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Musicality as a paradigm for the theatre: a kind of manifesto¹

ABSTRACT

In a manifesto of ten theses the author aims to establish the notion of 'musicality' as a paradigmatic principle in creating and perceiving theatre. He outlines how musicality can contribute to, enhance and change working processes in the theatre, be it in naturalistic productions or in a devising context. Key benefits from employing a musical frame of perception for both audiences and practitioners, he argues, are the heightened awareness of form, the productive liberation from the dominance of content and discursive meaning, the self-reflexivity and the potential for a politics of form and perception. The article draws particularly on examples of recent theatre productions from the European (and particularly German-speaking) context, for example by Heiner Goebbels, Michael Thalheimer, Ruedi Häusermann or Sebastian Nübling, but the author plans to develop this necessarily restricted manifesto into a wider and historically more far-reaching project in the near future.

INTRODUCTION

While the term 'musical' can refer both to the ability of someone as well as the characteristics of something, the noun 'musicality' is almost exclusively used to describe a human talent, usually associated with a sense of appreciation and competitive comparison. In this article, I would like to suggest dissolving two

KEYWORDS

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1. This text was initially conceived as a keynote for the symposium *Das Theater mit der Musik – Akustische Spuren im Schultheater* [Theatre with Music–Acoustic traces in school-theatre] of the Bundesverband Darstellendes Spiel (BVDS) [German

National Association for theatre in schools), Kassel, 16 September 2008 and was previously published in German (Roesner 2009). Translation and adaptation by the author, including all quotations.

2. See Jacoby (1984: 35–36).
3. I am using this term here as an anthropomorphism but also as a historical reference to the beginnings of theatre as a decidedly musical art form in ancient Greece. Nietzsche's notion of the 'Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music' (1872) is an unavoidable reference in this context.
4. Here I refer to Jacoby's concept of 'die Befreiung der schöpferischen Kräfte' ['the liberation of the creative forces'] (title of Jacoby 1984).
5. Christopher McCullough coined the term 'theatre praxis' in his book of the same title (1998) and defined it as 'practical work that does not claim an ideological neutrality, but seeks to theorize practice as praxis; that is, a practice that recognizes its potential for change' (McCullough 1998: n.p.).
6. James Tobias suggests a similar usage of the term for the analysis of film music: 'I aim to understand musicality – not strictly music – across multiple media, not film alone. Musical cultures and discourses can articulate relationships of corporeality, affect, identity and mobility: actions in a performative framework, any of which may contribute meaning to a work of time-based media. Musicality may drive

boundaries for this notion of 'musicality', in order to then discuss its relevance within the working processes of theatre in the form of ten theses.

First of all, I would like to suspend restricting the term to human talent, enabling me to apply the notion also to things, situations and processes, so that it becomes meaningful to speak of a musicality of the theatre, of a particular staging or lighting design, of a rehearsal or of the musicality of an act of representation. The second dissolution of a boundary is indebted to the music pedagogue Heinrich Jacoby, who as early as the 1920s criticized the judgmental notion of 'musicality', which was primarily derived from striving towards the benchmarks of high art. He put forward a notion of musicality as being a general expressive capacity of all human beings, comparable to their mother tongue.² Consequently, the notion of a musicality in theatre, as an art form and as the theatrical event itself, would refer to the intrinsic affinity of the stage to music, with which it was, so to speak, issued at birth.³ Striving towards a musicality in theatre is thus perhaps less a case of learning and training, but an act of excavating and 'liberating'.⁴

With these two amendments, it will be possible to recognise 'musicality' as a form of perceiving and thinking on the theatre stage, as a principle of 'praxis',⁵ which can be a training, working and devising method, a dramaturgical approach as well as a perceptive frame for audiences.⁶

The subject of my article is, thus, not only the various uses of (incidental) music in the theatre, but a wider range of developments, in which principles of music are applied to the expressive means of the theatre or at times – *vice versa* – the 'theatricalization' of making music. Musicality in theatre, I would propose, has the potential – as a mode of thinking, a working principle or a kind of perception – to act as a catalyst between theatre and music.

