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Abstract

This article seeks to recover a strand of postdramatic theatre that is engaged with feminist concerns. The motivation for this is three-fold: firstly, to redress the relative lack of attention paid to postdramatic forms and female practitioners whose work might be broadly identified as postdramatic in feminist theatre scholarship to date. Secondly, to develop a mode of feminist analysis and theory suited to postdramatic aesthetics which are typically only obliquely concerned with political matters. In order to do so this article, thirdly, suggests a return to feminist poststructuralist theorists of difference, specifically Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva. The continued usefulness of ideas from both theorists is developed in relation to two case studies: Pina Bausch’s *Café Müller* (1978) and The Wooster Group’s *The Town Hall Affair* (2016). Through close analysis of both pieces in relation to negativity (Kristeva) and the poetic (Cixous), the article asks for a re-evaluation of the use of their ideas to facilitate a broader historical understanding of feminist theatre. The article concludes that feminism in postdramatic theatre might be considered doubly oblique: formally, in its indirect approach to feminism and historically, in its tendency to lie at an angle to more readily recognised feminist waves.

Keywords: feminism, postdramatic theatre, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, Pina Bausch, The Wooster Group, *écriture féminine*, political theatre

Article:

The political in postdramatic theatre only becomes significant when it is in no way translatable or relatable to the logic, syntax and terminology of the political discourse of social reality. [...] The political in theatre is not the reproduction but the interruption of the political.¹

What works do we consider as part of the spectrum of feminist theatre-making? What proper names, aesthetic forms and critical perspectives are summoned when we determine, debate and reforge connections between theatrical practices and feminist politics? This article grows out of a desire to illuminate—with historical hindsight—a further facet of feminist theatre, not in order to replace or erase existing critical approaches but in order to diversify and extend its reach. My argument arises from a keen awareness that postdramatic criticism as well as practitioners who can be considered typically postdramatic have played little role in feminist theatre theory to date. . In part this is because Hans-Thies Lehmann’s formative study that brought the term into wider circulation was only published in English in 2006, after the peak of feminist theorising in theatre of the 1980s and 90s. More fundamentally, the mode of postdramatic analysis—which Elinor Fuchs has critiqued as an ‘exclusively aesthetic’ approach²—sits at odds with the Brechtian-materialist perspectives that

¹ Lehmann, *Das Politische Schreiben* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2002), 16-17. My translation.

² Fuchs, ‘*Postdramatic Theatre* (review)’, *TDR: The Drama Review* 52, no 2 (2008): 181.

concurrently became dominant in feminist theatre studies and the more anthropological approach of performance studies alike. Indeed, a postdramatic analysis is typically primarily aesthetic, concerned as it is with a production's challenges to and divergences from dramatic form. Consequently, as Lehmann suggests, much of postdramatic theatres' engagement with political issues cannot be approached head-on but only from 'an oblique angle, *modo obliquo*',³ as interruption, caesura or interval. This indirect mode of political engagement presents a particular challenge for feminist criticism since, firstly, the tendency of postdramatic forms to abandon the representation of subjects in favour of embodiments of 'hidden impulses, energy dynamics and mechanics of [...] motorics', does not sit well with subject-centric modes of criticism.⁴ Secondly, the political effects of postdramatic forms need to be conceived foremost on a sensorial, experiential and affective level. This means that Brechtian-materialist approaches with their emphasis on discourse, political analysis and linguistics are ill-suited to theorising such works. Despite the dominance of materialist approaches to feminist theatre and performance lessening in the twenty-first century and some feminist scholars such as Geraldine Harris and Elaine Aston calling for less 'political hygiene', there still remains a gap in scholarship that would account for the feminist potential of postdramatic forms.⁵

To redress this, I aim to respond to Karen Jürs-Munby's question to what extent a kind of theatre that relies on 'the sensory dimension of art' can be considered political and Brandon Woolf's contention that 'we might (re)conceive of "the political" in performance beyond commitment, beyond the primacy of *content*'.⁶ To do so, I see it necessary to return to what Abigail Bray has termed 'post-structuralist feminism of difference'.⁷ That is a set of feminist theorists whose 'anti-representationalism' is grounded in 'a continental tradition of speculative philosophy' and who seek to deconstruct binary notions of gender by unsettling oppositional thinking itself, often by means of poetic 'insurgent writing'.⁸ This kind of feminism suggests alternatives to 'traditional emancipatory politics' that hold on to a female subject.⁹ Rather than delivering a political theory of aesthetics (critically interrogating

³ Lehmann, *Das Politische Schreiben*, 18. My translation.

⁴ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge, 2006), 32.

⁵ Aston and Harris, *A Good Night Out for the Girls* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 11.

⁶ Barnett, Lehmann and Jürs-Munby, 'Taking Stock and Looking Forward: Postdramatic Theatre', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 16, no 4 (2006): 487; Woolf, 'Towards a Paradoxical, Parallaxical Politics' in *Postdramatic Theatre and The Political: International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance*. Ed. J. Carroll, K. Jürs-Munby and S. Giles (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 36.

⁷ Bray, *Hélène Cixous: Writing and Sexual Difference* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 20.

⁸ *Ibid.*; Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' *Signs* 1, no 4 (1976): 880.

⁹ Sjöholm, *Kristeva and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 2.

representations from a political standpoint), these thinkers politicise aesthetics via notions of affect, emotion and experience; that is, they invest in the radical potential of aesthetics to ‘resist the repressive effects of “the political”’, which always runs the risk of returning to oppositional logics.¹⁰ I would like to suggest that writers such as Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, who I draw on in my analysis, provide a plentiful intellectual habitat in which to situate these works. Turning to these writers allows me to think through the specifically feminist potentials of postdramatic forms in contrast to adjacent thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida or Theodor Adorno who are more frequently invoked to theorise the politics of postdramatic theatre. This article then asks for a re-evaluation of ideas from both Cixous and Kristeva in order to explore how the formalist experiments of postdramatic theatre might be included within the wider field of feminist theatre and to facilitate a broader history and understanding of feminism in theatre.

