

"Broken Sounds" FORUM FORUM "Sons Cassés"

Enrique Pardo (editor)

notes and articles are by Enrique Pardo unless specified otherwise

« Sons Cassés » est l'un des deux thèmes proposés pour l'Université d'Été 2006. Ce Forum contient l'éditorial, ainsi que des échanges de préparation. Contributions bienvenues – à Enrique Pardo
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« Broken Sounds » is one of the two themes proposed for the 2006 Summer University. This Forum contains proposals and discussions towards it. Contributions welcome - to Enrique Pardo
<mailto:pan@pantheatre.com>

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Références & Liens / Liens

- 2006 Summer University
www.pantheatre.com/6-archives-MV06-homepage.html
- Université d'Été 2006
<http://www.pantheatre.com/6-archives-MV06-homepage-gb.html>
- **FORUM** : "Who is the Music?" -- "Qui est la Musique?"
<http://www.pantheatre.com/pdf/6-archives-MV06-music.pdf>
- *Monkey Business et les Fausses Cordes Vocales* (Français & English)
<http://www.pantheatre.com/pdf/6-archives-MV06-fausses-cordes-vocales-fr.pdf>
- "Voice and Place" article
<http://www.pantheatre.com/pdf/6-archives-MV06-fausses-cordes-vocales-fr.pdf>

Editorial

English brochure short version
See below for enlarged version

« Broken Sounds »

Are so-called « broken sounds » at the heart of the Wolfsohn/Roy Hart voice work?
Facts, myths, ideologies.
theme for the lectures, master classes on the voice

Under the generic term "broken sound" we are considering all forms of multiphonic vocal emissions, that is, sounds that break, split, crack, shred, splinter, roll (and rock), drone, howl, holler, chant, wail and generally fracture the textural (and emotional) uniformity of a vocal emission.

The term "broken sound" was the militant one used by the Roy Hart Theatre in the 1960s – the reason why I am bringing it back here. "Breaking sounds" carries connotations of the period's upheavals: breaking the sound barrier, revolutionary break-throughs, breaking virginal integrities. It is an iconoclastic term (we should really speak of "phonoclasm"!) It also sounds dangerously close to "breaking voices"... to recklessness, to crude and aggressive expressionism, and of course, to damage, to vocal pathologies, and to literally broken voices.

As part of the tributes to Alfred Wolfsohn at last year's Summer University we were reminded that the founding moment of his voice work was linked to the sounds of dying soldiers during World War One. Broken sounds, broken souls, broken bodies.

We also discussed the poem *Biodrame*, written by Serge Béhar in 1972, and which Roy Hart to a great degree made into his own manifesto. He underlined the link between violence and personal and artistic transformation. The poem defines acting in terms of: "I have aggressed my body in order to come closer to you" (J'ai agressé mon corps pour me rapprocher de toi.) Were "broken sounds" the core of this self-aggression for the sake of generosity?

Since those pioneer years the world has heard and got used to all sorts of multiphonic broken vocal sounds, from Mongolian and Tibetan chants to Heavy Metal, from David Hikes' harmonics to the great tide of soul music – Ray Charles, Howling Wolf (just the name!) and especially a white woman singer who rekindled these discussions when more than one lyrical singer confessed she had come to work with us because she wanted to sing like... Janis Joplin! This triggered the Nick Hobbs' yearly lectures on "*Bel Canto* and *Hell Canto*". We shall be hearing his third instalment this year with nearly 100 recordings and videos – from the blues to flamenco.

Greek mythology tells a crucial myth where something like the great split between *bel canto* and *hell canto* occurs: the musical competition between Apollo and Marsyas. In Ovid's version, the loser, Marsyas, is flayed to death and his blood turns into a red river - the great river of "broken sounds"?

Vicente Fuentes will be presenting the physiology of broken sounds with videos filmed in collaboration with France's top voice specialist, Doctor Guy Cornut. It would seem that possibly the most important factor in their production are the so-called false vocal chords (ventricular bands) just above the presumably "true" vocal chords. Is this another instance of *bel* against *hell*?

Enrique Pardo

Preliminaries Questions

1. **DEFINITIONS** / What are we calling "broken sounds"? We want to set the borders in an inclusive way, using – why not? – the opposition to 'non-broken' sounds, call them "clear sounds", or "*bel canto*" sounds, etc. During a recent visit to Malérargues, I was asked by a teacher if for instance "chorded sounds" (multiphonic) should be included. My answer is yes.
2. **CLASSIFICATIONS** / An inclusive approach to "broken sounds" requires methodologies of classification. I am particularly interested in the criteria used for these classifications, and especially criteria based on physiology.

Nota 1: one of my current hobbies is collecting definitions of the voice. The point, for me, is the plurality of points of view, from literal, physiological, to philosophical (political, linguistic, etc.) It is here that Steven Connors' book ¹ is such an eye opener – if only by the very fact of taking the point of view of *ventriloquism*. There is a chapter for instance on the American Constitution and the roots of the notion of "the voice of the people of the United States", which is a form of ideological ventriloquism whose roots are more uncanny than we tend to remember, involving rational neo-magical massonic ideals, for instance.