For my metaphoric use of the term catalyst it may suffice to define it as an entity that facilitates two other entities interacting with each other more easily. In this, the catalyst produces something that enables interaction without being consumed itself. The idea and practice of a musicality in theatre thus reduces the activation energy needed for the interaction and interplay between music and theatre. The catalyst also determines to a great extent, *how* theatre and music interact and react with each other, for example; whether they merge or remain distinct, whether they act as two very similar or dissimilar elements. The mutual reactions can manifest in subtle changes as well as evaporate in a big bang, at times they produce energy (in chemistry this is called 'exothermic'; in the theatre, perhaps, 'insight, fascination, experience'), on other occasions energy is absorbed (the so-called 'endothermic' reaction, which in theatre may translate to 'boredom, predictability or redundancy'). In the following ten theses I will focus on 'exothermic reactions' between theatre and music that arise out of the spirit of musicality.

1. Musicality in theatre is a matter of exercise

I understand 'exercise' here in a twofold way: on the one hand it is the development of musical sensitivity and imagination that requires exercise – practical try-outs, failure, modification and dismissal – since musicality in theatre is not something as readily crafted on paper as a choir piece in four voices. While the harmony of voices is predictable for the experienced musician, the incomparably more complex interplay of movement, text, sound and space in the theatre can only be composed at the table to a very limited degree. Even composers who do just that – such as Mauricio Kagel,⁷ or Manos Tsangaris⁸ – often edit

and adapt their work during rehearsals or create unique versions for different performances.

Second, I would argue that the training of a sense of theatrical musicality belongs in the canon of exercises and performer training units – from compulsory education to drama school and University drama degrees. Creating a sensitivity towards rhythm, timing, sound quality, musical form, dynamics, space and sound etc. through corresponding exercises and experiments develops an awareness (and to some extent, the technical skills) to perceive and craft theatre as a sonoric and rhythmical event.

How long does a theatrical action sustain? How loud should a playback of incidental music be? Where do I place an instrument? What shoes sound best on what surface? And (with a nod to Ruedi Häusermann⁹) which chairs 'sing' best when pulled gently across the stage?

In all this I believe there is no 'recipe', as some guide-books seem to suggest¹⁰; it seems much more important to me to facilitate the *experience* of different consequences and impressions, to enable their description and reflection and to be thus more sensitive and critically interrogative in one's use of musicality in theatre.

2. Musicality in theatre is not a matter of quantity but quality

Music and musicalization must be used and set free on the theatre stage with moderation, reason, taste and sensitivity. A theatre production is not automatically more musical when more music is being played.

Hence, musicality may also mean that, for example, for almost the entire duration of Michael Thalheimer's production of *Emilia Galotti* (Berlin 2001) only *one* musical theme is being played over and over again.¹¹ However, the theatre musician Bert Wrede continuously presents this theme in new ways by changing its dynamics, tempo, the quality and location of the sound source and by adding subtle sound effects to it. Thus, the theme lends the performance a seductive continuity but also makes the audience listen time and again when yet another imperceptible change has become perceptible.

Musicality may also mean that – as is often the case in the acclaimed productions of Sebastian Nübling and his theatre musician Lars Wittershagen¹² – particular incidental music is composed and played back during rehearsals as an acoustic backdrop, which provides the actors with an orientation as well as something to work against. During the actual performances, this music often is no longer played back at all – it merely contours the attitude, timing and flow of energies within the scene in the cast's collective subconscious, as a mixture of a musical stage direction of sorts and an acoustic subtext.

3. Musicality in theatre requires opening up towards a self-reflective theatre, conscious of form and abstraction

Music is a non-discursive language, which struggles to make any factual, fictional or narrative statements. Its meaning, I would argue (although this is a much debated topic), is primarily self-referential. Music makes statements about music. Even if cultural use has ascribed particular extra-musical meaning to certain musical phrases or characteristics by means of convention, I would uphold that the primary content of music is actually its intra-musical form.

Consequently, musicalization of theatre, or an activation of a musical frame of perception during the creation process, necessarily works as an extension

narrative, but it is also a mode of reception' (Tobias 2003: 29).

