

Theatre Aurality: Beginnings

HISTORIES OF THEATRE SOUND

Though philosophy has sometimes been accused of ignoring that which falls upon the ear, from latent aural amnesia to overt sonophobia (see Chap. 1), theatre has had no such problem with the possibilities of listening. Prior to the advent of manufactured light and visual effects, theatre was largely an outdoor event of auditory experience. From our first gatherings as an audience, theatre relied entirely upon the effective transmission of sound to reach the imagining ear. As obvious as this may seem, this innate aurality of theatre is at odds with the most commonly cited etymological root of theatre as a ‘seeing place’. *Theātron* (which stems from the Greek *theaesthai*, which means ‘to see’) does denote a ‘place for viewing’, a particular site (whether natural or built) where people are gathered to spectate; yet the same root term for spectator, *theōreîn*, is also directly related to *theōriā*—the root of theory—which is a reminder that theatre is also a place of thoughts and ideas, of theses and discourses, which invite modes of engagement and exchange that are not necessarily visual. Of course, spectating took place in early theatres and this is particularly evidenced by the mechanical illusions of the *deus ex machina* or the scenic effect of the painted backgrounds of the *skene* of ancient Greek Theatre.¹ Yet theatre sound researchers have argued that visual effects were a later addition to the Greek and Roman theatres, which were initially designed to optimise the acoustics of an entire performance.² Furthermore, when visual effects were introduced,

these were crafted for specific moments, such as entrances and interludes, and therefore these were for specific dramatic effect rather than of theatre form. Early spectatorship was largely contingent on what was heard, as Vitruvius repeatedly stated, theatre was for the ‘ear of the spectator’: audiences gathered to listen to theatre being orated, soliloquised and sung by resonant bodies—actors, musicians and choruses—and even the visual paraphernalia of Greek, early English Medieval and Renaissance theatre, it is thought, also served the aural experience.³ Histories of theatre, from the formal Ancient Greek amphitheatres to the performance spaces of Renaissance London, indicate that spectating took place through theatre sounds, as it was voices that made visible the performance. This is one reason why it is often said that Shakespeare was originally heard rather than seen, that the text brought the visual stage into view by being spoken within the acoustic sphere of our early theatres that optimised listening and assembled us for this purpose. Even the onset of illumination, which made possible the scenic and pictorial nineteenth-century stages and eventually shed light on its three dimensionality, giving us the twentieth-century inhabitable, realist stage, didn’t divert theatre makers from the potential of sound and the development of the performance space as sonic—auditory and sonographic.⁴

From architecture to sound effect and eventually sound design, theatre has a rich history of aurality which, despite its impact on our theatre spaces and performances, has been somewhat obscured from the discourses of theatre and performance. One of the reasons for this is that, despite its origins in aurality, during the twentieth century there was also a certain amount of industry resistance to theatre’s sonic potential. This could be attributed to the rapid development of the visual stage, in particular the early adoption of lighting technologies for which, as Christopher Baugh (2005) points out, there was already a certain aesthetic logic, or ‘scenic syntax’ (p. 204) in theatre production. Yet the reason lies more in the problems that sound technologies presented to theatre practice, not just practical issues (though there were many of these) but the medial, material and aesthetic challenges that introduced entirely new production and performance techniques which, in turn, seemed to expose the constructs of theatre. These suggest a different aurality at play through the development of theatre sound: therefore, this mapping of the beginnings of contemporary theatre aurality starts with the disruptive nature of sound, in particular the introduction of the effect.

Contemporary theatre aurality as it is conceived of in this book, in particular its material possibilities and critical potential, can in some ways be traced through the development of sound production, particularly the evolution of the sound effect. However, any link or particular causal relation between technological advances and new forms of theatre must be treated with caution; partly because as Jonathan Sterne (2006) has so poignantly argued, technological design cannot be separated from the existing ideas of what sound is and how we engage in it; but also because there is no singular, traceable route from the introduction of technological innovation to the art of theatre sound. There are a number of histories of how sound making became a theatre art and—more recently—an art of theatre (some examples of which are the subject of this book), some of these are entwined, others are quite contradictory, hence it is more appropriate to speak of plural histories rather than discrete roots of development. Nevertheless, the introduction of the electronic effect in theatre practice is worthy of investigation because it reveals how different ideas about sound production and its proper use in the theatre were directly linked to deeply held notions of what theatre should be in terms of its practices and its ontology.

Before the introduction of electrics to the theatre, the sound effect was a very practical, mechanical endeavour of unseen, and therefore often unacknowledged, offstage labour. In the UK, there are histories of nineteenth and early twentieth century theatre architectures and documentations of performances that detail an array of inventive solutions for mechanical sound effects and the performance that these required to generate sound in the wings, which is now referred to as the art of Foley.⁵ Sound making in the theatre was literally a practice of generating ‘noises off’, as the sounds required by the plays, melodramas and music hall skits were often illustrations of the weather, atmospheres and calamities that took place outside that being watched: torrential downpours were simulated by rain boxes and wind machines, the pending entrance of characters heralded by door bells rung in boxes and accidents out of sight but within earshot produced by a well-timed clatter crash.⁶ Up until the mid-twentieth century the practice of making sound effects was more often than not the job of the stage crew or props managers, grappling with cumbersome devices, some of considerable size, such as the recently restored thunder run at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre, England. The move from noises off to on—not just those obvious sounds that could be made on the stage, but those which became a part of the

aesthetic—is often attributed to the development of the realist theatre through modern drama and the infamous soundscapes, atmospheres and spot effects that new member of theatre personnel—the director—thought that Chekhov’s and Ibsen’s texts cried out for.⁷ But the technical craft of theatre sound was also made possible through the rapid and competing processes and formats of amplification, recording and replay through the inventions of the microphone and telephone (1876), the phonograph (1877) and the gramophone (1887). David Collison’s (2008) detailed history of the theatre sound effect mentions the first occasions in which a phonograph and gramophone were used in London theatres: 1890 and 1906 respectively, although the amplifier and loudspeaker were not available until 1927, there were enthusiasts who experimented with the recording and replay of rudimentary effects including, for instance, Tyrone Guthrie at the Old Vic Theatre, London.

