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L'Art de l'écrit s'incarnant: The Theatre of Noëlle Renaude

In diminishing the mimetic function of theatre – theatre as representation of 'reality' – a number of contemporary writers for the French stage are following in the line of writers such as Beckett and Duras, for whom the stage was essentially a 'de-realising' space, a place that denies the reality of everything that appears within its frame. A form of theatre that seeks to undermine mimetic representation is free to explore the equivocal nature of identity, and the relationship between identity and language. According to Patrice Pavis, *alterity* is the subject of new French writing for the stage: "Le thème transversal, c'est au fond la difficulté de l'être humain à donner un sens à un monde privé de centre et de valeurs stables. [...] Tout se serait-il donc concentré sur le débat de l'altérité?" [The over-arching theme is that of the human being's struggle to make sense of a world that has lost its centre, a world without stable values. Has theatre become focused then on the question of alterity?] While I agree that many of the writers for the contemporary French stage present a de-centred universe (Koltès, Minyana, Novarina, Renaude) I would have to disagree on the question of alterity. The strand of theatre I will be exmining here – the plays of Noëlle Renaude framed mainly by Valère Novarina's thoughts on the nature of theatre – are not preoccupied with alterity, intersubjectivity or questions of inter-

relationality. What this theatre is concerned with is the promotion of theatre as a place of reading, that private and individual act. Here, the spectator is engaged in a reading of the actor's body as it sounds the writer's transcription of her origins in the in-between of body and word.

The theatres of Renaude and Novarina set out to dismantle the grids we apply to knowledge within the representational frame of page or stage: the dialectical opposition of subject and object, identity and difference, presence and absence on which specular systems of representation rely. Novarina, in his *Lettre aux acteurs*, calls on the actor to abandon the grid of intelligent diction "où le travail de l'acteur consiste à découper son texte en salami, à souligner certains mots, les charger d'intentions, à refaire en somme l'exercise de segmentation de la parole qu'on apprend à l'ecole [...]." [where the actor's work consists of cutting his text up into slices of salami, underlining certain words, loading them with intention, breaking language up into segments, just like you learn to do in school.][1] This would seem to suggest that not only are plot and character abandoned, but meaning or sense at the level of the sentence are also evacuated, in favour of a 'chute dans la parole', where "la parole forme plutôt quelque chose comme un tube d'air, un tuyau à sphincters, une colonne à échappée irrégulière, à spasmes, à vanne, à flots coupés, à fuite, à pression." [the spoken word is like a tube of air, a tube with sphincters, a column pressing air out at irregular intervals, in spasms, sluicing it out, letting it leak, stopping and starting the flow, pressurizing it] (*Le Théâtre des paroles*, 10). The stage, according to Novarina's conception of it, is no longer a space of representation, of images, but what he calls 'le ring de la parole, l'enclos du langage, l'arène de la transfiguration et des métamorphoses, un lieu d'attraction, de transmutation." [the boxing-ring of the spoken word, the enclosure of language, an arena of transfiguration and metamorphoses, a place of attractions, of transmutation][2] – a space where actors and spectators come to be broken down in language. Participants in this theatre are stunned,

dazed, stripped of linguistic, cultural and ideological defences and brought to a place where they can be amazed by the simple collision of body and word in the voice, carried on the breath. Page, stage and body are enmeshed in this theatre, which stages above all the materiality of the word, written and spoken. Deprived of the usual hiding-places in logical thought, the body of the writer/reader/ actor/spectator is built up again through language and breath. The form of theatre proposed by Novarina is a theatre that is an attempt to move participants away from the tyrannies of form, naming, and ideology, and toward an affair of muscle and breath:

> Le texte devient pour l'acteur une nourriture, un corps. Chercher la musculature de c'vieux cadavre imprimé, ses mouvements possibles, par où il veut bouger. [...] C'est ça la vraie lecture, celle du corps, de l'acteur. [The text becomes food for the actor, a body. He must find the muscles of this old printer cadaver, its potential for movement, find out where it wants to go. [...] That's what reading really is, a reading of the body, of the actor.] (*Le Théâtre des paroles*, 20-21)

