OVIDIUS UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANȚA
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
DOCTORAL FIELD: PHILOLOGY

ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

REARRANGING CORPOREALITY: SOUNDSCAPES AND URBAN SPACES IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH CITY COMEDY

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CONSTANȚA
2019

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: soundscapes; corporeality; sound physicality; aurality; vibration; reverberation.

This doctoral dissertation examines soundscapes produced in early modern drama—particularly in the city comedies produced in the period 1590-1620—and the ways in which playwrights orchestrate sounds that would be heard during particular scenes. These soundscapes are suggested to the audience as a reflection, as shapes taken in their imagination through vibration. The reflection suggests emotions that the soundscapes call forth, such as anger, joy, defiance, and confusion. Through these soundscapes it is possible to explore a character's perspective during dramatic interaction, but also assess the level of sensation that a particular scene creates by means of particular soundscapes. The term "soundscape" derives from ethnomusicology and is intended to describe the complete set of sounds present within a particular environment. By placing the early modern London theatre at the centre of the production of soundscapes, I argue that drama destabilizes the merely visual interaction during the theatrical performance by rearranging corporeality by means of soundscapes, based on the reverberations or vibrations of theatrical sounds on stage and among the audience.

Early modern drama functioned as the crucible for new conceptions of the human senses that challenged early modern notions of rigid sensory hierarchies. Medical, religious, and philosophical thought of this period located the senses at the border between body and soul, mind and matter, and tended to favour the higher sense of vision and to denigrate the lower faculties, such as hearing, touch or smell. In contrast, playwrights working in the diversified sensory environment of the early modern playhouse had a particular investment in the sense of hearing. This sense, I contend, was at least as important as vision—if not more so—in the theatrical experience, as manifested in early modern city comedies in relation to rearranging the corporeality that defines these plays.

This dissertation builds upon the methodology of performance theory, ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, early modern psychology, theatre history, theories of embodiment and sound studies, geocriticism and spatial literary studies, as well as discourse analysis, and responds to recent materially oriented scholarship on the early modern body and phenomenological approaches to the senses. I investigate how sound physicality is inscribed in the theatrical imaginary not only in terms of performance, but also in terms of how the spatial and experiential aspects of drama are manifested in text. I also challenge the privileging of the visual as exclusively important among the senses and include soundscapes as new factors of

conveying emotions. The increasing importance of vision was due to the rapidly developing and disseminating technologies of print, perspective, optics, and geography in early modern Europe. Although sensory modalities, other than sight, are often said to have only marginal importance in early modern culture, I make the case that the sense of hearing and the theatrical soundscapes were also important in the emergent early modern ideas about gender, language, aesthetics, politics, and affective exchange.

From blending in the sociological theory of interrelated actor networks (Latour 24) with current experiments in propagating sound in modern theatre (Ball 58-59), I derive the conceptual framework of this dissertation: soundscapes are an interface between audience and the action on stage during theatrical performance. Sound reverberations produced by soundscapes act as a threshold between actors and audience, and between what is seen and what is heard during the performance, suggesting meanings beyond the visual. What my dissertation brings as a novelty in the reconsideration of aurality in early modern city comedy, starting from Bruce Smith's spatial concepts of "*here*ness" and "*there*ness" (*Acoustic World of Early Modern England* 8), is the idea of soundscapes as vibration through space and reverberating throughout the theatre audience during the dramatic performance. Authors whose plays I consider include William Shakespeare (*The Taming of the Shrew*, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Tempest*), George Chapman, John Marston, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Dekker, and Ben Jonson (*The Alchemist*, *Volpone*, and *Epicoene, or the Silent Woman*). By questioning the early modern hierarchies of the five senses, I argue that the material and the metaphorical meanings of soundscapes in early modern drama destabilize the central symbolic construct of the period's theories of the five senses through the corporeality of sounds in city spaces. The soundscapes of city comedy, in relation to the early modern London urban space, produce liminal but commanding emotions that are just as important as the visual in the theatre.

The first chapter, "Sounds of the River" (1), examines the soundscapes produced in *Eastward Hoe* (1605) by Ben Jonson, John Marston, and George Chapman; *Westward Hoe* (1603-04) by Thomas Decker and John Webster; and *Northward Hoe* (1605) by John Webster and Thomas Dekker to show that soundscapes produced in these three plays are part of the material culture and the urban space of London's city comedy. I argue that representations of the soundscapes of the river are important for the plays' topographies and they create vibrations of aural imagery that contribute to the emotions produced by the performance. In the context of the boatmen's cries represented by the three plays' titles, the Thames is a personified presence in the dynamics of these three comedies and the sounds of the river acquire burlesque tones represented through the songs and loud noises on stage. The flow of the river suggests

direction and it triggers notions connected to change and fluidity; the cries of the Thames boat rivermen lying at the source of the three plays' titles integrate the sounds of these plays into a pattern of direction, sound, and movement. Movement eastward, westward, or northward, along or across the river, suggests transformation of the characters.