7. See Rebstock (2004: 25–49).
8. Tsangaris' composition *Drei Räume Theater. Suite. Stationentheater für etwa 20 Mitwirkende* (Tsangaris 2004a), for example, is site-sensitive and was adapted respectively to the performances at Donaueschingen (2004b), at the Festspielhaus Hellerau (2005), at the d.a.m.p.f Festival Köln, Halle Kalk (2005) and for the Internationalen Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Darmstadt (2006).
9. I spent a significant part of a very interesting five-day workshop with Ruedi Häusermann at the *KlangKunstBühne* in Berlin in 2003 pulling chairs across the stage in order to make them 'sing'.
10. See for example Kaye and Weiler (1992), Waaser (1976), Gubler et al. (1998).
11. *Yumei's theme* by Shigeru Umebayashi from the film *In the Mood for Love* by Wong Kar Wai (2000).
12. See also Roesner (2008: 47–48).

13. I am using this shorthand phrase merely as a (polarizing) illustration and have elsewhere elaborated on why sense and sensibility are of course not necessarily opposed in a dichotomy (see Roesner 2003: 47 and following).

of the kind of attention one brings to the theatre: one becomes mindful not only of *what* is being told on stage, but *how* it is being told. Those who, for example, not only occupy themselves with the content of a text, but also with its rhythmic and sonic structure, reflect how language is being used and presented and on how the act of saying interacts with what is being said. Actors who not only motivate their entrance psychologically, but also reflect on the timing and the agogic of their movements enrich the mimetic performance with a poetic dimension.

Because music cannot be reduced to content, musicality of (the) theatre necessitates an act of abstraction that is conscious of form. The self-reflective aspect of this abstraction then enables or even requires decisions on why to tell, present and perform something in a particular way and no other. It also enables the decision *not* to fix a certain meaning but – as Heiner Goebbels calls it – to merely stage ‘opportunities for making an experience’ (Goebbels 2007a: 144). The particular communicative mode of music as a medium with its emphasis on event and ephemerality and its tendency to be non-referential aids this approach.

This shift towards (or addition of) an attention to the musical form of the theatrical event also has consequences for the audience, as the next thesis will suggest.

4. Musicality in theatre liberates audiences from their reflexive quest for meaning and opens eyes and ears for theatre as a multi-medial audio-visual event

Musicality as a principle of perception facilitates a communicative process, which affords the spectator the ‘user privilege’ (‘Anwendungsprivileg’), as Hans-Otto Hügel calls this in the context of his notion of ‘entertainment’ (Hügel 2003: 80). Hügel argues that ‘entertainment’, in contrast to ‘art’, allow its recipients to decide at all times whether to use it merely as a distraction or engage with it more fully and in-depth. This ‘ambiguity’ (‘Zweideutigkeit’) (Hügel 2003: 80) exists, I would argue, in the context of the musicalization of theatre in a slightly different way: here, it refers to the opportunity of the recipient to switch between ‘theatrical’ and ‘musical’ modes and habits of perception. The spectator *can* go hunting for meaning and try to semantically decipher but may also let his or her attention wander and idle, and in doing that detect structural connections and explore the sonic and rhythmic qualities of the performance.

Particularly, rather ‘polyphonic’ productions, such as those by the Belgian choreographer and director Alain Platel or the Swiss director Christoph Marthaler, who often do not offer a clear focus or visual hierarchy for the audience, may be frustrating for the compulsive meaning-searcher, but delight the *flâneur* of eye and ear, who makes sense *en passant* of the theatrical events, the mysterious, the cryptic and the playful. *S/he* is pleased to be *encapacitated* (with an empowering en- not an in-) by the staging’s musicality to embrace a mode of spectatorship, which is encouraged to oscillate between a theatrical and musical perception, or – in a conscious oversimplification – between sense and sensibility.¹³

5. Musicality in theatre creates second-order form and coherence

The postdramatic period or era, which was proclaimed by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his book ‘Postdramatisches Theater’ from 1999, has proven to be of a certain durability and may prove to be more than a mere episode or

‘island’ in the theatrical landscape. The discourse on theatrical forms that are not primarily based on a dramatic text also seems to continue and widen not least due to the English translation of Lehmann’s book in 2006 (by Karen Jürs-Munby) as well as the closely related development of the notion of ‘Devised Theatre’ in the English-speaking context.¹⁴

Lehmann describes, in some detail, the strategies with which theatre practitioners, on abandoning dramatic character, dramatic form and narrative, have sought to sometimes deliberately avoid the formation of new coherencies, but more often have employed other alternative principles, which guide their ways of working and provide orientation for the audience. Musicality is one of these principles.

