Theatre and Psychoanalysis, or Carl Jung on Martin Crimp's Stage: "100 Words"

Solange Ayache

OpenEdition Journals

Sillages critiques

10 | 2009
Artifice
Partie II : Théâtre

Theatre and Psychoanalysis: or Jung on Martin Crimp's Stage: “100 Words”

Solange Ayache
https://doi.org/10.4000/sillagescritiques.1838

Résumés

English Français
This article explores Martin Crimp’s use of Jung’s word association test in his masterpiece *Attempts on Her Life* (1997). In scenario 11, the playwright reproduces the list of one hundred stimulus words devised in 1909 by the psychoanalyst to test a patient’s mental health. Our point is that this “collage” of disarticulated words inserted by Crimp into the dialogue of three anonymous art critics ironically emphasizes the absence of the main character, the suicidal artist, and her refusal to undergo “treatment.” Anne’s posthumous silence both ignores the psychoanalyst’s trigger words and mocks the critics’ conflicting opinions. By foiling these “attempts on her life”, her aphasia reflects the vain pretensions of language and points both at the failure of the scientific purpose of psychoanalysis and at the “pointlessness” of the intellectual debate. Crimp’s collage itself is a criticism of the temptation to make uncompromising statements about one’s life and motives. While the critics’ debate ends in disagreement, the scientific voice faces its own loneliness and becomes a pure dramatic event. A similar resort to psychoanalysis and psychiatry can be found in Sarah Kane’s *4.48 Psychosis* (2002): in these “theatres of the mental space,” both authors turn either the clinical voice of the doctor or the neurotic voice of the patient into a self-referential source of vocal stage poetry displaying the bare materiality of words and the disapearance of the subject.

Cet article sur la pièce majeure de Martin Crimp, *Atteintes à sa vie* (1997), propose une étude du scénario 11 en regard du test d’association de mots créé par Carl G. Jung en 1909. Récupérée et insérée au cours du dialogue qui prend place entre trois critiques d’art anonymes, la liste de cent mots « inducteurs » mise au point par le psychanalyste pour évaluer la santé mentale de ses patients fait ici l’objet d’un « collage » textuel qui souligne ironiquement l’absence du personnage principal, l’artiste suicidaire, et son refus de se soumettre à tout « traitement » psychanalytique. Le silence posthume d’Anne à la fois contrarie les appels lexicaux du médecin et moque l’affrontement verbeux des critiques. En contrecarrant ces « atteintes à sa vie » par la parole, l’aphasie de l’artiste morte reflète en creux les vaines prétentions du langage et pointe du doigt l’échec des ambitions scientifiques de la psychanalyse autant que la vanité du débat intellectuel. Ce collage permet à Crimp de critiquer la tentation d’émettre des jugements catégoriques sur la vie et les motifs de « l’Autre ». Tandis que le débat des critiques s’achève sur le même désaccord initial, la voix clinique est renvoyée à sa propre solitude et devient un pur événement dramatique. On trouve le même ressort à la psychanalyse et à la psychiatrie dans *4.48 Psychose* de Sarah

Kane : dans ces « théâtres de l'espace mental », les deux auteurs transforment la voix – que ce soit celle du médecin ou celle du patient – en un langage auto-référentiel, source d'une poésie de la scène qui met à nue la matière sonore des mots et fait écho à la dissolution existentielle du sujet.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : 4.48 Psychose, absence, Atteintes à sa vie, auto-référentiel, Carl G. Jung, cent mots, collage, espace mental, hypotexte, langage, Martin Crimp, mise en abyme, nombres, parodie, performance, poésie, psychanalyse, psychiatrie, psychopoétique, Sarah Kane, scénario, silence, stimulus, test d'association de mots, théâtre, traitement, voix
Keywords: 4.48 Psychosis, absence, Attempts on Her Life, Carl G. Jung, collage, hypotext, language, Martin Crimp, mental space, mise en abyme, numbers, one hundred words, parody, performance, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, psychopoetics, Sarah Kane, scenario, self-referential, silence, stage poetry, stimulus, theatre, treatment, voice, word association test

Texte intégral

I have consciously developed two methods of dramatic writing: one is the making of scenes in which characters enact a story in the conventional way - for example my play THE COUNTRY - the other is a form of narrated drama in which the act of story-telling is itself dramatised - as in ATTEMPTS ON HER LIFE, or FEWER EMERGENCIES, recently produced by Vienna's Burgtheater. In this second kind of writing, the dramatic space is a mental space, not a physical one.1

1 "A mental space": this is how Martin Crimp, recently interviewed about his latest productions on the occasion of the première of *Into the Little Hill* (2006),qualifies the new dramatic space he inaugurated in his masterpiece, *Attempts on Her Life* (1997). Composed of "17 scenarios for the theatre," the play offers a collection of variations on the multiple lives of Anne, a ghostlike and polymorphous character who never appears on stage and whose voice is never heard. This group of short pieces shows with striking irony the language's "attempts" to define, grasp and "voice" the absolute spectrality, the shady emptiness of a woman with no existence of her own. This character, or rather this "absence of character,"2 nevertheless constitutes the main object of the dialogues. Anne invades the language as a multi-faceted referent, fragmented and diffracted through the speakers' voices which objectivate, manipulate and appropriate her problematic subjectivity. She thus functions as a productive dramatic device; her physical invisibility, and more generally her existential abstraction allow the play to explore the infinite potentialities of "all the things that Anne can be,"3 although her mysterious "mental space" remains unreachable and impenetrable.

