



## ***How do we think about Sound in the Performing Arts?***

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The proposal to place sound at the center of the discussions in this thematic issue *Sound in Performance* arises from a context in which only 1.5% of academic studies published in Brazilian Performing Arts journals addresses sound aspects in theater (Trevisan, 2024). This percentage does not include studies on the voice, which, unlike other sound elements, has a significant academic production, to the point of enabling the existence of a semi-annual journal dedicated exclusively to this area<sup>1</sup>. However, despite the increase in Voice Studies and the overall expansion of research in recent decades, the sound elements of the Performing Arts continue to be treated in a fragmented manner, with investigations into voice, acoustics, stage music, and sound effects rarely connecting or engaging with each other.

An indication of the difficulty in thinking about theater sound in a more integrated manner is reflected in the very lexicon of the field. While terms related to visual elements are widely established and rarely generate controversy, in the realm of sound the vocabulary is so ambiguously defined that there is no consensus on the meaning of words like *sonoplastia*<sup>2</sup> (Uhiara, 2013; Lignelli, 2015; Leal, 2022; Lignelli; Magalhães; Mayer, 2022). Raul Teixeira's research (2021) maps approximately 70 terms used to designate sound elements in the production credits of theatrical performances in São Paulo over the past decades. It is not a coincidence that, at this moment, two distinct research projects, granted by national funding agencies, are dedicated to studying the lexicon of theater sound in Brazil<sup>3</sup>. This topic is an urgent one.



In this sense, the thematic issue *Sound in Performance* is launched with the aim of encouraging reflections that encompass both the experience of listening and sound production in the Performing Arts, understood within a broad and plural spectrum. The authors gathered here have responded to this invitation with works that explore the theme of sound from various theoretical and methodological perspectives. The *corpus* analyzed covers a range of artistic works – from radio-based creations to traditional street performances, from opera to dance – and includes practices carried out in different countries across Latin America and Europe. Thus, we can affirm that this thematic issue significantly contributes to expanding the boundaries of research and to understanding the central role that sound plays in the construction and experience of a performance.

The approach to sound proposed here is aligned with what has been defined as the “Sonic Turn” in the Humanities (McEnaney, 2020), an academic shift beginning in the 1980s that reevaluated the importance of orality, listening, and soundscapes in the methodological approaches of various disciplines, such as Anthropology (Aterianus-Owanga; Santiago, 2016; Revel; Rey-Hulman, 1993), History (Corbin, 1994; Descamps, 2019), Communication Studies (Sterne, 2003; Ong, 1982), Philosophy (Nancy, 2002; Kittler, 1990), among others. In Brazil, researchers from different disciplines have embraced a broader approach to aurality, constituting research groups such as: the Laboratório de História da Cultura Sonora (Laboratory of the History of Sound Culture)<sup>4</sup>, led by José Geraldo Vinci de Moraes from the Department of History at the University of São Paulo; and the NuSom-Research Center in Sonology<sup>5</sup>, led by Fernando Iazzetta from the Department of Music at the same university, both of which have been active for over a decade. Both groups have produced significant work that may provide important insights into the understanding of sound in the Performing Arts.

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The landscape of the Sonic Turn in theater is explored in depth in the article *From one audible past to another, the same listening protocol?*. Revisiting over a decade of coordinating two pioneering international projects in the field of theater sound, Marie-Madeleine Mervant-Roux offers a brief historical, methodological, and bibliographic overview of this area of study. Her account highlights the contributions of *Sound Studies* to the study of

sound in the Performing Arts, particularly in the analysis of sound documents, the listening of which is neither “natural” nor intuitive<sup>6</sup>. In the text, presented as a personal contribution to a collaboration between research groups in France and Brazil,<sup>7</sup> Mervant-Roux shares the challenges faced by her team, drawing comparisons between the two contexts and raising questions for identifying pertinent methodological paths in this field.

