

Listening to the Silences of Kay Sage

Abstract

Through close analysis of two of her Surrealist one-act plays, this essay aims to introduce readers to the under-researched written work of Kay Sage and highlight the originality of her approach to gender, theatre and silence. In two of her plays, *Chateau de Chemillieu* and *Failure to Discover*, silence is depicted as a visceral and alien presence that intrudes on the ordinary experiences of Sage's characters. These presences are recognisable, conforming to the mythology around ghosts and spiritualism, but also unnerving in their refusal to melt away into the background. These depictions of silence as a powerful and emotive presence illustrate her belief in communicative possibilities beyond the conventional constraints of the verbal world. Furthermore, her work explores the ways in which her female characters are silenced, engaging with the complex gendered politics of the Surrealist movement.

Kay Sage, as a female, American Surrealist painter, occupies an unusual position within the Surrealist movement and despite the originality of her work and her role in helping the core members of Surrealism flee to New York during the Second World War, she remains an elusive figure in contemporary discussion about this period. There are three distinct phases to Sage's artistic life: her life prior to her first encounter with Surrealism, her life after first encountering Surrealist paintings, including that of her husband Yves Tanguy, and her life after his death. Sage spent much of her childhood travelling across Europe with her mother.¹ As a result she was multilingual and had greater attachments to Europe than her homeland. In 1925 Sage married an Italian prince and became the new Princess of San Faustino.² However, she did not take to married life and between 1934-35 she separated from her husband, this separation was, at least in part, due to a realisation that 'in order to have a career in art . . . leaving her husband was something she must do'.³ Even at this early stage in Sage's development as an artist, it is clear that her understanding of herself as an artist was a deeply gendered experience.

¹ Judith Suther, *A House of Her Own: Kay Sage Solitary Surrealist*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) 3.

² Stephen Robeson Miller, *Kay Sage: The Biographical Chronology and Four Surrealist One-Act Plays*, (New York: Gallery of Surrealism, 2011) 21.

³ Miller, *Kay Sage: The Biographical Chronology*, 23.

As will be discussed later, Sage's gender continued to colour her engagement with her artwork and, in particular, her relationship to Surrealism throughout her life. Up until this point Sage had not taken her artistic studies seriously and had not developed her own artistic style, but this changed in 1936 when Sage saw her first Surrealist painting and travelled to London to attend the *International Surrealist Exhibition* where she first encountered the work of Yves Tanguy.⁴

This encounter with Surrealism proved transformative for Sage who then moved to Paris and started to produce her own Surrealist paintings in earnest⁵. Suther illustrates the seriousness with which Sage dedicated herself to Surrealism, stating that Sage was 'not suited to or interested in playing the role of muse or handmaiden for the male Surrealists; she had private income and artistic ambitions of her own'.⁶ Sage's early paintings are heavily influenced by the early, metaphysical work of Giorgio De Chirico and Yves Tanguy, the latter of which she began developing a personal relationship in 1939.⁷ Sage later organised for the two of them to relocate together to America due to the outbreak of the Second World War and further helped other artists to flee Europe during this time, using her position as an American citizen to help other members of her artistic community to flee the conflict.⁸ Sage and Yves were married in 1940 in a civil ceremony in Nevada⁹ and remained together until Tanguy's sudden death from a haemorrhage in January 1955, his death deeply affected Sage who made several suicide attempts before succeeding in taking her own life in January 1963.¹⁰

During her career as an artist Sage enjoyed some considerable success, with her paintings exhibited in the permanent collections of seminal North American museums such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York.¹¹ Stylistically, her artwork reflects a characteristically Surrealist interest in psychic phenomena as well as a tendency towards the representation of bleak architectural landscapes as exemplified by Sage's painting *Le Passage*.

4 Miller, *Kay Sage: The Biographical Chronology*, 23.

5 *Ibid*, 25.