2 Scenario 11 is one of the most interesting fragments of the play, as it exhibits *a contrario* the disturbed "mindscapes" of the speakers who try to determine and embrace Anne's psychology. In the eight pages of this dialogue, paradoxically called "Untitled (100 words)," Crimp explores a dramaturgy that not only plays with the status of words and the functions of language, but also resorts to psychology, dramatising 20th century discoveries in the field of psychoanalysis. The unknown personality of Anne, the suicidal artist, is replaced in this fragment by the contrasted personal reactions of the three anonymous art critics who discuss her tragic performance and wonder whether she should undergo psychiatric treatment. As they comment on her subversive artwork, which consists of a postmodern installation of "the various objects associated with [her] attempts to kill herself," the speakers' unconscious complexes spring from their words and use of language. Their anonymous voices and undetermined lines – which remind us of Elfriede Jelinek's "Sprachflächen" (expanses of speech, or juxtaposed language surfaces) where the voice is the only physical presence implied by the text – only express their own projected psychological disturbances, which obviously pervade their impassioned dialogue as they try to analyse Anne's mental state.

Resorting to dramatic irony, Crimp thus makes the *phonè* the vehicle of the *psyche*, although the *psyche* in question turns out to be that of the speakers rather than of Anne.

3 But the polyphonic, ironic structure of this fragment, as well as its "psycho-phonetic" dimension, also result from the implicit hypotext that Crimp used, reproduced, and fragmented in his text and which should be related to psychology. In addition to the three speakers' interlocution, the dialogue itself is indeed regularly interrupted by the recurring appearance of a depersonalised, spectral voice, which is directly extracted from the field of psychoanalytical experimentation. However, the one hundred words, unrelated to each other, that are uttered by the blank voice and divided by Crimp into five series of twenty units, at first seem to come out of the blue. This enigmatic voice breaking the silence may indeed appear like an inner voice expressed on stage, a mental voice babbling out loud at random:

Silence. In the silence:

Ink

Angry

Needle

to swim

journey

blue

lamp

[…]

4 These puzzling lists of very basic words, incongruously integrated into the "texture" of the scenario, beg the question of their interpretation – beyond the semantic simplicity of their immediate signification. Elisabeth Angel-Perez, Heiner Zimmermann, and Aleks Sierz, who have all commented on this scenario in particular, agree to consider this inclusion of lexical utterances as "inserts of *poésie concrète*."4 Indeed, the scenario's structure as well as its artistic value are determined by the poetical opposition between two dramatic *praxeis* : the *logos*, actualised in the conventional intersubjective form of the critics' dialogue (and even in the classical form of the intellectual debate), and the *lexis*, exposed in the new form of this impersonal – or depersonalised – soliloquy. This list forms a vertical row on the right-hand side of the page that contrasts with the dialogue's horizontality and linearity: like the combination, in linguistics, of the paradigmatic axe and the syntagmatic axe, in this scenario the *lexis* and the *logos* seem to exhibit the decomposition of language and to point at its artificiality, displaying the spectacle of words.

5 But it would be incorrect to consider these lexical inserts only as free-floating words punctuating the art critics' discussion. In spite of their decisive reflexive function, since they also obviously offer a metapoetical illustration of the very object of the dialogue (art), they cannot be reduced to their poetical effectiveness. For this collection of a hundred words is not an original textual material, although its manipulation by Crimp as a dramatic experiment is absolutely avant-garde. This list actually was (and may still be) uttered and used in real life in a very specific context of utterance – a scientific one: it is one of the linguistic tools devised by psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung in order to test a subject's mental health. In an interview with Sierz in May 2005, Katie Mitchell, who directed the first performance of *Attempts on Her Life* in Milan, recalls the list's original context of utterance:

> The 'Untitled (100 words)' scenario draws, in part, on Jung's list of one hundred words. He would say a word, ask his patients to free-associate, timing their responses with a stopwatch, and he would then note any disturbed associations, or those which took a longer time. This word game revealed the patient's unconscious. In our production, the list of words was said very quietly by one of

the cast. The effect was that this innocent list, when juxtaposed to the noise generated by the critics, had a significant emotional force.5

6 It is this hint that we would like to explore further. We thus have to deal with a literal "collage"6 of a ready-made speech that belongs to the scientific sphere, and more precisely to the psychoanalytical field of clinical examination. This lexical series is an exact copy of the pre-existing list of one hundred "inducer words" or "trigger words" of the 1908 form that was elaborated by Jung himself for his word-association test. This list was presented by Jung at the first lecture he gave at Clark University in Massachusetts in September 1909, in which he explained his method – using one hundred words to identify abnormal patterns of response in order to determine personality traits and infer psychological complexes, along with intellectual and emotional deficiencies.7 On the basis of one's linguistic responses, this psychological test aims at establishing the "feeling-toned complexes" of a subject; that is to say, his or her "psychic fragments which [...] disturb the conscious performance," producing "disturbances of memory and blockages in the [normal] flow of associations."8 As neurologist and psychiatrist Dr. Robert Winer phrases it, these mental "abnormalities" are thus what "the examiner observes through the patient's reactions to the verbal presentation of one-hundred (100) stimulus-words." 9

7 Reproduced as a tacit quotation and fragmented into five sequences embedded at different points in the dialogue, this document has been appropriated and recycled by Crimp as a rich hypotext. The poetical value of these words, which are a reproduction of a (so-called) scientific pre-existing material, is secondary and consequent to this process of decontextualisation and abstraction. Considering that this psychoanalytical object has been turned into vocal material, our point is that Crimp's new dramaturgy of the "mental space" corresponds to what we could call "a psycho-poetics of the voice."

