



*Myths of the Voice*  
Malérargues, July 4 to 17 2005

## Forum of Ideas and Discussions (3) Enrique Pardo "On Subjectivity"

Updated 20 June 2005

Main Forum on <http://www.pantheatre.com/6-archives-gb.html>

Exchanges with Sonu Shamdasani on <http://www.pantheatre.com/pdf/6-archives-MV05-sonu-gb.pdf>

Biodrame and Roy Hart's Letter: <http://www.roy-hart.com/pauls.htm>

This forum page is edited by Enrique Pardo (EP).

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Extracts and notes from

### **"Speculations on the subject, object and abject of voice performance"**

By Enrique Pardo

a lecture presented at the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki

as part of a conference titled "Voice, sound and subjectivity"

Organized by Pentti Paavolainen of Finland's Theatre Academy, in collaboration with Sibelius Academy of Music and Pythagoras Institute for Music Research

Helsinki, Finland, June 6 to 8, 2005.

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The invitation : Pentti Paavolainen

The main focus is in the multiple approaches on the phenomena of singing, speaking, producing sound, manipulating the sounds/voices, and all what follows to the notion of subject: whose sound, whose voice, what is present, what is absent etc. Partly with sophisticated theoretical discussion, partly with artistic/practical examples.

One day of the conference will dedicated to spoken voice or "human sound". You as the "next generation" of the Roy Hart tradition, in the Pantheatre would be the key person especially to hear from, with your approach also to the psychic meaning/effects of voice, as I have understood in your article in the Performance Research.

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## **SUBJECTIVITY**

The notion of subjectivity opens a monumental, massive, dizzying portico into the palaces of philosophy. The specific portico that has "subjectivity" written over it is possibly THE grand entrance into the fortresses of ontological thinking, where, in my baroque fantasy at least, daunting old

philosophers spiral into abyssal discussions on the subject of the subject of the subjectivity of the subject's subjection to subjectivity, etc. etc...

In the speculative manoeuvres I am about to undertake, subjectivity and my own position will be often changing sides, finding themselves at odds with each other, but sometimes in the same camp facing some common enemy. Subjectivity is a conceptual tool used to stir the subjects, objects, abjects, and projects of voice performance.

Also, when one stands in front of a construct such as subjectivity, one starts to see double as the concept splits before one's very eyes for we tend to wear dualistic, oppositional spectacles in order to create, consider and think through such concepts. One cannot tackle subjectivity without its twin or Siamese brother appearing immediately: objectivity. Furthermore these constructs sometimes fuse or swallow each other, appearing as guest ghosts in each other's domains or entrails. One hears that there is objectivity in the deepest subjectivity, though one has to ask what depth is, and where it is. Conversely, one of the main leitmotifs of today's epistemology seems to be that so-called objective experimentation is influenced by the observer's subjective gaze. One is constantly facing not one but two figures, a tandem of intimidating and feuding constructs. It remind me, again in my baroque fantasies, of the palaces around the Sforza castle in the centre of Milan with their sombre, massive, grave and heavy doorways, and the sculpted grotesque faces of aggressive old men glaring and shouting down at you from the overbearing decoration motives, clearly meant to intimidate and impress you. Once the threshold crossed one can of course very easily get lost, hypnotized, brain-washed, converted. But in the corridors, chambers and chapels of philosophical thinking, in the halls of mirrors, trap-doors, cul-de-sacs, ivory towers, cellars and attics, there is a trove of crucial challenges, cultural reflection, and artistic inspiration.

With this architectural fantasy I am giving away the plan of this presentation, somewhat labyrinthical, sometimes abyssal in its baroque meanderings, not a straightforward promenade, nor even an organized guided tour, but more like a visit to an archaeological site, or to the foundations of a laboratory in the making. As the title I proposed indicates I am taking the opportunity to **speculate** on some of the basic premises – subjects, objects, and abjects – of what I am calling “voice performance”.

## Cards down

I will put my cards down from the start in relation to the position I tend to take towards the notion of “subjectivity”, and how I use it to further the points I want to make. I argue and work from a position which is rather **contrary** to the esthetical and ethical implications of subjectivity, ((( contrary and not opposed ))) ...as this concept has been called upon to rule much of **the justification for acting** in theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is a militant artistic biased point of view.