In this theatre, then, the actor – and we must all become actors if we are to access these texts – is called upon to open up the body/text with voice and breath, to follow the text's breath patterns in order to find its rhythms, and not to force it into blocks of 'meaning', which it will in any case resist. Patrice Pavis suggests that a similar method should be used by the reader of these texts, and that this new form of theatre therefore calls into question the traditional definitions and separations between writer, reader, actor and spectator.[3] The distance between orality and textuality is not wide, according to Novarina:

writing is a precipitate of the writer's body, the product of a 'chute', a descent into language whereby "the acting goes through a process of passivity, of laissez-faire, of letting go." ("La Parole opère l'espace," 101-104)

According to this view of writing for the stage, the writer must attempt to achieve an abnegation of the ocularcentric self, and enter an acute state of listening. Writer, reader, actor, spectator are all actors on the stage of the page, in the audio-vocal theatre of writing. And yet, Noëlle Renaude achieves something more than this, for her theatre is both a theatre of the spoken word and a theatre that attempts to stage the visual dimension of the printed page, and the reader's movement through it. My claim for her theatre from the outset then is that it is perhaps the first theatre to truly stage the *movement* of the self in the in-between of body and language, in the gap between the visual image (the body narrating) and the narrative text (the narrated body). Hers is a theatre of the text in the true sense of the term, in that it stages the activities of writing and reading, and engages actor and spectator in these activities. It is also a theatre that stages movement in space – the crossings and re-crossings of a page by a body or bodies.

Throughout the 1990s, Renaude experimented with theatrical form in a series of plays that take narrative representation to its limits. Her theatre has evolved from a theatre that stages a terrifying babel of voices emanating from the body of one actor to one where a small group of actors gives voice to the making of a world in words. This is not a theatre of address in the conventional sense – it is not concerned with dialogue, or with intersubjectivity. Renaude is concerned only to evoke a world on the borders of self and world. She plunges actor and spectator into the roots of the French language, into an unravelling of the language's demotic and literary palimpsests. Thus, the experience of

acting or viewing one of these plays is that of wandering, without apparent direction, in the magma of a particular language and culture, an experience which exercises the auditory memory and imagination:

> La terre de vos ancêtres? Charmant comme paysage. Les miens étaient de Thionville pour une branche et de Sarreguemines pour l'autre. Vous connaissez Jean Prélat? Il a herité d'une baraque un peu comme la vôtre, dans une campagne sinistrée un peu comme ici. Du côté de Guéret? [The land of your ancestors? Lovely spot. One branch of mine were from around Thionville, and the others were from Sarreguemines. Do you know Jean Prélat? He inherited a shack – something like yours – in a townland that was a bit of a disaster zone – a bit like this place.][4]

In her theatre, page, stage, body, are surveyed, their measure taken by writing, but – what country, friends, is this?[5] This is the question that is often on the lips of spectators at Renaude's plays. For the director Frédéric Fisbach, who directed Renaude's *Les Cendres et les lampions* in 1993, "it was the space of memory."[6] In this 'interior' space, there was no question of 'exits' and 'entrances' by the actors. Here, Renaude gives voice to 94 'apparitions', who represent between twenty and twenty-five centuries, that is, between 2000 and 2500 years. In order to bring about the apparition, animation and disappearance of these 94 'characters', these 25 centuries, Fisbach chose to work with five actors – four women and a man – and 94 chairs. The author uses the device "je suis né, je suis mort" (I was born, I died) as the starting-point for giving voice to a multitude of 'figures' (in talking about 'character' in Renaude's theatre, nouns such as 'figure', 'apparition' or even 'silhouette' seem more appropriate).[7] These figures are introduced by a narrator – the author? – who simply announces the name of the figure. And yet, the text requires the actor to create the entire drama of this family's history from his enunciation of the

successive first names of 'apparitions' summoned to the stage: "Baptiste... Amédée... Jules... Bertrand... " What Fisbach has to say about the role of the narrator, is revelatory: "Il fallait qu'il arrive à faire jaillir ces prénoms [...] à l'oreille, on devait pouvoir se dire, lui il le connaît, lui il a mauvaise réputation, lui c'est l'idiot de la famille." [His task was to make these first names spring to life, so that one would be able to tell, from the sound of the way he said the name, ah yes, he knew that one, that one had a bad reputation, that one was the family idiot.] (Interview with Fisbach, 135).