8 Jung's own approach can help us to understand the playwright's project and the light that is placed on the entire scenario by the use Crimp makes of this list. In the psychoanalyst's word association method, the word is given a decisive psychological value and efficiency. Jung's test in context occurs between two persons, patient and doctor: after each word uttered by the examiner, the test subject is expected to "answer as quickly as possible the first word that occurs to [his/her] mind."10 The words chosen by Jung are thus used as "stimulus," while the words with which the subject responds are regarded as "complex indicators."11 Here are Jung's comments on his own choice of the one hundred words reproduced by Crimp: "This formulary has been constructed after many years of experience. The words are chosen and partially arranged in such a manner as to strike easily almost all complexes of practical occurrence. As shown by the above formulary, there is a regular mixing of the grammatical qualities of the words. This, too, has its definite reasons."12 Although he does not explain the reasons for the order he chose for the words – the repetition of the schema noun/adjective/noun/verb twenty-five times – Jung asserts the psychological relevance and scientific rationality of the logic that determined the grammatical pattern of his list.

9 The first individual who actually uttered this list of words, given its original context of appearance, was thus Jung himself. In the communication situation which is expected in this test, this list is meant to be uttered by a clinical voice and addressed to a subject in the definite circumstances required by psychoanalysis. Its primary function is to provoke or "stimulate" the psychological reactions of the addressee for an analytical, and then therapeutic, purpose. In scenario 11, however, there is absolutely no verbal reaction to these utterances of stimulus words. By borrowing and extracting Jung's list from its original or traditional context of appearance, Crimp decontextualised the lexical series and did not reproduce the test's experimental conditions – in other words, the typical situation of utterance which was expected and which included the subject's variable responses. Crimp has reproduced Jung's list of trigger words *in abstracto*: because they do not enter the specific situation of utterance programmed by this lexical speech, they do not perform their original function of stimulus. These lexical utterances thus sound like implicit performatives that turn out to be inefficient; the presupposed

clinical voice implicitly attempts to command the subject to give a verbal response, thus trying to perform a tacit imperative or directive act, but the conditions required by the procedure are not fulfilled.

10 As regards the expected situation of enunciation, the act of communication, in Crimp's scenario, is thus a failure. The examiner's speech acts immediately vanish into nullity under the unalterable silence of the potential addressee – possibly Anne. It leaves the clinical voice, whose discourse is pre-defined, on its own, facing only the silence that impassively echoes each of these vain utterances. The words occur "in the silence" and vanish back into the silence, which is physically materialised in the text by the blanks on the left-hand side of the page. There is one lonely utterer and no addressee, which leaves the pseudo-clinician's voice inefficient, dysfunctional. Yet despite the invalidation of their stimulus function Jung's words are still being uttered, quite mechanically, as if the dehumanised clinician had not noticed the disappearance of the test subject. This creates an anxious feeling of absurdity: death, absence, dehumanisation, and mechanisation are the spectral threats that impregnate this soliloquy.

11 In scenario 11, the silence thus sounds more evocative and significant than the words; similarly, as the interlocutor's absence involves the test's failure, the unanswered stimulus words point at the vanishing of the subject. Yet the lexical utterances constitute a continued attempt to communicate. If Anne were present and responded to the linguistic stimulation by uttering the words she would associate with the list, then this lexical exchange would actually stand for a verbal exchange, that is to say, another kind of dialogue. We would have a dialogue between clinician and patient embedded within the critics' dialogue – a lexical, paratactic dialogue breaking into (or parallel to, or alternating with) a logical, syntactic dialogue. Dr. Winer recalls that for Jung himself, the word association test "simulates what happens in actual dialogue":

> Jung suggested that one consider the Association Test as reproducing the psychic situation of a dialogue between two people within which lays the possibility of being able to objectively evaluate it. "Instead of questions in the form of definite sentences, the subject is confronted with the vague, ambiguous, and therefore disconcerting stimulus words, and instead of allowing an answer, he has to react with a single word. Through accurate observation of the reaction disturbances, facts are revealed and registered which are often assiduously overlooked in ordinary discussion, and this enables us to discover things that point to the unspoken background, to those states of readiness, or constellations... [which] also happens in every discussion between two people" (Jung, 1969a, par. 199).13

12 For Jung himself, the utterances of stimulus words stand for a set of implicit, elliptical questions, which remain unanswered and abort in Crimp's scenario because of the presence-absence or spectral "lack" of the addressee (Anne). The language of the Word not only coexists with the language of the Verb, but tends to be substituted for it. For Jung, the *lexis* is apt to replace the *logos*, as a "single word" can symbolically but efficiently act as a whole articulated sentence. This suggests that the syntax is no longer necessary: the *logos* turns out to be useless and superfluous. This disqualification is highlighted by Crimp in the dialogue between the irreconcilable critics, which displays and aporetically ends on an unresolved disagreement which announces Rebecca's reproach to Corinne in *The Country* (2002): "The more you talk, the less you say."14 The word is actually even more significant than the sentence, since, according to Jung, its psychological concentration in terms of significance – its emotional resonance – draws attention to what is both 'overlooked' and 'unspoken' in every ordinary discussion.

