

Rediscovering Artaud's Sonic Order

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1. Introduction

The article describes some of performance artist Antonin Artaud's ideas that shaped the implementation and performance of the music theatre work *To have done with the judgement of Artaud*. The first part of the text discusses Artaud's ideas related to the use of the voice and sound in his late radiophonic work *To have done with the judgment of god*. The second part of the article describes different approaches for the use of the voice and the physical space in the devised work using a flexible array of portable loudspeakers during performance. The final part of the article provides some concluding remarks about the potential of using high quality wireless loudspeaker technology as a way to enhance a truly immersive audiovisual experience in music theatre works.

2. Artaud's Sonic Order

From the beginning of his short but productive artistic career Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) was interested in using sound as an active component in theatre (Hollier, 2002). In *The theatre and its double*, arguably Artaud's most remarkable text, he explains some of his innovative ideas regarding the use of voice and sound in the theatre (Artaud, 1974). Artaud felt that an original approach to the use of the human voice was a key element in creative efforts to break 'theatre's subjugation to the text and rediscover the idea of a kind of language somewhere between gesture and thought' (Artaud, 1974: 68) in order to give words 'the importance they have in dreams' (Sellin, 1968: 84). As a way of transcending the meaning of words Artaud developed his own particular glossolalic language: a manifestation of language at a level of pure sound in order to 'reveal its possibilities of physical shock and to actively divide and distribute it in space' (Weiss, 1994). Artaud wanted to investigate the possibilities of speech outside words, trying to relate it to an active use of the physical space as a way to connect with audience sensitivity in an attempt to blur the boundaries between the stage and the public, having 'the spectator in the middle while the spectacle surrounds him' (Artaud, 1974: 103; McAuley, 2000: 5-6). Artaud was interested in creating a *spatial language* that would effectively integrate the performers' movements with vocal onomatopoeic sounds, sound effects and lighting. The idea was to eliminate the stage so that 'the spectacle can spread to the entire theatre and, taking off the ground, will surround the spectator in the most physical ways leaving him in a constant pool of lights, images, movements, and sounds' (Artaud, 1974: 150).

Paradoxically, probably the only work where Artaud implemented some of his ideas concerning the use of the voice and sound was in one of his last works, the radiophonic creation *To have done with the judgment of god*. This piece, originally commissioned by Radio France in 1947 and banned because of its strong anti-American and anti-religious content, was written and

conceived by Artaud as a combination of intense texts with interludes of instrumental and vocal improvisations (Artaud, 1995; Finter, 2002). Table 1 shows the structure of the radio play as recorded by Artaud at the studios of Radio France with a group of actors in November 1947 (Barber, 2001; Artaud, 2006).

Section	Title	Content
1	Opening	Text read by Antonin Artaud
2	Sound effects 1	Shouts and percussion sounds by Antonin Artaud and Roger Blin
3	Tutuguri	Texts read by María Casares
4	Sound effects 2	Xylophones sounds played by Artaud and Roger Blin
5	Research on fecality	Text read by Roger Blin with glossolalia sections
6	Sound effects 3	Voice and percussion improvisation by Antonin Artaud and Roger Blin
7	To raise the question of..	Text read by Paul Thevenin
8	Sound effects 4	Voice and percussion improvisation by Antonin Artaud
9	Conclusion	Text read by Antonin Artaud
10	Sound effects 5	Percussion improvisation by Antonin Artaud

Table 1. Sections of the radiophonic work *To have done with the judgment of god* as recorded by Artaud and a group of actors in 1947.

Inspired by the original text and recordings of the radio piece a collaboration was developed with musicians and dancers from the company *Base Theatre* to create a devised dance-theatre piece for the 2007 Edinburgh Fringe Festival entitled *To have done with the judgment of Artaud* (Base Theatre, 2007). The main goal of the project was to explore different types of relationships between sound and physical movement using the original radio play in its written and recorded version as a way to reassess the relevance of Artaud's work today. In the following sections some of the ideas developed in the devised piece in connection with the use of the voice and sonic spatial design will be described.

