclear if their power is strange and terrifying or awe-inspiring and positive. Taking the second half of the phrase together as a unit - "...that one with a belly, a witch" - modifies the meanings of both symbols by linking them together. The phrase's linkage of pregnancy, a time when the female body is engaged in an act of natural creativity not duplicable by men, and witches gives rise to a host of other

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[15] Moira Roth, ed. *The Amazing Decade: Women and Performance Art in America 1970-1980* (Los Angeles: Astro Artz, 1983), 27.

interpretations regarding the 'magical' powers of the pregnant female body. Although psychoanalytic literature has been historically more concerned with women's alleged envy towards men, the most influential example being Freud's theory of penis envy, female procreative function has been proposed as a cause of anxiety and/or envy for men. In their article "On the Denial of Women's Sexual Pleasure", Freida Fromm-Reichmann and Virginia Gunst suggest that women's procreative powers are a source of fear for men because they perceive them as entailing the reverse powers of death, creating a kind of womb/tomb paradigm: if a woman can conceive life, might she also take it away?[16] During pregnancy woman's Otherness is pronounced; she is both herself and a vessel for someone else, and the association created between pregnancy and witchcraft in this phrase emphasizes this fact.

There is a dream-like quality to this opening scene, a sense of recognition combined with a pervasive strangeness that recalls the often surreal way the unconscious combines and transforms the elements of our daily lives during sleep. Even Harrison's vocal delivery, which is slowed down, over-enunciated, and difficult to understand, evokes the sometimes-garbled speech of a character in a dream (or a dream sequence in a David Lynch movie.) She continues, her face contorting: "(S)he said to me...ooooh...see...the ones with the skirts, the kilts, the petticoats." Again, this phrase is vague, mysterious, and open to multiple interpretations: the reference to "see...the ones with the skirts..." obviously has to do with women, but it is unclear which women in particular she is referring to. The actions of the companions as Harrison delivers this phrase give no real indication; they clink their spoons against their glasses, hold the

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[16] Freida Fromm-Reichmann and Virginia Gunst, "On the Denial of Women's Sexual Pleasure", in *Psychoanalysis and Women*, ed. Jean Baker (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 86-93.

spoons up by their faces, and use them to play with their hair. Harrison's last line in this scene is particularly difficult to understand – what I heard was "Meanwhile we drove home…many time it lays himself…but it was him…says…so, we meet." After Harrison says this, Monica Moseley stands, raising her left fist in the air in a kind of worker's salute. Moseley's reaction implies that it was indeed this group of women that Lanny journeyed to meet at the suggestion of another woman (that one with the belly, a witch.) After Moseley sits down, all of the women mime eating with exaggeratedly clink-y spoon motions. This sharing of a (symbolic) meal comes across as a ritualistic gesture celebrating the arrival of a new companion and emphasizing their connection to each other. This opening scene overflows with visual and textual symbolism having to do with community, domesticity, journeying, maternity, and femininity. Meaning is not bestowed upon a passive, receptive audience; instead, images which are deliberately multiple are layered together, and each spectator has the opportunity to take in the offered imagery in whatever way they find most meaningful. Monk calls this "working mythically":

> You could take it as a metaphorical thing, that there's this phylogeny-ontogeny thing, where it can be seen that it's one person (and) it can be seen that it's the world...it offers those two layers simultaneously. (In *Girlchild*), it can be that each woman is coming in...from another part of the world, so there's the whole world at that table. Or it could be that it's different aspects of one person or it could be that each person has a different kind of quality.[17]

A deliberately theatrical Brechtian moment introduces the next section, as three stagehand-like figures, dressed in black, enter bearing a sign announcing what is to come: A Test. The events in this world, like the characters that inhabit it, are archetypical, not specific; what exactly is being tested is left to the imagination of the spectator. The stage

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[17] Meredith Monk, quoted in Leslie Satin, "Being Danced Again: Meredith Monk, Reclaiming the Girlchild", in *Moving Words: Re-writing Dance,* ed. Gay Morris (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 128.

is now set with a long, low rectangular platform upstage centre; a man and a woman – the silent "narrators" of the work - stand on either side of the platform, both wearing black suits and eyeglasses. The Ancestress (played by Tone Blevins) is seated in the centre of the platform; she wears a white shiny dress and a tall, cylindrical black hat that ties under her chin. Thick strips of black cloth are wound around her hands and body, and her face is white and contorts as she makes horrible hissing and screeching noises. This figure of monstrous femininity is both horrifying and pitiable, as she is both ensnared and enraged. She circles her torso, seated, going through deep expansions and contractions in a movement phrase that recalls Martha Graham's *Lamentation*. She seems to be in great pain, and she alternately hisses, growls, and bares her teeth like a frightened or angry animal. This figure of monstrous femininity is simultaneously horrifying and pitiable, as she is both ensnared and enraged, her sounds and movement suggesting a deep inner sorrow and frustrated anger.

The companions enter with white veils draped over their heads; they spread out in a circular formation and twirl in the manner of whirling dervishes while singing a simple, folk-like melody. Blondell Cummings is the first of the companions to approach the Ancestress on her own: moving to the centre of the space, she removes her veil (as do all the women when they come forward to dance for the Ancestress) and does a beautiful, lyrical dance that begins with her following her raised hand with her gaze, then moving into a curved spine contraction and releasing to repeat. The upward movement of her hand and eyes suggests a welling up of emotion, while the curved contraction and averted gaze of the second half of the phrase implies her humility in front of the Ancestress. The tone of Cummings' dance is one of veneration; the Ancestress may be a monstrous,

pained figure, but she is someone of great importance, and the dances the companions do alone and as a group in this scene convey their reverence for her. This ritualistic "test" evokes images of goddess worship, but the companions are not just directing their energy and worship at the Ancestress – they also seem to be receiving and responding to her energy. Harrison approaches the centre, and the two dance together, staying roughly in one place and moving their feet and hands on the horizontal axis only. The constricted nature of their movement echoes that of the Ancestress, which is limited by the strips of black cloth tangled around her body and hands. The Ancestress wordlessly screeches her disapproval, causing the two companions to dance with their teeth gritted in a grimace, cupping their hands to their ears and dancing with their eyes as in Indian Classical dance and Kathkali theatre. The responsive quality of their dance, seen in this section as they take on and broadly perform the reactions of the Ancestress, recalls the boundless identity Cixous ascribes to women in "Le rire de la méduse"; these women embrace merging with the Ancestress and "derive pleasure from this gift of alterability."[18]

Continuing their enigmatic ritual, the companions return to their circle formation and sing their simple melody in unison while twirling. Monica Moseley approaches the Ancestress, removing her veil, and the Ancestress raises her arms, pressing her hands, palms outward, towards Moseley in a gesture that suggests a blessing or transfer of energy. Moseley next approaches the Ancestress for her dance of veneration, which she begins by extending her arms to the horizon, then raising them above her head. She looks as if she is about to dive forward into a stylized bow, but she stops when her torso is about a quarter of the way, her fists clenched and her arms extended straight out from the

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[18] Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa", 260.

shoulder. She walks downstage and crouches, her arm reaching up on the diagonal, one finger extended and pointing; then she moves her finger in small circles. The Ancestress responds as if Moseley's finger is a needle on a record, making corresponding light, screechy noises that accelerate as her gesture does. Again, this gesture emphasizes the psychical/spiritual connection between the companions and the Ancestress that seems to be the foundation of this ritualistic test.

The next section of Moseley's solo is a dance of flailing through space: she circles to upstage right and begins to jump, her arms swinging in circles as she makes gasping, screechy noises on an ingressive breath. She then stops abruptly, crouching and folding over forwards, and the Ancestress screams. The rest of the companions congregate with Moseley at centre stage, where they form a line and begin a movement sequence based on a three-steps forward-two steps back pattern with a corresponding contracted torso moving into an upper-body release with swinging arms. The steps of this sequence are similar to those used in the processional scenes, bringing to mind images of journeying, while the upper body movements, a deep contraction and swinging release, suggest introspection or humility and expansion, respectively. Taken as a whole, this movement sequence, which evokes travel, submission, and elation, may be seen as a representation of the pilgrimage taken by the companions to pay tribute to the Ancestress. Screeching lightly in response, the Ancestress rises, pointing her finger straight up, her eyes closed. The companions scatter, except for Nagrin and Harrison, who remains centre stage right. Nagrin, veiled, approaches the Ancestress; lowering her head, Nagrin removes her veil and raises both hands in a gesture suggesting healing, a blessing, or a transfer of energy, which silences her screams. Turning her back towards the Ancestress to face the

audience, Nagrin walks on the downstage left diagonal to about centre stage, where she stands facing Harrison. Her feet planted securely in a wide stance, she intones a long, drawn out "aahh" on a mid-range note, and her voice sounds warm, powerful, and confident. This causes Harrison to go into a deep contraction, as if she'd been punched in the gut, her facial expression appropriately surprised as she finally folds over into herself in a collapsed forward bend.