6 Suther, *A House of Her Own*, pg. xv

7 Miller, *Kay Sage: The Biographical Chronology*, pp.26-31.

8 *Ibid*, pp. 37-39.

9 *Ibid*, 39.

10 *Ibid*, pp. 65-76.

11 *Ibid*, 67.

Belton reflects upon this image:

architecture offers no shelter but serves as a reminder that the material world, whether transformed by parapraxis or not, offers no security. Staring across the barren plain, this figure – the only one of its kind in her generally deserted oeuvre – has more in common with the religious yearning after the inexpressible and the profound alienation of women in the paintings of Casper David Friedrich.¹²

Although, as Belton references, many of Sage's paintings include no obviously human figures, in *Le Passage* we can observe Sage's interest in constructing complex architectural images and the resulting feeling of isolation that these landscapes espouse.

The tendency of her work to consider themes of isolation and alienation is deeply reflective of her own position in the Surrealist movement. Belton asserts that 'male Surrealists were almost totally indifferent to the work of women artists'.¹³ When André Breton first noticed the artwork of Kay Sage in the Salon des Surindépendants he commented that it 'must have been done by a man'.¹⁴ This serves to illustrate Sage's position as a female Surrealist at odds with the 'exclusively male construct of the artist'¹⁵ that Surrealism had adopted. Her work may have been innovative and original enough to gain Breton's attention, but his narrow conception of gender and false impressions of both her and her work illustrate a tendency within Surrealism to overlook the talents of women. Suther highlights that 'Like other women painters and writers associated with Surrealism, Sage managed to define her own sources of artistic empowerment – precisely because the group's definition of the artist did not include her'.¹⁶

Sage, like other female Surrealists, was never fully accepted into the inner sanctum of the Surrealists and this attitude towards Sage potentially contributes towards the lack of recognition that her work has endured. Furthermore, Sage suffered with comparison to her more renowned husband, as Suther describes 'it has been erroneously assumed that her major indebtedness was

12 Robert Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb: The Image of Woman in Male Surrealist Art*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995) 265.

13 Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb*, 253.

14 Suther, *A House of Her Own*, 253.

15 *Ibid*, 69.

16 *Ibid*, 70.

to her husband, the Surrealist painter Yves Tanguy'.¹⁷ Sage's relationship with her husband resulted in her work being directly compared with Tanguy's, often to her detriment. While some of her early work reflects an awareness of Tanguy's work, ultimately she developed her own distinctive style and this tendency to credit her husband with her talent affected the level of recognition she received as an artist.¹⁸

¹⁷ Suther, *A House of Her Own*, xv.

Nonetheless, Surrealism did offer female artists a new form of self-expression, as Chadwick indicates, Surrealism was 'the first modernist movement in which a group of women could explore female subjectivity and give form (however tentatively) to a feminine imaginary'.¹⁹ Regardless of their lack of inclusion within the movement, Surrealism offered female artists an aesthetic through which they could experiment with representations of femininity. Thematically, the works of female Surrealists differed slightly from their male counterparts, potentially a result of their isolation from the movement as a whole. Typically, the work produced by women affiliated with the Surrealists displays 'an affinity for the structures of fabulist narrative rather than shocking rupture, a self-consciousness about social constructions of femininity as surface and image, a tendency towards the phantasmic and oneiric, a preoccupation with psychic powers assigned to the feminine, and an embrace of doubling, masking, and/or masquerade'.²⁰

¹⁸ Miller, *Kay Sage: The Biographical Chronology*, 26.

¹⁹ Whitney Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors", *Mirror Images: Women Surrealism and Self-Representation*, ed. Whitney Chadwick, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) 5.

²⁰ Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors", 6.

²¹ Stephen Robeson Miller, "In the Interim: The Constructivist Surrealism of Kay Sage", *Surrealism and Women*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, Rudolph Kuenzli, Gloria Raaberg, (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1991) 130.

²² Miller, "In the Interim", 131.