13 Here, though, this lexical dialogue is spectral just as Anne is spectral and because Anne is spectral: there only remain the phatic clues and the hints of a virtual dialogue that was not performed, the vestiges of a potential exchange that did not occur.15 The spectral echoes of Anne's silent voice turn the "trigger words" into self-referential poetical signs. This is how Crimp turns Jung's test into a poetical attempt to communicate, which testifies both to the presence of a witness trying to grasp Anne's

psychology and to the absence of a subject who definitely escapes any characterisation – any (psycho)analysis. The absence of Anne who, as a potential patient, does not respond to the clinician's voice thus indicates the failure of any "psychiatric treatment," although this is precisely what the conservative critic would have wanted for Anne. But her silence and non-reaction to the stimulus words sound like a critical refusal to submit to any clinical language. Avoiding not only verbal language (she is absent from the critics' dialogue) but also lexical language (she does not submit to the psychiatrist's test), Anne's silence turns out to be her way of saying "your help oppresses me," which seems to confirm the supportive critic's interpretation.

14 Because Jung assumed that every linguistic response could be analysed in terms of psychological normality or abnormality, sanity or insanity, and the reactions categorised according to a strict classification, his word association method aroused controversy. Crimp's integration of Jung's list is thus ironical and self-critical as regards the hypotext. To the scientific pretension of Jung's polemical analytical method, he opposes the silence of the subject's non-response, which prevents Anne from being once again the object of another analytical discourse, another narrative, another voice trying to investigate and interpret her secret subjectivity and the meanders of her psychology (her "constellations"). As in scenario 1, in which the unanswered messages left on Anne's answering-machine are evidence of communication failures – since she never answers the phone and thus does not "react" to the "stimulus" – here, too, each utterance, each trigger word is itself an indicator; not of a complex, but of a phatic attempt that has been disappointed by Anne's silence. Whereas Jung's list was almost dramatized in the communicative context of his psychoanalytical test and given the value and effectiveness of a fruitful exchange, in Crimp's scenario Anne's aphasia implies and achieves a paradoxical form of dedramatisation. Whereas in Jung's test the *lexis* stands for a dialogue, in Crimp's text it no longer functions as an exchange. No more stimulation, no more simulation, the verbal simulacrum no longer works; we can only consider metaphorically that the *lexis* talks with Anne's eloquent silence and becomes theatrical by itself.

15 For Crimp does not only endow Jung's hundred words with a phatic function. Given the test's disqualification, the effectiveness of the utterances has to be found elsewhere, and the self-referential value the words are given by Anne's silence makes the blank voice appear like a pure, autonomous stage event. This abstraction or decontextualisation is precisely what gives the word its metapoetical dimension. Crimp, indeed, multiplies reversed mirror effects: *lexis* and *logos*, verbalisation and vocalisation, syntax and paratax, dialogue and soliloquy coexist and compete, offering a new scenario to dramatic language, in which the contraries ironically reflect each other. Just as Anne's artwork is compared to "a pure dialogue of objects," Crimp's text could be compared to a pure exhibition of fragments, a dismembered body. The disembodied blank voice uttering Jung's words is disconnected from the inner world (its dehumanisation evokes the vanishing of subjectivity) as well as it is isolated from the exterior world (its soliloquy reflects the disqualification of intersubjectivity). Similarly, the absence of syntax and the invalidation of referentiality in Jung's list deprive the *lexis* of those significant ligaments that could have related the words, these lexical bones, to each other or tied these isolated utterances to the speakers' lines in the dialogue. Gerhard Willert, who directed German-language productions of *The Treatment* and *Attempts on Her Life*, is right to point out that Crimp"boils his material down to the bone until it reveals its structure."16 As if the lexical fragments of Jung's list exhibited the broken skeleton of language, the isolated words reproduced by Crimp express the ideas of discontinuity, dismemberment, and isolation of the self. The dislocation of the play into a plurality of scenarios, the "collage" and recycling of various kinds of speeches and styles within the scenarios, and the polyphonic multiplication of voices that surround Anne's silence also symbolise this tragic dissolution on a larger scale.