The images of goddess worship and bilateral communication between women evoked in this scene from Part One of *Girlchild* reveal yet another prismatic perspective on life in this mysterious city of women. Meaning in this work is accrued gradually through a combination of words, gestures, and sounds pregnant with multiple associations. The density of the imagery in *Girlchild* provides spectators with what amounts to an excess of meaning; however, each audience member will notice different elements and have different associations based on their backgrounds and personalities, effectively creating their own meaning for each event. Rather than handing audience members a fixed meaning to be consumed passively, Monk and members of the House offer viewers a "deep, internal, sensation-feeling experience" in *Girlchild*.[19] With its plentitude of symbols, the work recalls the potential for multiplicity Irigaray ascribes to women in "when our lips speak as one."

The extraordinary always has its roots in the everyday world in Meredith Monk's interdisciplinary performances. Common objects, historical figures, and buildings that are undeniably part of the 'real world' combine to create powerfully condensed images that

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[19] Lee Nagrin, as quoted in "Personal Mythologies: Meredith Monk's *Education of the Girlchild*, 1995", Marianne Goldberg, in *Meredith Monk*, ed. Deborah Jowitt (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 52.

are far from realistic. *Vessel,* a three-part "opera epic" performed several times in New York city during October 1971 by Meredith Monk and The House, is a work rich with multiple meanings. During the first section, spectators entered to find in the back of Monk's loft a scene of enigmatic domesticity made diminutive by the distance at which it was viewed by spectators, situated at the opposite end of the space. The tables, rugs, and chairs do not occupy the entire performance space, as they would have in the theatre of the early twentieth century, but are rather merely one of several realms depicted using only the most essential elements and arranged in a montage through which both spectators and performers journey.[20] Sharing the space with this 'living room' and its black-clad inhabitants are a pair of "androgynes" sitting at a kitchen table, naked, reminiscent of a similar couple in Monk's earlier work *Blueprint*; a King and a procession of peasants; a bearded lady raking up money; and of course Monk, serving as the titular vessel for historical and theatrical figure Joan of Arc.[21]

Such heterogeneous combinations of character types and objects are only part of the way Monk creates layers of meaning in *Vessel*. Perhaps Monk's most significant break with theatrical tradition in *Vessel* is the way she allows the real world outside the performance space to penetrate the imaginary world created by the performance. In *Vessel*, a site-specific piece, Monk uses real spaces to give oblique focus to the unreal events happening within them, grounding her work, which primarily gives voice to fantasy and the unconscious, by situating it in "reality space".[22] Unusual images serve as counterpoint to a space based in reality, creating a surreal effect. The deliberate

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[20] Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1986, p200.
[21] Brooks McNamara, "Vessel: the Scenography of Meredith Monk – an Interview" *The Drama Review: TDR,* 16/1 (March 1972), 89.
[22] ibid, 90.

disconnect between the self-conscious theatricality of the imaginary world Monk creates in *Vessel* and the very real world –her loft, a parking lot, a bus ride late at night through downtown New York- that she frames it in forces spectators to consider the work in relation to the real world. Visual and sonic elements are purposely mismatched with their grounding, emphasizing the enormous chasm between what critic Marcia Siegel terms "the real, raunchy world that Meredith Monk inhabits and the make-believe one she wants to create."[23]

Vessel exhibits to audiences the hallucinatory, revelatory consciousness of the artist-as-shaman, breaking down the boundaries between reality and artifice and in turn becoming a metaphor for the transformative power of opening up to new ways of perceiving, thinking, and experiencing. Part One of *Vessel* has already been described in chapter three, which looks at how Monk's filmic/theatrical manipulation of time in performance is deliberately contrasted with the passing of 'real time' in *Vessel.* In the remainder of this chapter, aspects of overflow and abundance in Parts Two and Three of *Vessel* will be examined, such as Monk's use of montage and collage techniques, accumulative syntax (instead of hierarchical), and the horizontal layering of sonic and visual events.

Part Two of *Vessel* took place in the Performing Garage, a SoHo theatre that was the home base of The Performance Group, an experimental theatre company started in 1967 by Richard Schechner. The Performance Group, primarily under the direction of Schechner, produced what he termed environmental theatre, completely redesigning the space for each new production and constructing multi-level sets which attempted to

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[23] Marcia Siegel, "Virgin Vessel", *At the Vanishing Point* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1972), p.297.

eliminate distinctions between audience's and actor's space by constructing unusual audience frameworks and enlarging the playing area to encroach upon the audience's space.[24] The space itself, as its name suggests, was a former taxi garage, a wide expanse of empty indoor space that was an ideal blank canvas for constructing new environments for each production. When Monk and the House arrived to rehearse Part Two of *Vessel*, they found the space full of multi-level scaffolding from The Performance Group's last production; they decided to drape the scaffolding with muslin to create a "mountain", a multi-level set with many playing areas. In an interview with Brooks McNamara, Monk explains: "the second section of the piece is called Handmade Mountain, and we wanted very much that quality for the whole Garage, that's why we did it ourselves. I much prefer to show what I am doing. No one *designed* that mountain. We did it ourselves."[25]

Part One of *Vessel* introduces the archetypical characters that appear in Parts Two and Three: the madwoman, the king, the lady, the scribe, the wizard, the prophetess, and the traveler. In Part One, they wear mostly black and white, but in Part Two they appear in Technicolor, their vivid new colours (the madwoman wears a bright red wig reminiscent of the one Monk wears in *Sixteen Millimetre Earrings*) echoing the increase in activity in this section. The archetypical characters simultaneously perform tasks such as chopping vegetables, writing, and mixing fluids, reading, while Joan, now painted silver, stands trial in a court presided over by paper-crowned aristocrats, and is questioned by two Bishop Cauchons.[26] The visual aesthetic of Part Two of *Vessel* was inspired by Monk's longstanding desire to create "a living tapestry piece, related to a

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[24] For a more thorough description of The Performing Group's work, see Richard Schechner's *Environmental Theater* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973).
[25] Brooks McNamara, 98.
[26] Sally Banes, "The Art of Meredith Monk" *Performing Arts Journal* 3/1 (Spring-Summer 1978), 6.

medieval two-dimensional kind of visual perception."[27] Unlike Part One of *Vessel*, in which the focus of the audience is directed by lighting one area and plunging the rest into darkness, the entire set is illuminated for all of Part Two in order to clearly show how the "tapestry" keeps changing as the performers work against each other. Lighting the entire set also allows spectators to chose their own focus based on which performer is most interesting to them. As in Part One of *Girlchild*, there is a feeling of overflow in this section of *Vessel* that recalls Cixous's descriptions of the limitless nature of women's writings: there is no refusal, no reduction, but rather an abundance of symbols, a multi-faceted web of tasks and objects and archetypes.

In her introduction to *Meredith Monk*, Deborah Jowitt notes "Monk's profound and ongoing interest in quest as theme and source of structure."[28] *Vessel* takes up these ideas in many different ways; for example, spectators journey from one performance space to the next, evoking a sense of pilgrimage. Activities in this work also suggest questing: in Part Two, Ping Chong, as the traveler, walks along a path "from one side of the scaffolding all the way through the mountain, around to the other side of the scaffolding, and then around the back of the audience."[29] His journey around the space brings to mind more symbolic journeys, embodying metaphors for spiritual, artistic, psychological, or even biological development.