In *Eastward Hoe*, discussed in the first subchapter of chapter one, "Sounding Citizens and the City on the River Bank: *Eastward Hoe*" (1.1), the intended movement to the west (to the New World of Virginia) fails lamentably and characters end in a shipwreck on the Isle of Dogs and in prison. Soundscapes heard in a goldsmith's shop in the morning alternate with women chattering, the Bow-bell ringing, sounds of a monkey screaming, as well as trilling tunes and references to the aural world of the theatre. In the second subchapter of chapter one, "Sounding Revelry on the River in *Westward Hoe*" (1.2), I demonstrate that *Westward Hoe* dramatizes revelry on the river in the context of the amusements available to the citizens of London; the sounds produced in the play (ticking of the clock, movement of the engine, current chatter, fiddlers, and music) suggest the lively atmosphere of the commercial city, in which bawds and merchants' wives interact with gallants and debt-ridden courtiers. The third subchapter of chapter one, entitled "City Wives and River Sounds in *Northward Hoe*" (1.3), argues that *Northward Hoe* renders the river sounds in interaction with city wives and gallants, who produce sounds in the whorehouse and the tavern. The fluid nature of social norms is typified through the fluidity of the river and the liquid sounds and songs produced in the three plays.

The second chapter, "Sounds of Trades and the City's Underworld" (2), examines the soundscapes in *The Roaring Girl or Moll Cutpurse* (1611) by Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker; *The Shoemaker's Holiday or the Gentle Craft* (1600) by Thomas Dekker; and William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (1605) to show sounds of the various trades overlapping with the rumour of the people jostling in the streets and the cries of the bears and the dogs barking from the bear-baiting arena. The dialogic exchange transformed into expressive soundscapes in the three comedies under discussion reveals an aural world in which various trades and people (shoemakers, wives, prostitutes, and gallants) interact in a noisy atmosphere. The first subchapter of chapter two, "Sounding Femininity: *The Roaring Girl*" (2.1), demonstrates that soundscapes in Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl* are incorporated in the title of the play, since the play dramatizes a transgressive woman whose voice is loud and who plays the viol. The second subchapter of chapter two, "Sounding Male and Female Power: *The Shoemaker's Holiday*" (2.2), demonstrates that in Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* soundscapes are mainly produced by the merry shoemakers, whose

activities in the London city-world imply loud talking, singing, and the final merry dance. Music and dancing, however, resolves tensions only partially, just as the play shows an individual case of rags-to-riches story, while the general social hierarchy is respected and social tensions are far from being resolved through the harmony of music and merrymaking.

In the third subchapter of chapter two, "Sounding Power and Authority in *Measure for Measure*" (2.3), I observe that, in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, sounds produced in the corrupted city of Vienna are not so obvious as in the two citizen plays discussed earlier, *The Roaring Girl* and *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. In Shakespeare's play, sounds and hearing metaphors disclose a world of sound silenced by power. There are several metaphoric voices in the aural environment of this play, such as the Duke's muffled voice of power; Isabella's voice demanding justice, which ends in silence; Angelo's double speech—at first insistent and later ending in silence; Marianna's melancholic voice and music; and Lucio's irritating voice, speaking out of order. The collective voice and the noises of the city's underworld are shaped from the sounds of these multiple character voices. The places in which the action is set are also symbolic for certain sounds: the silence of the convent is broken by Lucio's shouts; the prison, expected to be a noisy place, is quiet during the night of curfew, while in the morning the shouts of both executioners and convicts cut through the tense atmosphere in which matters of life and death are being resolved.

Chapter three, "Imaginary Soundscapes" (3), discusses the city comedies *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher (1607), Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610) and *Volpone, or the Fox* (1606), as well as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611). I argue that the city-comedies discussed incorporate soundscapes into the urban surrounding and influence the world outside the theatre space through the corporeality of the actors' voices on stage. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, however, sound and music are part of the dramatic texture and typifies inner emotion. Sounds and music are generated as a form of total magic in this play, which reverberate throughout the theatrical space. In the first subchapter of chapter three, entitled "Corporeality of Sounds in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*" (3.1), I show that sound on the early modern stage is characterized by materiality and corporeality, so Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is constructed as a musical fugue, with contrapuntal themes and plot lines, while the songs in the play are interrelated to formulate a consistent soundscape. The second subchapter of chapter three, "Sounds as Mischief in *The Alchemist*" (3.2) demonstrates that Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* is organized meta-theatrically by means of fake magic; the con-characters interact in the form of multiple plays-within-the-play staged

for the benefit of their gulls; these in-play theatrical productions include noisy scenes and are organised according to the contrapuntal technique of fugue-like themes.