Musical form, rhythm or sound can endow meaning and coherence on a second, more abstract level: coherence does not emerge here on a discursive level but on a music-formal level, for example as motif relations, repetition, variation, or by rhythmic protention and retention. Not infrequently, however, there is then another step, supported either through the suggestive staging or, less predictably, by the audience – a kind of re-semanticization of the initially self-referential musical coherence. This is possible, or almost inevitable, since the musicality in theatre always occurs in a context of bodies, texts and images and is thus never absolute music, or – as Peter Kivy calls it – music alone (1990).

In Goat Island’s last production, *The Last Maker* (2007a) for example, I saw a silent, mysterious movement sequence. After a while, a musical coherence emerged for me from the fact that I began to recognize how the movements of the performers were repeated, but shifted in relation to each other. I was then able to observe on a formal level how due to the different duration of all the looped movement sequences, new constellations and correlations appeared continuously. In a next step, motivated by the declared topic of the performance, which dealt with both the disbanding of Goat Island as well as ‘last things’ in a wider sense, I could ascribe further semantic meaning to the initially purely musical coherence, for example by interpreting the different performative orbits in the movement sequence, as a metaphor for the cycles of creative work in an innovative collective. Everything is in motion, everything is repeated, but due to the fact that the work is collaborative, there are infinite changes and shifts in the constellations, which allow for continuous novelty. However, the finiteness of this performance – and with it the group’s finiteness – were perhaps an admission of the limits even of the supposedly infinite.

The group itself has, in the performance’s programme notes, provided a different set of meanings for the musical structure of said sequence, which in my view does not take away the validity of any audience member’s deviating individual re-semanticization, but rather confirms the principle of a second-order coherence. Goat Island writes:

The piece takes its inspiration from the historical trajectory of the Hagia Sophia: church/mosque/museum, considered here as movements encountered on different planes. Situated between an audience seated at opposite sides of a square stage, the performance begins with an architectural dance, in detailed triadic rounds. The performers diverge and reconverge, in accordance with hybrid mathematics, to a regular beat with irregular measures.

(Goat Island n.d.)

14. See for example Oddey (1994), Heddon and Milling (2006), Smart and Mermikides (2010).

15. See Guido Hiß' critique on Erika Fischer-Lichte's *Semiotik des Theaters* in Hiß (1993: 50–51).

16. For example, does André Wilms accompany Ravel's string quartet with his rhythmical onion chopping in *Eraritjaritjaka*, or vice versa? For an in-depth discussion of *Eraritjaritjaka* see Goebbels (2007b).

6. Musicality in theatre raises awareness of the harmony of theatrical media

Since the discovery and invention of polyphony around the ninth century (AD), the music of all genres and categories has been decidedly occupied with researching and experimenting with forms of interplay and harmony of different voices and levels. The development of an understanding of the interaction of *theatrical* voices, layers and expressive means, however, has been quite limited so far. Means and signs are generally reduced to their *semantic* meanings, and the correspondences of these meanings have been essentially reduced to two basic models; they are seen to be either homologue or antinomy.¹⁵ This is obviously too limited a view, as theatre scholar Guido Hiß confirms:

The joining up, the *composition* of the multimedia form [in theatre] does not evolve as a simple equalisation of different expressive elements [...]. The multimedial code constitutes a realm of meaning, in which the involved partial systems react to each other in such a way that they mutually interpret each other.

(Hiß 1993: 51, original emphasis)

Even if the material nature of theatre and music is of course different – we appreciate, for example, the 40-voice motet by Thomas Tallis as pure canorousness, however, 40 different simultaneously spoken texts will be regarded as a cacophony – the notion of musicality in theatre provides us with richer, more multi-faceted and accurate ways of dealing with the consonances and interplays of the wide range of theatrical 'voices'.