However, though there was a certain amount of early artistic enthusiasm for the new technologies of electronic sound production, the fact remained that theatre buildings and budgets were not built to house sound creation other than that Foleyed in the wings. This was not just a problem of early twentieth-century theatre logistics; the sheer potential of producible sound also presented a number of challenges to its organisation. Despite the fact that theatre was arguably the first artform of the sound effect, the possibilities of electronic sound actually caused a hiatus in theatre sound production. In the UK in particular, there was a significant lag between the introduction of the recordable and replayable sound effect and the emergence of sound design in theatre, and this is often attributed to lack of investment. However, the delayed art of sound in theatre, though sparsely documented, is nevertheless contested. The most common complaint was that the equipment that electronic sound production required was inappropriate for the practicalities of theatre production. The first dual turntable devices, such as the cueable Panatrope,⁸ which allowed operators to locate specific grooves in discs and to switch between or alter the order of effects in accordance with the inevitable variations of live performance, took up a considerable amount of space and got in the way of what was deemed to be the more essential business of the back stage. Those stage and artistic directors who fought to make space for sound production did so with an acknowledged element of risk as, unlike the sound studios of the film and burgeoning recording industry, theatres were dusty places that made it hard to maintain sensitive equipment, which also quickly became dated and

was expensive to replace. A prevailing sense of incompatibility between available kit and working conditions was difficult to shake off and sound creation and operation was, as recently as the turn of the millennium, still a rather beleaguered endeavour, as John A. Leonard puts it, of creating ‘the best possible sound with the worst possible equipment’ (2001, p. 2). Adverse practical conditions may well be to blame but the new ways of operating effects, which were more often than not pre-recorded from stock collections, also impeded progress as these required cueing rather than playing, therefore their operation didn’t necessarily require a specific member of the crew; as such there was little opportunity for a sound specialist. Oddly enough, the lack of opportunity for artistic development is also considered to be exacerbated by sound’s shift from stage management to artistic theatre production as its operation became the responsibility of those who were perhaps the least interested in it.⁹ Furthermore, the development of theatre sound is not easily traced along the line of technological advances. For example, the introduction of recordable magnetic tape and reel-to-reel players, which replaced the disc and turntable and liberated sound effects recording, didn’t offer the same degree of flexibility during performances because all aspects of the sound effects (including duration, levels and so forth) had to be captured on tape. This also changed the order in which final decisions around sound effects needed to be made, nearly always earlier than directors were prepared for, and, as such, some sound technicians felt that directors simply lost interest.¹⁰

The slow progress of sonic technologies in the theatre industry is thought to be the reason why the mechanical effect has endured and remains a feature of theatre sound production. However, the performance of live sound was an important part of the effective introduction of electronic sound into theatre performances. Napier (1936) described the limitations of early electronic sound effects discs in both operational and aesthetic terms. Practically, the discs for gramophones or the Panatrope could only hold effects of short duration so any lengthy atmospheric sound involved fading between more than one disc or device. Effects were expensive to record and print and, with a limited supply of wind or rainfall to hand, the sound operator risked the comic effect of audience familiarisation. If the theatre had only one playing device then there was an additional risk that the effect would draw to an abrupt halt while the operator frantically repositioned the needle. Therefore, Napier advised that a cross-fade could be created

and repetitions disguised by the addition of vocal or mechanical effects from the operators themselves. Moreover, Napier advocated the mix of live effects with the recorded because sound effects discs deteriorated and recording processes didn't guarantee that the effect would sound as it should.¹¹ The mechanical effect remained a part of theatre sound production not just because theatres found it difficult to accommodate or afford new technologies; the sound operator's performance also rendered the electronic effect more authentic. Even recorded sound effects were, more often than not, those performed or Foleyed in studios because the capture of the actual sounds was notoriously tricky. Theatre sound handbooks continue to recommend tried and trusted means for recreating 'real' sounds with findable objects often combined with the odd household appliance.¹² The rustling of a piece of cellophane or an empty crisp packet against a microphone is still the most reliable, cheap and safe way to simulate a crackling fire—one of the traditional acts of recordable Foley that feature in Complicite's *The Encounter* (see also Complicite/Simon McBurney 2015, p. 30). While the art of produced sound effects may be attributable to technological developments, these developments didn't eradicate the presence of actual sounds—whether these were effects of actors, as well as of operators, or happenstances, sounds of audiences, or intrusions from the theatre's exteriors. This has produced a mix that is unique to theatre, one which Ross Brown (2010) has called an 'aural ecology' (p. 31), which in turn produces its own acoustemology of sound.¹³ The evolution of sound effects making in theatre has always been a combination of theatricality, technical skill and design—in part because there is a fidelity to certain traditions of effects making, but also because these are considered to be more convincing. Certain produced sound effects still lack the clarity in playback that their live production can have, for example spot effects—the gunshot, for instance—are still made live (with blank cartridges) because the recorded versions sound *recorded* and can be distracting from the immediacy and the authenticity of the effect. And this is a conundrum that has impacted upon theatre sound creation: that an electronic effect is no substitute for the real sound unless it convinces us that it *isn't* an effect. This is not just a problem for realist theatre production, but impacts all effects creation and operation as the sound technician navigates the diegetic terrain: should an effect be perceivable as an effect?¹⁴ Though the pre-recorded effect can be perfectly synchronised it can

also inhabit a dissonant space in relation to the stage, an agitating and noisy affect, a potential of which some of the sound designers featured in this book take advantage.