When I say that subjectivity “has been called upon to rule much of the justification for acting in theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century” I am pointing to the question (or call it the “subject”) of **identity and identification** in creating a psychological entity, singular and unified, and therefore “un-divided”. This “undivided entity” is the so called individual. Subjectivity becomes the animating singular principle of the individual, as he or she appears on stage, mostly within a naturalistic-realistic world view. Acting becomes the identification interface between at least 2 subjects: the actor and the character. Theatre is understood as a dialogue of subjectivities. I am rephrasing in a rather lapidary manner the definitions of what we tend to call “traditional theatre”.

## Kantor and Castellucci

Two notes on this. The first address two artists for whom I have enormous respect and admiration, maybe the greatest I have seen in theatre: the late Tadeuz Kantor and Romeo Castellucci. Both, like

many other recent and contemporary theatre artists, made moves which are also “contrary” to traditional “identity theatre” and therefore to the opening afforded to acting, or one could say, to acting as the interplay and display of subjectivities by the actors on stage. Kantor said as much: “I am looking for a theatre without acting”. Castellucci does everything he can not to have actors acting in his performances – transforming them often, not unlike Kantor, into semaphoric token figures, ghosts of a kind, underworldly shades. I mention Kantor and Castellucci because I feel in my work I go along with them in their reactions to the value of “subjectivity acting”, hunting for the same artistic and philosophical treasure, but while moving with them, I feel I am looking in a different direction, as if though I want, like them, to “**objectify emotion**” but with the full **presence** of the actor, or rather, with all the levels of presence an actor can constellate. This presence, or ‘presences’ represent something fundamental for me, and I feel like using here a philosophical enormity like “dasein”, the dreamer caught, and therefore **present** in the dream. Kantor of course was on stage, very present in his performances; this factor played an enormous part in the fascination his performances provoked. In the context of this conference I would add that that presence represents what I would call “the voice”.

### “The Narcissism of Subjectivity”

I saw Romeo Castellucci’s “Gilgamesh” in 1990 and was able to invite him to Pantheatre’s 1991 Myth and Theatre Festival on Dionysus. (1<sup>st</sup> to France! 5 times at the Avignon Festival !) Let me quote from the closing section of an article I wrote on his work. The section is titled “**The Narcissism of Subjectivity**”. In the section leading up to this extract I analysed some of the mechanisms of image-making in Castellucci’s performances and their relationship to narrative in what I called a “mythographic approach to theatre”.

### The Narcissism of Subjectivity

“The second fulcrum of resistance to (Castellucci’s) mythographic approach to theatre comes from one of the most firmly entrenched **humanistic paradigms** in modern traditions in theatre, art and psychotherapy, what I will call **the narcissism of subjectivity**. It implies that the ultimate value in a performance is **inside the performer**; that the performer, as human **subject**, is the subject and object of the performance, the embodiment of fiction. Theatre, ideas, characters, plots, images, emotions are funneled through the subject and re-emerge as re-lived, re-presented, per-formed subjective expression. The key words in this subjective implosion are “**identity**” and “**expression**”. Identification implies the introspective conjunction of subjects: finding the character (the literary subject) in one’s self. This process of identification is considered to be the core of performed fiction, with its logical corollary: self-expression. The obvious danger in this therapeutic drift, under the protection of that massive contemporary totem called “the self”, is that personal catharsis swallows all meaning. What is performed is not **so much meaning but ‘meaningfulness’**: a display of personal sensitivity. Art becomes a humanistic personal achievement, linked to psychological concepts such as *individuation*. The performer is considered the depository, the embodiment of values worth displaying: **a higher achiever**. It is this subjectivity that we are actually being called to contemplate in the performance, not the ideas, not the myth, not what I would call the objective image. What comes across is the performer as:

**a/ the depository of beauty:** perfected bodies, amazing voices - each with his or her own (usually fundamentalist) esthetic canons.