Interdisciplinary dialogues emerge in two articles that explore the soundscape of the Performing Arts, using approaches and tools from other disciplines within the Humanities. The first article addresses a cultural history topic from a sonic perspective: a practice in which part of the audience noisily stomped their feet as a way to interrupt the performance. In “*Pateada*”: *echoes of an extinct but noisy practice*, Luiz Paulo Pimentel examines this noisy audience manifestation, which was part of theatrical conventions, receiving extensive media coverage until its suppression and disappearance in the early 20th Century. The study reveals how these sounds, which once formed part of the soundscape of theaters at the time, were silenced to the point of becoming absent from most of histories and theories of theater.

In *Sounds of Devotion: acoustic experience in the São Benedito scenology*, social anthropologist Giovanni Cirino analyzes the soundscape of the “Congada” of Ilhabela, a cultural event from the northern coast of São Paulo, celebrated for three days in mid-May as part of the Feast of Saint Benedict. The article offers an ethnographic analysis of the various sound and musical elements that compose the soundscape of this cultural tradition, which intertwines religiosity and performance, bringing together ancestral instruments and sounds that can be heard (and seen) through the *links* included in the article.

The soundscape originating from Brazilian popular forms is approached in a different context in *Experience of Image and Sound Density: effects of presence in the staging of Auto da Catingueira* by Ana Cristina Moreira Pessôa. The scenic work *O Auto da Catingueira* by Elomar Figueira Mello, creates a dialogue between opera, the sounds of popular forms, and animation. In her article, Moreira Pessôa examines the notion of presence from the sonic experience of this performance, analyzing the sound effects; this sound perspective leads to a revision of the bibliography on the topic of presence.

The notion of presence, central to studies on contemporary Performing Arts (Icle, 2011), and a recurring topic in the trajectory of this journal itself (Souza, 2024), is also addressed, in relation to sound, in another article in this issue: *Theaters of sound: listening, immersion, alienation*. In this article, José Batista Dal Farra Martins (Zebba dal Farra) articulates the notions of presence and absence through the analysis of processes of immersion and strangeness in the following stage works, such as: *Ouverture Alcina* (2009) – music by Luigi Ceccarelli –, *Elettra* (2004) – directed by Andrea De Rosa and sound design by Hubert Westkemper –, *Eislermaterial* (1998) – directed by Heiner Goebbels – and *Not I/Eu Não* (1986) directed by Rubens Rusche.

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In the call for contributions for this thematic issue, we emphasized our interest in texts that addressed the acts of listening to plural sound sources and sound production in theater from the perspective of "actors and actresses, sound designers and technicians, playwrights, directors, the public or of the space itself" (Uhiara, 2023). The proposals we received were quite rich in this regard, encompassing both analyses of performances or accounts of artistic creation from various theater professionals.

Relating to this subject, five articles delve into important questions related to sound creation, approached from two or more creative perspectives and situated in diverse geographical contexts: Athens, Buenos Aires, Goiânia, Paris and Rio de Janeiro. These studies allow us to explore, each in its own way, some aspect of the creative relationship between sound artists and those responsible for other elements of the performance, weaving a dialogue between theory and practice – some from within, others from outside – and connecting the various voices that form the complex soundscape of the Performing Arts.

**Paris.** In *Réinventer le Silence: sur l'introduction des fonds sonores dans le théâtre français du dernier tiers du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* [Reinventing Silence: The Introduction of Background Sounds in French Theater in the Last Three Decades of the 20th Century], Noémie Fargier demonstrates, through the analysis of productions by Joël Pommerat and Patrice Chéreau, how the use of background sounds became a recurring sound practice on French stages starting in the 1970s. Working on the creative processes of André Serré and

François Leymarie (who created the sounds for Chéreau's and Pommerat's productions, respectively), Fargier examines these sounds – produced with a variety of technical solutions and serving diverse dramaturgical functions – in order to understand the relationship between background sounds, stage silence, and the acoustic contours of the performances. The text illustrates how this relationship develops progressively, emerging from the intertwining of the concrete challenges presented by the craftsmanship of both staging and sound.

**Buenos Aires.** Shifting to the 21st Century, we find, on the other side of the Atlantic, the creative partnership between a composer and a director explored in *Sound Documents, Biographical Resonances and Montage for the Configuration of Idiorrhythmic Constellations: the mutual influence between Lola Arias and Ulises Conti*. After tracing the long creative history of the Argentine duo, Denise Cobello offers an analysis of this collaboration through the lens of idiorhythmia (Barthes, 2003), that is, rhythm as the "combination of personal time and collective experience" in the creative process.