The field of sound design in theatre emerged when sound had the potential to affect more than the specific effect, particularly with the arrival of the theatre mixing desk in the 1970s, which brought all aspects of theatre sound into the design domain. The tools of sound creation, management and operation signalled a shift in the position of sound with the industry. David Collison, generally considered to be the first theatre sound designer, progressed from the role of assistant stage manager to sound operator at the Arts Theatre, London and collaborated with then artistic director, Sir Peter Hall, on producing and recording different effects and experimenting with their playback in performance. One of the principles Collison established was the necessary shift of position of the sound operator from the theatre wings to the auditorium, a very practical step that enabled them to monitor the effects created. Yet this simple change of location was also a significant repositioning of sound creation within the hierarchies of theatre production, allowing it to sneak into the now established space of theatre direction. As a consultant, Collison advised on the provision of sound in new arts centre based theatres, establishing the positioning of the control room at the rear of the auditorium (at the Royal National Theatre, London as well as regional theatres across the UK) and as such he also inaugurated the theatre sound department (the logic being that when there is space dedicated to the creation of sound, it requires someone to run it).¹⁵

Throughout the twentieth century there were, of course, alternative forms of theatre and radical performance that embraced sound technologies: from the onstage presence of Foley artistry in Dada and absurdist theatre; the alterity of the sonic materiality of the avant-garde, to the noisy possibilities of Artaud's theatre.¹⁶ Yet the histories of sound in mainstream (both commercial and subsidised) theatre practice were contentious because sound's presence exposed the 'presence' of theatre: it could transmit, amplify and transform performances, and so the question arose—what *is* theatre if it could be thus mediated? These tensions between sonic technologies and theatre exposed anxieties about its ontology.

SOUND'S AFFECT

The art of theatre sound design was also built upon the controversial possibilities of sound reinforcement. From the introduction of microphones, speakers, multi-channel mixers and, eventually, MIDI systems all aspects of 'live sound' could be augmented in some way. It was one thing to produce sound effects or atmospheric soundscapes through technical means, quite another to capture, mix and amplify all the sonic material of a theatre performance. Despite the early adoption of technologies for audience engagement, for example, the *théâtrophone* in Paris and the Electrophone in London, which allowed audiences to dial into live transmission of theatre performances and listen in at large, it was the arrival of sound reinforcement and reproduction within mainstream theatre practice that was significantly delayed to the extent that it affected the industry's place in the socio-cultural lives of its potential audiences. Jean-Marc Larrue (2011) describes the consequences thus:

While Western theatre rapidly adopted the innovations that electricity could bring to its lighting systems, it waited almost three-quarters of a century — into the 1950s — before allowing electric sound to enter its stages, auditoriums or creative process. It took barely ten years for Edison's incandescent bulb, invented in 1879, to sweep gaslight from the great majority of Western theatre's stages and halls. But seventy-five years after Bell invented the telephone (1876), after Berliner (1877) and Edward Hughes (1878) introduced the microphone and Edison the phonograph (1877), reproduced sound remained a rarity in these venues. During this period, thanks to the new technology, the cabaret, with its singing and comedy (1936), radio (1920), and talking films (1927) experienced their phenomenal growth! Mediatised sound therefore spawned three major media in less than a half-century — the record-phonogram-phonograph system, radio and talkies, all of which weakened the position of theatre in the growing entertainment field, which it had dominated until then. (Larrue 2011, p. 18)

Larrue attributes the late arrival of sound technologies into theatres—on stages and in processes as well as technological provision—to 'mediatic resistance' (2011, p. 20), impressing the point that it is the idea of sound as a *medium* that presents a threat to theatricality, in particular the socio-cultural terms of its production, such as the norms of what theatre was, and how it should be best communicated. Sound

reinforcement in particular brought with it the possibility of reproducibility. A ‘public address’ system (and the PA system is still referred to as such) is, of course, simultaneously a conduit for recording. The point is not so much that theatre performances were recorded (either transmitted for off-site audiences or illegally copied), but that the presence of the mediating capacity of sound—whether in transmission or reproduction—in turn confirmed theatre as an art form that could not (or certainly *should* not) be mediated. It is interesting to note that it was technological, rather than architectural reinforcement, that consolidated a difference between mediatisation and theatre. And this, in turn, exposed the surprisingly persistent idea that theatre is still considered to be exclusive to media: it is resolutely *not* a medium; it is *live*. Yet liveness, as Philip Auslander (2008) has explored in depth, is itself a construct, not an ontology. Liveness is not a neutral state vulnerable to exploitation through reproduction. Rather, Auslander points out, that it was the arrival of the reproductive media that in turn confirmed theatre’s status as uniquely ‘live’. That liveness, rather than being the opposite of the mediated, is actually established by its potential for being mediated, not just by incorporating sonic technologies, but by the fact that it can be recorded and distributed. Seen in this way, mediatic resistance could be considered a fear of mediatic potential, but also of its effect upon the idea of the ‘original’, particularly the anxieties about the status of the live in relation to its mediated state, something that the sonic technologies, as considered to be so distinct from the visual effects of theatre, posed a particular problem. The very presence of sound reinforcement brings with it the potential for capture and the inevitable dilution of the original that the notion of the ‘copy’ implies. Yet it is not only reproducibility, in Walter Benjamin’s sense¹⁷ that threatens to erode the theatre ‘original’ but its reproducibility within the form itself, the immediate reproduction of sound made by reinforcement in the live moment that constitutes the theatre performance. It is the very presence of amplification that prompts mediatic resistance because it alters the actor’s ‘presence’ by palpably extending the voice beyond the body’s physical limits. The mediatic resistance sustained by mainstream theatre production revealed a problem of theatre ontology, of ‘theatre’s episteme’ as Larrue puts it (2011, p. 20), as *the* form which is created by the presence of the actor, on steadfast definitions of what the presence of the actor *is* (auratic, mimetic and poetic) and how this should be produced.