**b/ the depository of intelligence and cultured sensitivity.** I have been heard to say that “I hate ‘intelligent’ actors”, because they let me see that they know their text beforehand, and that they are ‘giving me the book’, handing down an interpretation, delivering a lesson in how things should be done, said, and felt. Theatre turns into didactics; there is no sense of imaginal adventure. I, as spectator, am not invited to imagine, to share in the dreaming, the risk, and the discovery. I ingest. The performer hands down a form, per-forms for me. I would go as far as to say that there is a

usurpation of imagination, and that this 'subjecting' of culture to personally lived "high art" is one of the main reasons why people turn away from theatre and prefer to stay home and read the play (or watch TV)

c/ most important of all, the performer as **the depository of emotion**, within a humanistic definition of emotion as something not only human, but actually inside humans ("my emotions"); emotion as confined to subjects, to identities. ... In Castellucci's work the performers seem to almost push you away from emotional identification - they certainly do not call pathos towards them selves. They can appear to be cut off from emotional involvement - mechanized even. I see this as an aggressive bias against the narcissism of subjectivity, as Castellucci's way of going at the mythical dimensions of image. ...

The question goes well beyond a matter of excellence and craft, where, as a performer, I refine and groom my body as my working tool. It transposes a humanistic, self-centered model to theatre, with implications of spiritual progress (finding and being true to one's self) and of personal therapy. In this sense Castellucci's work is a radical cure, bringing us back to an imaginal dimension of theatre (he often calls it "pre-tragic"), where bodies, voices, musics, objects (and in my case, texts) are all elements in the reality of imagination. Theatre as an underworld democracy of objectified images."

End of quote

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### What is psychology? (note, aside)

The second note or card that I wish to put down concerning the take on subjectivity I am proposing, addresses **psychology** and what is understood by psychology – a term most contemporary artists tend to be allergic to, and to which they oppose often imagistic and musical theatre. This is something I do not necessarily go along with, mainly because I fear the baby is being thrown out with the water, and that all forms of language are identified with attitudes that are psychological in a reductive way, which is didactic, pedantic, academic. Possibly this reflects the presumptuous superiority of what we have seen in too much of psychological talk, the claims of its "talking cure" and its reductive haughty case-history literature. I think too often the logos of Psyche has been thrown away in this move, the logos of psyche as it can express itself in what I would call **language-voice**. I detect in what most artists call psychology what I would call "the dramaturgy of subjectivity", and the enshrinement and domination of which I spoke earlier when I said that subjectivity "has been called upon to rule much of the **justification for acting** in theatre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century." What is this psychology? To put it bluntly, it is the literal and literary plots that have come out of Freudianism. I say "Freudianism" not to necessarily blemish Freud himself – though a massive critique is on its way from contemporary historians, amongst them Sonu Shamdasani whom I will introduce later. Freudianism leads to living-room subjectivity, to inter-personal stories that claim the foundation of personality in family plots, in the dialogic mechanisms of Mummy and Daddy, in a humanistic reduction of the dimensions for instance of the Oedipus myth. Subjectivity is bound close to biography, and biography to the family myth, often to the child cult, and to an affordable, controllable small cast of cultural figures. **Film**, not to mention television, has made this its daily bread. My opinion is that film has made theatre a favour by eloping with *Lady Subjectivity*; film deals so much better with her and with her need for close-up biographical revelations, moments of 'truth', of inarticulate feeling and image lulled by musical affect, and all this in the intimate anonymity of collective black-rooms, with the thrill of post-freudianist gossip. Film and subjectivity are an unbeatable couple; theatre can get on with other things.

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## PHILOLOGY AND HERMENEUTICS

Before entering more specific and practical aspects, and without wanting to involve us in the philosophical history of subjectivity, there are two schools of thought, or rather specific figures within those two schools that I want to mention. The first ones refer to contemporary philology and hermeneutics, and to the work of Peter Szondi and Jean Bollack, whose definitions tend to abstract subjectivity and make it a principle of hermeneutics in ways that are not unlike some of my proposals here, and in particular when working with texts, and what I would call the voice of texts. Szondi and Bollack propose that there is subjectivity in a text (one must keep in mind that they speak from within the fields of philology and hermeneutics), the moment “there is something to interpret”, that is, the moment there is a voice to be heard (or to be deciphered) in the text itself. French philologist Denis Thouard, in speaking of Szondi’s and Bollack’s points of view and what is known today as the school of critical hermeneutics (*herméneutique critique*) speaks of the subjectivity of the text itself the moment it have been written, as separate from the standard hermeneutic references, especially of author and context. He puts it this way: “Autant un texte est interpretable, autant il interprète lui-même, autant il a de subjectivité”: “To the degree to which a text is liable to interpretation (or offers a potential for interpretation), to that same degree it is itself the interpreter, and has subjectivity” (my translation). I bring these thinkers in because of the way *subjectivity* is depersonalized, decontextualized, or even “deterritorialized”, to invoke Gilles Deleuze’s much used aphorism of particular relevance to the exploration of the voice of texts and its place in choreographic theatre. In choreographic theatre, texts are as it were invited into theatre with no strings attached, especially the strings that link them to ‘the book’, to authorial and cultural references; texts are in a sense voided of their *genetic* references, and invited to speak in alien territories, in new and foreign contexts, contexts or territories that do not bow to the text’s authorities, (contexts that are not as it were ‘colonised’ by the text, or built on the texts specifications), but contexts in which a “dance of ideas” can take place, a dance between text and context, where the text’s “other” subjectivities can find their voices.