In doing so, I am wary of reigniting debates around gender essentialism and the body, given my focus on theorists who have been historically grouped as proponents of *écriture féminine* (feminine writing) and subsequently dismissed as ultimately perpetuating the binary gender system they set out to critique, especially in anglophone scholarship. Toril Moi’s writing might be considered exemplary in this respect. She suggests that whereas Cixous’s “deconstruction” of the feminine/masculine opposition remain valuable for feminists’, the proposed way out of this system—the practice of *écriture féminine*—‘in the end [falls] back into a form of gender essentialism’.¹¹ For Moi ‘femininity theories inevitably and relentlessly turn women into the other’.¹² In contrast to Moi, who largely reads Cixous’s work representationally, descriptive of a maybe more subversive yet still compulsory femininity that shackles women to particular images, I approach Kristeva and Cixous more along the lines of Elizabeth Grosz’s call for a feminist ‘politics of acts not identities’.¹³ That is, I read them as not so much theorising an essence of being, but formulating a speculative mode of doing. The feminine for both is after all primarily an aesthetic function and a potential effect rather than a description of a real subject. In order to mark the difference between a feminine aesthetic function and compulsory femininity, I prefer to speak of ‘the feminine’ for the former.

¹⁰ Bray, *Hélène Cixous*, 14.

¹¹ Moi, ‘Feminist, Female, Feminine’, in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, eds C. Belsey and J. Moore (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 125.

¹² Moi, ‘From Femininity to Finitude: Freud, Lacan, and Feminism, Again’, *Signs* 29, no 3 (2004): 845.

¹³ Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 183.

My contestation then is that ideas of the feminine as developed by Cixous, Kristeva and others still have a place in feminist theatre scholarship today, especially in relation to postdramatic theatrical experiments. This means translating a textual aesthetic politics into a theatrical one, asking how the live, embodied and time-bound experience of theatre beyond literature might be understood via these ideas. Cixous reminds us that ‘we need a poetic practice inside/as a political practice’.¹⁴ This is a practice that works on unravelling and re-joining the imaginary fabric that weaves together individual desires and political positions. It does so not necessarily through the critical presentation of content but through aesthetic experience. As such, the analysis enabled by theories of the feminine is particularly suited to tackling the typically indirect and oblique ways in which postdramatic theatre forms engage with political issues. Ultimately, I want to propose then that deconstructive accounts of the feminine—which often posit the feminine itself as the force or driver of deconstruction—can be used to positively reposition a body of works in the twentieth and twenty-first century within the larger field of feminist theatre practice.

Looking back: Oblique postdramatic feminism

There... [is] an arid millennial ground to break, what I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable.¹⁵

It is high time that women gave back to the theatre its fortunate position, its *raison d'être* and what makes it different—the fact that there it is possible to get across the living, breathing, speaking body.¹⁶

Despite Lehmann’s insistence that postdramatic theatre is a term developed to account for tendencies in live theatre practice rather than playwriting, existing discussions of feminism in postdramatic theatre focus mainly on authors such as Elfriede Jelinek and Marlene Streeruwitz.¹⁷ At the same time the foundational publications for feminist theatre studies make little reference to female practitioners who might now be described as postdramatic.¹⁸ Despite their historical proximity to these publications and their consistent interest in gender, if not necessarily feminism in an overt way, practitioners such as Pina Bausch, Elizabeth LeCompte or Meredith Monk find little mention. In the following, I take

¹⁴ Cixous, *Weiblichkeit in Der Schrift*, trans E. Duffner. (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1977): 7. My translation.

¹⁵ Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, 875.

¹⁶ Cixous, 1984. ‘Aller à La Mer’, trans B. Kerslake, *Modern Drama* 27, no 4 (1984): 546.

¹⁷ For example: Nina Birkner, Andrea Geier and Urte Helduser, *Spielräume des Anderen: Geschlecht und Alterität im postdramatischen Theater* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014).

¹⁸ For example: Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*; Elaine Aston, *Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995).

Bausch's *Café Müller* (1978) and her reception in feminist criticism as a case study to develop a mode of analysis enabled by difference feminism (which notably was discarded in feminist scholarship at the same time as the above practitioners were being widely received) that is suited to the poetic and oblique ways in which postdramatic theatre forms engage with feminist politics.

It is perhaps particularly surprising that an appraisal of Bausch's work (whether positive or negative) is wholly absent from major studies on feminist theatre since her *oeuvre* overtly focussed on female and male gender roles, the violence inherent in such roles and—arguably—attempts to break free from them. In part, this can be explained by the fact that despite her iconoclastic disregard for the boundaries between dance and theatre, her training, career and sites of presentation were rooted in dance more than in theatre. While feminist theory and politics took hold in dance studies as much as they did in theatre scholarship, there was little cross-over between the two in their foundational phases. With the emergence of postdramatic theatre forms in which dramatic 'principles of narration and figuration' are eroded in favour of the 'real virtuality' of theatre in which bodies, sounds, images, words encounter each other in a dynamic and coeval—yet still figurative—situation, such dividing lines have become increasingly hollow.¹⁹ Although Bausch's reception by feminists and the expulsion of her work from the landscape of feminist practices occurred within dance studies primarily, these discourses are revealing of the problems that postdramatic forms pose to feminist scholarship in theatre too.

Feminist dance critic Ann Daly's initial position and later self-correction demonstrate this. Writing in 1985 following the first major appearance of Bausch's company in the US, Daly acknowledges that Bausch's violent scenarios speak of 'the rage of a woman' while simultaneously dismissing them for feminism due to the lack of a 'mediating ideology' that would allow for critical distance.²⁰ Essentially, Daly demands that Bausch's work be judged against materialist-Brechtian norms that seek to foreground the 'representational apparatus' of theatre to achieve an 'analysis of gender in material social relations'; lacking this she finds Bausch's work wanting for feminism.²¹ Daly's position echoes that of many contemporaneous feminist critics in theatre in its emphasis on materialist criticism, though there were critical perspectives being outlined that could have been used to approach practitioners such as Bausch. Sue-Ellen Case's notion of a 'new poetics' which would enable

¹⁹ Poschmann qtd in Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 18; Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 172.

²⁰ Daly, 'Tanztheater: The Thrill of the Lynch Mob or the Rage of a Woman?'. *TDR* 30, no 2 (1986): 56.