The problem of the amplified voice is not just a matter of consternation about the need for reinforcement (the prevalent notion that this is something the properly trained actor shouldn't need), rather that voice in theatre is already a form of transmission. Prior to visual effect, it was the job of the voice to transport the drama being played out. In many ways the voice is the default medium of theatre: it is invariably considered to be the essence of drama. For instance, the voice is expressive of theatre, it speaks its 'truth' via conventions of direct address or by means of aesthetic pleasure, or it is considered to be that which communicates theatre, as the carrier of linguistic meaning, the deliverer of dialogue or the barer of a character. The voice in theatre has become so commonly associated with its written material, that which is found in the drama if studied closely enough or enshrined in a script if it is a record of things spoken, that its theatrical purpose has become enmeshed with the various functions of the text. The interesting consequence is that the theatre voice has become dislocated from its relationship to the sonic. Tim Ingold (2000) makes the point that our familiarity with the written word has altered our perception of speech in relation to the sound that carries it. Rather,

when it comes to speech, we are inclined to treat hearing as a species of vision — a kind of seeing with the ear, or “earsight” — that reacts to sound in the same way that eyesight reacts to light. Thus we are convinced that we apprehend words, not sound. It is almost as though the sounds of speech were seen rather than heard. (Ingold 2000, p. 248)

The introduction of sound reinforcement exposes the fact that the voice is of sound not text, and that it is an aural phenomenon. For this reason, the application of any form of reinforcement necessarily invites questions about its effect upon theatre form because it throws the voice into the aural sphere, potentially cleaving its relation to the actor. Vocal amplification is not innocuous: it is always about extending the reach of voice in ways that can be contentious and genre-changing. For example, a mic-ed up actor is still considered to be a marker of musical theatre not just because the mic can often be seen but because it is usually mixed to provide lyrical clarity. The microphone is not of theatre-proper where any reinforcement must be visually and sonically imperceptible. Yet questions about the visible presence and levels of aural appropriateness are tactics of coping with the ontological anxieties of employing one

media—sound—to communicate another—theatre, one of the consequences of which is that sound brings theatre in relation to broadcast.

The transmission of theatre and performance through broadcasting, a more recent audience development strategy employed by New York's Metropolitan Opera and London's Royal National Theatre (amongst others) to extend the reach of their productions across Europe and internationally, has largely been a success. This is hardly surprising in an age where audiences are more than familiar with the live as broadcasted. As Auslander points out, contemporary audiences possess a knowledge of mediated liveness, they are informed by a kind of 'media epistemology' (2008, p. 36), and the 'live stream' of theatre performances is a form of encounter that audiences embrace. Yet the notion of the broadcasted voice, particularly in the latest UK and US referendums and elections, has never courted so much mistrust and dismay. This is one reason why the practices in the field of theatre aurality often focus on reconfiguring the relation between voice and audience with forms of theatre emerging that alter the relationship of voice to ear through mediated sound. For example, one radical alternative to the broadcasted voice is the intimate vocality of on- and in-ear theatre techniques and headphone shows, and this close-up or proximate voice features in the contemporary practices in this book for two key reasons: first, because, as a consequence of sound technology, the notion of theatre space has radically changed; and second, the voice has had to find other ways of navigating this sonic space to circumnavigate broadcast. In an age when oratory is suspect, the theatrical voice needs to be cast in a different relation to the ear so that listening can take place on different terms. The proximate voice has become associated with authenticity; for example, it is a technique of verbatim theatre—a form of testimony via 'narrowcast' (Wake 2013, p. 321) that, because of its immediate relation to the ear, ostensibly quells any extraneous performance other than that of giving voice to what is heard. This approach has brought speech as sound into certain theatre practices and a glimpse of voice uninterrupted by its incarceration into the visual domain of the written word.

Any technology that augments by remediation or reproduces the craft of the actor presents an ontological challenge. Yet mediatic resistance also hints at the potential for sound to reinvent theatre, by introducing new theatre material, by radically altering the terms of its performance and introducing a new aural field of engagement. Sound's potential to challenge the ontologies of theatre indicates the presence of another

history of the sonic in relation to the stage: if sound conjured that which was seen in early theatres then, as a consequence, sound's function was to serve the visibility of theatre production. Eric Vautrin (2011) points out that, until the arrival of mediated sound, it was 'directly linked to the performance in its construction and/or its conventions' (p. 141) whereas 'as soon as we were able to record and diffuse sound, this enabled the creation of fictional spaces outside of the stage's boundaries' (ibid.). Vautrin maps the subsequent developments of what he terms an 'acoustic dramaturgy' (ibid.) which culminates in a theatre that can be almost entirely driven by mediated sound. This sonic history is concerned with a form of theatre sound that is annexed to reinforce the visual spaces of theatre production, a material hierarchy that is potentially toppled by technology because sound is unshackled from its ordinary diegetic function, that is to support the (predominately visual) narrative of the stage. Therefore, mediatic resistance may not be attributable to sound's potential ontological threat, but marks the point at which sound created spaces elsewhere, beyond the visual frame of theatre and entirely apart from it by potentially carving out its own performance space and creating its own diegesis.¹⁸