Crimp's neomodernist collage of Jung's collected words also linguistically mimics Anne's postmodern collage of various objects. Indeed, both Anne and Crimp resort to

ready-mades that they decontextualise and recontextualise, and both produce a new text(ure), whether it deals with objects from the empiric world turned into artistic materials by Anne, or lexical tools for scientific experimentation turned into poetical objects by Crimp. The playwright's reflexive reproduction of Jung's collection of words mirrors, textually and orally, Anne's "juxtaposition of materials." And just as the body is dismembered in Anne's collage, language is dislocated in Crimp's collage; the ruins of language stand for the ruins of the body. We thus enter a playful system of metapoetical resonances and reverberation. Not only does the performance of the *lexis* indicate and display the death of the *logos*, but it also echoes ironically the dislocated objects (the "bones" that remain, the vestiges) of the destroyed body in Anne's performance. As a consequence, Anne's suicide and her infinite silence are symbolised and materialised by the immediate presence on stage of this dehumanised voice, and the performance of its soliloquy. The fragmentation of Anne's self is not verbalised by the *logos*, but vocalised through the *lexis*: the death of the artist, who is absent from the stage, is represented (reactualised as well as imitated) by the death of the syntax, which is absent from the soliloquy. The correspondences between the artist's act of self-destruction and the self-referentiality of the *lexis* thus enter into a circularity that is both tragic and playful. This spiral of equivalences finally displays Crimp's renewed poetics of the artifice, which is focused on the word's materiality.

17 Thus, by exposing the bits and pieces of her life in a "texture" that is representative of her "abused, almost Christ-like body," Anne tends to "evoke in the viewer an almost visceral reaction" (we find organic matter and bodily fluids such as blood, saliva, sperm, etc.); similarly, by composing a scenario that constitutes a piece but also consists of a patchwork of pieces (lexical, verbal, textual, and vocal pieces), Crimp, too, achieves "this return to viscerality, clearly reminiscent of Artaud's theories"[17] that is frequent on the contemporary British stage. This viscerality takes the form of the word's "radical pornography" and its pure expressivity. With Jung's list, the performance of the word achieves a sort of linguistic retrogenesis; language seems to regress to a virtual primitive state, the *lexis* to refer to an embryo-language. In parallel, the emphasis is put on the emergence of the voice as a theatrical event: the living flesh of the sound incarnates the utterance as a dramatic phenomenon. Thus, the "spectacle" of the *lexis* (the word), the *glossa* (the musicality of the language), and the *phonè* (the voice), precisely constitutes Crimp's specific dramaturgy, which is not only a verbal theatre, but also and above all a vocal, almost glossolalic theatre. This linguistic conciliation of the *logos* and the *lexis* constitutes his "revolutionary attempt to reactivate a verbal theatre" and to invent a dramatic language "of the poetic sort: a theatre based on the necessity to create different, almost artaudian, missions for words (chosen for their "vibratory" potential), a theatre emerging from the music of the signifiers, ultimately a theatre of voices" by which he manages, unlike Anne, "to escape the ethical and aesthetic aporia postmodernism walled itself in."[18]

18 This *mise en abyme* of Anne's performance by Crimp's collage of Jung's list thus has ironic effects. Instead of pointing out the psychological features of the self, Jung's list of unanswered words now indicates the very *loss* of the self. And this loss of the subject is as existential as it is psychological. Thus, the psychoanalyst's test recycled by Crimp reflexively points at its own "pointlessness." It is the vanity of any psychoanalytical attempt, the failure of language to grasp the subjective *psychè* of a human being, that are both playfully and tragically underlined by this lonely voice that reflects its own loneliness.

19 The emptiness of the language, the absence of the subject, the aphasia of the voice, the void of the space, the blank of the page, the disappearance of the body: Crimp multiplies reflections of this loss echoed by the vibrancy of silence, ironically wondering if we are not "in a world in which theatre itself has died." But Crimp's dramaturgy gives it an original rebirth. If the *logos* and the *ego* tend to vanish, broken into vocal and material fragments, these fragments are, at the same time, recollected, recycled, "recollés," and the "pure dialogue of objects" that they finally form "tells" us (in fact, informs and performs) the death but also the survival and the rebirth. The word, the

subject, the voice remain; their forms are even renewed. Jung's lexical signs are thus metapoetically objectivated just as Anne's tragic tools are artistically exhibited. His words are no longer stimulus just as Anne's objects are no longer tools. Dysfunction and invalidation are the fertile soil for recreation.

20 Crimp's recycling of Jung's list thus has a decisive poetical significance. As we have seen, the disarticulated *lexis*, which borrows its regularity from Jung's scientific method and experimental language, both coexists and contrasts with the logic of the dialogue – between eloquence and logomachy. Whereas the critics' articulated *logos* submits to the constraints of verbalisation and communication (referentiality, signification, non-contradiction, etc.), and furthermore obeys the rhetorical and argumentative logic of the intellectual debate, the hundred words offer *a contrario* another kind of rational progression that relies on the metric and rhythm of numbers – that is, on the pure form and materiality of language. In spite of their apparent fortuitous and meaningless succession, and although their asyntactic enumeration evokes a strong feeling of absurdity, the lexical utterances follow an order that is not accidental and arbitrary but displays numerical constancy. In these five sequences of twenty words, each divided into five groups of four words (noun/adjective/noun/verb), the lexical goes hand in hand with the numeral; enumeration has become a substitute for signification. The sphere of language, reduced to its minimalist components, has passed from the world of the sentence (*logos*) to the world of the word (*lexis*) and even flirts with the world of the figure (*arithmos*). The word is almost turned into a figure, just as the form tends to eradicate the process of signification since self-referential logic has replaced referential logic. Crimp's collage thus constitutes what we could call, with Elisabeth Angel-Perez, a "neomodernist" linguistic attempt to renew languages, reconciling in this case the human sciences with dramatic poetry.