Heiner Goebbels' works, especially *Black on White* (1996), *Eraritjaritjaka* (2004) and *Stifter's Things* (2007), are prime examples of how text, music, lighting, set and movement at times entangle in complementary rhythms, provide sonic punctuation for each other, concentrate or disperse the atmosphere, flirt with changing causal connections,¹⁶ remain mutually foreign, develop anthropomorphic autonomy, become co-performers and so on.

In short, an awareness of the interplay of scenic elements and theatrical means, which makes use of the wealth of the models available in musical voicing and composition techniques, expands the scope for staging theatre far beyond the homologue/antinomy dichotomy and enriches the theatre with differentiated, engaging and imaginative interplays between the theatrical voices. The models may be borrowed and adapted from classical music, from the improvisation- and arrangement-practices in jazz or from methods of sampling, sound editing and track-work of pop or hip hop.

7. Musicality in theatre expands and enhances the work on text

Musicality in theatre means to approach the theatrical means of expression in a musical way, which could mean that there might not even be a single musical note in the performance in the end. Musicality can instead manifest itself in other ways, particularly in the work on texts. Marianne Van Kerkhoven speaks of 'text which does not solely transmit a certain content but also becomes a musical score; [...] a concrete dramatic event, which turns into a vehicle of abstract musicality' (Van Kerkhoven in Van Kerkhoven and Schlüter 1995: 18).

Working on text musically unlocks different levels than a purely content-related analysis will. It discovers, following Roman Jakobson's terminology

(1972), the poetic and sonic function of words in addition to their referential function; it reveals the rhythmic qualities of paragraphs, line breaks and punctuation beyond their semantic meaning, and invites experimentation with intonation, vocal pitch and timbre. The act of speaking is thus rendered into a performative event beyond its informative character and its capacity as a character's utterance. It becomes untranslatable and unique as the sonic manifestation of a fixed textual *Gestalt* in a moment of ephemeral presence. And this is one of the reasons, I would argue, why we go to the theatre rather than just reading the original dramatic (or other) text.

8. Musicality in theatre is a productive performative task

The director Thomas Ostermeier once wrote about the developments in actor training in drama schools:

They are prepared to let the kitchen-psychology of any frustrated drama teacher become the benchmark of the art of acting. The motto: 'I am afraid I didn't really believe what you just did!' provokes psychopathological convulsion in those poor puny human beings and pauses pregnant with meaning in which they feel something or other, rather than exercising serene enlightenment and *musicality* [...].

(Ostermeier 1999: 10–11, emphasis added)

Robert Wilson says something similar, although in a different, more concise way, when he impressed upon his cast of *The Civil Wars* (1984) in rehearsal: 'Painfully listen all the time' (in Brookner 1985: n.p.), or, while working on *The Golden Windows* (1985): 'Just open the eyes. Hold four seconds. Don't also move the head. It's too complicated' (Cole 1992: 154).

Both directors emphasize musicality as a key acting task, aiming, however, at different results. Ostermeier is concerned about a psychologically realistic representation to be achieved *qua* musicality and Wilson's interest lies in an abstract, formalized performance, which is fed and underpinned by a high precision in the acoustic and temporal perception, which are key disciplines of musicality.

Musicality in theatre appears here as a methodological complement to techniques of psychological embodiment or as an alternative and replacement for these; as a liberation, perhaps, from the 'laboured psychology, from the dictates of the as-if-realism' (Müry 1993: 16), as the theatre critic Andreas Müry put it referring to the actors in Christoph Marthaler's productions.