As the traveler makes his 'rounds' around the Performing Garage, the performers spread out across the mountain perform individualized activities, the ordering of which was left to the individual performer. Each performance featured a different arrangement

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[27] McNamara, 99.
[28] Jowitt, 7.
[29] Meredith Monk, as quoted in McNamara, 99.

of adjoining activities. In his article "A Metamorphic Theater", Mark Berger notes that "(s)eeing such compartmented activities, in varying series, each spectator structured relationships between them differently."[30] Several performers may do the same activity in unison, followed by a period where everyone is doing a different thing; scenes are added on top of the activities of the archetypical characters, creating continually shifting layers of foreground and background. Additionally, at any moment, this open-ended structure could be completely altered by a sonic cue - a stamped foot, a shout, a knock, a sung note, or a plucked instrument – that "reordered the performers into a 'matrixed' ensemble."[31] The profusion of images and activities in this section simultaneously present multiple metaphors for traveling, working, communication, and personal development, leaving the spectator to ultimately craft their own meaning from the many possibilities presented.

While Part Two took place in an entirely constructed environment, Part Three sets pageant-like activity and large-scale group movement in a decaying urban landscape. Elements, visual and sonic, from Part One are continued in Parts Two and Three, always augmenting in dimension and arc, sometimes in different guises. The image of a girl juggling oversize money in Part Two becomes a whole troupe of clowns who tumble out of a VW microbus during Part Three; peasants wearing silver hood-masks duel with rakes in Part One; in Part Three, two peasant armies charge at each other.[32] At various intervals, the lot comes alive with precisely deployed sequences of clowning, formally dressed children playing a circle game, an army of kazoo people who battle an army of

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[30] Mark Berger, "A Metamorphic Theater", in *Meredith Monk,* ed. Deborah Jowitt (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 46.
[31] ibid., 46.
[32] Siegel, 299.

pennywhistle people, Spanish and Scottish dances, a gang of motorcycles, and a fire before which Monk hovers, twitching, near the point of self-immolation. Spectators are seated on a small bank of bleachers to watch the proceedings. The effect is like a sporting event, a field of battle, or a public square. At one point, a trio of figures dressed in white, representing Joan's spiritual advisors Saint Michael, Saint Elizabeth, and Saint Catherine, cross the space. They later appear illuminated in the porticoes of the church across the street, waving slowly to Joan, to everyone. This gesture was an attempt on Monk's behalf to slowly expand the playing environment "until you're aware of more and more and more in that parking lot. When you think you've got the limits of the parking lot, the two brick walls, your eye moves across the street, expanding even more."[33]

Throughout the course of *Vessel*, Meredith Monk plays with scale and structure, encouraging spectators to move past what they previously held to be the limits of their perception. Reality and fantasy are placed side by side; encouraging spectators to both interpret the work in the context of the larger world around it and to expand their perception of reality. Alternately emphasizing and problematizing the actual and the fantastic, *Vessel* shows spectators the world as visionaries such as Joan must see it: layered and fractioned, symbolic and mysterious, communicative and beyond language. Reality and fiction are layered on top of each other, collaged or montaged or arranged in ways to suggest new ways of perceiving both. Not only does such an approach highlight the extraordinary that is latent in the ordinary, the hidden and varied symbolic content of quotidian objects, sounds, and movements, it also suggests to spectators the potential of

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[33] McNamara 102-103.

an existence lived on several levels – that the unconscious is not separate from reality, but something that goes on within us all day long.

Vessel, by juxtaposing and alternately highlighting reality and artifice, suggests that a life experienced solely on a rational level is in many ways incomplete - that, as suggested by Jung, the more of the unconscious we are capable of making conscious, the more we integrate and understand ourselves and the world around us.[34] Like *Girlchild, Vessel* is, in some ways, designed to open up the spectator to deeper levels of perception. In these works of interdisciplinary vocal theatre, Meredith Monk weaves disparate strands of imagery, sounds, and movement into a luminous whole capable of expressing what cannot be expressed in any other way. As in the *écriture féminine* of Irigaray and Cixous, meaning is plural, and diversity and openness replace unitary systems of logic.

Écriture féminine emphasizes woman's abundance to counteract historical understandings of woman as absence or lack, and prioritizes multiple meanings over unitary systems of logic. I have already discussed the negative potential of a collective female identity; however, the goal of expressing multiple meanings in a text also has a potential for negative interpretation. Works such as *Education of the Girlchild* and *Vessel* are full of evocative visual, sonic, and gestural moments; as previously noted, they contain an excess of signifiers. This abundance of meaning could conversely be viewed as preventing any meaning at all from being conveyed, the symbolic content of simultaneous images and sounds no longer distinct, but blurred into a unified chaos. This criticism, however, assumes that conveying a discernable "meaning" is the ultimate goal

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[34] James Rose-Evans, *Experimental Theatre: From Stanislavski to Peter Brook* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989), p.87. Jung's views on the value of the unconscious/subconscious are used by the author to support the claims of alternative theatre groups (he uses the example of the Grand Magic Circus) that without embracing the intuitive, one is merely experiencing a portion of existence.

of a performance. *Education of the Girlchild* and *Vessel* propose that audience members determine for themselves what, if any, meanings these works convey; these meanings will necessarily be different for each audience member, as they largely choose their own focus and will have each taken in a different variety of signifiers in a different order. While certainly these works convey meaning differently than most texts, written or performed, I do not agree with those who would say that their excess of meaning renders them meaningless. There are meanings to be had, even if they are not predetermined; such an approach indicates to me not a lack of selectivity, but rather a greater level of respect for the individual interpretive processes of performers and spectators.

Chapter Six

Sounds from Beyond: *Jouissance,* Extended Vocal Techniques and Electronics in Vocal Theatre

This music is concerned with tendencies towards excessive behavior.

An obsession,
extremes omnipresent and encroaching upon the other,
within microseconds, coalescing one moment and dissolving the next,
towards the ultimate dissolution,
which is the soul's own Implosion.

You do not go to a hospital to inspire the recreation of your own
Death onstage. You know it by heart.
This need, this voracity for the extremes of consciousness I return to.
An actor may simulate the desired emotive state through a skilled
manipulation of external object materials, or he may use the raw
materials of his own soul in a process which is the immediate, the
direct experience of the emotion itself.

The second concern is felt by performers who, not just *professional*,
are *Obsessional* performers.

- Diamanda Galás, "Intravenal Song."[1]

First published in 1982 as part of Diamanda Galás's program notes to a performance of *Wild Women with Steak Knives*, the above passage begins as a description of Galás's vocal performance.[1] By the end of the first stanza, however, it becomes clear that this is equally a poem describing Diamanda Galás herself. The words that dominate this poem – obsession, extremes, excessive – evoke the incessantly intense nature of Galás's music and her performance persona. They also describe Galás as she has portrayed herself in interviews: a confrontational artist with tendencies towards excessive

[1] Preparatory performance notes read at the conference on "The Oral Mode in Contemporary Art and Culture", Center for Music Experiment, UCSD, La Jolla, California, February 20, 1982. reprinted as part of Diamanda Galás, "Intravenal Song", *Perspectives of New Music* 20 (Fall-Winter 1981/Spring-Summer 1982), 59.

behavior in her life *and* music, a woman compelled to the most extreme states of consciousness, an Obsessional performer/composer who "takes risks with energy and urgency in order to break through the limits of (her) immediate gravity."[2] In an interview with Andrea Juno, Galás reveals that although she derives extreme pleasure from her work, "sometimes my performances feel to me like a ripping of flesh, a bloodletting."[3] Her aggressive and visceral performances are both physically and emotionally demanding; drawing on energies outside of herself, she often seems entranced, a shamanistic figure charged with diffracting her personality to give voice to those who exist on the incorporable margins of society: the insane, the dispossessed person, the person with AIDS. She is at once possessed and self-possessed, precisely wielding a wide array of electronics to manipulate a powerfully emotive voice that sounds as ancient as nature.

Galás's poetic performance notes point to the ultimate goal of her art: "the ultimate dissolution, which is the soul's own Implosion." Her anticipated breakdown of identity may be viewed as a moment of musical *jouissance,* which transgresses the limits of her voice and body in performance to express the inarticulable will of the bodily and sexual drives. As the term is used in the works of authors such as Roland Barthes, Jaques Lacan, and Judith Butler, *jouissance* refers not to orgasm (its literal translation) but to a shattering of the self that transcends the enjoyment of a coherent identity. The concept of *jouissance* figures heavily in the work of Lacan, who identifies the Real – that which

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[2] Diamanda Galás, quoted in Nicholas Zurbrugg, ed. *Art, Performance, Media: 31 Interviews.* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 153.