²¹ Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 14; Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 1997, 82.

a ‘deconstruction of the forms of representation, and dialogue and modes of perception characteristic of patriarchal culture’, gestured towards the possibility of a feminist poetics of theatre while Price explicitly suggests that theorists of *écriture féminine* be mobilised to develop feminist readings of Bausch’s work.²² However, these broad outlines were not widely carried forward. This article might then be conceived as a return to and development of some of these suggestions in relation to the emergence of postdramatic discourse. Notably, Daly reneges on her initial position fourteen years later, suggesting that what she was lacking were the analytical tools to assess Bausch’s work for feminism initially. She explains that Bausch ‘jam[med] the feminist machinery’ because there was no suitable ‘theory of theatrical emotion’ at the time that would have accounted for ‘theatre as communal space where feelings can be shared and meaning generated’.²³ From a contemporary vantage point I would add to this a series of terms no less significant but aimed at naming less immediately structured and socialised forms of perception: affect, sensation and experience.²⁴

My suggestion here is then that in the context of postdramatic theory it now becomes possible to assess Bausch’s work as feminist. Without the means to theorise the non-representational ‘energetics’ of postdramatic practices, it indeed is difficult to identify precisely the political slant in them, feminist or otherwise.²⁵ What speaks from such positions is a mistrust in the process of considering somatic experience, sensation and perception as an aspect of, or maybe even constitutive for, political and ethical transformation. This seems to me to be underpinned by an assumption that all postdramatic theatres produce the same qualitative experience: typically, a merely self-reflexive experience of the *possibility* of experience. Doing so dismisses what Lehmann describes as postdramatic theatre’s capacity to deliver a kind of ‘emotional training’ in which ‘affects are released and played out’ and through which new subjectivities might be formed.²⁶ In contrast, I suggest that the affective tutelage of postdramatic forms is capable of being politically vital, efficacious and, indeed, political in a feminist way. Daly’s initial reaction to Bausch’s work can be considered emblematic of how postdramatic aesthetics are awkwardly (mis)aligned with feminist theatre discourses. Instead of producing what Theodor Adorno called committed theatre premised upon an ‘unshaken faith in meanings which can be transferred from art to reality’ (which still

²² Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008 [1988]), 132; Price, ‘The Politics of the Body: Pina Bausch’s *Tanztheater*’, *Theatre Journal* 42, no 3 (1990): 321.

²³ Daly, ‘Feminist Theory across the Millennial Divide’, *Dance Research Journal* 32, no 1 (2002), 41.

²⁵ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 78.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 186.

guides many materialist approaches, no matter how postmodern), Bausch's work—like much postdramatic theatre—remains ambiguous both in its commitments and to what extent meaning is actually achieved.²⁷ By entangling spectators within the processes of meaning-making, its politics is located at the level of perception, especially perceptive shock or what Heiner Müller described as the 'thorn in the eye of the beholder'.²⁸ As I explore below in relation to *Café Müller* this refusal of 'the political' may be considered a peculiarly oblique kind of postdramatic feminism.

Pina Bausch's aesthetic politics between negativity and poetry

Undoubtedly, Bausch's own hesitancy towards feminism played a role in the sidelining of her work in feminist scholarship. Like many other postdramatic practitioners, she regularly articulated a distaste towards fixed political positions and resisted co-option of her work for any particular agenda: her long-term dramaturg Raimund Hoghe describes this as a refusal to 'smooth over' the 'rough edges' of her work that always threaten to 'tear up old wounds, the repressed' in service of a message.²⁹ Ramsay Burt contextualises this refusal to consider her work political in relation to the 'aesthetically conservative model of socialist realism' that dominated ideas of political art during her training as well as the general atmosphere of 'political disappointment' that followed the upheaval of the 1960s in both Germany and the US.³⁰ With the emergence of the discourses surrounding postdramatic aesthetics, however, it becomes possible to situate her work within a feminist context retrospectively. This does not mean foisting particular politicised standpoints upon it but instead searching for modes of analysis that remain faithful to what I suggest is an oblique feminism. I see such an oblique politics at play in the way that Bausch's work engages with a feminine aesthetic function, especially in its incarnation as negativity (as per Julia Kristeva) and the poetic (following Hélène Cixous).

The interplay between negativity and poetry is particularly evident in Bausch's influential piece *Café Müller* that was produced as part of her 'experimental phase' in which she began to develop her characteristic 'collage approach'.³¹ Read against preceding works that explore what Cixous polemically refers to as 'the murder scene which is at the origin of

²⁷ Adorno, 'Commitment', *New Left Review* 88-87 (1974): 79.

²⁸ Müller, 'Blut ist im Schuh oder das Rätsel der Freiheit', in *Tanz-Legenden: Essays zu Pina Bauschs Tanztheater*, ed U. Hanraths and H. Winkels. (Frankfurt: Tende, 1984), 120.

²⁹ Hoghe, *Pina Bausch: Tanztheatergeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 20-21. My translation.

³⁰ Burt, *Judson Dance Theatre: Performative Traces* (London: Routledge, 2006), 21.

³¹ Lucy Weir, *Pina Bausch's Dance Theatre: Tracing the Evolution of Tanztheater* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 70,

all cultural productions', *Café Müller* can be understood as a search for a theatre that manages to 'get across the living, breathing, speaking body' instead of depicting woman merely as 'sacrificial object'.³² Accordingly, *Bluebeard. While Listening to a Taped Recording of Béla Bartók's 'Duke Bluebeard's Castle'* (1977) created a year earlier echoes Clément's analysis of opera as a form in which women 'sing their eternal undoing'.³³ In it the titular figure (Jan Minarik) performs violent dance phrases depicting his compulsive violence towards women while replaying sections of the opera on tape. Like ballet does in the earlier *The Right of Spring* (1975), opera becomes a cypher for cultural production itself, which as Walter Benjamin contends cannot help but be a document of 'barbarism'; in this case the barbarism committed against women.³⁴

Café Müller, in contrast, despite similarly showing bodies ruined and tormented by normative expectations, opens up more liberatory possibilities in the way the dancers wield imagistic and gestural materials. In the piece six dancers—three women, three men—inhabit a café after-hours. They move wordlessly through a stage strewn with identical black chairs to a soundtrack of Baroque arias by Henry Purcell, engaging in fleeting encounters, both tender and violent. Throughout the piece flesh gets in the way of the correct execution of movement phrases, the real weight of the performer ruins the dance's illusion of grace as in the famous lifting scene, heavy breathing points to labouring bodies chaffing against the strain of compulsory (gender) performance. Although Bausch does not produce utopian alternatives in *Café Müller*, it also does not nihilistically repeat the status quo; Johnathan Price notes we witness 'molecular movement, in which "characters" succumb to an ineluctable entropy'.³⁵ We see negativity, not negation at work. That is, rather than reproducing the logic of negation—described by Michel Foucault as 'the old categories of the Negative (law, limit, castration, lack, lacuna)'³⁶—Bausch sets in motion negativity, which behaves as a 'liquefying and dissolving agent', as theorised by Kristeva.³⁷ The reproduction of gestures in the moment of their entropic dissolution produces 'infinitesimal differentiation'

³² Cixous, 'Aller à La Mer', 546.