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From an insider's perspective on creation, this thematic section presents three case studies by pairs of artist-researchers.

**Rio de Janeiro.** In *Colaboração ou 16 variações sobre um tema: paradoxical configurations between dance, music and concept*, Maria Alice Poppe and Tato Taborda examine, through the creative experience of a dancer and a musician, interactions between sound and gesture. The duo questions silence, noise, listening, and body awareness in each variation. The dialogue between the two disciplines prompts a discussion on resonance and dissonance within the shared lexicon of both languages, to "produce meaning from the crossing of these terminologies, as a way of activating processes in a language that starts from the concepts and terminologies of the other".

**Athens.** Another reflection on practical experience written collaboratively is found in *Sound dramaturgies: Repoliticizing performance*. Angeliki Poulou, a playwright, and Manolis Manousakis, a sound designer, reflect on the relationship between sound and dramaturgy within the Greek artistic collective *Medea Electronique*, particularly on how sound can contribute to the repoliticization of theater and performance.

**Goiania.** Finally, the third “duet”, consisting of Flávia Honorato dos Santos and Renata de Lima Silva, focuses on the sounds of the stage produced by bodies in performance within a creative process where the actress and director, respectively, are inspired by Afro-Brazilian musicality. In *Musical resonances in the body and on the scene of black performance*, the traits identified by what the authors call “black performance” are part of a concept in which dramaturgy, music, voice, and body are inseparable. Entwined, they build the sound dimension of the performance – a perspective that presents a particularly interesting counterpoint to methods of sound creation for a performance solely guided by musicians or sound designers.

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The theme of radio is also explored in this issue through three articles. In these texts, the relationship between radio and theater is examined from multiple methodological approaches.

One article focuses on the radio endeavors of a theater figure during the Military Dictatorship in Brazil. João das Neves, who was responsible for the artistic and administrative management of the *Opinião* Group (RJ), considered German radio plays (*Hörspiel*) as a way to connect with an audience that was “disconnected” from politics, by playing with an accessible language. In *The German radio drama and João das Neves' efforts to spread the genre in Brazil*, Roberta Carbone traces the history of the *Hörspiel*, a genre that has undergone various stages of development, to explore João das Neves' radio project in Brazil in the 1970s.

Andrés Morales' article spans two countries and two different time periods. *Loss and serendipity, twists and turns in the archives of Enrique Buenaventura's En la diestra de Dios Padre* discusses the 21<sup>st</sup> century discovery of a lost version of a Colombian play, uncovered in the sound archives of a French radio station, which broadcast the play's performance in 1960. The audio recordings of *En la diestra de Dios Padre*, from the Teatro Experimental de Cali's participation in the Théâtre des Nations Festival (1960), allowed the recovery of lost elements of Enrique Buenaventura's text, offering crucial insights into the play's creative genesis.

The third and final example in this section is found in *Radio, scène et documentaire sonore de recherche: explorations sonores de la peinture de Mark Rothko* [Radio, Stage and Sound Research Documentary: three propositions

to listen Rothko's Paintings] by Séverine Leroy, which details a sound documentary produced by France Culture. In a chain of events, this documentary evolved into the creation of a live performance by the authors themselves, which, in turn, prompted Leroy to reflect on this creative process through the medium of a sound documentary. The article includes links to the research, presented in what Leroy calls a "sonic research practice", highlighting the importance of sonic forms in disseminating research outcomes.

These studies are emblematic of a movement that reconsiders the importance of sound archives in Performing Arts research. Sound recordings of performances and rehearsals, radio and phonographic repertoires, and narratives about the sound memory of critics and spectators are some of the documents explored and valued in this process. While initially, researchers sought to uncover forgotten sound archives, today there is a movement towards the creation of new types of collections to preserve theatrical memory through sound archives, including those documenting the sound practices of theater.