²³ Ibid

Sage's work is no exception, not only does her painting *Le Passage* demonstrate an interest in interpretations of femininity, but additionally, her preoccupation with psychic phenomena is recognised by Robeson Miller who describes 'an unusual psychic event that was probably to play a role in her later Surrealist imagery'.²¹ He states that, in 1930, Sage was awoken by the noise of a 'roaring, crackling fire, as well as people shouting incoherently . . . She immediately ran to the window'²² however on her investigation she only encountered 'complete silence'.²³ She later learned from a priest that 'her experience matched exactly that of a French abbé of the sixteenth century'²⁴ and was persuaded that she had

'encountered the same supernatural forces that the abbé had'.²⁵ This preoccupation with the supernatural and its links to the experience of silence strongly characterises much of Sage's work, including her paintings such as *No One Heard Thunder*²⁶, *Margin of Silence*²⁷ and *I Walk Without Echo*²⁸, the names of which all reflect an enduring interest in silence.

However, the theme of silence is far more prominent in her written work than in her paintings. Suther remarks that, despite Sage's success as an artist, even after her death she remains almost completely 'unknown as a poet'²⁹ but, regardless of her obscurity, she was prolific writer.³⁰ Much like her paintings, 'Sage's poems are a distinctive expression of Surrealism. It is artificial, perhaps even impossible, to consider Sage the poet apart from Sage the painter'.³¹ Here Suther recognises the influence of Surrealism on Sage as a writer, but focuses solely on Sage's poetry, rather than addressing the entirety of Sage's written output. Alongside her poetry, Sage wrote several Surrealist one-act plays between 1939 and 1960, all of which have largely escaped public attention. The biographies of Judith Suther and Stephen Robeson Miller have gone a significant way in documenting Sage's life and her complex relationship with the Surrealist movement. In particular, Miller's translation of Sage's texts from the original French into English have increased the accessibility of her plays, a body of work that has often been overlooked.

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Robeson Miller, "In the Interim", 131.

²⁶ Miller, *Kay Sage: The Biographical Chronology*, 33.

²⁷ Ibid, 44.

²⁸ Ibid, 39.

²⁹ Judith Suther, "The Poetry of Kay Sage and French Surrealism", *Comparative Literature Studies* 23, no. 3 (1986) 235.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid, 236.

In the two plays, *Chateau de Chemillieu* (1939) and *Failure to Discover* (1956), Sage overtly explores the links between silence, isolation and uncanny psychic phenomena. Reflecting Sage's personal encounter with the supernatural, these texts illustrate an interest in ghostliness and spiritualism. However, her experience with the supernatural was also a confrontation with the silence that followed her apparent auditory hallucination. Consequently, for Sage, silence is a central component of encountering psychic forces. Chesney argues that the depiction of silence on stage is characteristic of 'a particular strand of late modernism'³², situating Sage amongst

a group of artists and writers who were participating in a wider project to engage with the representation of silence and voicelessness. Silence also holds a complicated place in Surrealist thinking, in his *First Surrealist Manifesto*, Breton describes how in his experiments with Surrealism he intended to create writing 'akin to spoken thought'.³³ This sets out the paradox of the Surrealist's position, to think is a silent and unconscious process, yet to create something from this silence and to give it a voice is to completely break the wall of silence that surrounds it. Giving a voice to silence is a concept that occupies much of Sage's plays, culminating in her use of ghostly, liminal presences on stage.