I said texts are “voided” – of course this is impossible; in fact it is not desirable. If as a spectator I know the actor is speaking a text by Sarah Kane, for instance, Sarah Kane and her ghosts will be present in the fantasy and cultural contexts we as spectators associate with her. My point is precisely that they are there as ghosts, as shadows, as underworld figures, and not as the main bodies of fiction.

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## GENIUS (notes)

When deciding about the content of Pantheatre’s new flyer, I was quite adamant that the main declaration, as it were, had to include the word GENIUS. Here is the phrase describing PANTHEATRE ACTS Voice Performance School:

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**Voice performance training** involves a dynamic blend of technical finesse and expressive risk.

It also seeks the affirmation of **personal genius** - character and musicality - and a commitment to the relevance of what one has to voice,

be it in speech, song, scream, silence, image or movement – or their synthesis in **choreographic theatre**.

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You can imagine the discussions: **a school for genius!** YES, but lets qualify the word “genius” – I did not mean outstanding exceptional beings à la Einstein or Mozart (though great if they come work with

us!) == “Native intellectual power of an exalted type” where you get the connotations of inborn exceptionality.

It gets closer when it is defined in terms of “instinctive and extraordinary ability, skill, wit, intelligence, intuition, etc.” I meant genius as in “original, personal creative factor”.

In terms of schooling – one can associate *genius* with ingenious and with engineer. (and “ingenuous” i.e. *ingénue* – inborn, free-born, not slave... and hence the pejorative opposite of “guileless” = artlessly innocent, or “natural”) (The French call “Le Génie” the army division of corps of Engineers, trained in engineering work, build bridges in one hour, setting up landing ports, airports, etc...) Their job is to be ingenious about engineering: the choice of materials, the intelligence and applicability of concepts, a great capacity for improvisation and *ad hoc* invention, for construction and composition. I like the idea of a school where you “engineer you genius” = because it calls in a quality of sagacity for dramaturgy, how to adapt, give value, even exploit your genius, how to “set it up”.

With the notion of genius we also pass over into the domain of myth, where we meet the figures said to construct the subject and manage its destiny. You could say “the figures who engineer subjectivity”.

OED Genius: “With reference to classical pagan belief: The tutelary god or attendant spirit allotted to every person at his birth, to govern his fortunes and determine his character, and finally to conduct him out of the world.”

In a polytheistic logic (a “mytho-logic”) all the Gods and Goddesses have some form of bearing on the subject, some Gods appear close and active, for or against, others are more distant and uninvolved; some never cross our paths and might go totally unknown. There are Gods and modes of behaviour we never get to know. Mythological fantasy personifies these equations into a figure called *genius*. The genius of myth is to allow us to relate to a broad theological picture, and to have a mytho-poetical understanding of our make-up, or more precisely, of how a voice is made and made to sound through a human being, as the potential subject becomes a person – a *per-sona*, a “through sound”, how the original sound becomes voice, how a person acquires a voice.

The etymological root of “genius” links it with *genus* and “generation”, i.e. with creation and creativity. It also links genius with “genes”, with the idea of conception and concept, and with the individual *genius* ADN codes – or as James Hillman would put it with the “The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling”.

Interestingly, *genius* is linked with appetite; it is certainly a question of individual or individualized taste, (what we taste like!) I see also genius as ambition (historically it is linked to festivities to propitiate the *genius*, to make offerings to it, to dedicate the performance to it.) Genius implies ambition, maybe even greed, and a determination to state, to have a voice.

Posit: “**your voice is your genius**” or maybe better “**your genius is your voice**” - but voice has to be understood here in a very broad-minded way, not only referring to the voice you are using, but more, in Giorgio Agamben’s sense to which we will come presently, to the voice **in** what you are saying.... That is why the statement on the leaflet says that “voice performance” requires

“a commitment to the relevance of what one has to voice be it in speech, song, scream, silence, image or movement – or their synthesis in **choreographic theatre**.”