[3] Diamanda Galás, interviewed in Andrea Juno, V. Vale, eds. *Angry Women.* (San Francisco, Calif.: RE/Search Publications, 1991),20.

cannot be reduced to representation- as "the paradigm of *jouissance.*"[4] Lacan's writings on the structures of language and representation became a starting place for the inquiries of a new generation of French feminist theorists, including Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, who would explore language's role in the repression of the feminine. *Jouissance* is defined by Kristeva as poetic discourse beyond hegemonic standards of reason and order, a signifying practice that resists and challenges the limits of the symbolic coherence imposed on representation.[5] Moments of *jouissance* occur when unity is challenged and the semiotic transgresses its boundaries, such as the breakdown of identity during moments of psychosis, or the breakdown of meaning and coherence in poetic texts. Both of these "breakdowns' demonstrate the usually repressed semiotic contributions to the symbolic by providing the semiotic with expression. By its very nature both excessive and transgressive, disavowing unity and embracing contradiction, *jouissance* challenges the limits of representation.[6]

The term *jouissance* is often contrasted with *plaisir,* explained by Barthes as "a pleasure...linked to cultural enjoyment and identity, to the cultural enjoyment of identity, to a homogenizing movement of the ego."[7] *Plaisir* is a result of "the operation of the structures of signification through which the subject knows himself or herself; *jouissance* fractures these structures."[8] *Plaisir,* in other words, is the enjoyment of the known; *jouissance* the disorienting rapture beyond the known. While these terms were originally

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[4] Willy Apollon, "Introduction II" in *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics,* ed. Willy Apollon and Richard Feldstein. (Albany,New York: State University of New York Press, 1996),xix.

[5] Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 150.

[6] Elizabeth Groz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1989), 51.

[7] Roland Barthes; Stephen Heath. *Image, Music, Text.* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 9.

[8] Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music.* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990, rev. 2002), 261.

used to discuss literary texts, they are readily applicable to musical texts as well. For example, in the realm of vocal performance, *jouissance* often results from listening to the performance of a well-known aria sung and ornamented in accordance with *bel canto* traditions, an experience which confirms the "rightness" of what is known, while the sonorous excesses of the voice allow for an extra *frisson* of identification and transcendent expression.[9] The abject, on the other hand, finds a natural counterpart in extended vocal techniques and electro-vocal performances that move beyond the limits of *bel canto* vocal aesthetics, embracing screams, sighs, whispers, and a wide palate of vocal colours that may be rearranged or intensified by the use of electronics.

Although they are by no means exclusively feminist phenomena, in this chapter I explore the feminist implications of instances of *jouissance* and the abject in the vocal theatre of Diamanda Galás. The power of Galás's voice, heightened by her use of electronics, to express the unconscious in *Wild Women with Steak Knives for Solo Scream* embodies principles of abjection musically. These flashes of the Real, Lacan's realm beyond representation, are woven into *Wild Women* in the form of involuntary, non-verbal bodily sounds, the retching and groaning and shrieking of the marginal body, the instable body, the body in intense emotional/physical pain. In my analysis of this work I consider these moments, which fragment both language and identity, as important intrusions from the marginal realms categorized by Kristeva as abject. Abjection, as

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[9] Over the past twenty years there has been significant reference to the idea of *jouissance* in opera in musicological scholarship. Michel Poizat's *Le cri de l'ange* argues that the (female) operatic voice is an embodiment of jouissance, resulting from its sonorous excesses. In Wayne Koestenbaum's *The Queen's Throat,* a more contemporary work, the voice of the (female) diva is put forward as a site of *jouissance* and a point of identification for the gay opera queen. see Michel Poizat, *Opéra, ou Le cri de l'ange.* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986) and Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993.)

Kristeva describes in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (*Powers of Horror*) operates in an in-between zone "of phobia, obsessions, and perversions."[10] The abject and *jouissance* both destabilize identity, an experience understood by Kristeva and avant-garde artists such as Antonin Artaud (an important source of inspiration for both Kristeva and Galás) as capable of transforming not only the symbolic, on the linguistic level, but also the social realm.[11] As I will discuss later in the chapter, *Wild Women* also (intentionally or not) functions as a feminist artwork by reversing stereotypical gendered operatic performer/spectator power dynamics and serving as a point of identification for women spectators.

Diamanda Galás's "intravenal electro-acoustic voice work(s)" employ a range of extended vocal techniques, including her trademark high, harsh, sustained screams, special uses of body resonance, overtones and subharmonics, vocal breaks, vocal "static", pitch inflection, and the variable vibrato of a demonic Maria Callas, along with vocal samples and the real-time electronic manipulation of samples and her amplified voice.[12] She got her start as a composer/performer of vocal theatre in the 1970s, when she began working and studying at the Centre for Music Experiment in San Diego. During this period she began experimenting with quadraphonic space, working with four or five microphones but creating only minimal changes in reverb using simple electronics. An interest in the colouristic and orchestral possibilities of unorthodox vocal timbres, both processed and "dry", led her to begin working with prerecorded voices on tape. Her early

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[10] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 45.

[11] Julia Kristeva; translated by Margaret Waller; with an introduction by Leon S. Roudiez. *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 83.

[12] Peter Belsito, ed. *Notes From the Pop Underground* (Berkeley, CA: The Last Gasp of San Francisco, 1985),30.

tape pieces layer vocal timbres like rock formations, creating sounds so dense that they no longer are recognizable as vocal sound.[13] Even at this early stage of her career, Galás was using the voice to progress beyond *jouissance*, deliberately exceeding the standard applications of the voice in performance to create radically disorienting works. Ironically, it is her vocal training in the operatic *bel canto* tradition that arguably has allowed her to push her voice as far as she has for so long. In "Invoking Diamanda", Michael Flanagan (Diamanda Galás's researcher and, according to her website, her Minister of Information) notes that with her strong technique and 3.5 octave range, "Diamanda could probably have had a successful career in the mainstream of classical music…Instead, she has taken her instrument and challenged the boundaries of both the musical world and her listeners."[14]

She performed some of her early quadraphonic experiments in art spaces but felt unappreciated by the art world, which she felt expected a colder style of presentation, one that was more conceptual and less emotional. Dressed in black, she sang/screamed her wordless vocal improvisations with her back facing the audience in an attempt to be as invisible as possible, but audience members still reacted in disgust to her "hysterical" performance.[15] A screaming woman, no matter how inconspicuous, is still at best unsettling in a patriarchal society deeply uncomfortable with women expressing strong emotions. Encounters with the abject can be both horrifying and transformative – not every subject is ready to encounter the Real, especially in the form of female madness.

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[13] Nicholas Zurbrugg, ed. *Art, Performance, Media: 31 Interviews,* 150-151.

[14] Michael Flanagan, "Invoking Diamanda" in *Life Sentences: Writers, Artists, and AIDS,* ed. Thomas Avena. (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1994),162.

[15] Nicholas Zurbrugg, ed. *Art, Performance, Media: 31 Interviews*, 151.

Although Galás is most famous for her trilogy of works on AIDS, *The Masque of the Red Death,* her early work was also specifically political and often focused on the politics of gender.[16] *Wild Women with Steak Knives: A Homicidal Love Song for Solo Scream* (1981-3), one of Galás's first electro-vocal theatre works, addresses the murderous rage of the betrayed and suggests connections between female insanity and anger. Galás describes the work as "a kind of bloodless and unmerciful brain surgery, a kinesthetic representation of the mind diffracted into an infinity of crystals."[17] Although subtitled a work for solo scream, in *Wild Women* (as in most of the work she creates and performs) Galás's voice takes on multiple parts/roles, in this case the disjointed 'selves' of a schizophrenic woman. Her voice is multiplied and fractured using several microphones and an array of signal processing equipment including harmonizers, delays, and massive amplification. As Galás explains, "(t)theatrically, this diffraction of the mind is made infinite through a ceaseless navigation of the following variables: physical body effort & shape; changing lights series which are choreographed; vocal timbre chains; incremental change of room and reverberation; manipulation of sonic spatial coordinates and trajectories through the use of four (the recorded version uses five) microphones sent to a triphonic sound system. With the exception of the changing light series, the performer has control over all of the above during performance."[18] Additionally, Galás

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[16] Rebecca A. Pope and Susan J. Leonardi, "Divas and Disease, Mourning and Militancy: Diamanda Galás's Operatic Plague Mass" in *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference,* Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin, eds. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997),317.
[17] Diamanda Galás, "Intravenal Song.",59.
[18] ibid., 61.