Silence is defined as a 'state or condition when nothing is audible; complete quietness or stillness; an absence of all sound or noise'.³⁴ However, linguistically silence is more complicated than a mere absence of noise. Instead, silence is recognised as a 'medium of communication whose processing requires more cognitive effort than speech'.³⁵ Here silence is characterised as a form of communication itself rather than simply an absence of sound. This has distinct implications for the inclusion of silence in theatre where, as Sontag discusses, 'Silence doesn't exist in a literal sense, however, as the experience of an audience. It would mean that the spectator was aware of no stimulus or that he was unable to make a response'.³⁶ In theatre therefore, the ability of a script to represent silence is limited. It would either be represented as a continuous absence of sound and movement, which has limited artistic possibilities, or would involve audience participation in order to represent the process of being silenced. To circumnavigate these difficulties, Sage envisions the voice of silence as a spectral figure, thereby allowing her to express silence as a concept with both communicative and aesthetic possibilities rather than merely an absence of meaning. Its presence allows Sage to comment on the nature of silence, its importance in communication and writing, as well as the power dynamics inherent in deciding who is silenced and who speaks. There are also significant political implications to the representation of silence and voicelessness. Sage's

³² Duncan McColl Chesney, "Silence Nowhen: Late Modernism, Minimalism and Silence in the Work of Samuel Beckett", *Currents in Comparative Romance Languages and Literatures*, edited by Tamara Alvarez-Detrell and Michael G. Paulson, (New York and Washington: Peter Lang AG International Academic Publishers, 2013) 105.

³³ André Breton, "First Surrealist Manifesto". *Theatre of the Avant-Garde, 1890-1950: A Critical Anthology*, Ed Robert Knopf and Bert Cardullo. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001) 369.

³⁴ Oxford English Dictionary Online, (Oxford University Press, 2000), "silence, n. and int."

³⁵ Adam Jaworski, *The Power of Silence: Social and Pragmatic Perspectives*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc, 1993)159.

³⁶ Susan Sontag, *Styles of Radical Will*, (London: Penguin Classics, 2009) 9.

plays depict a woman, a girl and a genderless voice as symbols of silence or as being silenced. She utilises understandings around ghostliness, and the practices of spiritualism and séances, in order to explore the potential for a theatrical representation of silence. The aesthetics of specters and of spiritualism both play large roles in the ways in which Sage is able to represent and animate the concept of silence on stage and they act as a framework through which Sage can unpick the politics of voicelessness, isolation and alienation which, as we have seen, is intimately linked to the experiences of female artists within the Surrealist milieu. Sage's engagement with silence is therefore deeply complicated; it is both ascribing to and rupturing Surrealist conventions, both a threat to her characters and a solution to their problems. Silence is a tangible presence in her work yet remains an indistinct figure that requires interpretation by her audience.

In Sage's play *Failure to Discover*, silence is depicted as a disembodied 'Voice'.³⁷ The introduction of silence as a character in the play speaks to a tradition of ghosts on stage and therefore naturalises the audience's experience of coming into contact with silence. This voice appears suddenly, as if from nowhere, after the apparent disappearance of Z's friend A:

VOICE: Please allow me?
Z: Who are you?
VOICE: I am the silence.
Z: Hello, silence.³⁸

This exchange is made more bizarre by the complete acceptance of Z that the mystery Voice is the voice of the silence around him. However, Z's acceptance serves to solidify the character into the position of silence, through Z the audience is forced to accept the presence of this new, vocal silence. The Voice proceeds to describe itself as 'opaque'.³⁹ The speech of this voice, by nature of its ability to articulate itself, presupposes the presence of a body, and this claim to substance or

³⁷ Kay Sage, *Four Surrealist One Act Plays*, Trans Stephen Robeson Miller, (New York: Gallery of Surrealism, 2011) 95.

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

form lends the character the 'paradoxical invisible visibility'⁴⁰ of a spectre. Carlson confirms that 'the practice of theatre has been in all periods and cultures particularly obsessed with memory and ghosting'.⁴¹ The presence of an apparently ghostly figure is therefore not unusual on stage, however rather than contributing to this tradition directly, Sage uses the acceptance of this form on stage in order to provide a voice for an intrinsically mute subject. Sage applies the aesthetic markers of ghostliness in order to animate the silence that so fascinates her. The ghost's 'liminal position between visibility and invisibility, life and death, materiality and immateriality and their association with powerful effects like fear and obsession'⁴² provides a framework of reference around which Sage can construct the character of silence. The paradoxical qualities of the ghost – itself both a presence and a marker of physical absence, both active on stage and passive in its inability to affect the world around it – is understood in theatrical terms, and therefore the paradoxes around the animation of silence are understood and accepted more readily by an audience. The aesthetic of a ghost is theatrical trope and therefore its familiarity and stability as a voice on the stage both solidifies the presence of silence as a voice worth listening to and provides Sage with a framework with which to actualise it as a presence.