The concept of theatre as media, medial, multi or inter is already explored in-depth from Auslander's assertion that the 'liveness' of theatre is already a mediated experience to Christopher Balme's proposition that theatre is a 'hypermedium, that was always capable of incorporating, representing and on occasion even thematizing other media' (2008, p. 90). Perhaps it is the latent but potent effects of sound that forced questions as to how the means of theatre (mediatised or not) produce the ontology of it (live or not). Are the concepts of live and media so mutually exclusive? Can sound—in all the ways it affects theatre performance—offer other (more politically expedient) versions of what theatre is? For example, theatre maker Chris Goode (see Chap. 5) offers a sonic version of theatre's mediated presence. For him, theatre is 'a medium with an inherently low signal-to-noise ratio: in fact, this is, to a great degree, simply another way of describing the complex of conditions that we normally identify as "liveness"' (Goode 2015, p. 190). Whether or not sound (in all its manifestations from voice to the sound effect) is considered a mediation of theatre, the problem stems from the association of sound with media and, in particular, as a medium, and one of the consequences of this is that there is a tendency to think more about what sound serves in theatre rather than what it does. The other

consequence is that the focus on sound's utility in theatre has resulted in a lack of critical discourse about it. Instead of defining sound as a medium, what happens if it is considered as a theatrical phenomenon, what of sound as performance? This will draw attention to what sound *does* as well as what sound might be, or what constitutes it. Sound as performance draws on the tenets of performance studies but also invites performing (not just performativity) back into the equation. How is sound—music, song, noise, voice—manifested by performance? And is sound brought into existence not by its objects but by its performance?¹⁹ This is one reason why this book focuses on sound's generative capacity—to make, create and perform—rather than its mediatic function, to transport that already made.

FROM THEATRE SOUND TO THEATRE AURALITY

This book focuses on contemporary theatre that is formed through sound in some way, including: that which makes specific use of the sonic—from sound design to vocality—to affect the meaning and experience of the performance; theatre performances which are created through a process of sonic and/or noisy practice; to those forms of theatre which are made exclusively from sound and can *only* be experienced as an aural performance. These contemporary practices are, of course, not exclusive to this study and they frequently feature in contemporary theatre and performance analysis and, as such, there are glimpses of sonic possibilities and of the integral nature of aural engagement in current research into contemporary theatre forms. For example, the potential of sound in contemporary practice is seeded in Hans-Thies Lehmann's concept of postdramatic theatre, in which soundscapes, sound effects and sonic spaces are frequently acknowledged as a core component of the fragmented, heterogeneous, 'theatre of states and of scenically dynamic formations' (2006, p. 68). In a study largely organised around the 'profoundly changed mode of theatrical sign usage' (2006, p. 17), he explores various and diverging examples of '*auditory semiotics*' (2006, p. 91, emphasis in original), which can emerge from any part of the creative process from directorial musical and rhythmic preferences, to design-led sonic excess. However, Lehmann does find a commonality and that is a 'consistent tendency towards a musicalization' (2006, p. 91), something that becomes a core means of expressing the 'otherness' of the postdramatic, and this is a particular approach to the composition and sonority

of theatre, which is a common directorial strategy for reinterpreting the dramatic text. Music theatre and gig theatre²⁰ are, of course, key forms of contemporary practice that make much use of sound in overt ways. The shift towards musicality (whether we consider this to be specific to the postdramatic or not) took place at the level of process and methodology as well as production and this brought sound—as an aesthetic as well as a discipline or skill—into the materiality of theatre (see Roesner 2014). One upshot of this is that analysis of music theatre has begun to embrace aurality, aesthetically, politically and socio-culturally (see Verstraete 2013).²¹

Theatre that is made exclusively for an aural experience (whether this is primarily a vocal, aural or sonic form of theatre) is often referred to as ‘immersive’, and particular forms of this include theatre in the dark and headphone theatre, some examples of which are featured in this book. Immersive theatre is characterised by the sensory audience experience it creates, by its affective capacity often generated through complex and expansive design, including scenography, installation and technological spaces involving both vast and minute spaces—and sound is frequently acknowledged as a core means of generating the immersive effect. As noted in Chap. 1 of this book, sound is most commonly assumed to be an (if not *the*) immersive phenomenon, and so it makes sense that theatre sound features in the analyses of immersive theatre practice. Indeed, there is some attention to the potential of sound in creating this form of theatre; for example, sound is explored as an effective means of establishing spaces and environments through sensation (see, for instance, Welton 2012) and our aural sense forms a part of the multi-sensorial audience that immersive practices invite (see, for example, Machon 2009, 2013). The immersive is identified by its association with interiority, not just being inside certain spaces (such as the installations and performances of Dreamthinkspeak or Punchdrunk), but of the experience of being inside, of within-ness (see, for example, White 2012) of an interiority that isn’t ordinarily apparent, which can only be available through performance. It is these states of interiority, rather than sensate experiences of effects, that constitute immersive theatre. I believe that attention to sound and its constructs enables further understanding of how this interiority is manifested in performance (particularly its capacity to sound interiors that are not available to the naked eye; see Chap. 3). The territories of aurality as outlined in this book also figure in some of the analysis of interactive and participatory theatre, because these forms of

practice are often established by participation in the sonic aspects of the performance, particularly that which requires its participants to speak—in other words to give voice to audience. Participatory performances are, by design, aleatoric and unfixed in form and (often to a managed extent) in content, and it is the actions of the audiences that construct the performance as they take place. Here, the languages of musicalisation and sound become useful as ways of understanding the improvised sonority of the performance; for instance, the audience as a compositional element of it (see White 2013).