The first of the theatrical conventions to be undermined by Renaude therefore is that of character. And while the diminishment of the dramatic character is not new, Renaude takes it to new depths: "Can the name alone create the character, free of all other fictional detail?" she asks in relation to her play *La Comédie de Sainte Etienne*.[8] In their recent book on the status of the character in contemporary French theatre, Jean-Pierre Ryngaert and Julie Sermon note that a number of contemporary writers for the French stage (Vinaver, Koltès, Lagarce, Renaude, Minyana) have manipulated the naming of characters in order to counter any tendency toward representational verisimilitude. Instead, these writers place their characters in an 'ailleurs', an elsewhere, alienating both actor and spectator from the character, to make of him or her a creature of sound, of language: "Les noms, pittoresques, exotiques, donnent alors presque trop bien l'idée de ce qu'ils sont censés évoquer: ce sont des clichés acoustiques éminemment représentatifs [...]." [The names – colourful, exotic – are almost too effective in evoking what they are meant to evoke: they are acoustic snapshots, eminently representative.] (*Le Personnage théâral contemporain*, 74). These nominal vestiges of character are effective in pulling the play away from the real and into its own poetic space.

In addition to the nominal identity and figural or spectral nature of her characters, the devices of acculumation, excess, and proliferation are features of Renaude's theatrical universe. The story of the creation of *Ma Solange, comment t'ecrire mon désastre, Alex Roux* is by now well known. Written for, and with, a single actor, Christophe Brault,

between 1994 and 1998, it features at least two thousand figures or voices, and runs to 16 hours of theatre if played in its entirety – which it has been, on many occasions. The eponymous Alex Roux is a constant, if intermittent figure throughout, a mediator for the proliferation of fleeting speakers that appear and disappear and seem to represent a wide range of types and spatial and temporal locations – a frenzied journey through the history of the types of people who might have inhabited, who still inhabit, a rural French townland. A small number of characters recur throughout the text – which runs to 351 pages in the 2004 *Théâtrales* edition – giving it a vestigial structure or scaffold.

During the period of writing, Renaude produced portions of text, piecemeal, which were performed by Brault in theatres around France. The play contains "le journal crypté d'une ecriture en train de s'inventer," (Interview with Renaude, 238) according to Renaude. The secret diary of the writing process, inscribed in the text, tells of "how writing comes into being, how it suffers, how it falls apart, how it recovers abandoned fragments, how it sets itself free from fiction." (Interview with Renaude, 238) The coming and going between the writing process, the work with the actor, re-writing and staging enabled a liberation from the codes and conventions of theatrical forms and institutions, and allowed her to produce writing that was based on the principle of sutained discontinuity and fragmentation. This process, which resulted in the successive invention of two thousand 'figures' raised one key question: how to stage "cet empilement de voix," (Interview with Renaude, 238), the seemingly impossible task for a single actor of incarnating such a multitude. According to Renaude, the body of the actor in this theatre is, first and foremost, a 'corps vocal' – his physical body is not called upon directly by the text, but it gradually invents a choreography of bodily movement in space that mimics the movement of the writing itself: "une chorégraphie de la discontinuité ou de l'amorce [...] qui réinvente en fait la typographie de la page, le movement de l'écriture (le long, le haché, le bref, le ponctué, le non ponctué)." [a choreography of perpetual

beginnings, one that re-creates the typography of the page, the movement of the writing (long, short, broken, punctuated, un-punctuated.] (Interview with Renaude, 235).

Created according to a principle of discontinuity and breakdown between fragments, the play is a marker for where Renaude wanted to take her writing for the stage – to the limits of the genre. The challenge she set herself early in her career was that of resisting the generic boundaries – in order to see how they would hold – to work with impossibility, unrepresentability. In the course of 350 pages of writing, she summons two thousand figures through fragments of encounters, scraps of memories and anecdotes, sections of letters, lists. An array of forms is also traversed: story, theatre, diary, letter, dialogue, monologue, eclogue, correctional tales for children ('LES JOLIES PETITES HISTOIRES de Tante Mick'). The dead are ressucitated and speak their own tongue; there are talking tomatoes, frogs and stones (dolmens), and a talking moon. And all of this is delivered by a single actor. Form in this theatre amounts to the shape conferred on blocks of writing by the breathing body. The actor twists his body into the shape of the writing, its syntax. What counts above all in this kind of work on a text is its rhythm, Renaude's theatrical writing being closer to the form of poetry than to narrative fiction.