Sage also reflects this understanding of silence and ghostliness as a presence in *Chateau de Chemillieu*. The play is set in a 'Dining room', depicting what appears to be a communion of important Surrealist artists and writers; the guests around the table include André Breton, Yves Tanguy, Sage herself and Esteban Frances.⁴³ The play reflects a summer that Sage spent visiting the real Chateau de Chemillieu where the aforementioned Surrealists 'wrote, painted and criticised each other's work'.⁴⁴ It is important to recognise that while Sage often visited the house, she herself was staying at the 'Chateau de Bourdeau'⁴⁵ during the summer and was therefore set apart from the other guests. This may go some way towards explaining why themes of isolation and exclusion permeate the narrative

⁴⁰ María del Pilar Blanco, "The Spectral Turn/Introduction", *Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, Ed Esther Peeren, (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2013) 33.

⁴¹ Martin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, (n.p: University of Michigan Press, 2003) 7.

⁴² Blanco, 'The Spectral Turn/Introduction', 32.

⁴³ Sage, *Four Surrealist One Act Plays*, 83.

⁴⁴ Miller, *Kay Sage: The Biographical Chronology*, 33.

⁴⁵ Ibid

of the play. Sage depicts the dinner table as haunted by a silent ghost whose voice is inaccessible even to the audience and the readers. The character Pajarito 'says something but nobody listens to her'⁴⁶ and 'Speaks, but nobody listens to her'.⁴⁷ This creates the image of a strange, unacknowledged figure trying to gain access to the discussion at the table. Even the name 'Pajarito', a translation of the Spanish for 'little bird'⁴⁸ reduces her to a nickname, rather than a full name, as if she is not a full person. The performance of Pajarito's silence on stage is complicated by the audience's inability to know what she was trying to say, therefore she must be rendered mute. How then, is attention to be drawn to her? In order for her and her speechlessness to be noticeable on stage she would need to be moving, possibly waving, in what appeared to be an attempt to get the attention of the rest of the group. This then appears to be a silent subject, who the audience can see and acknowledge, attempting and failing to gain the attention of a group gathered round a table.

Baker and Benjamin describe the practice of a séance as 'people gathered round a table, hands joined with each other and with the individual serving as the medium, who was the conduit to the other world, that is, to the afterlife. There would be mysterious sounds – sometimes noises, sometimes voices – and ghostlike forms would appear'.⁴⁹ The silence of Pajarito, coupled with the fact that the guests at the table appear to be unable to see her or engage with her, recalls this imagery of a séance. Pajarito appears as a kind of half-person and her somehow silent speech becomes the mysterious sound that can only be translated through mediumship. However, without any help Pajarito is unable to engage with the group at the table and remains on the outside. As Helen Sword states, 'whether viewed seriously or satirically, spirit mediumship illuminates the foibles of written and verbal communication and the paradoxes of modernist thought'.⁵⁰ The intention of the play is almost to reduce Pajarito to the position of a ghost or spectre and to highlight her irrelevance to the Surrealists conversing around her. Sage recalls the practice of Spiritualism, already a

⁴⁶ Sage, *Four Surrealist One Act Plays*, 83.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 84.

⁴⁸ Suther, *A House of Her Own*, 82.

⁴⁹ David Baker, and Ludy Benjamin, *From Séance to Science: A History of the Profession of Psychology in America*, (n.p: University of Akron Press, 2014) 20.