A theory of contemporary theatre sound could certainly be traced through these (and many other) forms of contemporary theatre and performance. However, drawing together (seemingly) different examples of sound in theatre in pursuit of their *aurality* can, in turn, shed light on what is shared by these forms of theatre—and why. These forms of contemporary theatre and performance are characterised by some—if not all—of the following: *aural intersubjectivity*, *sonic presence*, *lack of visual reference*, *sonic sensibility*, *non-visual spatiality*, *the corporeality and hapticity of audience* and that *sound performs*. There are a number of concepts of sound which invite a theory of theatre aurality. In particular, the development of the ways in which sound is formed in relation to something whether this is a surface, a space, an interior, or is specifically for another. Sound is social. It is also critically relational and, for some of the theorists and philosophers featured in this book, it holds a vital *aural intersubjectivity*, a destination which is always the ear of another (Cavarero 2005) and the possibility of encounter with others (Nancy 2007). Theories of the experience of sound, in particular of *sonic presence*, in turn echo some of the key concepts of theatre engagement such as: ‘presence’, ‘co-presence’, ‘liveness’ and, in actor-training parlance, being ‘in the moment’. For example, Voegelin describes the temporality of sound as that which is not so much ‘always already’ but is ‘always now’ (2014, p. 2). Sound is present—or it *presents* the present. As Jean-Luc Nancy points out, the present quality of sound is significantly different from the ‘present moment’, it is:

not the instant of philosophico-scientific time [...] it is a present in waves on a swell, not in a point on a line; it is a time that opens up, that is hollowed out, that is enlarged or ramified, that envelopes or separates, that becomes or is turned into a loop, that stretches out or contracts. (Nancy 2007, p. 13)

This ‘present’, he suggests, is one that is carved out by the materiality of sonority, specifically its condition of space, and this leads Nancy to conclude that ‘the sonorous presence is the result of space-time’ (ibid.). Sound’s present, then, is made possible by movement, and this generates a presence which is an ‘in the presence *of*’ (ibid., emphasis added). Sound is also considered to be actual, or at least is an effective means of presenting actuality. For example, the word-for-word of verbatim testimonial has gained currency on the contemporary stage because the voices it uses are from the actual events being played out. The voice as an authentic sound of the original event also circumnavigates the problem of inauthenticity in witnessed or documentary theatre, something which the presence of visual objects can exacerbate. Sound can be a useful solution to the perpetual problem of mimesis (so often a matter of visibility) because of its potential to take place in the here and now. In this way, sound invites us into an aural present which is often associated with encounter, interiority and immersivity and these are terms that are frequently used to describe forms of theatre that are about sensual engagement and experience. Sound makes *the* present felt as well as makes *its* presence felt. It is this materially generative quality of sound that has piqued interest in it as a creative rather than as a mediatic force in theatre.

The *lack of visual reference* is most obvious in headphone theatre, theatre in the dark, audio theatre and acousmatised performance. Yet this is also a feature of theatre which is in some ways visually present, but which stages specific aspects of its aesthetics through sound (see Chap. 4). As certain chapters in this book explore, censorship of vision is not necessarily absence of the visual but a destabilisation of the visual object that is critiqued in particular ways (see Chaps. 3, 6). It places an emphasis on audience, not by replacing listening for spectating, but by foregrounding our relation to sound in the meaning-making process. What is revealed in this process is not what sounds mean in and of themselves but what might be known by means of them—culturally, politically—and what their signification structures are. Aurality exposes the bases of our meaning making. This becomes particularly apparent in audio walks and podcast performances, which often rely on the presence of the visual but frequently recast this by, for example, reimagining its function in relation to what is heard, or unearthing its other, socio-historical visual presences. In these forms of performance, the audiences are often aurally privy to something else that lurks within the visual world; as such, through these performances, the visual can be subject to change. Paying attention to

the aurality of theatre demonstrates that lack of visual reference is not an outright rejection of visuality but often forms a critique of the visual dominance in theatre discourses. Therefore this book is not anti-visual; rather, it explores the ways in which aurality allows us to re-examine the visual, the terms on which it is constructed in theatre—and on *whose* terms. For example, staging aural subjectivities can unshackle the body from its appearance in the scopic sphere, as a visual object. Sound invites aural engagement in which we are not so easily seen as fixed, or visually determined, and aurality (as explored in Chap. 1) draws us into more mutable experiences that are relational, changeable and sometimes constitutive of the theatre experience.