³³ Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Woman*, trans. B. Wing. (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 7.

³⁴ Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', *Marxists Internet Archive* (online). Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm> (16 Jan 2019).

³⁵ Price, 'The Politics of the Body: Pina Bausch's Tanztheater', *Theatre Journal* 42, no 3 (1990): 330.

³⁶ Foucault, 'Preface' in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari trans. R. Hurley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), Xiii.

³⁷ Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Walter (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 110.

from within, softening, even suspending, the contours of habituated behaviours and modes of spectating.³⁸

For Kristeva textual negativity is a productive process set in motion not representationally but through affective sensations usually repressed: the ‘rhythmic’, ‘kinetic’ and ‘intonational’ impact of a work on the receiver’s experience.³⁹ What Kristeva theorised for the literary text is produced here by theatrical time: negativity takes hold precisely through the increasing illegibility of the gestures and images in their repetition. What at first seems decipherable—an array of images that can be relatively unproblematically located within a range of familiar emotions of love, jealousy, longing for and fear of intimacy, the pain and pleasure of solitude and so on—is rendered increasingly enigmatic through repetition. Assigning meaning to them begins to fail and so interrupts the cultural logics that would validate their meaning. This negativity opens up a poetic space of escape. Fundamental to Bausch’s poetic politics is a postdramatic displacement of dramatic antagonism; the rivalry between opposing characters, viewpoints or values, resurfaces in the agony of the body. In Lehmann’s words whereas ‘the dramatic process occurred *between* the bodies; the postdramatic process occurs *with/on/to* the body’.⁴⁰ The body here is not one and it cannot be exhausted. The dancers assemble, exhibit, displace and ironise the legible grammar of existing bodily practices through various techniques of deformation: slowing down, speeding up, gruelling repetition, shocking juxtaposition. By staging an array of images suffused by and precisely crafted from the debris of recognisable images that give shape to our understanding of the subject (gendered subjects in particular), bodies vibrate with competing, compacted inscriptions. To some extent Bausch’s work is geological, she causes erosion in the miniscule changes effected by wearing away pervasive and oppressive images through repetition. This corrosive activity occurs primarily on the level of representation. At the same time the excess of expressive force points to a poetic realm beyond representation in that it demonstrates that even the most repressive, the most insidious cultural inscriptions cannot entirely subsume the body that hosts them—a dissonance that is exploited more often for comic effect in later pieces such as the equally famed *Kontakthof* (1978).

If for Kristeva, the feminine remains bound up with negativity, Cixous gives us a way of understanding how new sensory, affective and ultimately political configurations arise

³⁸ Ibid, 125-126.

³⁹ Ibid, 91.

⁴⁰ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 163,

from its debris. She distils this into a particularly evocative image: playing on the double meaning of the verb *voler*—to fly and to steal—she insinuates that it is necessary to steal the forms of extant culture in order to take off and escape towards yet-unthought possibilities.⁴¹ Cixous's feminine poetic is located between agony and ecstasy, as the two faces of *jouissance* but also in their etymological senses as Gillian Rye suggests as struggle and rapture, a 'go[ing] beyond (as in *ekstasis*)'.⁴² This poetic politics is most precisely crafted in *Café Müller's* somnambulist figure, historically performed by Bausch herself, who wanders, eyes closed, lost, across the stage. As the first to appear and the only one to dwell after the dance has ended, she functions as an irritant. At times, she performs short movement phrases that are fragile and enigmatic, at others she remains in the background, occasionally convulsing, seemingly overcome by the emotional charges of the others that run shock-like through her body. *Café Müller* is, among many things, a piece about touch and being touched, about the struggle of opening ourselves towards the touch of an other. No gesture evokes this struggle more precisely than the somnambulist's walk: her arms slightly bent, palms facing forward and out, she gives herself up to the hazardous and the coincidental, she puts herself at risk.

The somnambulist's journey amongst the chaos of chairs metonymically points to one of the pieces overarching gestures: 'finding clearings, paving a way, creating spaces for movement'.⁴³ Movement here is at once concrete; the dancer's search for bodily expression, and speculative; the movement of thought it seeks to stimulate in the mind of the spectator. As an irritating enigma that refuses exhaustive interpretation, to communicate or mean anything in particular, she demands of the spectator that they open themselves up to a risky business: to accept and dwell on the indecipherable and inexhaustible signs of an other. In gestures, as Giorgio Agamben writes, there 'is a potential that does not give way to an act in order to exhaust itself in it but rather remains as a potential in the act, dancing in it'.⁴⁴ Such a gesture is then an example of a postdramatic feminist politics in its incarnation as poetic *ekstasis*, an exteriority that goes beyond representation, that takes us towards an unknowable otherness.

⁴¹ Cixous and Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 96.

⁴² Rye, 'Agony or Ecstasy? Reading Cixous's Recent Fictions', *Paragraph* 23, no 3 (2000): 296.

⁴³ Hubert Winkels, 'Quergänge', in *Tanz-Legenden: Essays zu Pina Bauschs' Tanztheater*, ed. U. Hanraths and H. Winkels (Frankfurt: Tende, 1984), 110. My translation.

⁴⁴ Agamben qtd in Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 164.