⁵⁰ Helen Sword, *Ghostwriting Modernism*, (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 2002) 78.

feature in the development of a Surrealist writing aesthetic, in order to interrogate the politics of speech and, in particular, speechlessness. In *Chateau de Chemillieu* speechlessness is a specifically gendered concept. The male Surrealists converse comfortably amongst themselves, their only recognition that they might be ignoring someone arises when the character of Breton states: 'I can't hear what you're saying, but surely it's anti-surrealist'.⁵¹ Not only does Sage depict a woman as the unheard figure at the table, but she depicts Breton as the gatekeeper of Surrealism, determining who is and is not Surrealist and who dismisses the unheard voice out of hand, assuming it does not belong with the rest of the group. In this instance, involvement in Surrealism is portrayed as deeply gendered and the male Surrealists play an active role in the silencing of female voices at the Surrealist table.

⁵¹ Sage, *Four Surrealist One Act Plays*, 84.

Sage extends her experimentation with speechlessness and silence in *Chateau de Chemillieu* further, exploring a different conception of silence and voicelessness through her representation of 'Aube Breton (three years old)'.⁵² Aube is, in many ways, very expressive. She is depicted as shouting and waving her utensils around during the meal:

⁵² Ibid

TANGUEY: For God's sake.

AUBE: (mouth full of potatoes – waving her fork)

FOR GOD'S SAKE!!⁵³

⁵³ Ibid

Here, Aube's voice is presumably muffled by the food she is eating but Sage still depicts her voice as loud and powerful through the capitalisation and punctuation of the phrase. Furthermore, its contrast with the voice of Tanguy makes Aube's repetition of his speech seem even more extreme. In the other instances that Aube speaks, she continues to repeat the phrases of people around her, shouting 'BITCH!'⁵⁴ and 'They can go to hell!'⁵⁵ after Kay and Tanguy speak. However, despite the force and volume at which Aube is depicted as speaking, her voice has almost no impact on the community around her. Jaworski emphasises that 'excessive repetition may

⁵⁴ Ibid, 84.

⁵⁵ Ibid

create an indiscriminate series of noises equal to indiscriminate non-communicative silence'.⁵⁶ The volume at which Aube communicates and the fact that she chooses to repeat the words of the others around her amounts to this specific type of silence. The communicative possibilities of her speech are reduced by her lack of nuanced intonation and her apparent inability to reciprocate intellectually with those around her. She becomes an insubstantial and ghostly echo, a sound that marks the silence rather than overcoming it. However, towards the end of the play she deviates from this position momentarily:

BRETON: In the front.

AUBE: (waving her spoon) IN THE BACK!!⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Jaworski, *The Power of Silence*, 105.

⁵⁷ Sage, *Four Surrealist One Act Plays*, 84.

Aube shifts from mere repetition to directly contradicting her father. Her voice is imbued with more power and value once she engages with the ongoing discussion. The adults, by ignoring the child, suggest that her speech is valueless, however by challenging her father she proves that her voice has substance. The volume at which she speaks can be reinterpreted as an attempt to gain their attention rather than simply a childish trait, it is the volume of desperation rather than comedy. Aube is depicted as an insubstantial and impotent figure who, much like Pajarito, is unable to break into the shared space of the Surrealists. She has a ghostly and ineffective presence but, unlike Pajarito whose personal opinions about her silencing are absent from the play, Aube is a howling and angry figure. Sage is, once again, exploring the possibilities of silence and experimenting with the different forms that it can adopt on stage. Aube's lack of power effectively renders her voiceless, silencing her despite her cries to be heard. Again, the symbol of voicelessness is female, however Aube's position as a child also contributes to her silencing.