The third subchapter of chapter three, "Sounds as Delusion in *Volpone*" (3.3), shows that the play's noisy atmosphere is created by the characters' permanent agitation and mischiefs. Meta-theatricality is symbolized here by means of the acoustic illusions presented to the gullible characters, while the theatrical-illusion technique is achieved through the songs introduced at key moments during the play. In the fourth subchapter of chapter three, "Magical Sounds in *The Tempest*" (3.4), I argue that meta-theatricality relies on the metaphoric use of the contrapuntal technique and soundscapes alternate in meaningful sequences to suggest interiority and elusive emotions. The play rearranges corporeality as a polyphonic symphony in which the dynamic soundscapes are conveyed through language and music. In this way, sounds become catalysts that highlight corporeality during dramatic interaction.

Chapter four, "Sounds and Silence: Corporeality of the Stage" (4), examines the dialogue exchange, music, and other sounds, but also the silence, which is an integral part of each play's soundscape. The analysis focuses on the ways in which soundscapes are reflected in two comedies: Ben Jonson's *Epicoene or The Silent Woman* (1610) and William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1592). Drawing on the soundscapes as conveyed through sound imagery, descriptions, as well as stage directions, I argue that the comedies make creative use of silences, which act as transition points, generating the effect of counterpoint elements of a fugue. The first subchapter of chapter four, "Soundscapes, Sounds, and Silence in the Theatre" (4.1), starts from questions concerning the connections and transition points between soundscapes and silence in the theatre world and contends that, apart from dialogue exchange, music, noise, and other sounds of the early modern stage, dramatic interaction is also defined by silence, which is an integral part of the particular play's soundscape. The second subchapter of chapter four, "*Epicoene or The Silent Woman*: Silence versus Harsh Sounds" (4.2), demonstrates that in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene*, harsh sounds—in opposition to Morose's idiosyncratic need for silence—are carefully orchestrated by the other characters in a series of plays-within-the-play that create alienating soundscapes. Songs, the chatter of the Collegiate ladies, fish-wives and orange-women crying, blacksmiths' hammering, dogs barking, trumpets sounding, bands of street musicians playing instruments are in contradiction with the silence hoped for by Morose in his soundproof chamber, or the dumb shows of his servant Mute. Morose is at the centre of a sphere of soundscapes and he is surrounded by the fluid aural environment.

The third subchapter of chapter four, "*The Taming of the Shrew*: Sounds and the

Harmony of Silence" (4.3), argues that, in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, sounds create various contrasting soundscapes: the play starts *pianissimo*, with the almost silent soundscape during which Sly is sleeping, and grows in volume ending with a noisy banquet including all characters. Apart from the music performed during the play, music, sound and noise are also embodied by characters and instruments. The antithetical pair Katharina and Bianca represent the opposition between noise and silence. Both plays analysed in chapter four can be regarded as songs played according to a musical score, where noises and sounds are provided by the alternations and discrepancies between loud and silent sequences, like a contrapuntal fugue, in which sounds influence personality. Whatever the role of soundscapes or silence in each play might be—whether they represent the source of malaise or the symbolic tones of music and love—soundscapes articulate the comic effect in specific ways. Rather than being mere aural illustrations of the actions on stage, soundscapes are enriched with meanings derived from dramatic interaction and react on the audience's emotions through vibration generated by means of the embodied actors' voices.

Soundscapes conveyed through vibration within the corporeality of the stage space can take many shapes in early modern city comedies, depending on particular plot and character interaction. Soundscapes can be defined by alternative moments of silence, which have similar results in the dramatic world as noise or music do. Each dramatic unit of sound can be heard by audiences in the theatre, who perceive the total emotion-creating soundscape as vibration, in tune with the particular sound-world being represented on stage. Metaphoric descriptions of raging storms—on the river and at sea—suggest physical and mental suffering provoked by the disruption of social order. Metaphors of hearing in *The Tempest* are connected with knowledge in the human and the spiritual world, while this knowledge may be used to produce melodious music and harsh sounds, depending to the characters' relation to their own conscience and power of introspection. Music organised according to the rules of social hierarchy can be rewarding or symbolizing dissonance when the social hierarchy is transgressed. Music is played in taverns and in the streets by fiddlers, but also by wayward transgressive women (such as Moll Cutpurse in *The Roaring Girl*) or by educated women (such as Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew*). Music is also played in brothels, taverns, and hospitals for the mad. Many songs in the plays consist of a single melody, supported by harmonies that provide texture. However, some songs exchange the harmonies for additional melodies, overlapping and interrupting and supporting each other. Sometimes these melodies are complementary and other times they are opposite, but they still work together, forming

coherent soundscapes, which rearrange the play's corporeality and vibrate with the audience's imagination.

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