

# Brigitte Cirla

## Invisible Score

*Through song, the evocative  
power of the sound leads  
towards something that  
approaches poetry.  
It is no longer only the sense  
of the words that counts  
but the associations  
that are evoked in me  
- the spectator -  
and the dreams that  
I create.*

In order to speak of the materials used on stage, the text and even the writing of a theatre piece, its outline, its guiding principle, I have need of my own language, French.

### TEXT AS RESOURCE

Poetry is always a point of departure for me. Poetry is the kind of text that most closely unites my obsession with the relationship between sound and sense. I can only refer you to a poem that was one of the foundations of my last production: *Les mots* by Julien Blaine.

*Les mots, malgré leurS significationS,  
pourraient-ils perdre leur sens pour n'être plus que du son?*

*Et si le son domine  
que reste-t-il du sens?  
Dans ce son vainqueur,  
que devient le sens vaincu?  
Le sens et ses résidus,  
ses séquelles, comment pollue-t-il  
encore le son?*

...

*Peut-on éviter le sens au bénéfice du son seul?*

*Le son peut-il faire sens?  
Le son inarticulé, désarticulé qui agit sur le sens a-t-il un sens?  
L'action est-elle possession?  
Est-elle sensé ou insensée?  
Dans n'importe quel ordre, les mots lus feraient toujours sens, mais  
les mots écoutés  
peuvent-ils se dissoudre dans le son et devenir insensés?*

...

Despite their signification, do words  
lose their meaning and become nothing more than sounds?

And if the sound dominates  
what remains of the sense?  
In the triumph of the sound

what becomes of the defeated sense?  
The meaning and its residue,  
linger, how can they re-infect the sound?

...

Can we avoid the meaning for the benefit of  
the sound alone?

Can the sound make sense?

The inarticulate, unarticulated sound that acts  
on the meaning, has it any meaning?

This act, is it always possession?

Does it mean anything?

No matter in what order, words that are read  
always make sense;

perhaps words that are heard dissolve  
in the sound and become meaningless?

...

When sound takes precedence over sense,  
when sound changes the meaning of the  
word, when the intention, perhaps even that  
of the author, is distorted by the rhythm and  
the melody of the sung or spoken phrase,

when the physical action creates an unex-  
pected semantic space - here are my constant  
obsessions.

In music theatre the confrontation  
between sound and sense is always enor-  
mous. First there is the purely technical and  
vocal difficulty for the performer of changing  
from the "singing" voice to the "speaking"  
voice. Then for the theatre director, the  
impact of the singing voice always creates an  
imaginative and visual space larger than that  
of the spoken voice. Through song, the evoc-  
ative power of the sound leads towards  
something that approaches poetry. It is no  
longer only the sense of the words that  
counts but the associations that are evoked  
in me - the spectator - and the dreams that I  
create.

Music has in itself the particular singu-  
larity of being a completely separate  
language. Musical abstraction does not  
appear as a reductive barrier, but on the  
contrary as the bearer of multiple spaces of  
meanings and simultaneous emotions. Faced



Brigitte Ciria Photo: Martine Derian

with the wave of possibilities provoked by the sound, the language of words, with its immediate meaning, apparently creates a very reduced space.

Partly for these reasons, it is always complicated to mix together the spoken and sung voice in theatre. (Schöenberg's "sprech-gesang" may have been a response to this unequal battle.)

### TEXT AS SCORE

I am obsessed by the enunciation of words as much as a performer as a director. Text for me is a score. I can never disassociate words from their sonority so every nuance of the text, every punctuation mark, becomes, for me, rules which need to be respected absolutely (like *solfeggio*) and I need to hear the exact rhythm first, then the stress and the modulation of the author, in the hope of gradually reaching his/her hidden meaning. In fact, I embark on each text as though it were a musical score, a potential musical writing.

### TEXT AS INVISIBLE OUTLINE

I think of working with the dreams of the spectator, dreams of which I am ignorant, with that human capacity for inventing a meaning at any cost, imagining invisible connections.

At the beginning of rehearsals I have always one or more very strong images that don't necessarily have any connection, some text, a few poems that move me and some ambitions.

When I am a spectator, I am delighted when the text leads me away from its first meaning into a discovery of other meanings.

I always build a production from sound and song (in fact, I don't know how to do anything else). It is the sounds, the songs, the music that inspire me with images,

rhythm and space. In fact, it is very mysterious, this process of building with disparate elements; it is a little like having a puzzle with different shaped pieces and attempting to put them together. Underneath there is always a very personal intuition about what is right and what is not, the impression of groping towards an unknown target; I feel that I know the road but I don't know what is at its end.

Once on stage, I can gradually reconstruct something that appears to be coherent. It is necessary for me to see the bodies, hear the voices in order to discern where I am going, and I always invent structures for acting and expression that are as strict as a score. The link with music is perhaps also that; it is necessary for me to have a tempo, a framework, a rhythm, dynamics, an extremely rigid structure to catch a glimpse of freedom in action and play.

I am always astonished at what the audience remembers of a performance, often the invisible things, or those things which I imagined were invisible.

Translated from French by Gilly Adams

BRIGITTE CIRILA (France) is a singer, actor and director. She created Voix Polyphoniques in 1991 and later the musical theatre group Les Dissonantes with whom she tours two performances *Dissonantes* and *Le Rôti de l'Impératrice*. She conducts several choirs in Marseille and abroad and leads pedagogic sessions in several institutions in Europe. In 2001 she is directing *La Cantatàpied*, an opera for ninety young people, and a performance, *Litaniques*, at the invitation of the University Aix/Marseille.