21 Crimp's concern for figures, crystallised in scenario 11, is also noticeable at various other levels – first of all in the division of the play into seventeen scenarios. As Aleks Sierz points out, "Finally, this play's form also flirts with numerology: Crimp says, about the number of scenarios, 'Seventeen is a prime number and with a prime number you never quite fathom things out.'"19 The specific place of scenario 11 is in fact geometrically relevant, since it divides the play into the proportion of the golden section.20 This specific centre formed by scenario 11 highlights its unique status and perhaps its prevalence over the others. Crimp's creative dynamic, which combines a lexico-arithmetic language and the poetical recycling of a textual "ready-made," illustrates his neomodernist search for constraints. He himself declares: "I'm just always looking for new rules, I'm looking for constraints, looking for constraints all the time, and it's the constraints which will let the material be created by me. It's the constraints that I need."21 His aesthetic of textual recycling constitutes one of his most resourceful ways of exploiting this poetics of the constraint. As a specific form of intertextuality, the collage involves polyphonic games that are all the more relevant on the dramatic stage, and that play a decisive role in what we can call Crimp's "theatre of the voice". In *Attempts on Her Life*, and scenario 11 in particular, Crimp's reproduction (cloning) of a pre-existing "textual phagocyte," as well as his poetical "flirting with numerology," can be related to his nostalgia for the old fixed poetical forms: "It would be lovely if there were established forms as there were at the end of the nineteenth century. With each piece of work you have to find your own structure."22

22 In scenario 11, the so-called unfailing rationality of psychoanalytic experimentation that he mocks also allows Crimp both to coin a new poetical structure and to renew the dramatic resort to psychology. The movement by which this list of words is endowed with a poetical and artistic value corresponds to the transformation of Jung's *test* into Crimp's *text*. For, as we have seen, Crimp does not simply refer to Jung's psychoanalytical method as an instrument for "characterization," he first manipulates the textual object to make a poetical voice emerge from clinical material. He extracts the text from its original context of appearance and diverts it from its primary purpose. Crimp recycles the linguistic material of Jung's method – the text of the test – by renewing and shifting its original function, thus turning it into a poetical object, and

this second-hand material opens the hypotextual ready-made to new significances and resonances. Jung's list of a hundred words, which is reactivated, remotivated, and recontextualised, undergoes an ironic re-creative manipulation: the psychoanalytical object is submitted to a poetical "treatment," the clinical voice itself is "treated." Denouncing "the outmoded conventions of dialogue and the so-called characters lumbering towards the embarrassing *dénouements* of the theatre," Crimp not only mocks the naïve artificiality of the psychological drama but also points out Jung's own scientific pretension in his approach to language and psychology, which is no longer used naively to create realistic characters, but resorted to ironically and self-critically. The playwright's self-conscious use of artifice – through the technique of collage and the ready-made – denounces the limits of psychoanalysis in real life, while also using it as a new dramatic resource.23

23 This process of poeticisation of psychoanalysis is what can finally "restore our faith"24 in language. Jung's purely formal use of grammar – since the words are chosen for their grammatical nature *in abstracto* and not for their grammatical function in context – allows Crimp to display the structural artificiality of language as well as what Derrida calls the"pure expressivity"25 that can spring from an evocative use of the *lexis*. Like a second layer of language embedded in the language itself – which reminds us of Beckett's attempt to "bore one hole after another into [language], until what lurks behind it – be it something or nothing – begins to seep through"26 – these lexical sequences finally endow the language of the scenario with a new depth and give vocality a new dimension, a new resonance. Crimp's poeticisation of this illogical language derived from the field of psychoanalysis can thus be related to what George Steiner calls the contemporary development of "sublanguages" or "antilanguages" – those non-verbal languages of the *praxis*, such as mathematical language, non-figurative art, and concrete music, by which the world of the word finds itself reduced.27 Artistic collage, mathematical enumeration, musical rhythm: Crimp's list is indeed closer to these "sublanguages" than to verbal language. The only certainty left seems to lie in this formal, arithmetic approach to the *lexis* as a vestige of language. This reassuring reliability given to language by the predicable, scientific pattern that Jung's words follow offers a renewed possibility of trusting words, at least as signifiers. This is the only possibility left after and beyond the invalidation of referentiality, the loss of the meaning, the deconstruction of the subject, the failure of communication, the threat of silence, and the absolute loneliness of the voice, which are generally acknowledged to be symptomatic of our post-traumatic society. This alternation of polyphony, soliloquy, and silence illustrates Crimp's theatre of the voice that flirts with the "unvoiceable."