> Vivons et tentons d'y aller voir, aux replis des ces secrets noueux, ce qui nous agite et nous fait tant hurler.
> J'ai mal, Solange, de ne plus rien y voir.
> [Let's live and try to discover, in the folds of these old secrets,
> the reasons for all our agitation, our howling.
> It hurts, Solange, no longer being able to see anything there.]
> – (*Ma Solange,* 272)

This play, and Renaude's subsequent writing for the stage, presents a world teeming with life, with bodies, with languages. Her theatrical writing starts from a principle of

excavation, followed by profusion and expansion, multiplication to the point of excess – a world spilling over, overflowing its frame or limits:

> Entendez-vous ce martèlement, ils montent des hors-fonds, des abîmes, des rives sombres [...] ils avancent, sous nos pas, nous rient la gueule béante de nous voir ici même à rectifier leurs danses. [Do you hear that hammering, they're coming up from the depths, from the abyss, from the dark shores [...] they're advancing beneath our feet, howling with laughter at our attempts to correct their dances] – (*Ma Solange*, 235)

In undermining syntax and punctuation, blurring the generic boundaries and confusing the distinctions between popular speech and discourse of the highest register, Renaude uses the stage to put both language and the actor's body under extreme pressure. The ultimate target of this writing is the frame itself, that of the page or computer screen, that of the stage – the writer's desire is to explore, and possibly explode, the frame, the limit of what can and cannot enter the space:

> Tout texte est une carte à décrypter, avec ses itinéraires balisés, ses carrefours, ses plis. Au bord des cartes, le monde ne s'arrête pas. Il continue à exister. À son echelle à lui. Le texte, lui, comme la carte, soumis à des constantes variations d'échelle, s'occupe à occuper le monde. [Every text is a map to be read, with its routes marked out, its crossroads, its folds. Beyond the edge of the map, the world doesn't stop, it continues to exist, on its own scale. The text, like the map, subjected to constant variations in scale, gets on with occupying the world.][9]

What Renaude raises here is the question of occupying space – space of textual and human bodies. The space of the text is a function of the writing as it emerges from the

writer's body, the weave of conscious and unconscious selves. The actor is called upon to inhabit the space of writing, to live inside it, to bend her/himself to its rhythms. It is clear that what Renaude is staging is the page of writing, with a body or bodies moving across it. And the question she poses for her writing project is that of the limits of that page, where it begins and ends, and the extent to which she can experiment with its apparent fixity, explode its borders.

A theatre then of dispersal and displacement, of voices and fragments of writing untethered, adrift. This is writing that does not envisage a form, no formal provision is made at the outset by the writer, a theatre of disaggregation, lacking fixity and therefore one that makes identification with the stage image difficult if not impossible. The image of the self projected by Renaude's theatre is that of a displaced migrant wandering off the map, in unfamiliar landscapes, without signposts. A number of the more recent plays – *Promenades* (2003), *Ceux qui partent à l'aventure* (2005), *Par les routes* (2006) – use the trope of the wanderer. In *Ceux qui partent à l'aventure*, one of her latest plays to be published,[10] the story of the search for their missing son by the parents of a man who disappeared following his bankruptcy, is contained within a framing narrative, that of a group of walkers hiking in a landscape somewhere in France. The play opens with the exchanges of these hikers, who become increasingly intrigued by the story of the bankrupt young man who disappeared. Gradually, this anecdote in turn explodes to give a series of other 'stories' or fictional modules, recounting the efforts of various people (his best friend, his parents, his ex-partner) to make financial gain from the man's disappearance. His mother, in visiting the morgues of France in search of her son, begins to invent obituaries for the abandoned bodies she visits. Background and foreground are blurred as a plethora of fictions accumulates, and the writing moves back and forth between the initial story of the hikers, the second story of the missing man and the multiple tertiary stories that spring from this. An added difficulty for the spectator/reader is that the fragments are not chronological, there is no spatial or temporary coherence. A

possible thread uniting the fictions is the story of a country – France – traversed by a multiplicity of bodies, stories and histories.