3. Shaping Boundaries with the Voice

One of the most interesting aspects of Artaud's radio play as source material for a devised piece is the fact that the radiophonic work exists both as text as well as recordings. This allowed the possibility of developing the piece creating different types of sonic relationships between Artaud's recorded voice, the performers' voices and diverse transformed sounds. These relationships were framed with the intention of using the voice as a flexible tool exploring glossolalia texts as a 'manifestation of language at the level of its pure materiality, the realm of pure sound, where there obtains a total disjunction between signifier and signified' (Weiss, 2004). Figure 1 shows a diagram of the different types of sonic relationships explored in *To have done with the judgment of Artaud*, and table 2 shows the glossolalia texts used in the devised piece.

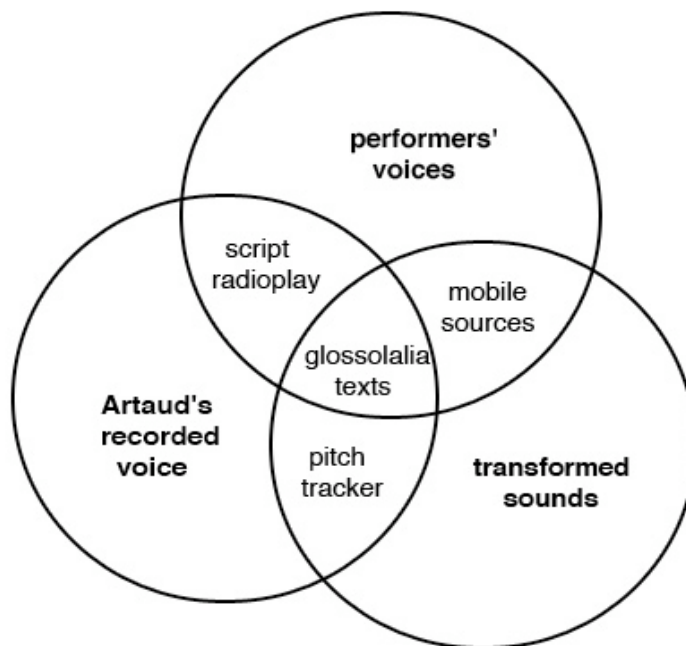


Figure 1. Diagram of different types of sonic relationships explored in *To have done with the judgment of Artaud*.

kré	puc te	o reche modo
kré	puk te	to edire
pek	li le	di za
kre	pek ti le	tau dari
e	kruk	do padera coco
pte		

Table 2. Glossolalia texts from Artaud’s radio play original script used in *To have done with the judgment of Artaud*.

The first type of sonic relationship explored in the piece was the connection between the performers’ voices and Artaud’s recorded voice. The basis for this relation was provided by the script of the play used as a framework to develop phonetic and semantic aspects of the original materials. This was emphasized by the fact that the radiophonic piece was originally recorded in French, whereas the devised piece was developed from English translations of the text. This also allowed the possibility of building different types of relationships between spoken and recorded material using the glossolalia texts as the main driving force to develop material with the performers.

The second type of sonic relationship examined in the piece was the relation between Artaud’s voice and transformed sounds created using diverse voice samples. These sounds were developed using mostly a pitch tracker that captured the attacks and pitch changes of Artaud’s original voice to

create a gamut of tonal and percussive sounds for the desired character of different sections of the piece. These generated sounds were combined and blended with some of the recordings of the original play and played through individual mobile sources that the speakers carried with them in different parts of the piece, as will be explained in further detail within the next section. This approach allowed the possibility of creating an effective transition from the intense and dramatic nature of the original recordings to organic tonal and percussive textures closely bounded to the performers' movements, inspired by Artaud's idea of developing vocal sound material as an extension of the body (Hollier, 2004). This method also proved to be a very effective way of relating the speech articulations with glossolalia texts in a way similar to Eric Sleichim use of amplified voices (Verstraete, 2004).

The third relationship investigated in the piece was the one between the performers' voices and the transformed sounds. This relation was established using mobile sound sources that the performers carried with them in different sections of the piece, as will be explained in detail in the following section.



Figure 2. Performers delivering speech and holding mobile sound sources during a performance of *To have done with the judgment of Artaud* at the Northern School of Contemporary Dance in Leeds, England.