I will briefly outline two variations of a new, musical type of performer: the score performer and the chorus ensemble. Both have been explored theatrically by prominent directors such as Heiner Goebbels, Andreas Kriegenburg, Nikolaus Stemann, Einar Schleaf, Robert Wilson, Katie Mitchell and Christoph Marthaler. They are, however, also particularly suited – as the long-standing practical research at the University of Hildesheim has demonstrated¹⁷ – for working with amateur actors as they expand the historical perspective on performance, which is often lamentably limited to a mere 150 years of theatrical naturalism and filmic method acting in that context.¹⁸

'The score', as the French theatre semiotician Patrice Pavis describes it, 'refers both to the scenic trajectory of the actor and the stage itself, with all the elements that constitute the *mise-en-scène*. It is the entire sign structure, with which a production addresses the audience' (Pavis 2000: 39f, my translation).¹⁹

17. See for example Beirer (1997), Kiefer (1997), Kurzenberger (1989, 1999), Nübling (1998a, 1998b) and Roesner (2003).

18. Anyone who has been on interview panels for University drama courses will recall the kinds of statements that a majority of applicants put forward in their letters of motivation.

19. 'Die Partitur bezieht sich gleichzeitig auf die szenische Bewegungsbahn des Schauspielers und auf die Bühne selbst, mit allen Elementen, die die Inszenierung ausmachen. Es handelt sich um die gesamte Zeichenstruktur, mit der eine Inszenierung sich an den Zuschauer wendet'.

20. Consider also Gerald Siegmund's notion of the task performance as choreography (2002).
21. See my detailed analyses on the chorus ensembles in Einar Schlee's work in Roesner (2003), as well as Primavesi (2003).
22. The creativity scholar R. Keith Sawyer has investigated the affinities of certain improvisation techniques in theatre performance to jazz improvisation. A jazz inspired musicality can here supply productive impulses, templates and metaphors for the working processes in collective theatre improvisation (see Sawyer 2003).

Even though Pavis then goes on to obfuscate the notion of the score unnecessarily, his point stands, that a musically motivated form of representation encompasses all theatrical signs and – as opposed to Stanislavskian or Chekhovian techniques – works from the outside to the inside. Like a musician, the score performer at first technically develops a structural frame and then – depending on the piece – fleshes it out emotionally or leaves that to the spectator. Quite often the performance thus consists in carrying out an elaborate sequence of tasks rather than a narrative or psychological portrayal and the theatrical fascination for the audience arises from watching someone skilfully executing this score rather than pretending to be someone else, pure making instead of making believe.²⁰

In the chorus ensemble, there is – in addition to aspects that are similar to the score performance, such as the musical shape and conduct of voice and movement – especially the allure of seriality. The multiplication, duplication or fragmentation of characters into the choric has strong musical features. Just as a theme is developed through the various voices of an orchestra, and can be newly orchestrated time and again (Ravel's *Bolero* is perhaps the most famous example of this), the chorus ensemble offers a set of instruments, to de-individualize texts and movements and present them in manifold sonic, rhythmic and dynamic ways.²¹

In contrast to music, where any choir aims to sound as homogeneous as possible, letting the individual voice hide in the overall collective sound, the theatrical chorus provides an interesting paradox: on the one hand it gives the impression of a collective, sometimes even a uniform mass and on the other hand features the individual at the same time by consciously exposing the small deviations within the uniformity. The scenic and linguistic levels of expressions never quite gel and merge in the same way that musical expression can. Musicalization by means of the chorus ensemble thus increases the interplay and sensitivity of performers for each other, while at the same time providing the audience with a scenic phenomenon, which oscillates between effects of multiplication and individualization, unity and difference, scenic consonance and dissonance.

9. Musicality in theatre has potential as a principle of devising

Musical techniques and principles can be applied profitably in the forms of devising theatre, which Heddon and Milling describe as follows:

'Devising' suggests the craft of making within existing circumstances, planning, plotting, contriving and tangentially inventing. [...] Devising is a [collaborative] process for creating performance from scratch, by the group, without a pre-existing script.

(Heddon and Milling 2006: 2f)

Musicality seems to me to be a devising strategy similar to site specificity or improvisation,²² which not only contributes to the generation and structuring of scenic material, but does so with potentially quite unique results. I want to provide a few brief examples.

After researching John Cage's works, students in one of my seminars explored the idea of notation as a symbolic language and the extension of this idea by incorporating found, non-intentionally musical visualizations (such as star charts or maps in Cage's case) as musical notations. They then created a

short music-theatrical performance, based on the birthmarks on one of the student's arms, which they filmed live and used as a notation for sounds and movements etc., and thus playfully interrogated the relationship of body, image, sound and music.