24 The *lexis* of Jung's list thus has a decisive testimonial function in Crimp's collage. It testifies to the post-traumatic loss of the *logos* and the dissolution of the subject, but also to the optimistic revival of the word as a productive poetical vestige, displaying its pure expressivity. The clinico-poetical voice of Jung's "test" precisely "testifies" to Anne's irreducible absence; in its loneliness, it is what we would call, in the terms of Maurice Blanchot, an "impossible witness – witness of the impossible,"28 because Anne's sacrifice can neither be verbalised nor lexicalised but belongs to the unvoiceable. This vocal testimony of the sacrifice allows us to hear Anne's very silence. Crimp's "spectro-poetics"29 of the voice thus corresponds to an aesthetic of the contrast or "negative" – "the words we use are just the shadow of a language that we've lost."30 The white space on the page, the holes inside the language indicate the place where Anne's spectre lies, where her voice hides, where the trauma and the sacrifice enclose her. The silences and the blanks are the gaps where the absence is anchored and where Anne's eloquent aphasia satirically points at the speakers' vain emphasis. The voice and the words are the vestiges that surround this absence and perhaps even resurrect Anne's presence within another form: "It is through the words, between the words, that one sees and hears."31 Thus, the blanks have a critical function that is not totally negative; and although Crimp's dramaturgy flirts with a "literature of the Unword," it definitely remains a literature of the word, even though this may be the single remaining word.

25 Crimp's borrowing of Jung's lexical list in scenario 11 thus indicates that the playwright is resorting to all that language can be to produce both poetical and ironical effects, in a dramatic attempt that can no longer make a naïve use of language, but a necessarily critical, and even self-critical, parody of discourses. Crimp's new writing is political: it displays a deconstructive, and eventually parodical recycling of psychology, and first of all, of the naïve discourses in psychoanalysis and characterisation. This is all the more important because Anne's state of mind in scenario 11 is actually questioned by the art critics, and especially by the conservative speaker who suggests that she "should've been admitted not to an art school but to a psychiatric unit. [...] A mental hospital. Somewhere where she could receive treatment." The main character in Crimp's previous play, precisely entitled *The Treatment* (1995), is also called Anne and is already a kind of schizophrenic woman who is eventually dispossessed of her own language and silenced by the drama producers who attempt to appropriate her voice and finally recycle and dramatise her story for the stage.

26 Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis*, which was written one year after Crimp's *Attempts on Her Life* premiered, was deeply inspired by Crimp's play and undoubtedly by scenario 11 in particular, as Graham Saunders has suggested.32 Kane, too, blurs the speakers' identities, and similarly plays on the vocal ambiguity between the main voice – a woman who is mentally ill and undergoing treatment in a psychiatric hospital – and the voice of her doctor. Kane also integrates into her play the young woman's responses to a psychological test; on two occasions, the main voice utters not one hundred words but fifteen numbers, counting backwards according to the subtraction rule of a test that, in psychiatry, aims at evaluating a subject's concentration.33 These are not one hundred numbers, but 100 remains a key number since it is the starting point of the calculation. The first time the numbers are uttered, they come one after the other in a quite illogical and erratic way; they are isolated and spread out all over the page, which suggests the speaker's deep mental confusion. The second time, they follow each other with order, accuracy, and regularity, constituting an imperturbable vertical column on the left-hand side of the page. Although it obviously indicates that the young woman has eventually recovered her mind and provides evidence of her concentration, it may also announce her calm but desperate irrevocable resolution to make an attempt on her life.34 Whereas in scenario 11 the list of words could be uttered by the psychiatrist, in *4.48 Psychosis* the list of numbers is uttered by the test subject; this test subject could thus be Anne, precisely before her suicide, in the hypothesis of her being interned in a "psychiatric unit" as the conservative speaker suggests. In a way, we can imagine that in her posthumous play Kane resurrects the Anne of scenario 11; she gives her back the voice of which she is posthumously dispossessed by the art critics in *Attempts*, and lets us hear her tragic mental flow of speech while at the hospital before killing herself and vanishing into silence. Kane would thus be taking us retrospectively and introspectively back into Anne's mind – her "mental space" – at the time when she was still alive – the moments before she committed suicide. In *4.48*, the utterances of the psychological test are no longer pronounced by the clinical voice but by Anne herself, whose own algebraic speech becomes poetical. Whereas she remains silent in the face of the clinician's stimulus words in Crimp's scenario, she responds with numbers and faces a silent doctor in Kane's play. This reversal of voices is parallel to the mirror effect between both texts; if we place side by side the columns of words on the right-hand side of the page in scenario 11 and the column of numbers on the left-hand side of the page in *4.48*, we see Kane's response to Crimp's dramatic attempts, Anne's answers to Jung's test.

27 This symmetrical reading of scenario 11 and *4.48 Psychosis*, which seem to constitute a kind of intertextual diptych – even a triptych if we add *The Treatment* – proves the importance of scenario 11 not only within Crimp's dramaturgy, but on the contemporary British stage. The same poetics of constraint resorting to the arithmetical logic of numbers, the same poetics of the ready-made practising a textual recycling of a psychoanalytical test, the same psycho-poetics of the spectral voice performing the loss of the subject: Kane's last theatre obviously follows in Crimp's steps. What seems to be a decisive aspect of these new dramaturgies of the voice is the renewed resort to

psychology in the specific form of psychoanalysis in a post-traumatic society where the individual is ruined, fragmented, dislocated, and dismembered. Crimp's – and Kane's – poeticisation, through the technique of the collage, of scientific hypotexts, their poetical performance of the mathematical figure, and their dramatic "treatment" of textual objects found in psychoanalytical experiments and turned into vocal materials for the stage tend to achieve this new form of tragedy with a renewed faith in the power of the voice and its expressivity. In Kane's and Crimp's last plays – including Kane's *Crave* and Crimp's *Fewer Emergencies* – this avant-garde poetics of "drama-in-the-head" is taken to an extreme. However, during those psychoanalytical tests in scenario 11 as well as in *4.48*, the performance of a true dialogue remains problematic, and even seems impossible: the voices tend to stay enclosed in the loneliness of their "mental space." In scenario 11, the clinical – supposedly serious – voice of the lexical utterances becomes poetical because it is isolated, and its scientific authority is thus discredited and invalidated. Reciprocally, the young woman in Kane's last play is on her own while performing the psychoanalytical test; her soliloquy faces the silence and inefficiency of a spectral psychologist who has disappeared.