4. Building Spaces with Sound

Inspired by some of Artaud's ideas related to the use of the physical space, the initial goal for the devised piece was to develop a sonic framework that would allow an effective use of the spatial sound design, keeping a clear sonic reference for the audience and, at the same time, exploring the idea of sonic mobility in connection to the choreographed movement of the performers. After

experimenting with different devices it became clear that the most effective way of doing this was to use portable CD players to be carried by the performers in specific sections of the piece. On the one hand this would allow the audience to make the connection with the radio as an object linked to the nature of the radio play and the intensity of Artaud's voice, and on the other hand, it allowed the possibility of creating relationships between the performers' movements and specific sounds on stage. In general terms, the piece itself was created considering a spatial design that could be easily implemented but would still contain interesting and detailed timbral and spatial developments (Otondo, 2008). This was achieved by composing the work as a multi-channel piece, combining throughout the piece the two stationary loudspeakers of the PA in the venue with the two mobile sources carried by the performers. This allowed the possibility of developing a compositional framework to explore different types of spatial relationships between the performers' movements, their voices and reproduced sounds as shown in table and figure 3.

Throughout the development of the music and spatial design for the piece the idea was to incorporate as much as possible the use of sound across the stage, integrating specific sounds with the actions of performers on stage in a similar way to that proposed by Barker (Bicât and Baldwin, 2002). As shown in table and figure 3, different types of spatial design arrangements were carefully devised in connection with the development of the choreographed movement for the different parts of the work. One effective way of doing this was to use the glossolalia excerpts recorded by Artaud and Roger Blin for the radio play to develop vocal material with a close relationship to the new movement material created by the dancers. Through an intense series of workshops a whole section of the piece was developed as a combination of vocal and dance improvisation based on the sounds of some of the glossolalia texts shown in section 5 of table 3. The use of this newly generated vocal material in close connection with the use of spatialisation of sound mentioned above proved to be an effective way of keeping the attention of the audience throughout the performance, as one reviewer of the show noted:

“To have done with the judgment of Artaud is just as innovative, if not more so, in its use of sound to help create the appropriate atmosphere. At times the sound effects are so consuming, it is hard to distinguish their origins. Which sounds are the performers making? Which from the overhead speakers? What about those hand-held radios? At one point, the performers leave the stage. There is nothing, but the sudden, violent bursts of sound - behind the curtain, overhead, all around you. The next moment, one of them has moved so silently, you only now notice they're right beside you and have started muttering again” (Powell, 2007).

Section	Spatial design
1	Sparse use of speech in relation to reproduced sound through a four-channel soundtrack using the PA system and two mobile sources. Two performers move with mobile sound sources while the others two move delivering speech (figure 3a).
2	Use of a 2-channel mix with noise for two mobile sources synchronized with speech spoken by the four performers. The noise bursts give the delivery of speech by performers according to a prepared text score (Figure 3b).
3	Use of one mobile source playing the voice of Artaud that blends and masks the speech of the performer carrying it.
4	Dance duo with a stereo mix played through the PA system.
5	Improvisation by three performers that combine glossolalia texts with choreographed movement material. The fourth performer carries a mobile source playing noise that masks the voices of the rest of the performers marking the end of that section.
6	Dance duo with a 4-channel mix played through the stereo PA system and two mobile sources. Performers carrying mobile sources move on the sides of the stage while the other two performers dance in between (Figure 3c).
7	Small percussion instruments played by the four performers synchronized with a stereo mix played through the PA system. The performers deliver speech while they move across the stage (Figure 3d).

Table 3. Examples of the spatial design in different sections of the devised piece *To have done with the judgment of Artaud*, as presented by Base Theatre at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2007.