As an exercise, I also often provide my students with a short piece of music as a stimulus and starting point for a theatrical devising process. Instead of inventing music to accompany a theatre scene – as is customary in conventional practices of composing incidental music or film music – I ask the students to invent a scene to accompany the music by constructively using the sonic, rhythmic and structural characteristics of the piece as the 'script' for the scene. The results from each group tend to differ considerably, but one can always clearly recognize the mental process of abstraction, the accomplishment of a transfer from one medium to another, which often prevents an overly simple, 'unfiltered' approach and can result in interesting and complex results.

10. Gestic musicality in theatre in a Brechtian sense can have political implications

The notion of gestic music is complex and contradictory in Brecht's writings. In essence, however, there appear to be two main meanings: (1) *Gestus* as a social attitude *in* music and (2) *Gestus* as an attitude when performing music. Jürgen Engelhardt defines the first as follows:

Gestic composing [...] means to be dealing with the fact that the predetermined in the musical formation and the specific social and musical awareness of the compositional subject constitute themselves in organized sound behaviour [Klangverhaltung²³].

(Engelhardt 1984: 57)

The second meaning emerges from the following passage by Brecht:

It is an excellent criterion for a piece of music with text, to demonstrate with what attitude the interpreter must deliver certain passages, polite or angry, humble or abject, affirmative or dismissive, sly or without calculating. In this the most common, most vulgar, and most banal gestures are to be preferred. Thus, the political value of the music piece can be estimated.

(Brecht [1938] 1967: 485)

Gestus, as a principle, tries on the one hand 'to break the mimetic "naturalness" of the artistic material and show art as something made' (Engelhardt 1984: 57) and on the other hand to elevate a musical gesture to a social gesture.

To put it quite simply, musicality in theatre is not just formal shenanigans and musical re-labelling. How to compose for the theatre or *with* the theatre, and how to perform these compositions is *political*, insofar, as theatre in its process of creation can be seen as a model for social interaction, and in performance creates a space for perception, which can have political impact and significance.

This latter point has been elaborated on by the theatre scholar Nikolaus Müller-Schöll in his recent essay 'Theatre of Potentiality' (2004). Here, Müller-Schöll distinguishes between 'political theatre and doing theatre in a political way' (2004: 42). While the former would negotiate politics within

23. The word *Verhaltung* is very uncommon in German – Engelhardt defines it as follows: 'Verhaltung meint [...] die Gesamtheit menschlicher Aktions- und Reaktionsformen – vom Gefühl über die Phantasie bis zum Verstand, wie sie sich in Meinungen, Einstellungen, Haltungen, Gebärden etc. manifestiert'. ['Verhaltung means the entirety of human forms of action and reaction – from the emotion via fantasy to understanding, as it manifests itself in the opinions, convictions, attitudes and gestures etc.'] (Engelhardt 1984: 49).

an established representative framework, the latter would interrogate the framework itself, and thus that which we call the theatre. Müller-Schöll then shows with reference to Walter Benjamin that the political aspect of 'doing theatre in a political way' is to express 'the relationship between the performed action and the action of performing itself' (Benjamin cit. in Müller-Schöll 2004: 44). While the former, the 'presented action' (Müller-Schöll 2004: 44), can be controlled, there remains a rest of uncontrollability for the second, 'the very act of (re)presenting' (Müller-Schöll 2004: 44). This rest, one might conclude, is a subversive element vis-à-vis the circulating political as well as artistic ideologies of power and control.

Musicality in theatre is, I would argue, particularly suited to generate this dual focus (on the performance as well as the act of performing) in both the performers and the audience, since due to the intermedial transposition it almost inevitably undermines certain performative conventions and draws attention to the acts of their creation. Since the performative acts often do not match the expectations and conventions within the paradigm of musicality in theatre, there is – again, on both sides of the curtain – a productive uncertainty, how to understand, classify or assess the music-theatrical events. In my view, this opens up a utopian margin, the possibility to ask in every new production, 'What is theatre? What is music?' The necessity to re-determine their interplay each time also provides opportunity to continue discussing the social interaction between producers and recipients, and those two seemingly separate categories themselves.

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