The relationship of the Surrealist movement towards children is reflective of its relationship to women, Lusty argues that 'In validating the lived realities of modernity's marginal experiences (childhood, primitive culture,

deviant sexuality, criminality, poverty and madness), surrealism sought to disrupt the social and nationalist values⁵⁸ that permeated society around them. As Belton describes, the Surrealists viewed children as 'less repressed, less inhibited'⁵⁹ and sought to emulate this in order to 'respond to their primal urges without restrictions'.⁶⁰ However, despite this recognition that childhood informed the Surrealist imaginary, Belton states that 'Underlying all these is the same polarity that underlies misogyny: what is good is furthest from culture'.⁶¹ Here he aligns the experience of children in Surrealism to the experience of women. Despite recurring images of women in male Surrealist art, Belton argues that they were in fact 'totally indifferent'⁶² to the experiences of real women and viewed them as 'little more than explosive in attractive packages'.⁶³ This suggests that despite Surrealism's attempt to speak for fringe groups in society, Surrealism in fact reproduced the silencing of these groups through its indifference to the real experiences of individuals. Sage deconstructs the idea of the Surrealist muse, depicting Surrealism, and Breton in particular, as ignoring the actual voices of his supposed muses. These experiences do differ, Sage depicts Pajarito as *unable* to speak, whereas Aube has the ability to speak but is still not *heard*. However, both are portrayed as ghostly, silenced individuals who are unable to break into the Surrealist bubble around them.

Suther notes that in 1961 Sage left a note in her diary that stated 'I have said all that I have to say. There is nothing left for me to do but scream'.⁶⁴ While this post-dates Sage's plays, in many ways her writing encompasses this sentiment, not only in its handling of the themes of haunting and ghostliness, but in its suggestion that there are powerful emotive and communicative possibilities beyond the conventional constraints of the verbal world. In both *Chateau de Chemillieu* and *Failure to Discover* silence is a visceral and alien presence that intrudes on the ordinary experiences of Sage's characters. These presences are recognisable, conforming to the mythology around ghosts, but also unnerving in their refusal to

⁵⁸ Natalya Lusty, "Surrealism's Banging Door". *Textual Practice*, 17:2, 2003: 103.

⁵⁹ Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb*, 192.

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Ibid, 200.

⁶² Ibid, 253.

⁶³ Ibid, 254.

⁶⁴ Kay Sage quoted in Judith Suther, *A House of Her Own: Kay Sage Solitary Surrealist*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) 220.

melt away into the background. She experiments with this uncomfortable presence, both in the ways in which she can animate and represent silence on stage and in the ability of silence to distort the environment around it. For Sage this is a political difference, her writing explores the intricacies of the politics of voicelessness and silencing through the depiction of characters whose voices are prevented from affecting the environment around them, those who are silenced by the company they keep. Sage interrogates the position of the Surrealist outsider, as a figure who was kept on the fringe of the Surrealist community herself she engages with the gendered aspects of exclusion through her depiction of the voices of a girl and a woman as ultimately voiceless. Although 'our own era's interest in women's rights . . . must not be projected backwards and attributed to the female post-surrealists'⁶⁵, Sage can still be seen to be interrogating the foundations of Surrealism from her position as an outsider. Through evaluation of her work, we begin to see the faint presence of a woman whose work both engages with Surrealism and is highly critical of its internal politics. Although there is no record of a performance of her plays, this analysis contributes towards an understanding of the complexities of her texts, in the hope that they will one day be seen on stage. In many ways Sage's voice echoes that of Pajarito and Aube, a voice at the Surrealist table that nobody took the time to hear, however unlike her characters, Sage's silences are finally beginning to be heard.

⁶⁵ Belton, *The Beribboned Bomb*, 258.

AOIFE McGRATH



This series of photos is quite personal, I wanted to explore the inner turmoil I experience with understanding my own gender identity. The piece expresses the discomfort felt in one's own body when restricted by gender binaries. These photos evoke a sense of blinding discomfort or frustration and the face of my subject is never in full focus. This is an exploration into the feeling of never truly knowing how one is perceived by others, despite how one might present themselves or feel.