It is at this point in particular where I see an overlap between Cixous' feminist poetic theory and postdramatic forms. Fundamental to Cixous's feminist poetics is engagement in an act of approaching without appropriating, of 'not arriving' at a place of mastery while also not dismissing the other as completely remote and thus beyond our concern.⁴⁵ From this vantagepoint, aesthetic practices take on a nearly pedagogical function, they '[provide] the very possibility of change' by creating a space in which a 'transformation of social and cultural structures' can take place via aesthetic experience.⁴⁶ By nurturing new affects and sensations beyond phallogentrism and desire premised on appropriation, political efficacy and aesthetic experience are entangled. In the example of *Café Müller* it is the somnambulist's gestural language, her appeal to communication, to exchange, joined with her refusal to completely disclose herself to the spectator that produces a poetic encounter which is both agonistic—in terms of the struggle to engage, to comprehend—and ecstatic in the way it creates an elliptical break, a kind of syncopation of meaning which urges the spectator to go beyond accustomed modes of watching and understanding.

Looking ahead: Futural dissidences

Modern revolt doesn't necessarily take the form of a clash of prohibitions and transgressions that beckons the way to firm promises; modern revolt is in the form of trials, hesitations, learning as you go, making patient and lateral adjustments to an endlessly complex network.⁴⁷

Bausch's work and that of other practitioners working at a similar historical moment refused direct association with political agendas and can only be grasped as obliquely feminist. More recently and simultaneously with a revitalised interest in feminist politics in all cultural spheres, many theatre-makers working in postdramatic formats explicitly recognise feminist ideas as a significant stimulus. At the same time, many of those whose works have been frequently read as at most ambiguously concerned with feminist topics have in the twenty-first century cast their gaze towards the legacy of twentieth-century feminism: so for example, LeCompte's The Wooster Group premiered *The Town Hall Affair* in 2016, a meditation on D. A. Pennebaker's documentary *Town Bloody Hall* (1971) featuring a fierce debate between Norman Mailer and a panel of feminists. The following year Sasha Waltz created *Women*, citing feminist art-pioneer Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1974-1979) as her

⁴⁵ Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, trans S. Cornell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 65.

⁴⁶ Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', 879.

⁴⁷ Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt: The Power and Limit of Psychoanalysis*, trans. J. Herman. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 54.

main inspiration. In accordance with Lehmann's assertion that postdramatic practices are best defined as a 'concrete negation [of dramatic theatre] producing a new wealth of possibilities, each in itself concrete and unique', I do not wish to assert a unified style of such feminist postdramatic experiments beyond their abandonment of a dramatic 'fictional cosmos'.⁴⁸ Consequently, pieces as diverse as Nic Green's *Trilogy* (2010)—that also uses *Town Bloody Hall* as its primary starting point—and Young Jean-Lee's *Untitled Feminist Show* (2011) which examine the possibilities and limits of female nudity, GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN and Figs in Wigs' ironic mimesis of gendered expectations through self-reflexive theatricality, experiments with feminist choruses in Ontoerend Goed's *Sirens* (2014) and Marta Górnicka's *Chorus of Women. Magnificat* (2012), the 'sexy-gross mash ups' (Solga, 2016: 68) of Lauren-Barri Holstein's *Splat!* (2013) or Florentina Holzinger's *Apollon* (2017), and She She Pop's experiments in maintaining a feminist devising collective (professionally since 1998) might be counted among them.

This turn towards a more overt relationship with feminism in works that often lie on the cusp of theatre and live art is consistent with Lehmann's observation that following the ideological, economic and political shifts around the turn of the millennium in particular (including the rise of a new right, increasing economic precarity, the war on terror and its proliferating effects) 'theatre... felt and feels a need to deal more directly with political issues, even if there are no solutions or perspectives to offer'.⁴⁹ Although Lehmann's comments are characteristically sceptical towards any kind of strong efficacy of theatre it remains notable that there persists a significant trend towards the experimental formalism associated with postdramatic theatre among contemporary feminist theatre-makers.

This trend echoes a point that Lehmann has continually stressed in his assessment of the political capacity of postdramatic forms: that its political significance is to be found in how it 'changes perceptions'.⁵⁰ Many of the practitioners referred to above tackle the prescriptive nature of gender roles and pervasive media images of women through distortion techniques and shock tactics not unlike those pioneered by Bausch. Shock, in the modernist sense, is described by Huyssen as 'a key to changing the mode of reception of art and to disrupting the dismal and catastrophic continuity of everyday life'.⁵¹ Such emphasis on

⁴⁸ Lehmann, 'Word and Stage in Postdramatic Theatre', in *Drama and/after Postmodernism*, ed. C. Henke and M. Middeke (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007), 50; Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 3.

⁴⁹ Lehmann qtd in Woolf, 'Towards a Paradoxical, Parallaxical Politics', 2.

⁵⁰ Pia Janke, Karen Jürs-Munby, Hans-Thies Lehmann, Monika Meister and Arthur Pelka, 'Videokonferenz', in *Postdramatik: Reflexion und Revision*, ed. P. Janke and T. Kovacs. (Vienna: Praesens, 2015): 34.

⁵¹ Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 14.

perceptual shock and interruption coupled with a self-reflexive employment of theatre's mediality—that is, as Samuel Weber succinctly puts it, theatre's tendency to 'haun[t] and taun[t] the Western dream of self-identity'—makes for a very specifically postdramatic kind of feminist theatre.⁵² This does not mean that postdramatic experimentation is a simple continuation of modernist and avant-garde experiments. Lehmann offers a helpful differentiation between the 'energetic centre' of the historical avant-gardes on the one hand—which is the 'demand for changing the world, expressed by social provocation'—and the postdramatic moment on the other which is more modestly concerned with 'the production of events, exceptions and moments of deviation'.⁵³ Nonetheless, there is significant overlap between the two. A late modernist sensibility is a further point of connection to poststructuralist feminist theorists of difference, many of whom are deeply indebted to literary modernism. So Cixous's writing carries in Morag Shiach's analysis 'many of the marks of the modernist impulse', while Huyssen sees Kristeva as a theorist occupied with 'modernism at the stage of its exhaustion... a modernism of playful transgression'.⁵⁴ There is then an untimely insistence on modernist strategies, a continued employment of formal features that some—especially the most vocal critics of postdramatic forms—would maybe write off as anachronistic, perhaps even melancholic, at the very time at which the end of belief in their efficacy seems wide-spread.