distinguishes the voices of the various 'selves' through varied timbres, vocal styles, textures, vocabularies, and languages.[19]

The soundworld of *Wild Women* is cramped, frantic, and anxious: dramatic incantation, demonic *Sprechstimme,* screams, wails, whispers, shrieks, and glossolalia evoke feelings of rage, terror, and isolation. Many of Galás's works address "the caged person, the dehumanization of isolated individual, and escape through insanity."[20] In *Wild Women,* Galás uses a quadraphonic sound system to similarly trap the audience in her "cage" of sound, placing them in the centre of a schizophrenic woman's chaotic internal monologue. The work begins with a swarm of whispering voices that sound like the buzzing of insects from far away, or a cloud of bees speaking in tongues. The volume is increased, and the voices become louder, babbling nonsense syllables, manically repeating "la, la, la" in a screamed singsong, or electronically manipulated until they sound like breaking machinery or mechanical insects. The sound is harsh and tinny – Galás uses a special high-pass equalizer to bypass mid-range and low frequencies, accentuating the higher registers and resulting in a shrill, mechanical timbre.[21] The levels increase yet again, fragmented voices advancing upon the audience until they are completely immersed in Galás's soundworld. A voice speaking in French starts to become audible above the babbling: the first words to emerge from the chaos are "pitié" (pity) and "misère" (misery). They stand out from the babbling not only as discernable words, but also because they are drenched in reverb – the effect is as if the words were echoing in her head (which is also the "cage" surrounding the audience). Suddenly, the

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[19] Andrea Juno, V. Vale, eds. *Angry Women,* 8.
[20] ibid., 8.
[21] ibid., 10.

voices stop, and a recording of a bass drum being struck three times is heard, evoking the traditional "trois coups" of French theatre.[22] After the third strike, Galás begins to recite "Les Litanies de Satan" (The Litanies of Satan) by Charles Baudelaire in a low, dramatic voice made cavernous through the application of reverb. The text is an anti-liturgy[23] that takes the form of an extended antiphon and prayer to Satan.

Les Litanies de Satan (by Charles Baudelaire)[24]
(bold indicates clearly audible text)

Oh toi, le plus savant et le plus beau des anges **Dieu trahi par le sort et privé de louanges** ***O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!***	O Thou, of Angels loveliest, most wise, O God betrayed by fate, deprived of praise, *Satan, have mercy on my long distress!*
O Prince de l'exil, à qui l'on a fait tort, **Et qui, vaincu, toujours te redresses plus fort** ***O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!***	O Prince of exile, who was dispossessed, Who ever rises stronger when oppressed, *Satan, have mercy on my long distress!*
Toi qui sais tout, grand roi des choses souterraines, **Guérisseur familier des angoisses humaines,** ***O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!***	O Thou who knowest all, Hell's sovereign, Known healer of all mankind's afflictions, *Satan, have mercy on my long distress!*

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[22] "Trois coups" refers to the three strikes of a bell traditionally used to signal the start of a performance (or its recommencement after intermission) in French theatres.

[23] In an interview with Nicholas Zurbrugg, Galás describes her works *Wild Women With Steak Knives*, *Plague Mass,* and *Shrei X* as "antiliturgies performed in solidarity with those isolated or kept aside by their mainstream society." Nicholas Zurbrugg, ed. *Art, Performance, Media: 31 Interviews,* 145.

[24] Charles Baudelaire, "Les Litanies de Satan", reprinted with translation in booklet for *The Litanies of Sàtan* by Diamanda Galás (CD, Mute Records, 1989).

Toi qui, même aux lépreux, aux parias maudits,
Enseignes par l'amour le goût du Paradis,
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

O toi qui de la mort, ta vielle et forte amante,
Engenderas l'Espérance, -- une folle charmante!
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

Toi qui fais au proscrit ce regarde calme et haut
Qui damne tout un peuple autour d'un échaufaud,
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

Toi qui sais en quells coins des terres envieuses
le Dieu jaloux cache les pierres précieuses,
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

Toi dont l'œil clair connâit les profonds arsenaux
Où dort enseveli le peuple des métaux.
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

Toi dont la large main cache les précipices
Au sonnambule errant au bord des édifices,
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

Toi qui, magiquement, assouplis les vieux os
De l'ivrogne attardé foulé par les chevaux,
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

Toi qui, pour consoler l'homme frêle qui souffre
Nous appris à mêler la salpêtre et le soufre,
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

Toi qui poses ta marque, ô complice subtil,
Sur le front du Crésus impitoyable et vil,
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

Toi qui mets dans les yeuxs et dans les cœurs des filles
Le culte de la plaie et l'amour des guenilles,
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

Bâton des exilés, lampe des inventeurs,
Confesseur des pendus et des conspirateurs,
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

Père adoptif de ceux qu'en sa noire colère
Du paradis terrestre a chassés Dieu le Père,
O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!

PRIERE

Gloire et louange à toi, Satan, dans les hauteurs
Du Ciel, où tu régnas, et dans les profondeurs
De l'Enfer, où, vaincu, tu rêves en silence!
Fais que mon âme un jour, sous l'Arbre de Science,
Prés de toi de repose, à l'heure où sur ton front
Comme un Temple nouveau ses rameaux
s'épandront!

Thou who the lepers and the pariahs doomed
Show out of love the Paradise to come,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!

Thou who in Death, your mistress old and strong,
Breeds hope – delightful aberration!
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!

Thou who dost give the outlaw the proud glance
Which damns the crowd who watch his sufferance,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!

Thou who dost know where greedy earth enfolds
The precious stones a jealous God concealed,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!

Thou whose clear eye knows the deep sepulchers
Where multitudes of metals lay interred,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress

Thou whose great hand conceals the precipice
From the somnambulist whom roofs entice,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!

Thou who by magic softens the old bones
Of loitering drunks by horses trampled down,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!

Thou who, consoling frail mankind in pain,
Taught us to make our guns and gun-cotton,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!

Thou who didst set thy mark, accomplice skilled,
Upon the heart of Croesus harsh and vile,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!

Thou who put into women's hearts and eyes
The cult of wounds, the love of poverty,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!

Staff of the exile and discoverer,
Confessor of condemned conspirator,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!

Father to those whom in his sombre wrath
God drove from his paradise on earth,
Satan, have mercy on my long distress!

PRAYER

To Thee, o Satan, glory be, and praise,
In Heaven, once thy kingdom, the abyss
of Hell, where, now, thou dreamest silently!
Grant that my soul, one day, beneath the Tree
Of Knowledge, may rest near thee, when o'erhead,
Like a new Temple, its wide branches spread!

The bass drum provides a single strike after every couplet and refrain, punctuating significant moments in Galás's dramatic intonation of Baudelaire's poem. Additionally, the recurrent beat of the bass drum brings to mind a funereal procession, perhaps an event anticipated by the speaker. It is easy to imagine her repeated pleas to Satan to be released from her misery as a longing for death, which would indeed free her from her earthly torments. Towards the end of this section (starting with "Toi qui, même aux lépreux"), Galás intensifies her dramatic declamation style until it becomes more like *sprechstimme*. The change of style reflects the speaker's growing anxiety and anger, its heightened theatricality contributing to the overall feeling of madness. At the end of this section, Galás repeats the refrain four times as an electronic whooshing sound moves forward in the mix.

The *trois coups* are sounded again at a higher pitch, and Galás begins to recite the Baudelaire text again. This time her voice is doubled electronically, resulting in two distinct vocal lines speaking in perfect unison, except one is pitched far lower than Galás's natural speaking voice and demonically raspy. A third voice enters towards the end of the first refrain, high-pitched and processed to sound robotic. At first this mechanized voice only reinforces the ends of phrases, but soon it begins to layer the refrain *O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!* on top of the doubled voices, which continue to recite the Baudelaire text. The robotic, tinny voice repeats the refrain with increasing frequency throughout the next few minutes, sometimes elongating it by repeating sections of the phrase. This third voice has a buzzing, insect-like quality, highlighted by its incessant repetitions of the refrain – it sounds inhuman, desperate, like a panicking bee trapped between a window and a screen. The timbral and colouristic

differences between the three voices in this section clearly mark them as distinct personalities, and I hear them as indicative of some of the gendered identities this schizophrenic woman gives voice to. Following this line of thought, the doubled voices that begin this section may be interpreted as representative of male and female personalities, and the third voice as an insect, an unsexed, unseen, yet persistent presence. This "insect" voice could represent the dehumanized individual, nameless and unsexed, an anonymous site of suffering.