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## Definitions of the Voice

The genius of the concept of the “8 octave voice” developed by Wolfsohn and Hart is that it is both metaphorical or even allegorical (8 octaves “embodying” the full span of human expression, as it were), and literal – their vocal work was about “extended ranges”, literally aiming at those 8 octaves. Nevertheless, the fixation on the physical voice can, as it were, literalize the literality, and generate forms of **“voice idolatry”** that do not remind themselves that the voice is a medium, a metaphore, an instrument for expression and speech. It is for this reason, obviously, that both Wolfsohn and Hart insisted on the philosophical implications of their work, what Hart called the “aural vision”, and developed their own ethics of the voice and of singing. I shall return to this.

At the other end of the philosophical spectrum, we must mention the late Jacques Derrida’s 1973 landmark book, in many ways the emblematic foundation of post-modernity: **“La Voix et le Phénomène”** (“Voice and Phenomenon” - although translated into English generally as “Speech and Phenomena”). To summarize it with a bias towards its relevance in this conference on “Voice, sound and subjectivity”, one could say that Derrida deals with the role that the voice plays in the conveyance of language and in the structure of thinking itself. He uses the voice as a philosophical category, as a metaphore of transitional territoriality, as the conceptual filter in a given place and time through which language (including concepts like communication and expression) has to pass in order to materialize itself and exist as a voice and constitute itself as a body of thought. Derrida does not refer to the voice as a literal phenomenon – there hardly is any mention of physiology or biology in his book, and even the concept (the “construct”) of body is “deconstructed” as one more category of thought.

In line with Derrida’s philosophical speculations, here is a concise and wonderfully elegant definition of the voice, by contemporary Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (I have it in French, from a French journal): **“La recherche de la voix dans le langage, c’est cela la pensée”** (The search for the voice in, inside language, that is what thinking is all about” In English you would probably bring in the word “mind”.) Giorgio Agamben, in *La Fine del Pensiero*, Le Nouveau Commerce, n° 53-54, Paris, 1982, quoted in Jean-Luc Nancy, *A l’écoute*, n° 45, Editions Galilée, Paris 2002.

My particular stand, research and pedagogy calls on the voice within the reality of the imagination, within **image-making**, or if we want to be more specific and technical, within the concept and strategies of **choreographic theatre**. It calls on the voice literally, using the voice as sound, including the 8 octave ambition, the voice as music, and the voice as conveyor of words and loquacity. But the main use of the idea of voice is **metaphorical** and in line with a definition such as Agamben’s: the voice as thinking, **the voice as the mind of image**, be it reasonable mind or wild mind. This is, again, what is implied in the phrase that speaks of

“... a commitment to the relevance of what one has to voice, be it in speech, song, scream, silence, image or movement – or their synthesis in **choreographic theatre**.”

It expresses clearly that we are not necessarily and only talking of the literal, physiological voice.

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## The cry / Roy Hart / Biodrame

**(Nota : follows a series of extracts quoted from Roy Hart letter of 1973 on Biodrame, followed by notes by Enrique Pardo)**

For the full text of the letter and of Biodrame see Paul Silber’s archives <http://www.roy-hart.com/pauls.htm>

**Q1 “Most so-called avant-garde theatres, operas, etc.. are beginning to recognize the intrinsic significance of what is called the cry: they no longer hear it as mere noise, but as having its own**

**philosophical implications, not only for the evolution of musical theatre, but for people who sing, play, speak, that is to say for the human race.”**

The importance of the artist's subjectivity – exploration of the extremes dimensions of life, and its implications, especially of violence. Latter on “attack”. Transformation through expression: voicing as a means of conquering and transformation.

**Q2 “Like all great works of art, these three works deal with the transformation of Man. This transformation has a special significance to you and us, since it reflects the need to understand the devastations of two world wars, and possibly even more significantly the apparently complete breakdown which is expressed both on the private scene between men and women, and on the political scene by hijackings, guerilla warfare and general street violence.”**

Introduction of the man/woman dynamic (“complete breakdown”) – would take us too far away from our subject. The importance of the couple mechanisms. How Gender Studies and Gay Studies have addressed these questions in the past 30 years.