I would like to suggest that the works of this 'new wave' of feminist performances within a postdramatic context invest in a gesture of revolt as or within aesthetic practice. That is, these works do not conceive aesthetic practices as dialectical discourse (à la post-Brechtian formats) through which we might determine political positions. Nor do they offer instructions for a better way of living; rather, they serve as an aesthetic interruption of what Gerald Siegmund identifies as the pervasive 'extended present of the contemporary' of spectacular society which knows 'no future'.⁵⁵ This means breaking with the fetishization of presence often associated with live art, instead emphasising the complex temporal confluences of theatricality which is haunted by the past and in its untimeliness 'casts the present as an opening' towards a future yet to manifest.⁵⁶ In this way political effect can then

⁵² Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York, Fordham University Press: 2004), 7.

⁵³ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 105.

⁵⁴ Shiach, 'Hélène Cixous and the Possibilities of Resistance', in *Feminist Utopias in a Postmodern Era*. Ed. A. von Lenning, M. Bekker, and I. Vanwesenbeeck (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press. 1997), 15; Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 209.

⁵⁵ Siegmund, 'Doing the Contemporary: Pina Bausch as a Conceptual Artist', *Dance Research Journal* 50, no 2 (2018): 20.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*: 21.

be grasped via notions of the feminine which as Drucilla Cornell and Adam Thrushwell explain: ‘is tied to a political potential for rejection and disruption of the given state of society’, the feminine here becoming a ‘futural project of possibilities rather than a given identity’.⁵⁷

The Wooster Group’s tiny feminist revolts

What ties together postdramatic aesthetics, theories of the feminine and a feminist political analysis of the present is that all recognise that social and political power is dispersed in contemporary neoliberalism. For Lehmann power is now organised as a ‘micro-physics’ that ‘elude(s) intuitive perception and cognition and consequently scenic representation’.⁵⁸ Kristeva similarly asks ‘against whom we can revolt when power is vacant’? Jettisoning the feasibility of whole-sale revolution in a ‘culture of the image—its seduction, its swiftness, its brutality and its frivolity’, Kristeva instead asks us to pay attention to ‘tiny revolts’ of the mind.⁵⁹ For her, engagement with cultural processes might—through ‘a rehabilitation of the sensory’—‘establish another politics, some day’.⁶⁰ Many recent examples of feminist postdramatic experiments employ, similarly to Bausch, strategies of negativity and poetic resistance, however in their more deliberately political approach, they are more readily recognisable as tiny *feminist* revolts. As I discuss below these are aimed at producing the possibility of a feminist future time in a poetic, oblique mode. This is maybe most evident when theatre-makers tackle feminist pasts as in the The Wooster Group’s *The Town Hall Affair*. Taking this as a case study, I would like to suggest that the piece makes use of breaks and ruptures in the present for the purpose of revolt; its chronological distortion of the viewing experience as well as the uncanny ‘temporal drag’ that it exerts on the present cultivates a sensibility for the latent, so far unrealised possibilities of a feminist future time in a postdramatic mode.⁶¹

The Wooster Group’s work has, like that of Bausch, often been considered a retreat from overtly political content which has seen critics wrestling with their ‘unclear political allegiance or progressiveness, their postmodern ironies, not to say political incorrectness’.⁶² Differently to Bausch, the Group’s work has served widely as a foil for discourses on the

⁵⁷ Cornell and Thurschwell, ‘Feminism, Negativity, Intersubjectivity’. *Praxis* 4 (1985): 489; Sjöholm, *Kristeva and the Political*, 38.

⁵⁸ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 175.

⁵⁹ Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid* 5; 5; 223.

⁶¹ Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁶² Johan Callens, ‘Of Rough Cuts, Voice Masks and Fugacious Bodies’, in *The Wooster Group and its Traditions*, ed. J. Callens (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2004), 54.

political possibilities of theatre under the conditions of postmodernity. Since rehashing these debates lies beyond the scope of this article, it will suffice to point out that *The Town Hall Affair* is, in LeCompte's own words, 'one of the most topical' pieces the company has produced,⁶³ and is more directly engaged with feminism than previous productions (though a feminist re-reading of the group's oeuvre, especially *House/Lights* [1997] or *To you, the Birdie (Phèdre)* [2001] which wrestle with constructions of femininity seems timely in light of this). The performance integrates elements of the documentary *Town Bloody Hall*, spliced with scenes from Norman Mailer's mockumentary film *Maidstone* (1970), into their restaging of the highly charged 1971 roundtable discussion it features. The original event was held between a range of feminists representing different viewpoints and organisations—Germaine Greer (Maura Tierney), Diane Trilling (Greg Mehrten), Jacqueline Ceballos of NOW (not in the performance) and Jill Johnston (Kate Vaulk)—in conversation with Norman Mailer (performed by both Ari Fliakos and Scott Shepherd) who had just published his misogynistic tract *The Prisoner of Sex*.⁶⁴

Screened on a prominently placed TV screen, the documentary is condensed, its reenactment interrupted by 'technical faults' and both are framed with spoken texts by the least well-known and now mainly forgotten figure to appear: dance critic, essayist and lesbian feminist 'jokester' Jill Johnston. Refusing the 'correct and proper' form of the event, Johnston performs an associative, provocative and rhythmically entrancing poem entitled 'New Approach' in which she declares that 'until all women are lesbians there will be no true political revolution' before being interrupted by Mailer, staging a kiss-in with female friends, tumbling over and finally exiting.⁶⁵ LeCompte's staging revises the historical record by allowing Johnston to finish her speech, as well as beginning and ending with Johnston's reflections on the event that detail how she crafted her action as 'impromptu clown', deciding that despite the event being a 'disaster for women', 'dropping out [was] not the answer; fucking up [was]'.⁶⁶ This increasingly direct engagement with feminism and its histories is not an exercise in chronological story-telling. Indeed, the piece resists what Kristeva calls 'historical time' that is 'project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding', which—while important to emancipatory politics—is also liable to being 'inhaled by power systems' to be

⁶³ LeCompte qtd in Holly Williams, 'The Town Hall Affair: Making a show out of the showdown between Germaine Greer and Norman Mailer', *The Independent* (2018), online, available at: <https://inews.co.uk/culture/town-hall-affair-wooster-group-barbican-london-greer-mailer/> (16 Jan 2019)

⁶⁴ Mailer, *The Prisoner of Sex* (New York: Donald I. Fine Books, 1985).

⁶⁵ Johnston, 'Tarzana from the Trees at Cocktails', *Lesbian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 15.

⁶⁶ *Ibid* 15; 15; 20.