However, to add further to the confusion, Renaude has interspersed the text with pictograms, and plays freely with layout, fonts and other typographical features. According to director Robert Cantarella, for whom the play was written, the text calls for, and engages, the full panoply of theatrical languages in ways that other pieces of writing for the stage do not. Her writing demands to be read, first and foremost, and yet, initial readings render little by way of understanding: "La page s'offre à voir et à lire. Les deux fonctions agissent ensemble, sans privilège. [...] Le texte est à droite, donc disons-le à droite de la scène." [The text presents itself to be looked at and read. These two dimensions are equally important. The text is on the right of the page, so let's say it from the right of the stage.][11] By means of line drawings, the actors attempt to sketch the links and transitions in the text, to situate themselves in relation to the voices of the text. Gradually, they trace the map of the text, which is both a chart of the movement of writing across a page and the movement of a body in/through that writing. The result is, or should be, a performance that lets the framework or scaffolding of the writing and the actors' work on it, show through. Cantarella likens the pleasure of this type of performance – for both actor and spectator – to that of the pleasure given by the line drawing as art form, communicating the sense of a gesture that is reaching toward, but never reaching, completion or closure. (*Par les routes*, 164-65).

The 'chantier' structure offered to artists by the Théâtre Ouvert in Paris[12] provides the right environment for this type of work on a text, and many of Renaude's plays have been performed there, including her most recent. *Par les routes*[13] was staged in January 2006, under the direction of Frédéric Maragnani. Described in the publicity as a "road movie théâtrale" and by the author herself as a 'poème dramatique', the play is written in short lines that mimic verse, where there is no attribution of character. Two actors sit in what appear to be car seats, facing the audience; behind them, a large white screen. As

they begin to speak, a non-stop flow of words, phrases and pictograms streams across the screen – the road signs, place names, tourist information and advertising material that is the stuff of any motorway journey. The two men are 'on the road', travelling, it seems, from the Île de France region, though the centre of France and on to the Italian Alps. In the course of their journey, they make stops and detours, encounter animals, traffic jams and a range of strange characters, all of whom are played by the two actors. Both men have recently lost their mothers, and so, it seems, have many of the people they meet along the way: "C'est inouï comme tout le monde perd sa mère en ce moment." [It's crazy the way everyone's mother is dying at the moment.] (*Par les routes*, 11). As they make their way across the map of France with difficulty, the writing creates the impression that they are not in fact advancing – the text itself comes full circle, the end re-joining the beginning. With elegance and humour – her signature 'light touch' – Renaude brings us to the edge of representation, the horizon of language, where death resides: "La carte est muette et les mots creusent un vide, celui de l'absence, de la mort des Mères." [The map is mute, and words open up a void, that of absence, of the death of Mothers.][14]

The challenge to the reader of the text is to distinguish the speech of the two men from the profusion of text emanating from the road signage. In the theatre, the effect of this is that the spectator is placed from the outset in an interior world, where thoughts float freely: mesmerised by the hundreds of verbal messages wafting on the screen before her eyes, the spectator is both in the car as the road flies by, and in her own mind, with her thoughts. Thoughts that are stimulated by the words spoken on stage by the actors, as they lose their way, find it again, and generally enact the vagaries of their journey. According to Michel Corvin, what Renaude achieves here is nothing short of "writing the world': "Ce qu'elle propose, ce n'est pas un théâtre dans l'espace, mais un théâtre de l'espace, autrement dit le *theatrum mundi*." [What she proposes is not a theatre in space, but a theatre of space, in other words the *theatrum mundi*.] (*"L'esprit du lieu"*). From the

pile-up of ordinary detail and banal memories, the circular, repetitive nature of loss emerges.