**Q3 "Biodrame" in which he (Serge Béhar) has expressed in theatrical terms the central thesis of that which led us to study the cry. The cry as expressed by dying soldiers, babies, human beings in distress, and also manifest in outbursts of joie de vivre. This means that man, as an individual, is the root of society. As a Doctor, Béhar has understood that the political body expresses very clearly the biological body; and without a deep understanding of the Inside man, both physically and spiritually, no actor or politician can express so-called objective ideas, except as a projection of this lack of internal knowledge. “**

Today this is very polemical in its claims...deep understanding of the Inside man...

**Q4 “...this solo literally expresses vocally, through a longstanding organic process of integration, the relationship between body control and vocal control, in other words self-control.”**

One of the questions here is the relationship between the notion of “self-control” and artistry – in other words “what is being voiced?” The question here would be: is “self-control” the subject? I shall return to this evaluation of subjectivity and the actor as subject, as exemplar.

**In Roy Hart Theatre both men and women push their voices beyond bass and soprano in search of the human voice, as opposed to the specialised voice.**

The more classic understanding of the work of the Roy Hart Theatre and of the eight octave voice.

**Q5 “Most actors and singers wear a mask, and their artificial acting only consists in hearing themselves speak a text which they have not digested.”**

Commentaries on EMBODYMENT. Feel in his body what he is talking about – a visit to the psychological forces at play “giving them voice”. Importance of the subject (the actor / person as subject = for instance “Method Acting” – transplanting almost your identity. Here it is interestingly “ingesting” and “digesting”...)

**Q6 “We consider singing as the highest form of liberation of arterial circulation.”**

**“... and slowly discovering consciousness. It is not enough to cry with the pack, in the street, at the theatre: it is necessary to know why one is crying.”**

**“conventional actors and singers did not dare to attempt discovering their unconscious. I studied psychology as an actor. Now I believe Roy Hart Theatre has truly outgrown psychodrama, whilst many**

**avant-garde theatres are just beginning to discover it. Many actors only work on their technical capacity to wear a mask in order to hide the blood red substance which frightens them, but which, in my view, should nourish their performance. I believe it is necessary for the actor to contact in himself this capacity for murder..."**

**"...real biological revolution which gave body to my need for communion with another individual..."**

Key word here is "liberation": the link between subjectivity and philosophies of emancipation, especially of personal, "self" emancipation. Emancipation from *anthropos* drawbacks. Distinction with Janov's Primal Scream : release philosophies. Subtle difference – embodied in singing as musical discipline. Expression with musical control – akin to the notion of "self control". The marked difference between the 60s and 70s "emancipation philosophies" (and liberation politics) and current "tragic philosophies" (certainly in my and Pantheatre's work.)

**Q7 "the cry is not an end in itself but a means, 'rivé sur mes songes", a sublime hallucination, and the cry loses its significance if this aural vision is allowed to die."**

Singing as sublimation – again mention. Artaud-like quotation. Festival exploring the importance and the impact of Protestantism in the idea of singing, in the value of the voice. Jewish too.

**Q8 "...as all great works of art, it is about transformation. Let me repeat that this transformation requires an immense control of the body which must be attacked to overcome it..."**

Last quote from the letter.

Quote from letter to Sonu Shamdasani:

"What Hart meant by "aural vision" is in my view linked to what I described in an 1984 article in Spring Journal as the "root metaphore" of his voice work, which is quite simply the notion of "singing". In a voice performance, you do not cry a cry, or scream a scream, you 'sing' it. This has to be heard metaphorically, although the singing is also literal, because acted out. Roy Hart's central operating or performative point - inherited to a great degree from his master Alfred Wolfsohn, states with deceptive simplicity (one that can sound almost esoteric) : singing is the artistic transformation of sound. Very simple; yet, what idealism! Especially if you think of applying it to psychology or politics! Since Roy Hart's death in 1975, 30 years ago this year, the world has gone through enormous changes and the impact of what has been called the "end of ideologies", with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, has made everyone very wary of idealisms. In the last 30 years there has been much revisioning, criticism, rejection, and revivals of what different individuals consider to have been Roy Hart's legacy. For my part, I find his statements in this letter, once one has relativised the period's defiant "avant garde" prophetic tone, very touching in its ambitions and generosity. I also find it particularly relevant today: I think our times need a salutary injection of idealistic screaming. I shall return to this in a section entitled "Cri, crise, critique, crime", of particular importance for someone who is launching a "Voice Performance School"."