Nota 2: today there are a lot of definitions (and methodologies) of the voice that claim to be "central", or "normal", or "orthophonic". The implication is that each such definition and the teaching method that goes with it is not only the only objective one, but also the one from which you can understand and take on all others. These stands tend to be "physiologically" based ("knowing how it all works"); they have replaced the enthusiastic, "organic", "natural" and more 'hippie' definitions of the 70s and 80s. Scientific knowledge is not only an essential contribution but also a joy (if only for the complexity it reveals!), and it can save a lot of time, trial and error. It can also be a conservative refuge that literalizes the link between hygiene and aesthetics, usually based on an idealized version of *bel canto* – and a great fear of iconoclastic moves.

3. **TERMINOLOGIES** / classifications lead to questions of terminologies. What terms are used to describe sounds? What metaphorical networks are called upon? Medical, artistic, traditional, poetic, etc.? My view is that terminologies reflect esthetics, in the broadest sense: they are the signposts put up by the cultural filters of perception. For my part, I am particularly keen to work on "figuring out" the voice, and on the poetics of descriptive terminology – what I call, more generally, "imaginal criticism", the critical address of image and story through image and story.

Core Questions

Beyond the methodological groundwork lie the core questions which I have condensed in: "**Are so-called « broken sounds » at the heart of the Wolfsohn/Roy Hart voice work?**"

Putting the debate in these terms makes a link back to the 2005 Summer University where we discussed the founding myths of the voice work of Alfred Wolfsohn and Roy Hart. By moving to "broken sounds" I am implicitly saying that, yes, "broken sounds" are "at the heart of the Wolfsohn/Roy Hart voice work." The question is of course: "why?" and to some degree: "how?" Here are some of the topics I hope we will discuss:

- Firstly, I think the 'genius' of Roy Hart was in his way of linking *psyche* and *soma*, the literal and the metaphorical. It is important therefore to hear the terms of these discussions (*voice, broken sounds, singing*) both literally and metaphorically, physiologically and philosophically. It was the multiplicity of the dimensions and implications he gave to voice expression that most impressed me. Roy Hart gathered these in the idea of "singing", the "root metaphore" of his work ².
 - Note: I speak of Roy Hart and no longer necessarily of Alfred Wolfsohn. For one, I never met Wolfsohn, while I was for some years a direct witness of Hart's ideas at work. I also noticed that the 2005 Summer University paid many tributes to Wolfsohn but often shied away from the more polemic aspects of Roy Hart's ideas and practice.
- Roy Hart's was the most dynamic philosophy and teaching of "**personal transformation**" that I have encountered. And the confrontation with "broken sounds" was the "motor" so to speak of his practice, but again,

¹ Steven Connor, Dumbstruck, A Cultural History of Ventriloquism – see article "Figuring Out the Voice" <http://www.pantheatre.com/pdf/6-reading-list-voice-JPR-gb.pdf>

² I wrote about "singing" as Roy Hart's "root metaphore" in the first article I published in Spring Journal, in 1984, "Dismembering Dionysus." Soon online.

not only literally (the roaring and screaming for which the group was famous), but psychologically, in terms of what one makes of 'personnal' transgression. For the moment I am not addressing their artistic use.

There are two aspects here that need mentioning and discussing.

1. The very validity of "personnal transformation". Sonu Shamdasani's point of view, for instance and to put it very succinctly, questions the ethics of "personnal transformation", especially in psychotherapy, and considers most of it a lingering substitute for religious practices ³.
 2. The link between "personnal transformation" and theatre: there was an obvious danger of sectarian proselytism in a group that staged rituals celebrating "symbols of personnal transformation", to paraphrase C.J. Jung's best seller.
- Physiological research on voice production in the last 30 years points to the importance of the ventricular bands (known as "**false vocal chords**") in the control of effort and violence when emitting sounds. My early guess (I am waiting to hear further from the specialists) is that about 80 percent of what we are calling "broken sounds" rely on these "false vocal chords" – either directly (sounds produced only through them, bypassing the vocal chords 'proper') or in combinations between 'false' and 'proper' vocal chords. Many fascinating questions come out of these facts. To point to some:
 - Doctor Abitbol writes about the false vocal chords as a physiological remnant of evolution – of **animality** ⁴. The obvious question ensues: are broken sounds a direct link to "animality" and its implications? ⁵
 - Voice anthropologist Tran Han Quai showed us many of the massive muscular efforts and blockages linked with the emission of "**throat singing**" broken sounds ⁶. His demonstrations horrified those who make a dogma of singing in terms of fluidity, flow and relaxation.
 - In thermodynamics any transformation requires energy. Alchemy speaks of heat and of the full range of **violence**, from gentle indirect warming to brutal direct flames. During the 2005 Summer University we mentioned (and heard a performance) of *Biodrame*, a poem written by Dr Serge Béhar for Roy Hart, who to a large degree made it his own *manifesto* ⁷. Agression is very present in the poem and in Hart's comments. The act of theatre is described in terms of "I agress my body in order to get near to you" (the original: "J'ai agressé mon corps pour me rapprocher de toi".)
 - The poetics of "broken sounds" are not exclusively linked to animality. "Motor sounds", as they were called in the Roy Hart Theatre, carry mechanical connotations, with fixed sequential frequencies and intervals; they can be cold and soulless (or soothingly meditative, like some of the base drones of Tibetan monks.) "Peep sounds" (very high harmonics) can be heard as angelical and disembodied ⁸. But the most impressive "broken sounds" emissions are hulk-like multiphonic combinations of all these strands, produced on a very broad regulation of muscular effort and specific relaxation outlets. These efforts tackle primordial voices and take us to what could be considered the "heart of darkness", the heart of violence. To apply the notion of singing to the production of these 'brute' sounds involves "doing violence to violence." It is in this sense that during a recent round table on Voice Teachers' Training I spoke of violence as central to the work ⁹.

