

PAPERS 11 Sound effects and listening conventions

Chair – Misha Myers
FRI 11.45-13.15 | RR3

The vagaries of sound fx: supposed sounding and listening through the history of recorded sound

John Levack Drever

The first documented use of recorded sound in the theatre was in 1890, an off-stage sound resembling that of a baby's cry in Arthur Law's *The Judge On*. With the burgeoning of the record industry in the 1940s, the application of recorded sound became common practice. Sound fx records were commercially released for use in performance and production.

Some sounds have been handed down from generation to generation, from production to production, jumping genre from, say, radio drama to pantomime (dare we mention the BBC seagulls?). Through re-use they become genericised as reliant, efficient and unambiguous sonic conveyor of a supposed cause or atmosphere. Whilst other less successful sound fx are cast only once, consigned to the archive. They are non-transferable, unable to transcend the context and time of their initial airing.

With the aid of audio examples spanning more than 70s years of its practice, this talk will explore the vagaries of the commercial sound effect, and what it has to tell us about sounding and listening in theatre and beyond.

Aural acts: theatre and the performance of listening

George Home-Cook

Drawing on the work of Don Ihde, Murray Schafer, and Jean-Francois Augoyard, this talk develops the notion that listening-in-the-theatre, resembles and embodies a unique mode of performance. Conducting a phenomenological investigation of Robert Lepage's *Lipsynch* and Tim Supple's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (both pieces foreground theatre as soundscape and, consequently, adumbrate the aural as a mode of sensory/experiential engagement), Home-Cook explores the performance of listening on three levels. Firstly, drawing on the work of Alva Noe and Tim Ingold, arguing that listening is enactive; in order to perceive sound we must do something. Secondly aural acts, in the heterosonic world of theatre, require varying degrees of effort: etymologically, to listen means to pay attention. Yet, although attention is key to both concept and experience of theatrical performance, Home-Cook suggests that to attend the theatre is to experience the complexities and variations of being distracted. Rather than dismiss theatre noise as unintended sound, offering a broader usage of the term by setting it in dialectical relation to the phenomenon of attention.

Between platform and pit – the noise of Partch

Tim White

Partch's *Delusion of the Fury – A Ritual of Dream and Delusion* (1965-6) challenges the expectations of music theatre by dispensing with a libretto and instead employing dancers and mimes. It is an expression of what Partch termed 'corporeal music', involving the whole body, howsoever deployed. This paper considers Harry Partch's 'theatre noise' as it challenges both the eye and the ear.

Harry Partch might equally be termed a constructor as a composer; when instruments failed to create the sounds he desired, he built his own. Dissatisfied with the rigidity of the twelve-note scale he devised a 43 tone alternative and, considering the appearance of the performance to be at least as important as the sound, produced the manual on the maintenance and repair of some putative musical instrument which set out performance conventions.

Consequently, his works generate too much visual disturbance to sit discretely with "tight coats and tight shoes" on the Western concert platform yet frequently evince a ritual formality that renders them equally ill-suited to being heard and not seen in the pit of the theatre.