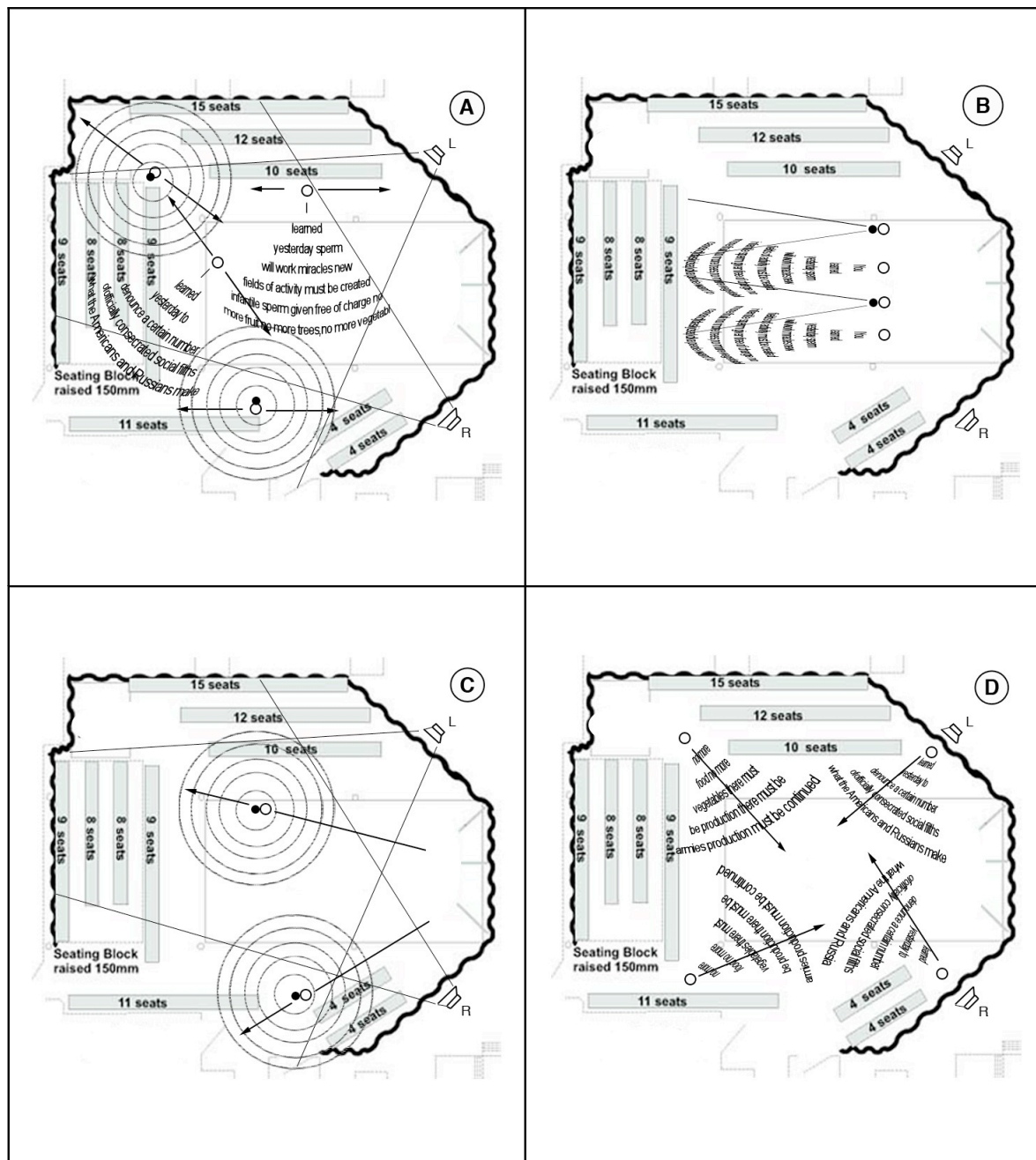


Figure 3. Performers’ position and movements with and without portable radios in relation to the main PA system in the venue at the 2007 Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Numbers refer to positions and movements of one or both sources in different sections of the piece as shown in table 3.

5. Conclusions

The developments of the music theatre project presented here showed that many of Artaud’s original ideas related to sound and performance can be effectively implemented as a way to enhance the aural and visual experience of music and theatre audiences. Simple but effective solutions like

the ones described above proved to be powerful tools when engaging with different kinds of audiences. Further developments of this project will consider expanding some of the ideas presented here using an extended audiovisual platform based on wireless loudspeaker technology (Otondo, 2010). This could allow the possibility of developing further the idea of sound mobility in relation to choreographed movements of performers on stage following Artaud's vision of a true integration between gesture and sound. The challenge for the development of such a platform will be to devise a performance approach that can effectively incorporate mobile sources as part of a larger spatial design in order to integrate the performers' movements into a composed sonic landscape, thus creating the truly immersive audiovisual experience that Artaud once dreamed of.

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