Renaude's theatre "fait théâtre de la page" [makes a theatre of the page] ("L'Art de l'écrit s'incarnant," 8) – its writing does not aspire to a particular form or genre. Her focus is the movement of writing within the space of the page: "L'auteur a peu d'outils à sa disposition pour créer son monde: des lettres, des mots, une grammaire, ses doigts, son clavier, sa plume, des signes de ponctuation, beaucoup de blanc, le cadre de la page et tout ce qui peut et n'y peut pas entrer." [The author has few tools at her disposal: letters, words, grammar, her fingers, her keyboard, her pen, puncutation marks, a lot of blank space, the frame of the page and everything that can and cannot come within that frame.] (*Par les routes :* 110). Interestingly, in her more recent plays, there is evidence of the effects of word processing on her writing – a text such as *Ceux qui partent à l'aventure*, for example, uses the full range of possibilities offered by the computer programme, with the result that the writing metamorophoses into a myriad of different shapes – fonts, character effects, pictograms – and the layout on the page is dizzying its capacity to explore every corner of the blank page, to inhabit the page as fully as possible. Such a text presents a number of challenges to actors and spectators attempting to 'decode' it, but this is the desired effect: both reader and spectator are disorientated, deprived of their usual navigational tools and safety nets, and are cast adrift in the text. Technology, it would seem, has enabled Renaude to go further in her attempts to free her writing from theatrical norms and traditions.

The necessity of anchoring the theatrical text in a recognisable space has been abandoned. The theatrical space is henceforth "the place from where the text is spoken." (*Par les routes :* 109). The cartography engaged in by the writer, as she makes tracks across the space of the screen/page with words, is re-enacted in the imagination of the actor and spectator. Ultimately, actor and spectator are called upon to cross a field of landmines, and to allow themselves to be exploded by the text, to become disaggregated

and dispersed across the page: “Lire, c’est faire travailler notre corps [...] à l’appel des signes du texte, de tous les langages qui le traversent et qui forment comme la profondeur moirée des phrases.” [To read is to work the body in response to the text’s signs, to the languages that traverse it and give the words their shimmering depth.][15]

Renaude creates the conditions for a form of reading that will not deliver its meanings easily – the reader is in a position of lack, despite the profusion of words, voices, fragments. Ultimately, her theatre is a true theatre of the text, where the text demands first and foremost to be read, and read very closely. She draws the reader into an obsessive decoding that amounts to a form of map-reading. This focus on reading draws attention to the status of the word in her theatre. According to the director Michel Cerda, “il faut avoir un goût quasi pictural pour la forme des mots, la forme des phrases, des pages écrites, des paragraphes.” [you need to have an almost pictorial appreciation of the shape of words, the shape of phrases, of written pages, of paragraphs.][16] This theatre stages the sensuality of the form of words, of the form of the page, its borders, its margins, its blank spaces, the disposition of words in space. For Duras, the joy of theatre was in “la portée d’exactitude [de la parole]... sa mesure, la perfection de cette mesure. [...] C’est ça la joie incroyable du théâtre.” [the extent of the precision in speaking the word, its measure, the perfection of that measure. [...] That is the incredible joy of theatre.][17] They may seem like odd bed-fellows, yet the theatres of Duras and Renaude are both driven by a desire to represent the writing body, the body’s struggle with words on a page – the body of the book, the book of the body. The possibility of graphic representation of writing’s struggle with its limits, marked by the frame of the page, is one of theatre’s key attractions for writers seeking to stage the birth and death of the self in language.

For Valère Novarina, “toute la joie de l’homme est de venir au théâtre voir l’animal parler. [...] Nous sommes venus pour voir le langage. L’action à suivre, au théâtre, est de voir le langage notre chair.” [There is nothing like the joy people get from

coming to the theatre to see the animal talking. We have come to see language. The action, in the theatre, is that of seeing language, our flesh.][18] Novarina describes a form of theatre that fuses the visible and the audible, textuality and orality. For him, the power of theatre is that it can show that the material world is a world made of language: a place where it is possible to "ancrer à nouveau le langage dans le corps, le faire résonner jusqu'au plus profond de la matière." [to anchor language in the body again, make it resonate to the depths of matter.] (*Lire à trois cents yeux*, 8). This seems to me to be a perfect description of Renaude's writing project for the stage. And although she claims the new technologies as a liberating force for her writing, what she is doing in the theatre is re-affirming the bodily-sonorous nature of language, its resistance to mediatisation, or even to interpretation. The word retains its quality of sign, and it is the relationship between bodies and signs in the hermetic space of the page that is played out on her stage. The challenge is that of finding one's way in the troubled terrain of writing by following a map made of voices coming from a multiplicity of different directions – which thread should one follow, which voice should one focus on? The experience for the actor/spectator is ultimately one of wandering in a landscape peopled by voices that tell the troubled history of a body in language.

