



auralia.space, digital platform for Aural/ Oral Dramaturgies: Post-Verbatim, Amplified Storytelling and Gig Theatre in the Digital Age

principal investigator Duška Radosavljević. <https://www.auralia.space>

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need to continue to do just that, while offering ample models for how it might be undertaken.

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auralia.space, digital platform for Aural/Oral Dramaturgies: Post-Verbatim, Amplified Storytelling and Gig Theatre in the Digital Age, principal investigator **Duška Radosavljević**. <https://www.auralia.space>

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The digital platform *auralia.space* is major output of a 2020–2021 AHRC Leadership Fellowship held by Duška Radosavljević. The platform hosts a repository of dialogues involving contemporary theatre- and performance-makers and scholars from around the world. Radosavljević and her team, including curator Flora Pitrolo, have gathered a diverse and inclusive array of contributors whose work, both artistic and scholarly, engages with aurality and/or orality. The underlying research project seeks to investigate the ‘increasingly apparent prominence of speech and sound in twenty-first century theatre and performance’ and proposes that ‘the aural aspects of speech, sound, voice and sound design emerge to replace the late twentieth-century dominance of literary textuality (new writing) and/or corporeality (physical theatre) as the primary dramaturgical motors in live performance’. This is a provocative proposal and an effective framework for an extensive series of conversations and verbal reflections. The amount of featured artists and scholars (there are 67 audio-visual artefacts on the platform) is an indicator of the project’s topicality and vibrancy. Radosavljević and her team have cast a wide net, engaging with work that variously relates (but is not restricted) to post-verbatim theatre, technologically amplified storytelling, and gig theatre. Consequently, the project highlights the centrality of speech and sound in the creative processes, intellectual concerns, and work of many contemporary theatre and performance artists, and scholars too.

The platform offers different ways of navigating and engaging with the content. One can browse by category or peruse the five issues of ‘Lend Me Your

Ears’, which curate the content thematically (around topics such as post-verbatim and gig theatre). There are four content categories. ‘The Gallery’ features interviews that Radosavljević has conducted with artists. ‘The Salon’ hosts conversations about sound between scholars, curators, artists, and ‘cultural agitators’. ‘The Laboratory’ contains Zoom-generated ‘making of’ documentaries in which artists discuss selected performance projects. Finally, in ‘The Library’, scholars answer questions about books they have written that have bearing on the overall research project.

I was initially unsure about the best navigational route to take and how the various content categories connected. The platform has a ‘choose your own adventure’ quality, which suits casual browsing but makes assessing the whole more challenging. Happily, the content of each of the contributions can be accessed in multiple ways: one can watch/listen to the embedded recordings or download audio recordings and verbal transcriptions. The latter have been expertly prepared. Indeed, the website design (created by director and playwright Beatriz Cabur) is of high quality. It is visually pleasing and easy on the eye. The recordings are also technically well produced. The platform’s creators have clearly thought carefully about the user experience and have sought to make the content appealing and accessible. The recordings vary in length, but many are over an hour long, so it is helpful to have a range of access options.

A spirit of generosity pervades the platform, which makes it a pleasurable virtual space to visit. The contributors are generous in discussing their work and sharing extracts from it. They are equally generous in their exchanges with one another, which are relaxed, probing, yet also playful, on occasion, despite the coincident pandemic. Radosavljević is an excellent interviewer, always listening intently, allowing her interviewees to follow their trains of thought, and never bluntly pushing an agenda or rigidly following a set of predetermined questions. As she states in an interview with the company ZU-UK, she is keen to ‘re-instate the artist in the process of knowledge production when we think about how theatre is made, how performance is made’. The artists she interviews respond favourably to this approach, as one might expect, and they discuss their formative influences, creative processes, past work, and future directions in an insightful and compelling manner. Scholars also provide candid and illuminating commentary on books they have written. A highlight of the latter

interviews, for me, was scholars discussing their favourite passage, chapter, or idea from their own work, which revealed the sometimes-obscured personal dimension of scholarship.

auralia.space offers a rich and complex tapestry, one that has been collectively created and is replete with beautiful ornaments and fine details. One can get enjoyably lost in the details, provided one does not fixate on how they all add up (as I did, at one point). Radosavljević does not press interviewees to confirm her thesis about there being a ‘paradigm shift’ in contemporary theatre and performance involving aurality and orality, nor is she dogmatic about descriptive categories such as ‘post-verbatim’ and ‘gig theatre’. Instead, conceptual correspondence, resonance, and overlap are cultivated, more or less loosely. Some issues of ‘Lend Me Your Ears’ ostensibly have more coherence than others, which may be intentional, or a result of the necessary ‘improvisatory’ process of adapting the project to the pandemic. Each issue of ‘Lend Me Your Ears’ is fronted by textual prefaces that discuss the contents. I would have preferred more editorial reflection and intellectual knitting-together, as Radosavljević’s hypothesis about aurality/orality as a contemporary paradigm remains a tantalising provocation. I was also a little surprised that theatre companies such as Filter Theatre and Sound&Fury and scholarly projects such as Adam Alston and Martin Welton’s work on ‘theatre in

the dark’ did not feature, but the platform does not claim to be comprehensive, and I discovered many artists and companies who were previously unknown to me. The site has a basic search function, and recordings have been tagged with keywords. I would have liked to have been able to access a list of all the keywords, like a book index, so as to see overlapping interests and points of connection more readily.

Yet, auralia.space is not the last word on this research project. Radosavljević’s forthcoming monograph on the topic, upon which the five issues of ‘Lend Me Your Ears’ have been modelled, will presumably make the case, argumentatively. The digital platform will likely have additional value as a complementary resource, though it also works well as a standalone resource and offers a fascinating snapshot of how artists and scholars reflected on their work during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is highly recommended to scholars of contemporary theatre and performance, specialists in sound studies, voice studies, and related fields, as well as to practitioners and educators. This digital platform offers much to absorb, much to learn, and much to ponder.

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