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## THE VOICE OF TRAGEDY

Furthermore, and as far as I am concerned, the main performing framework within which the voice speaks its mind is the model of **tragedy** (including its satyric counterpart). Tragedy is a conception of existence where there is little or no room for human victory, certainly not over death, but where, nevertheless, there is one crucial element of freedom: the voice. The voice is free, free to think, free to express, free to speak its mind, be it in a litany of lamentations, in a cry of despair or in an articulated discourse of defiance. The heroes and protagonists of tragedy, its subjects, are made to submit to the overwhelming power exerted by the forces of destiny personified by the Gods; they are 'subjected'. Tragic heroes have little or no impact on the course of reality, little or no liberating power, except in the ideas and feelings that they *voice*. Tragedy subjects them as physical (and grammatical) subjects, turns them into *objects* of destiny, but in doing so challenges them, and us, to voice our deepest forms of '*subjectivity*'.

The vision of subjectivity that prevails especially in actors' training, tends to be one that is filtered through what I would describe as ego-centered (or possibly 'self'-centered), and mostly rose-tinted glasses (spectacles) – “rose-tinted” because often tinged with a sentimental and sometimes inflated sense of self importance. Subjectivity tends to be a kind of preciously protected secret garden, the ultimate pristine preserve of private reasons, an inner refuge where the seal of ‘individuality’ is kept, the ontological sanctuary that holds the secret to a self-justifying uniqueness. I am not saying that each one of us is not unique, and I would agree that uniqueness is the point of subjectivity.

If one puts the tragic spectacles that I am proposing, subjectivity becomes something like the capacity and manner in which one constitutes oneself as a subject in tragic subjection, the way one realizes (realizes and voices I would add here) one's inherent subject-hood in the confrontation with those external referents called Gods. The more subjectivity, i.e. capacity to be subjected, the more subject can be created as it were. To take a substantial speculative leap I would add: “the more Gods there is, the more subject there can be, the greater the subjectivity, the more voice there can be.”

This is of course not the usual take on *subjectivity* nor the usual way of defining it. It leads to speculative definitions that are intentionally polemical, militant and therefore, to some degree, intentionally ‘contrary’, opposed to its predominant contemporary use. It is a move that addresses theatre (but not only) and in particular the way the voice is conceived of in theatre – you could say: the dominant myths of the voice. Such a tack on subjectivity has critical implications for the training of actors, mainly in terms of the mechanisms of inspiration, the approach to interpretation, and the relationship to emotions. I cannot develop all of these aspects in this one lecture but will try and point at some of them.

## SUBJECT, SUBJECTION, SUBJECTIVITY

*Subjection* implies dependence, and even forms of enslavement; it points to enforced subjugation, to domination; to be subjected is to relinquishing freedom and power, and – and here comes one of the crucial words in the move I want to make : the relinquishing of authority. Now, if one speaks of authority in theatre, one of the main implications is the question of ‘authorship’: who has the authorial power in the hierarchies of theatre? Or, to enlarge the scope and make things more explicit: who has the authorial power in the hierarchies in “image making”? Who are the authorities of and in image? Where is the source and seat of this authority, of authorship, especially in the actor, or rather for the actor? Our 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural and political sensitivity sees *subjection* mainly as a form of invasion, as an intrusion, an external imposition, possibly even as a form of rape – the rape of the inviolable sanctuary of our identity and dignity, in other words of that which constitutes us a subjects – certainly political subjects. Subjection means vassality: a loss of freedom. It is opposed to the chart of ‘human rights’ – or call them here, rather, “humanistic rights” - if one thinks of humanism as putting the human being at the centre of the world, or at least at the centre of the scale of values. But then, of course, the mechanisms of tragedy cannot be described as *humanistic*, and anyway, what would be the point of brandishing a chart of humanistic rights when facing the Gods? There is a point, of course, and that is: the voice: the actor as subject to tragedy tell us, voices what “Facing the Gods” implies and feels like. The actor ‘voices’ the human condition. I qualified specifically “the actor as subject to tragedy”, since he is not in this view the subject of tragedy, the existential and grammatical subject, the ‘first person’ originating and in control of action. He is subject to: he is subjected.