The forms of theatre featured in this book are created by artists, ensembles and companies who are acutely aware of sound and its potential: from sound designers, sonic scenographers and aural writers—for instance, Scott Gibbons with Romeo Castellucci, Matthias Kispert with Extant and Glen Neath with David Rosenberg—to directors who have experience of the creation of sound in theatre practice, such as John Collins' work as sound designer for The Wooster Group and Chris Goode's artistic journey, which has included performance explorations with his group Signal to Noise. These artists have a particular predilection for sounds, their generative capacity and their critical potential in practice because of what they can unearth. This attention to and approach towards the possibilities of sound Salomé Voegelin has referred to as a *sonic sensibility*, which:

reveals the invisible motility below the surface of a visual world and challenges its certain position, not to show a better place but to reveal what this world is made of, to question its singular actuality and to hear other possibilities that are probable too, but which, for reasons of ideology, power and coincidence do not take equal part in the production of knowledge, reality, value, and truth. (Voegelin 2014, p. 3)

A sonic sensibility also hinges on sonic materiality, the consideration, cultivation and generation of its substance and its material capacity to shape and create meaning.

Theatre aurality also captures the ways in which sound creates the spaces of sonic-driven performances. As this book explores (see Chap. 3), sound has the capacity to establish and dissolve spaces, and produced sound can accomplish this over considerable distances, bringing far flung

performance spaces to the proximity of the ear, making intimate the vast and vice versa. Sound orchestrates spaces for audience in ways that visuality would struggle to achieve. The creation of a *non-visual spatiality* is entirely reliant on the bodies that inhabit those spaces: our bodies, as well as the objects, surfaces and things that act as receivers, transmitters and resonators of an acoustic event (see Chap. 6). For this reason, theatre aurality also concerns the *corporeality and hapticity of audience* because any reception of sound is some kind of embodiment of it. All of the approaches detailed in this book incorporate corporeality in some way because sound requires bodies and noise commandeers them. Any discussion around a critical audience must countenance the sonic on corporeal terms, how perception can produce mobile bodies because sound not only moves through us but can also literally move us. Theatre aurality is about the presence of the body amidst perception, and the sonority and resonance, permeability and motility of the subject amidst all this. The ways in which sound works with bodies place an onus on *us* in establishing its meaning. We are not mere receptors of or conduits for sound, we are its source at the same time as its receiver, we can be both speaker and amplifier. Our bodies are also the point at which sound manifests its meaning, and in this way aurality requires performance—sound works on us (and vice versa) through its form. These effects demonstrate the final characteristic of theatre aurality: that *sound performs*, whether this is the creation of the spaces, fictions, atmospheres and dramas made through sound or the disassembly of all these through noise (see Chap. 5). The point is that sound in theatre has particular performance (rather than performative) potential, to the extent that it can take the part that the actor traditionally occupies.

Theatre aurality also describes the ways in which the ephemera of sound are made and experienced, through resonance, hapticity and the feeling of sonance as a *corps sonore* of audience. In this way, theatre aurality also captures the substance of theatre, its materiality as well as the immaterial ether of performance and our experience of this at its most intangible moment because, as Connor (2007) has pointed out: theatre, like sound, is of air.

NOTES

1. See, for example, David Seale's analysis of the Greek visual stage as a critique of the 'visual austerity' (1982, p. 12) which, he argues, was produced by Aristotle's categorisation of spectacle as 'the least significant of his six determinant "parts" of tragedy' (ibid.).

2. Patrick Finelli (2002) is a firm believer that Greek and Roman theatres were ‘all positioned for maximum sound efficiency’ (p. 13), citing the theatre at Pergamum, Turkey, which is ‘built on a mountainside like a trembling reminder of another age, it is the steepest theatre in the world with seats at a 45-degree pitch [...] This theatre has a special advantage for high fidelity sound. Prevailing breezes that blow in from the sea each afternoon in theatre season [...] carried with them the actors’ voices up to the audience seated on the hillside’ (ibid). David Collison (2008) makes the point that the back wall of Greek theatres was primarily acoustic; made of wood, these were designed to reflect the actors’ voices towards the auditorium. Only by the fifth century BC did this become adorned in order to indicate ‘the place of action; the “skene” [which] became the fore-runner of our modern idea of “scenery”’ (p. 5).
3. Vitruvius’ (2009 [original date c.27 BC]) architectural advice for the most effective construction of theatre (once a clean site is found that is not too exposed to the sun) is primarily based on the effective transmission of the voice, for it is the ‘ears of the spectators’ (p. 131) rather than their eyes that must be reached. Vitruvius’ *de Architectura* confirms that ancient theatre was primarily aural, with great attention to the acoustic efficacy, the aesthetic variations of harmonics and the amplifying capacity of sounding vessels, urns and vases that decorated the auditorium that had resonant capacities (see 2009, p. 135).
4. For example, see Jem Kelly (2005), who proposes that Piscator’s twentieth-century multimedial experiments ‘signal a paradigm shift from staging performances that create “visual space”, to a new paradigm of synaesthetic perceptual conditions commensurate with McLuhan’s theories of auditory space’ (p. 217).
5. Robert Dean (2013) makes the point that a certain amount of skill was involved in operating mechanical sound effects machines because they were not unlike rudimentary instruments and as such these required *playing*, particularly as these effects were often just one component of a whole composition: for instance, ‘the skill involved in operating a wind machine is an important reminder that simulating the sound of wind effectively did not require the operator to merely turn a handle. Like the musicians in the orchestra pit, the wind machine operator in the wings would need to respond intuitively to the scene as it unfolded, varying the speed and rhythm of the drum’s rotation and altering the tension of the material or wires. The operator would also be required to play alongside and in conjunction with other wind machines and sound effect devices, as well as the orchestra’ (Dean 2013).
6. Different intensities of rain, from light shower to torrential downpour, were generated from a variety of different sieves and boxes containing dried peas or lead shot, rotating leather strips around a wind machine or

by actually drizzling water into a trough. The clatter crash was made by suspending various strung objects and wooden slats which were dropped all at once in the wings.