The theatres of Renaude and Novarina seek to develop a permeability to the qualities of sound: attentiveness; dynamic connection and exchange between body and world, body and word; openness to indeterminacy, excess, inarticulacy and traversal. Any theatre that stimulates an intensity of auditory activity in its participants is attempting to make them vulnerable, to return them to the brink of identity, to open them to their origins in liquidity, breath, in the fusion of the noises of the body with those of other bodies. These theatres seek to mine the disruptive and disintegrative qualities of sound

and hearing, the auditory realm's potential to return us – writers, actors, spectators – to the equivocal nature of lives lived in the in-between of the material and the intelligible.

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[1] All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

Valère Novarina, "Lettre aux acteurs" in Le Théâtre des paroles (Paris: P.O.L., 1989), 10.

[2] Valère Novarina, "La Parole opère l'espace," in Lire (N° 400, juillet-août 2001), 100-01.

[3] Patrice Pavis, Le Théâtre contemporain (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), 228.

[4] Noëlle Renaude, Ma Solange, comment t'écrire mon désastre, Alex Roux 1-3 (Paris : Éditions Théâtrales, 1996, 1997, 1998, new edition containing all three volumes, 2004), 15. I will refer to the 2004 edition throughout.

[5] Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, Act I, scene (ii).

[6] Interview with Frédéric Fisbach, quoted in Trois Pièces Contemporaines (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 132.

[7] Jean-Pierre Ryngaert and Julie Sermon, Le Personnage théâtral contemporain: décomposition, recomposition (Paris: Théâtrales, 2006), 70.

[8] Interview with Noëlle Renaude, quoted in L'Avenir d'une crise: Écritures dramatiques contemporaines (1980-2000). Études Théâtrales (n. 24-25, 2002), 232-44 (240).

[9] Noëlle Renaude, Par les routes (Paris: Théâtre Ouvert/Enjeux, 2005), 110.

[10] Noëlle Renaude, Des Tulipes/Ceux qui partent à l'aventure (Paris: Théâtrales, 2006).

[11] Robert Cantarella, "L'Art de l'écrit s'incarnant" in Noëlle Renaude, Des Tulipes/Ceux Qui partent a l'aventure (Paris: Théâtrales, 2006), 7-8 (7).

[12] See David Bradby and Annie Sparks, Mise en Scène: French Theatre Now (London: Methuen, 1997) for an overview of French theatrical institutions, and an interview with Micheline and Lucien Attoun, direrctors of Théâtre Ouvert in Paris, which has staged and promoted Noelle Renaude's writing since the mid-1980s.

[13] Noëlle Renaude, Par les routes (Paris: Théâtre Ouvert/Enjeux, 2005).

[14] Michel Corvin, "L'esprit du lieu d'Eschyle à Renaude, " in Théâtre/Public (XX, January 2007).

[15] Roland Barthes, "Écrire la lecture" in Oeuvres Complètes III (Paris: Seuil, nouvelle édition, 2002), 602-04 (604).

[16] Michel Cerda, preface to Noëlle Renaude, À Tous Ceux Qui/La Comédie de Saint Etienne/Le Renard du Nord (Paris: Théâtrales, 2002), 7-10 (8).

[17] Filmed interview with Marguerite Duras by Michelle Porte, Savannah Bay, c'est toi, (Paris : Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, 1983), broadcast on ARTE (19 March 1996).

[18] Valère Novarina, "Lire à trois cents yeux", in Théâtre: Le Retour du texte?, Littérature (N°138, June 2005, Paris: Larousse), 7-17 (7, 17).