Galás has expressed in interviews her belief that "all great performers are transvestites, just like...all witchdoctors are transvestites....I mean transvestites in the sense (that)...they're male, female, insect, animal, they're kind of reptilian."[25] The contrasting registers of the doubled voices suggest that the protagonist of *Wild Women* contains within herself both male and female; it seems possible to me that she, like Galás's great performer/shaman/witchdoctor, exceeds the traditional dyad of genders to become at times more insect than human, a single-minded creature cut off from the world of human interactions. By 3:00, the supporting male/female voices have sped up and become more distorted; it is no longer possible to make out what they are saying; only the metallic buzz of the third voice repeatedly intoning the refrain. In the following section the "gendered" voices are transformed into a muddy, sped-up ostinato underpinning the inhuman tones of the same voice, which now repeats a shred of text (*de ma longue misère*) as two wind-like voices intone a sustained "oh" in the background. The dominance of this insect-like voice heightens the protagonist's disconnect from reality

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[25] Peter Belsito, ed. "Diamanda Galás", in *Notes from the Pop Underground* (Berkeley, California: The Last Gasp of San Francisco, 1985), 25.

and her growing identification with forces exceeding the limits of her fragile human body.

Starting around 3:30, a new, three beat percussive pattern is introduced which seems to be a sped-up and looped sample of the *trois coups* that designated the start of the recitation of "Les Litanies de Satan". The tinny insect voice continues its dominance, picking up where the male/female voices left off and reciting Baudelaire shrilly over the looping percussion, which becomes increasingly menacing and mechanical. After around thirty seconds, the two wind-like voices from the previous section re-assert themselves quietly in the background. The use of slow, wide vibrato makes them now sound more tremulous than hollow; at times, the upper voice (Galás's "live" voice) slides towards the lower, grinding against its neighboring pitch only to back off again as if unsure of where to go. As the text is repeated by the insect-voice, the two wind-like voices become a quasi-angelic chorus of three, which hovers brightly over the industrial, repetitive thrust of the electronically manipulated percussive noise below. The section builds in intensity, its volume increasing and its pace becoming more frantic, until the insect voice begins repeating the refrain (*O Satan, prends pité de ma lounge misère!).* At this point, the background tones are manipulated, their pitch raised until the voices sound like the warbling wails of ghosts or the harsh cries of birds of prey circling above the insect-voice, which is again looping a fragment of text (*longue misère*). A battery of percussive noises enter, constant, repetitious, like a barreling train, at 6:30, and the insect-voice fades out. Although the insect-voice was inhuman, it did employ language; in the next section of *Wild Women* even that breaks down.

The insect-voice is replaced by another electronically manipulated voice speaking in a dramatic *Sprechstimme*; it is difficult to tell what language, if any, it is using, or if it is merely a reworked sample of the Baudelaire text. This voice is accompanied by Galás's extremely high, sustained vocalization, which utilizes what some refer to as the whistle register of the female voice.[26] The two high-pitched wordless voices become louder as the section progresses, holding their own over the *Sprechstimme* and what sounds initially like a sample of large machines powering down. This electronic underpinning becomes denser and more frantic, morphing into brutal, hyperactive thrusting sounds that end abruptly at 7:25, when all of the voices and noises are silenced for the first time in *Wild Women.* This brief silence serves to highlight how crowded the soundworld of this piece has been until this point – the insane rage of the protagonist is exhausting, multiple, and sonically excessive.

While the initial third of *Wild Women* deals heavily with language in the form of the Baudelaire text, in the next section words are fragmented, then forsaken completely. Given the privileged role text has played in this work until this point and the multiple languages the protagonist has spoken in an attempt to convey her needs and emotions, her abandonment of language seems especially significant. The use of several languages in this work not only helps listeners to differentiate between the protagonists' multiple personalities, but also shows just how badly she needs to communicate with someone. Perhaps it has become clear to the protagonist by this point that even if she tries to communicate in several different languages, her anguish will not be understood. In that

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[26] According to Michael Edward Edgerton, the term whistle register "typically refers to extremely high phonation in the female voice that features vocal fold oscillation with reduced amplitude of excursion." Michael Edward Edgerton, *The 21st Century Voice: Contemporary and Extra-Normal Voice* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2004), 31.

case, this next section, in which she increasingly relies upon bodily noises, may be interpreted as an attempt to communicate on a more basic level with the widest audience possible. The sounds of the body are not culturally specific – cries of pain or sexual pleasure transcend language and are immediately understandable by most humans. Incorporating the voice of the female body into texts is also, as previously mentioned, one of the positive projects of *écriture féminine.* The translation of the sounds of the body into written words has proven to be one of the more problematic elements of *écriture féminine,* but Galás is able to include these voices in a very direct way in this musical text.

The sounds of the body emphasize the humanity of the protagonist, but Galás also uses her voice to create sounds that seem entirely mechanical, perhaps to highlight the dehumanizing aspects of what sounds to be a largely solitary experience of mental illness. Two high, metallic voices, like the whistling of teakettles, enter at 7:30 and shimmer above a low, sustained tone from an electronic source, sliding away and towards each other with varying degrees of dissonance. At 7:50, another voice enters tentatively, barely managing to articulate the beginnings of words before trailing off. She speaks in English, the quivering of her voice nearly obscuring the word "listen", her voice breaking on "I said", then stuttering the rest of the sentence into a repeated "sh-sh-sh-sh". As tremulous as the earlier voices were dramatic and demonic, this voice seems incapable of speech, incapacitated by fear. It is significant that one of the words she manages to articulate is "listen"; her pleas to be heard call attention to her dehumanizing isolation.[27] It is impossible to say if the protagonist of *Wild Women* is isolated because she is insane or

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[27] Rebecca A. Pope and Susan J. Leonardi,317.

insane because she is isolated, but it is clear that her aloneness is causing her pain. Her voice breaks again on her next attempted entry, fragmenting her words into a stuttered "I-I-I-I-Sh-Sh-Sh-Sh", followed by what sounds like "shining" and "flying", softly sighed. At this point she abandons language altogether: the teakettle tones get even louder, and Galás lets out a high, choked cry, followed by a manic witchy giggle. Seconds later, she enters on a coloratura-high pitch, her voice cracking, then hisses down to her chest voice, stuttering out "Liss-Liss" (the first syllable of "listen") repeated twice. She then begins to make preparatory speech noises, the hesitant sounds people make with constricted throats when they know they have to speak but don't want to say what they have to say. This is followed by some low-pitched mumbling which transforms into bodily noises, like the involuntary sounds that escape from open mouths during sex and sickness. Her efforts to communicate with language in this section dissolve into what Kristeva would refer to as the *chora*, the place, which is not really a place at all, to which we retreat, a place where subject and object are eliminated in a state before language.[28]Other voices enter – the French voice is heard reciting the Baudelaire text in the background, along with another voice intoning in Latin – but the primary focus of the next few minutes is the voice of the ecstatic body. The "live" voice of Galás inhales, the saliva in her mouth made audible through amplification, letting loose on the exhale with a series of rapid-fire vocalizations which evoke the manic rapture of a Charismatic Christian speaking in tongues: she alternates between repeating syllables, burbling *glossalia* and frantic ululations utilizing the glottal break. She continues to frenetically

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[28] see Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essaie sur l'abjection* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980), 21-22.

babble vocables until around 10:00, her voice growing increasingly anxious and uncontrolled.