7. The challenge presented by the sound at the end of *The Cherry Orchard*, described as ‘the distant sound of a string breaking, as if in the sky, a dying melancholic sound’ (Chekhov 2002 [1904] p. 346), is evidenced by the fact that it features in a number of theatre sound handbooks (see Napier 1936; Green 1958; Crook 2013).
8. David Collison points out that, though the Panatrope was the brand name of the first electronic record player (Brunswick 1927), it became the generic name for dual turntable desks during the 1940s and 50s and until the 1970s sound cues in the UK were traditionally referred to as ‘pan cues’ (see 2008, pp. 84, 111).
9. Collison describes how, in the UK in particular, when sound became an artistic aspect of theatre production it was brought under the auspices of stage management, and its operation was usually the additional task of those members of the SM team whose main job was as an actor’s understudy. Collison’s histories of theatre sound indicate the impact of such practical and operational decisions: for instance, he refers to the union rules in the US which specified that only chief electricians—already charged with the responsibility for lighting—could handle turntables and microphones. The ramifications of this are hinted at in Collison’s assessment of the burden: ‘When a show moved into a theatre, the lighting rig was normally completed before anyone thought of unpacking the audio equipment—leaving little or no time for rehearsal. Making matters worse, because the chief electrician’s main concern was for the lighting, the responsibility for operating the sound equipment usually fell to the most junior, or the most ineffectual, member of the electrical team. Quite often, one or other of the lighting board operators would perform sound cues between lighting operations’ (2008, p. 109).
10. Collison (2008, 2013) makes the point that the introduction of tape in theatres in the 1950s altered the process of sound production, in particular its proximity to the creative process by changing where decisions about effects needed to be made—in the sound studio and often well before final rehearsals and technical runs: ‘But when tape came along, the director was expected to make a final choice of what sounds he wanted, how they were to be mixed, how long they should run and in what order they were required, all in the antiseptic atmosphere of a recording studio. And all this was to be agreed before the play was properly set in rehearsal. When the tapes were played in the vastly different acoustic of the theatre, the mix was inevitably wrong and the timings were out. To add to the frustration, when the director wished to hear an effect recorded in a different part of

- the tape, he had to wait while the technician spooled backwards and forwards trying to locate it. The impatient reaction of many directors under fraught rehearsal conditions, was simply to shout “Cut it!” (2008, p. 160).
11. Napier’s guide for creating sound effects includes advice on how to incorporate those prerecorded, about which he is rather sceptical: ‘The very means of recording and reproduction distort the majority of sounds, until they are no longer true, giving them a metallic quality [...] As a general rule records are completely successful only when the sounds recorded are metallic, e.g. car and airplane sounds’ (1936, p. 15). For Napier, the electronic effect was only one component of the sound operator’s technical apparatus because it had an identifiable sound.
 12. See, for instance, Neil Fraser (1988), which includes the wind machine, thunder sheet, clatter crashes and advises that different off-stage terrain can be suggested by footsteps in a tray of gravel.
 13. Drawing on Steven Feld’s (2003) concept of acoustemology, Brown describes how theatre sound creates ‘a culturally-defining repertoire’ (2010, p. 36) that is informed by its particular mix of the immediate and mediated, which in turn produces an integral theatrical intermediality.
 14. Collison (1982) makes the very revealing remark that sound along with ‘all the scenic and technical elements of a production must be designed and executed so as to be integral and related parts of the whole. In other words, the *only* justification for the technician’s existence is to serve the performer’ (p. 10) ‘Good’ sound is often considered to be that which goes unnoticed (for critiques of this see Curtin and Roesner 2016).
 15. See Collison (1982, 2013).
 16. See Curtin (2010, 2011, 2014) for in-depth analysis of Foleying, noise-making and Artaud’s theatre and Ovadija (2013) for a sonic history of alternative theatre from the avant-garde to the postdramatic.
 17. See also Chap. 1 of this book.
 18. Vautrin (2011) argues that considering theatre sound as an *event* becomes diegetic because ‘it represents itself. It is neither illustration, nor illusion, nor the expression of an idea, or innerness [...] A diegetic sound event enables sound to no longer be an image of itself, or an idea but rather it becomes something which could link gesture, matter, concept, space, movement and memories indistinctly’ (p. 144).
 19. Auslander (2015) takes a stand against disciplinarity and proposes that ‘music and its performance [are] inextricably imbricated with one another’ (p. 534) and that music is not so much that produced by the skill of playing, of which the performance is its expression, but “‘is” what musicians “do”’ (p. 541).
 20. In the UK, ‘gig theatre’ is a term used to refer to performances that are a hybrid of theatre and a music gig, to those which incorporate live or

recorded sound, and are identifiable by the presence of a single mic. Gig theatre also refers to the economy of the ‘one-night-only’ theatre event; the bare minimum of performance that is possible to muster in the current times of austerity. Like the gig economy, gig theatre is the result of precarity in the theatre industry, it is a phrase that articulates the problems that the gig format present to performers and programmers alike, but it is also a form of performance embraced by risky and radical theatre makers who are drawn to the possibilities that the one-off event uniquely presents.

21. Pieter Verstraete (2013) is emphatic about the aurality of music theatre and opera, and here’s why: ‘I take as axiomatic the link between music theatre and *aurality*—that part of our cultural discourse that both enables and disciplines the values, norms, meanings and opinions related to listening, not just in our aesthetic encounters in the auditorium but also everywhere else in our daily lives. I take it as a given that in their arrangement of sound within the particular construct of representation, opera and music theatre can display the secret workings of aurality’ (p. 187).

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