‘credited to the system's account’ creating deceptive impression of ‘progress’.⁶⁷ Rather, *The Town Hall Affair* plunges its spectators into a dizzying temporal network in which chronology is ‘fucked up’ in line with Johnston’s tactics.

Valk’s performance as Johnstone is key to creating this temporal complexity. Her mimicking Johnston’s physical and vocal characteristics is both foregrounded and complicated by the presence of the video which encourages spectators to assess her performance against the historical document. At the same time Valk’s charisma as a performer ensures that her re-presented Johnston is not just cool, ironic play with simulacra but a fleshy, sexy invocation of Johnston’s ‘improbable art of being a public nuisance and a maverick or a martyr at the service of the principle of chaos and corruption’.⁶⁸ Valk materialises not only Johnston’s words but also her nonchalant attitude, the mesmerising rhythm of her speech and poetic structure of her presentation that meanders through mythological origin stories and semi-serious political slogans while manifesting a ‘yearning for more ecstatic modes of erotic and political congress’.⁶⁹ This creates a paradoxical reflection on feminist time. On the one hand, as Sara Warner highlights, Johnston’s action is ‘not designed to stand the test of time but to respond to its vicissitude’.⁷⁰ On the other hand, the anachronism of the action contrasts with its enduring potential to act as ‘a world-making performativity’ in José Esteban Muñoz’s sense.⁷¹ That is, it ‘signals a desire for another way of being in the world, another way of knowing the world, and this world is one gleaming with potentiality’.⁷² Johnston’s revolting attitude attaches itself to the present via Valk, as an energy or an affect that is ‘sticky’ to use Sara Ahmed’s term.⁷³ The stage acts as a kind of feminist ‘memory space’ in which the spectator is prompted to reflect on the latent capacity of her own body.⁷⁴ Lehmann suggest that when theatre functions in this way it is capable of ‘reminding us of... buried possibilities, unfulfilled promises that slumber in bodies and their affects, the I looks beyond its boundary walls and opens itself up towards... the dimension of the other and of historicity’.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, trans. A. Jardine and H. Blake, *Signs* 7, no 1 (1981): 27.

⁶⁸ Johnston quote in Sara Warner, *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (Minneapolis: University of Michigan Press, 2012): 107

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁷⁰ Warner, *Acts of Gaiety*, 131.

⁷¹ Muñoz, *Crusing Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009): 27.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Ahmed, ‘Happy Objects’, in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. M. Gregg and G. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 29-51.

⁷⁴ Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater* (Berlin: Verlag der Autoren, 1999), 348. My translation.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Significantly, this play with time creates the possibility of rehabilitating the practice of revolt in terms of aesthetic experience which, following Kristeva, ‘opens psychical life to infinite re-creation’ (6) and which she associates—among other things—with the feminine. Cixous, similarly envisions a feminine poetics in specifically temporal terms as a mode of ‘never arriving’ that keeps us ecstatically open towards a different time, yet-unthought.⁷⁶ She describes the feminine text in the following fashion:

When a woman writes in nonrepression she passes on her others, her abundance of non-ego/s in a way that destroys the form of the family structure, so that it is defamilialized, can no longer be thought in terms of the attribution of roles within a social cell: what takes place is an endless circulation of desire from one body to another, above and across sexual difference, outside those relations of power and regeneration constituted by the family. I believe regeneration leaps, age leaps, time leaps. ... A woman-text gets across a detachment, a kind of disengagement, not the detachment that is immediately taken back, but a real capacity to lose hold and let go. This takes the metaphorical form of wandering, excess, risk of the unreckonable: no reckoning, a feminine text can't be predicted, isn't predictable, isn't knowable and is therefore very disturbing. It can't be anticipated, and I believe femininity is written outside anticipation: it really is the text of the unforeseeable.⁷⁷

Such emphasis on repetition and change, re-creation and interpretation without final resolution can be recognised as expressly theatrical (even if conceived via prose writing by Kristeva and Cixous) and as such makes it particularly appropriate for the analysis of postdramatic theatre. This feminine temporality, I suggest, is a useful way for approaching *The Town Hall Affair*'s feminist potential. In keeping with Johnston herself, LeCompte refuses to assign meaning to Johnston's action instead betting on their ability to unleash the virtual potentialities contained within the past to work upon the future of a now different present. Johnston's action in Valk's presentation exerts what Elizabeth Freeman has called a temporal drag, which involves ‘[trailing] behind actual existing social possibilities’ and ‘mining the present for undetonated energy from past revolutions’.⁷⁸ Such work on the future is particularly suited to postdramatic practices which rely on the transformational qualities of theatre that, as Lehmann points out, always remain necessarily deferred. Theatre does not purport to change us ‘here and now’ or make strong claims to efficacy, instead it creates the potential for a transformational experience that is ‘virtual’, ‘voluntary’ and ‘in the future’.⁷⁹ This is then not a genealogical project that would ‘inscribe a past and a pattern of

⁷⁶ Cixous, *Coming to Writing; and Other Essays*, ed. D. Jenson. trans. S. Cornell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), 65.

⁷⁷ Cixous, ‘Castration or Decapitation’, trans. Annette Kuhn, *Signs* 7, no. 1 (1981): 53.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁷⁹ Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, 138.

generational change as a way of trying to control the future' thus reproducing the oedipal drama; rather this is a queerer time, a 'pleasurably porous relation to new configurations of the past and unpredictable futures'.⁸⁰

I am drawn to LeCompte and Vaulk's treatment of Johnstone also because she seems to embody the underlying attitude of postdramatic feminism and the feminine in Kristeva and Cixous's conceptions alike: her 'anarchic and antiassimilationist gesture of civil disobedience... provides an opportunity and occasion for subaltern agency', as a joker she 'manipulate(s) and redirect(s) our gaze, distorting our clouded perceptions and disrupting our preconceived notions'.⁸¹ Feminist experiments in the postdramatic mode, as I have argued so far, likewise interrupt habituated modes of experience (here, a temporal experience), and in doing so create a space in which feminine negativity can take hold. Cixous's notion of the poetic in turn is helpful for understanding the productive and future-facing aspects of this process, which is generating the possibility of new, radically different subjectivities (albeit, without manifesting these). Just as postdramatic theatre's political potential must be conceived foremost as an interruption according to Lehmann, so its value to feminism lies in the ways it allows non-identity and difference to assert themselves, creating the conditions for new feminist world-building beyond the disciplining powers of identity.