The contrast between what I hear as the abject "voice of the body" – vocal sounds which mimic the involuntary sounds the body makes in sex, in sickness, in distress – and Galás's use of her voice as an instrument, which has more to do with *jouissance*, surpasses the dissolution of language to become the primary conflict of the next section. Galás's more instrument-like uses of the voice can be heard metaphorically in her strategic deployment of the vibrato-less teakettle tones of her extreme high register after a painful-sounding inhale, and in a more theoretical sense as she performs with electronically manipulated recordings of her own voice. The contrast between these "instrumental" sounds, which belie their human origin, and the visceral impact of Galás's guttural shrieks and moans intensifies the listener's awareness of the bodily origins of all vocal sounds. Registral, textural, and colouristic differences set apart the two categories of sounds in this section, but the level of perceived vocal control is perhaps the most important parameter distinguishing bodily sounds from more instrumental uses of the voice. If Galás's tea-kettle tones represent the voice under control – the voice as instrument – then the unbridled screams and grunts that become an increasingly important part of the soundworld of *Wild Women* during the next three minutes signify that which is resistant to control. These screams, intrinsically connected to the continually surpassed body, are equally the voice of the thrillingly disgusting abject, giving voice to a

language of pain and refuse, the elements of life we "permanently thrust aside in order to live."[29]

At around 10:05, Galás begins a series of vocalizations that contrast her "instrumental" control of her extreme high register with frantic glossalia and the grotesque sounds of the abjected body.[30] An extremely high, sustained pitch, free of vibrato, melts into burbling vocables at 10:14, vocal control losing out to vocal compulsion. Or, to be more precise, a performance of a vocal compulsion – Galás does not notate her compositions in the traditional sense, but they are far from improvisatory. Like Janis Joplin, another singer known for her wild, urgent vocal ornamentation and "genuine" emotion, who in actuality meticulously selected each shriek and moan, Galás presents a carefully planned performance of out of control vocalizations.[31] The fact that these sounds are not produced under "authentic" circumstances (Galás is not mad, and she is not actually being threatened or having an orgasm) does not seem problematic to me, however; eschewing language, they signify bodily experience, and that is important regardless of the deliberateness of their production. What is normally suppressed, the noisy debris of the most intense emotional states, is now an element of performance, an intentional focus. The sounds of Kristeva's abject body – retching, voice breaking, noisily and wetly inhaling – penetrate Galás's virtuosic, instrumental vocalization, flashes of sonic *jouissance* which convey nuances of emotion difficult to describe using words.

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[29] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez,3.

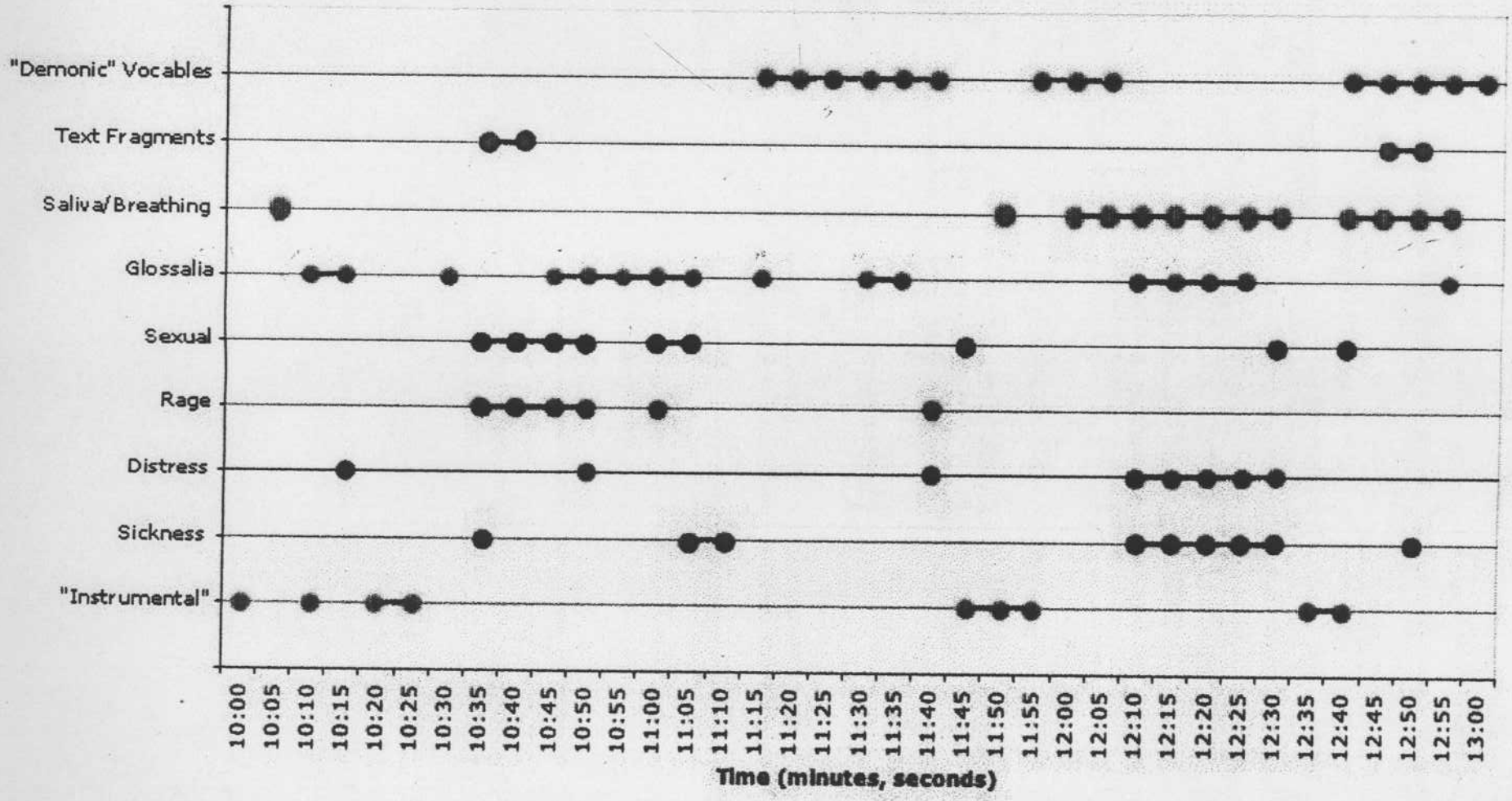
[30] This term is used by Herbert Blau in his essay "The Surpassing Body" to describe the grotesque realism of the performing body "which reveals its essence to the outside world with all its apertures open, gaping mouth, running eyes, unbuttoned belly, breasts, genitals..." Herbert Blau, "The Surpassing Body." *TDR* 35/2 (Summer, 1991),80.

[31] For an interesting analysis of the importance of Joplin's perceived emotional rawness to her audiences' expectations of authenticity, see Simon Frith, "Rock and the Politics of Memory", *Social Text* 9/10 (Spring, 1984), 66.

The subtleties of her screams in this section require more explanation than a single word can provide; for example, I would like to say that at 10:36 Galás begins a series of thirteen screams of hate-rage-orgasm, but that sort of hyphenation just reveals how difficult the sounds of the body are to interpret. In any case, the screams, which at first sound choked, emanate from a flurry of vocables, the voices of a woman possessed. This alternation of babbled rapid-fire vocables with breathy, guttural screams becomes a sequence which is varied and expanded until 12:30. At this point, the sequence is truncated into a shorter form which Galás performs seven times in rapid succession, exhaling on the vocable "ma/aa" like an angry wounded animal, then gaspingly inhaling. This is an overwhelming, painful-sounding moment, and another example of the sounds of the abject body. From this point on, Galás increasingly melds abject/bodily and virtuosic/instrumental sounds, using electronics to further distort her painful, bodily screams and aggressively encircle her audience with the multiple, fractured identities and voices of the protagonist of *Wild Women.*

As they are difficult to convey through description alone, on page 108 I have attempted to graphically represent the vocal events occurring between minutes ten and thirteen of *Wild Women.* Although my analysis of these works of vocal theatre has been overwhelmingly presented in writing thus far, this graph does not signify a change in analytical method, but is rather only a visual means of representing the way in which categories of vocal sounds evocative of emotional and physical states are organized in this section of the work. The chart employs the same mechanisms as the written sections; accordingly, it has more in common with linguistic/grammatical models than musical graphs based on pitch, meter, or harmony. In other words, not only does this chart

Diamanda Galás, *Wild Women With Steak Knives*



examine different material (emotive and physical states, rather than pitches or formal elements) than explored in most graphical musical analyses, it functions according to an entirely different method of understanding musical meaning. The numbers on the x axis of the graph represent the passage of time in five second increments. On the y axis, I have outlined the nine different modes of vocal communication that Galás uses in this section: highly controlled "instrumental" vocalization, text fragments, glossalia, "demonic" vocables, noises associated with breathing and salivation, sounds associated with sexual arousal and orgasm, sounds of the body in distress, sounds of rage, and bodily sounds associated with sickness. Vocal events are indicated by the colored dots; as more than one vocal event often occurs in a five-second span, there are frequently several dots occupying the same temporal position on the graph. This may also indicate that a vocal event belongs to several categories: an example of this can be seen at 10:35, where Galás begins a series of what I earlier described clumsily as screams of hate-rage-orgasm. is a useful way of showing the sequences and layers of emotional and physical states in particularly dense section of this work.