28 The poeticisation of psychoanalytical utterances is therefore linked to dedramatisation. What remains, then, are those tragic but recurring attempts to communicate, and the poetic resonance of a voice that testifies to what is left of the self and fights against the persistent spectral threat of a post-traumatic – "post-human" – definitive silence.

Bibliographie

ANGEL-PEREZ, Elisabeth. Introduction to *European Journal of English Studies* [*EJES*], vol. 7, n°1. 2003. 3-8

ANGEL-PEREZ, Elisabeth. "Spectropoétique de la scène : modalités du spectral dans quelques pièces du théâtre anglais contemporain" in Elisabeth Angel-Perez & Pierre Iselin eds. *La Lettre et le fantôme : Le spectral dans la littérature et les arts (Angleterre, Etats-Unis)*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris-Sorbonne, Sillages critiques. 2006. 145-157

ANGEL-PEREZ, Elisabeth. *Voyages au bout du possible – Les théâtres du traumatisme de Samuel Beckett à Sarah Kane* [*Voyages*]. Paris: Klincksieck, Angle ouvert. 2006. 211-212.

BECKETT, Samuel. "Letter to Axel Kaun." July 1937. In Ruby Cohn ed. *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*. Translated by M. Esslin. London: Calder. 1983.

BLANCHOT, Maurice. *Après coup. Le Ressassement éternel.* Paris: Editions de Minuit. 1983.

CRIMP, Martin. Interview by Ensemble Modern, "Into the Little Hill. A work for stage by George Benjamin and Martin Crimp." *Ensemble Modern Newsletter*. n°23. October 2006

CRIMP, Martin. Interview by Dominic Cavendish, "Martin Crimp Talks about Cruel and Tender." Theatre Voice website, http:/www.theatrevoice.com/tran_script/detail/?playID=343

CRIMP, Martin. Plays 1. London: Faber and Faber. 2000

CRIMP, Martin. Plays 2. London: Faber and Faber. 2005.

CRIMP, Martin. Scenario 11 "Untitled (100 words)" in Attempts On Her Life. London: Faber & Faber. 1997.

DERRIDA, Jacques. La voix et le phénomène [1967]. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. 2005.

JUNG, Carl G., The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche in Collected Writings, vol. 8. G. Adler, M. Fordham and H. Read eds. Princeton University Press. 1960-1983.LIVIO, Mario. The Golden Ratio: The Story of Phi, the World's Most Astonishing Number. New York: Broadway Books. 2002.

JUNG, Carl G.,"The Association Method" in *American Journal of Psychology*, 31. Translated by Dr. A. A. Brill. New York. 1910. 219-269.

KANE, Sarah. *4.48 Psychosis*. London: Faber and Faber. 2000.

SAUNDERS, Graham. *Love Me or Kill Me: Sarah Kane and the Theatre of the Extremes*. Manchester University Press. 2002.

SIERZ, Aleks. *The Theatre of Martin Crimp*. London: Methuen Drama. 2006. STEINER, George. *Language and Silence* [1967]. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1999.

WINER, Robert I. “Jung’s Word Association Test with Correlation from a Clinical Case.” February 20, 2005. 1. Robert Winer's neurocare website :

http://www.neurocareusa.com/Papers/2005jungswordassociationtestwithcorrelationfromaclinicalcase.pdf.

ZIMMERMANN, Heiner. “Martin Crimp, *Attempts on Her Life*: Postdramatic, Postmodern, Satiric?” in *Contemporary Drama in English* [*CDE*] “Discontinuities: Trends and Traditions in Contemporary Theatre and Drama in English” vol. 9. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier. 2002. 105-124

ZIMMERMANN, Heiner. “Images of a woman in Martin Crimp’s *Attempts on her Life*.” in *European Journal of English Studies* [*EJES*], vol. 7, n°1. 2003. 69-85.

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique
Solange Ayache, « Theatre and Psychoanalysis: or Jung on Martin Crimp's Stage: “100 Words” », *Sillages critiques* [En ligne], 10 | 2009, mis en ligne le 15 juin 2010, consulté le 22 avril 2022. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/sillagescritiques/1838 ; DOI : https://doi.org/10.4000/sillagescritiques.1838

Auteur

Solange Ayache
Université de Paris IV Sorbonne

Articles du même auteur

L’autre scène dans *The Three Birds* de Joanna Laurens (2000) : enjeux dramatiques de la réécriture d’un mythe [Texte intégral]
Paru dans *Sillages critiques*, 18 | 2014

De la mise au silence à la prise de parole : la voix féminine de Martin Crimp à Sarah Kane [Texte intégral]
Paru dans *Sillages critiques*, 16 | 2013

Droits d’auteur