³ I have gathered some notes on these philosophical exchanges. These can be consulted on two documents: <http://www.pantheatre.com/pdf/6-archives-MV05-sonu-ontologies-gb.pdf> and <http://www.pantheatre.com/pdf/6-archives-MV05-sonu-gb.pdf>

⁴ L'Odysée de la Voix, Dr. Abitbol (English translation available.) See "Monkey Business" FORUM, note below.

⁵ See my "Monkey Business" article quoting a passage on "false vocal chords" from Dr. Abitbol's book, and hinting at the tricky cultural questions behing such a take on "animality", including racist ones. <http://www.pantheatre.com/pdf/6-archives-MV06-fausses-cordes-vocales-fr.pdf>

⁶ See the notes on "Throat Singing". Soon online.

⁷ The full text of *Biodrame*, with Roy Hart's annotations, is available through <http://www.roy-hart.com/pauls.htm>

⁸ A particularly scathing critic in London, in the late 60's spoke of "asthmatic spiders"!

⁹ A CDrom video recording of this talk will be available from PANTHEATRE.

"Fractured Voices"

Towards the 3rd « Bel Canto and Hell Canto » lectures by Nick Hobbs.

Paris, January 27 and 28, 2006, see <http://www.pantheatre.com/4-agenda.html>

> -----Original Message-----
> From: Nick Hobbs
> Sent: Monday, December 05, 2005 2:30 PM
> To: pan@pantheatre.com; Linda@pantheatre.com; Eliza@pantheatre.com
> Subject: Singing whispers, croaks, growls and roars: An
> exploration of fractured voices from the Blues to Flamenco
>
> dear all,
>
> thinking about categories and more interesting i think to think
> in terms of characters than technique (technique and
> physiology will be covered though)
>
> characters that come to mind (each with rather different but
> overlapping kinds of broken voices) are
>
> - evil-doing (vocal devils, witches, wizards, psychopaths etc)
>
> - seduction (Soul)
>
> - ecstasy (Qawwali, Rock 'n Roll)
>
> - clowning & fooling
>
> - suffering & lamenting (Blues & Flamenco)
>
> - violence & anger (Rock, Punk, Metal, Goth, Industrial)
>
> - magic & shamanism (Tuva)
>
> - age (recent Bob Dylan & Leonard Cohen etc)
>
> - sickness & fragility
>
> - animality
>
> this is just a sketch which will get fleshed out in the
> lecture, but please let me know any other categories which
> come to mind
>
> thanks
> nick

How to classify "broken sounds"? The question of violence and damage.

From Enrique Pardo / December 10, 2005.

Dear Nick,

I very much like your title and proposals, and look tremendously forwards to your lectures.

Let me comment, maybe to compensate the massive encyclopaedic undertaking ! I would suggest a procedure which, for instance, chooses 12 voices as in-depth examples. Maybe one from each category you list, but not labelling them a priori. I fear the labels will predetermine the listening (in terms of emotional attitudes and intentions - what you call "characters".) Most singers mix categories, and probably use the same sounds to different effects.

My "classificatory" aim would be, with your help, with Vicente Fuentes, Linda, Liza, and participants, to respond, compare, and yes, "label" certain sounds. My labelling would go for metaphoric inventions (like what was labelled "motor" sound in the Roy Hart days.) Or to start to qualify and differentiate a blanket notion such as "throat singing" (and not reduce qualifiers to eco-ethnicities: regions, periods, etc.) We should find new names (either in usage, or invent them). And discuss the physiology mechanisms in the larynx mainly (not only resonators and harmonics), with Vicente's help.

Maybe this simplifies your task somewhat. You can qualify in your terms what you hear (you are very eloquent at this) and open to other perceptions and referential vocabularies.

We had a very good discussion last Sunday towards a "Pantheatre/Roy Hart Voice Teacher" certification. I did a whole rap on the centrality I attribute to the notion of "violence" (starting in the founding myth of Wolfsohn in the World War One trenches). I will bring that in too.

Should it not be simply "An exploration of fractured sounds from the Blues to Flamenco" - or even "An exploration of fractured singing from the Blues to Flamenco" ??? But, having said that, I prefer "fractured voices" (even with the risk of literalization it involves... Linda mentioned in the Sunday discussion that in 30 years there was not one case of voice nodules!

Enrique