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Subjectivity, seen through tragic lenses, would be something like the personal grit and intelligence, the character, or tragic genius that raises with subjection, with the way in which we, as subjects, face and react to subjection and to the realization that to be a subject is, by definition (or at least by mythological definition) to be subjected. This is a good moment to remind us of the etymology of

*subject, subjectivity, subjection. Sub jectare, sous jeter* in French, *sotto gettare* in Italian: literally “to throw under”, “to cast below”. The problem with this over and under scheme is of course that if the subject is seen as being below, as standing under and “understanding”, its position can be interpreted in two opposite ways:

In a heroic understanding, which we could call the Atlas or Herakles mode, the subject is underneath holding up the world. The subject is the source, support and foundation, the will, the muscle that lifts and holds up the reality of meaning. Presumably without Atlas or Herakles, the humanistic enterprise, the conception of the world which places man as its centre, would crash and shatter. In this type of epic, heroic story, the Gods are usually not around - or no longer exist. In mythology they are having a party in Ethiopia, and they do not look at all concerned. It is even probable that, maybe with the exception of Hera, they have all forgotten about Atlas, Herakles, and the likes of Prometheus, mostly titanic heroes who are going to lay the foundations of the kind of humanistic fantasies that will lead mankind to forget or deny their existence. Heroic vocal modes tend to be anticipatory, life-full, vitalistic, full of enterprise and idealism, optimistic, and, of course, “up-lifting” – how could it be otherwise? Interestingly, the Spanish give *subjection* a twist; *sujetar*, as in *mantener sujeto* (to hold as a subject), which means: “to hold so that the subject does not collapse, fall or fly off” !

In the tragic mode, on the other hand, the subject has been ‘thrown’ underneath. Maybe he or she is simply “hanging under”, holding on for his life, and, in the precarious danger and transience of his position, realizing where he is, where he has been ‘landed’, and what it all means - what is it that he is hanging on to, or what is it that is, as it where, ‘flying off’ with him. Notice the emphasis I make constantly on myth-like external factors. During this whole process, our subject is, of course, vociferously letting us know, (and the Gods - if they are within reach), what he thinks and feels about it all. These imaged descriptions may help comprehend something of the way in which I approach the voice in choreographic theatre. I tend to say that: **“If you find your place, you will find your voice”**. In other words, “if you understand your position, you will know what to voice”. The practical implications are physical, vocal and philosophical, which is the point of choreographic theatre. The dictum or aphorism “If you find your place, you will find your voice” also plays on a notion that we hear constantly in vocal work: the question and practice of “placing your voice”. I am once again here emphasizing the external factors, the understanding, as opposed to self-instrumental practices, necessary as they are in training, because of the danger that self-instrumental practices become self-centered and self-expressive philosophies, and do not tune us as responders to the world. For me it is also a question of political response-ability.

The tragic mode that I seem to be promoting tends to be reflective, even in its violence. It is *post-factum* and therefore usually late - as when I tell actors ***never to come in on cue***: “delay reaction, so that it includes some realization, a time for Echo; so that it is not just percussion but waits for re-percussion”. This tragic mode tends to include the kind of pessimism that makes us love (and regret) life all the more, and, like its Athenian original model, it is intrinsically ‘tragi-comically’ married to the satyric mode and to the necessity of thinking and feasting through humour and laughter.

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This ‘subjecting’ or subjectivity is of course far from being always passive, accepting or resignation. It is a fighting one and includes rebellion, refusal, invective, as we know from the passionate tirades and outbursts of tragedy, but it is clearly mined and hollowed by the realisation of failure, of a mortality that can achieve no literal victory. It has only the voice and the words, the mind that can articulate higher ideals, and the desire to implement these ideals, in spite of it all, in this world.

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Subjectivity carries the tragic understanding that rises from a particular destiny; it has its own ways of acting and reacting from a position of subjection, or sub-mission, accepted or not. Sub-mission implies a lower, perhaps deeper 'mission', one below or underneath the protagonistic, heroic stand on the stage of the world. This take on "subjectivity" gives it a particular twist; to use an old English meaning to the word, it 'wrongs' subjectivity away from the precious and often self-righteous sense of intimate and unique identity. It gives it a bitter twang or "wrang", as well as a wry bent direction that curves our complaints, and our screams, back towards us in the classic whiplash that happens over and over in tragedies, when the sentimental and innocent complaint of the hero-subject boomerangs back on him.