This panorama has led to the pioneering and simultaneous sound archives in different countries and types of custodial entities. Three examples of this movement include: the Center for Theater Documentation (CDT) at the University of São Paulo, which is currently handling sound archives of sound designers from the second half of the 20th Century in São Paulo; the Department of Performing Arts at the National Library of France (BnF), which is establishing a specific archive dedicated to theater sound design in a pioneering project within the country's long-standing tradition of conserving theatrical documents and objects; and the National Sound Archive of Portugal in Lisbon, which is incorporating a theatre sound archive into a broader framework of Portuguese sound heritage. The emergence of these sound archives necessitates the development of a specific field of study, one that enables the creation of new methodologies for the analysis, dissemination, and above all, the listening of sound documents. At the same time, it triggers the rediscovery of other sound archives, especially in the fields of radio, the phonographic industry, and television – precise records that are key to understanding stage techniques, given the movement of artists between media (Van Drie, 2010; Wegner, 2022). This will certainly provide new impulses for the area that we aim to strengthen with this thematic issue.

In conclusion, we express our optimism regarding the progress of research on sound in the Performing Arts. We received many highly relevant proposals, ones of great interest to the field, and it was a difficult task to not be able to include more in this publication. This optimism is further reinforced by the work of the reviewers: we engaged leading experts from various countries who provided rich analyses that, we believe, have contributed to the development of both the accepted and non-accepted studies. We would like to extend our gratitude to the team at the *Brazilian Journal on Presence Studies*, especially to Gilberto Icle, for their rigor and generosity throughout the editorial process. This experience has provided us with unparalleled learning about what constitutes an academic publication of excellence. The journal's indexing in various academic databases, such as SciELO, encouraged us to explore practices still uncommon in the field of arts research, such as those in Open Science, which, for example, advocates for the openness of peer reviews or the use of data repositories. Revealing a horizon of possibilities, these practices prompt us to imagine new pathways for research in the Performing Arts.

We hope that the studies presented here, with their diverse methodological approaches, objects, and listening perspectives, will contribute to the advancement of research into the sonic dimension of the Performing Arts. Beyond the study of individual sound phenomena, we hope that sound can be taken as a prism through which to reinterpret the history of the Performing Arts or to analyze contemporary aesthetics, pedagogies, and creative processes. We still have a long way to go, but we have taken important steps toward making sound an ontological and epistemological parameter in Performing Arts research. We wish you an engaging read!

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> We refer to *Voz e Cena*, a biannual journal published by the University of Brasília (UnB) since 2020. Editor-in-chief: César Lignelli. ISSN: 2675-4584. Available at: <https://periodicos.unb.br/index.php/vozecena/index>. Accessed on: Nov. 6, 2024.
- <sup>2</sup> *NdT*. “*Sonoplastia*” is a portuguese concept signifying both sound design and sound effects in theatre.





- <sup>3</sup> One is the project *Sonoridades da Cena: Termos e Conceitos*, funded by Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), led by César Lignelli. The other is the *Sound archives of theater* project, funded by the São Paulo State Research Foundation (FAPESP), led by Rafaella Uhiara.
- <sup>4</sup> For more information, visit the Sound Culture History Laboratory website. Available at: <https://www.memoriadamusica.com.br/index.php/apresentacao/>. Accessed on: Nov. 8, 2024.
- <sup>5</sup> For more information, visit the NuSom website. Available at: [https://nusom.eca.usp.br/sobre\\_nusom](https://nusom.eca.usp.br/sobre_nusom). Accessed on: Nov. 8, 2024.
- <sup>6</sup> For a deeper exploration of the dialogue between *Sound Studies* and the Performing Arts in the projects developed by the researcher's team, we recommend reading the interview given to Virgínia Bessa for the *History and Sound Culture* dossier, published in *Revista de História* (Bessa, 2023).
- <sup>7</sup> This is a partnership between the THALIM laboratory (CNRS/ENS/Sorbonne Nouvelle University) and the *Sound Archives of Theater* project, developed at the Center for Theater Documentation of the University of São Paulo, with support from the Young Investigator Grant from the São Paulo State Research Foundation (FAPESP) (2022/15032-4).

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