At 13:04 the growling voices and whooshing electronics stop. A few seconds of silence pass, and then Galás, intoning in a single voice heavy with reverb, recites again the first line of "The Litanies of Satan." She next diffracts her voice into a disjointed chorus emanating from multiple channels, reciting fragments of the Baudelaire text at varied speeds and levels of distortion. The soundworld becomes more and more cramped and anxious; at 14:20 a high-pitched, wild *glossalia* is layered over the increasingly hard to understand text. By 15:45 the voices have blurred into a tangle of reciting voices, and

earlier motifs are reintroduced, the abject sounds of a marginalized body: babbling vocables, rapid-fire stuttering followed by a gasping inhale and a painful scream, and wild, guttural exclamations. Suddenly, the swarm of voices retreats, reduced to a muted background as Galas recites the concluding prayer of the Baudelaire text. As she finishes the prayer, the crowd of voices, now repeating "O Satan" gradually advances, getting louder until the abrupt end of the piece.

What is expressed in *Wild Women* is the *jouissance* of madness, the breakdown of identity that occurs during moments of psychosis. Envoicing the Real, Galás fragments her voice into a multi-channel chorus of multiple personalities, a tremendous sonic assault of unspeakable rage. In their analysis of *Wild Women,* Pope and Leonardi note that insanity is figured in this work as a symptom of female anger. [32] It is still socially unacceptable in many cultures and contexts for a woman to express anger, and the repression of anger is a major cause of anxiety, depression, and mental illness among women.[33] Although insanity may be the unwanted outcome of a lifetime of repressed anger, in an interview with Andrea Juno, Galás suggests that it may also be viewed as a form of liberation or "freedom from permission."[34] Interpreted in this manner, Galás's performance embodies the *jouissance* of the diffracted personality, the transgressive rapture of a subject freed from illusory unitary notions of the self.

Equally transgressive is the way in which Galas reverses the traditional status of the mentally unstable female character in operatic/vocal performance. Male composers of opera since Monteverdi have presented female characters onstage in "mad scenes" in

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[32] Rebecca A. Pope and Susan J. Leonardi,317.

[33] Dana Crowley Jack, "Understanding Women's Anger: A Description of Relational Patterns" in *Gender Roles*, Janice W. Lee, ed.

[34] Andrea Juno, V. Vale, eds. *Angry Women,* 8.

which the sight of a woman in hysterics and her eventual control is presented for the enjoyment of the audience. In *Wild Women* this situation is reversed, and "she who is the object of the gaze gazes back."[35] Although Galás's use of themes common to traditional representations of opera divas such as female madness, excess, and transgression reference an earlier masculinist operatic tradition, as Susan McClary points out: "like other performance artists, she enacts her pieces upon her own body. This is politically very different from the tradition of male composers projecting their own fantasies of transgression as well as their own fears on to women characters. Galás is not interested in the narrative of raising the specter of the monstrous, flirting with madness, and then reimposing control....she enacts the rage of the madwoman for the purpose of protesting genuine atrocities."[36] Trapping the audience in the fractured soundworld of the protagonist, her performance disrupts the objectifying gaze of masculinist power and calls into question the politics of spectatorship. Her voice, multiple and powerful, becomes in performance a point of identification for other women, an extroversion of their buried anger, a vehicle for the expression of their rage and desires.

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[35] Rebecca A. Pope and Susan J. Leonardi,317.

[36] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings; Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991),110.

Conclusion

Vocal theatre, an interdisciplinary genre of performance primarily defined by the works of women composer/performers, shares numerous priorities with *écriture féminine*: the affirmation of a positive sense of collective female identity and values, the pluralization of meaning and the avoidance of unitary logics, a tendency towards abundance and excess, a preference for collage and mosaic forms instead of conventional narrative structures, and an interest in giving voice to women's *jouissance* and the female body. As such, I feel that *écriture féminine* provides a particularly useful analytical framework for interpreting works of vocal theatre. In this thesis, I propose that works of vocal theatre by Meredith Monk, Pauline Oliveros, and Diamanda Galás function as musical *écriture féminine*, providing new models for the way women's stories, concerns, and bodies are represented in performance. In demonstrating the ways in which women composers and performers have shaped the aesthetic norms of vocal theatre, I suggest that the genre demonstrates alternative, feminine/feminist musical aesthetics. I wish to stress, however, that I do not conceive of feminist musical aesthetics as a unified set of artistic standards; rather, they are inherently multiple, capable of encompassing a wide range of perspectives and visions of womanhood.

As a genre primarily defined by the works of women composer/performers, vocal theatre seems especially well-suited to the expression of feminine/feminist musical aesthetics. These works counteract understandings of woman as lack or absence in their abundance and multiplicity of meanings. I believe that this tendency is even more pronounced in works conceived by collectives of women, such as *Crow Two* and *Education of the Girlchild.* Their subversion of assumptions of compositional authority

and elevation of the role of performers and collective members to the position of creators results in works capable of simultaneously conveying the concerns and viewpoints of multiple women. This alternative compositional practice not only elides the traditional boundaries between performer and composer, but also ensures the avoidance of a unitary aesthetic perspective. Additionally, the creation of works by collectives of women facilitates the positive portrayal of female relationships. In "*Le rire de la méduse,*" Cixous writes beautifully about the significant role texts encouraging and featuring generous, intimate relationships between women could play in the crafting of a new positive collective identity for women. *Girlchild* and *Crow Two* were created in part by communities where the sort of woman to woman exchange Cixous passionately advocates in her writings was an important part of an exploratory compositional process, and these works emphasize the positive potential of female solidarity.

Many of these works also reevaluate the traditional role of the audience as passive receptor of meaning, involving them as active participants. In Monk's *Vessel*, for example, audience members travel between performance spaces, chose their focus from a wide array of events presented simultaneously, and construct personal meanings from the work's dense layers of imagery. Oliveros includes audience members as active participants in *Crow Two,* encouraging them to meditate, chant, and fully involve themselves with the performers in creating a transformative environment. The active role of the audience in these works enhances their deliberately multiple meanings by opening works up to the stories of others in a way not possible in more traditional musical practices.

As the genre of vocal theatre evolves, new possibilities for feminist musical inquiry emerge. For example, although I briefly look at the role of electronics in vocal theatre in chapter six, there remains far more to be said about the way composers such as Galás dominate their electronics in performance, refuting stereotypical conceptions of the woman's inherent connection to natural, "organic" forms and reluctance to engage with technology[37]. Galás's envoicing of the abject body in works such as *Wild Women* and *Vena Cava* also opens up exciting possibilities for further investigation. There is also much room for further investigation of the different aesthetic strategies employed by works of vocal theatre composed collectively and those representing the vision of a single composer. Methodologically, my thesis applies aesthetic criteria derived from *écriture féminine* to extra-canonical, interdisciplinary works of vocal theatre; I have found this theoretical framework extraordinarily useful in explaining the strategies of conveying meaning and values that these works employ. This approach, or a similar approach based on hermeneutic and aesthetic criteria, as opposed to the more traditional analytical parameters of structure or pitch, may prove useful in understanding other works and genres that do not fit current models of musical analysis.

Monk, Oliveros, and Galás celebrate differing concepts of womanhood in their works of vocal theatre, evoking a deliberately multiple vision of feminine identity. Their performances invite audience members to experience new kinds of beauty in music reflective of specifically female perspectives. Transgressing patriarchal musical aesthetic

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[37] Andra McCartney provides valuable perspectives on these issues in her writings on the subject of women in electroacoustics, specifically the relatively small number of women composers of electroacoustic music. see Andra McCartney, "Inventing Images: Constructing and Contesting Gender in Thinking About Electroacoustic Music", *Leonardo Music Journal* 5/95, 57-66, and "Creating Worlds for my Music to Exist: Women Composers of Electroacoustic Music in Canada", *IAWM Jounal* 2/2 (June 1996), 16-19.

norms, these works imply the existence of an emergent feminine/feminist musical aesthetics.

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