This process, however, is not easily translated into a concrete feminist politics or transposed from aesthetic experience to activism beyond the stage—as is characteristic of much postdramatic theatre. It is at this point in particular that I see a usefulness in repurposing elements of Cixous and Kristeva's theoretical approaches to the present (and the future) since their thought indicates a way of nonetheless recognising the feminist and political value of such work. As Cecilia Sjöholm explains, the political thrust of Kristeva's thinking hinges on the act of subversion and on a negative approach which 'is not *supposed* to be translated into a politics of emancipation, justice or recognition. [...] This does not make it politically impotent. An apolitical subject is rather a social one, staked out through given forms of symbolic exchange'.⁸² Despite their more overt connections to feminist thought, history and activism, more recent experiments in postdramatic feminism then continue to function obliquely in that they construct a feminist culture of revolt premised on 'the permanence of contradiction, the temporariness of reconciliation, the bringing to the fore

⁸⁰ Roof, Judith.. 'Generational Difficulties; Or, The Fear of a Barren History.'. In *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue*, edited by Looser Devoney and Kaplan E. Ann, Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 83; Freeman, *Time Binds*, 60.

⁸¹ Warner, *Acts of Gaiety*, 107.

⁸² Sjöholm, *Kristeva and the Political*, 40.

of everything that puts the very possibility of unitary meaning to the test (such as the drive, the unnameable feminine, destructivity, psychosis)' in Kristeva's sense.⁸³

Postdramatic feminism: An oblique wave

Waves do not so much overtake and succeed/supersede one another as rise and fall again and again in the same place, transmitting energy in complicated ways.⁸⁴

Across these two case studies, I have explored the value of an oblique postdramatic feminism which is concerned with *affect* and *sensation* over narration, *function* over representation and in generating the possibility of new subjectivities over empowering already known or familiar identities. By honing in on performances in two different historical moments, I have discussed how feminist politics have become an increasingly overt concern for postdramatic practitioners interested in gender and sexuality. This now explicit engagement with feminist issues may be in part due to a resurfacing sense of urgency in a time where 'the faultlines of neoliberal capitalism have increasingly been revealed as gaping divides' and pressure to conform to prescriptive gender identities grows as conventional femininity is traded as a commodity. In the current moment where we are able to rejoice in a wide spectrum of theatre and performance forms dealing with feminist concerns as *Contemporary Theatre Review's* special edition on 'Feminisms Now' demonstrates,⁸⁵ I think it is important to acknowledge a feminist tendency in postdramatic practice: meaning both a strand of feminist theatre that can be called postdramatic and the value of postdramatic theory to understanding the feminism of a set of practices both historical and contemporary.

To do so I have found it necessary to reclaim and repurpose a strand of feminism first outlined forty years ago—exemplified here by Cixous and Kristeva—that has largely been rejected in contemporary feminist theatre scholarship. Returning to these ideas of feminist/feminine aesthetic politics has allowed me to articulate and analyse the ways in which postdramatic theatre practices, which are less concerned with either materialist analysis or empowerment through staking out positivist identity claims, can nonetheless be considered politically engaged. By drawing out key ways in which the feminine and its political potential could be theorised, I hope to open out further ways of thinking about how poststructuralist feminist theorists of difference (from this generation and beyond) can be used more broadly to understand feminism in the postdramatic turn over the last few decades.

⁸³ Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 10.

⁸⁴ Alison Wylie. 'Afterword: On Waves', in *Feminist Anthropology: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. P. L. Geller and M. K. Stocke (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 173.

⁸⁵ Gorman, Harris and Harvie, 'Feminisms Now', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 28, no 3.

My intention here is in part to redress the balance between primarily anglophone pragmatic materialism—whose ‘dominance foreclose[d] the domain of intelligibility for social and political dissent within theatre practice’ as Harris contended in 1999⁸⁶—and critical theory in feminist theatre studies not in order to replace one with the other but to allow for a wider appreciation of feminist politics in theatre-making.

While I have taken Pina Bausch’s work as a case study to start recovering the history of postdramatic tendencies in feminist theatre, I do not want to reify her work as a singular point of origin. A more extended survey of this field would also need to look at her contemporaries including the vocal performances of Meredith Monk, the textual experiments of Elfriede Jelinek and the earlier works of The Wooster Group amongst others. Furthermore, there are rich seams of influence to be mined in earlier women’s modernist experiments. The queer refusal of both form and normative gender identity in Gertrude Stein’s writing, for example, connect in provocative ways with postdramatic approaches. Nonetheless, to claim a postdramatic tendency importantly does not mean to invent a ‘movement’ where there is none. The practitioners I have tried to connect here do not share a deliberate agenda, primary influences or artistic pedagogy. Rather I suggest it is possible to recognise a network of connections between works and styles if not necessarily between practitioners. To do so may mean disposing of the tropes of genius and genealogy which in its heteronormative associations is troubling for feminists anyway. Instead, queer theory may facilitate a means by which to identify and navigate the links between practices, noting the modes of transnational and transtemporal affinity. This allows me to productively draw together a series of similar approaches to theatre making and gender across diverse practices that are not necessarily ‘related’ in ways that are immediately transparent or accounted for via a generational logic of inheritance and influence.

This leads me to suggest that feminist postdramatic theatre and performance needs to be recognised as doubly oblique: formally, these works share a kind of oblique approach to feminism as identified throughout this essay. Historically and collectively, they might be recognised as an oblique wave because of their tendency to lie at an angle to more readily recognised feminist waves and theatrical forms. It is interesting to note here then that when two ocean waves meet at an oblique angle they cause ‘cross seas’, which create new—often hazardous—movements on the ocean surface. The resulting wave formations are not unified

⁸⁶ Harris, *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 79.

or unidirectional but they do produce recognisable patterns. This is a useful metaphor for approaching the connectivities between feminism and postdramatic theatre. Here we can recognise the patterns that emerge across the totality of the ocean while remaining attuned to the singularity of each wave-formation. This opens up the possibility of a valuable encounter between feminism and postdramatic practices, allowing for an expansion of feminist theatre scholarship into what might come to be recognised as feminist postdramatic theatre.