Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Shifting identities : the musician as theatrical perfomer

Hübner, F.

Citation
Hübner, F. (2013, November 13). *Shifting identities : the musician as theatrical perfomer*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/22342

Version:	Corrected Publisher's Version
License:	Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/22342

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page

Universiteit Leiden

The handle http://hdl.handle.net/1887/22342 holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Hübner, Falk
Title: Shifting identities : the musician as theatrical perfomer
Issue Date: 2013-11-13

INTRODUCTION

Expanding and reducing: The musician as theatrical performer

The professional activity of musicians today is by and large not restricted to the performing of concert music; more and more musicians are also active in various other realms of the performing arts. In these areas, the musicians' profession tends to be extended; extra-musical or performative[1] elements are appended to this profession. The present study aims to investigate the ways in which musicians take part in theatre and performance, not only in their core function as musicians, but in particular when their professional activities shift towards theatrical performing. More specifically, I aim to analyse and discuss stage works that are dealing with the idea of making specific elements of the musician's profession *absent*, rather than extending it.

As part of the extremely diverse performance practices arising with boundary-crossings between the art forms in the 20th and 21st centuries, musicians not only are required to play their instruments, but also to carry out a variety of performative tasks along with dancers, actors and mimes. The roles of the performers from different art forms tend to merge, and sometimes the borders between the different roles are difficult to define. In the recent theatre works of the Belgian group NeedCompany, founded by visual artist and director Jan Lauwers and choreographer Grace Ellen Barkey in 1986, all members of the ensemble - musicians, actors and dancers - switch fluently between dancing, music making, singing, and acting. In the work of German composer and director Heiner Goebbels, musicians perform various kinds of tasks besides playing their instruments or making music in the broadest sense. They read poetry, ride bikes or dance like dervishes. As musicians reach into other art forms, occasionally even the roles that they traditionally perform on stage disappear: the musician's professional identity becomes extended.

This breaking down of the barriers has not only been applied to the professions of live performers, but also to the human body in combination with digital technology. Since the 1980s, performing artists have been experimenting with digital media and incorporating it in their work. They have developed a diversity of approaches using electronics, video and interfaces for interactivity, to produce a multitude of possible relationships between the human body of the live performer and digital technologies. The multimedial performances of Laurie Anderson, such as *United States* (1983), combine songs, spoken text, singing, instrumental playing (keyboards and violin), electronic effects with projections of hand-drawn pictures, film excerpts and enlarged photographs. Heiner Goebbels works regularly with samplers to integrate extra-musical material into his compositions, staged concerts, or music theatre pieces since his earlier works in the 1980s, such as *Der Mann im Fahrstuhl* (1987), up to more recent works such as *Stifters Dinge* (2007). The Dutch composer, director and film maker Michel van der Aa lets singers and actors of his multimedial operas/operatic works *One* (2002), *After Life* (2005-2006) and *Das Buch der Unruhe* (2008) perform with fixed video parts, composing and closely interlinking the various media

---

[1] Throughout the book I will use the terms "performative" and "performativity" in the sense of musical or theatrical performances, as conventionally understood in theatre studies and musicology. I am aware of the fact that the term "performativity" might have different connotations in other discourses, such as the speech act theory and contemporary continental philosophy.

of live instrumental music, electroacoustic soundtracks, live voices and film (also containing speaking or singing performers).

These are only a few outstanding examples of performance-oriented "musical multimedia" (Nicholas Cook)[2]. In general, musicians today might frequently be confronted with electronic media on stage, both in contemporary concert performance situations as well as in the theatre. Microphones and loudspeakers on stage, technical attributes which can extend the activities of musicians on stage, at times with sound modulation, are regularly used in almost all areas of contemporary performing arts practices involving musicians. Singers and instruments including entire orchestras are often amplified, not only in contemporary works by composers such as Louis Andriessen, or in theatre performances as *Sentimenti* (ZT Hollandia, 2003), directed by Johan Simons and Paul Koek, where the actors and singers are amplified by wireless microphones.[3] Also the internationally renowned Koninklijk Concertgebouworkest is amplified when it is performing an opera in the Muziektheater in Amsterdam. Apart from merely amplifying voices and instruments to allow softer sounds to be heard in large spaces, the use of microphones "enables the artistic use of close-up sound and makes expressive intimacy […] part of the singer's repertoire", acting as "a kind of aural magnifying glass, [bringing] individual vocal artifacts and artistic detail to our attention with great clarity." (Salzman and Desi 2008: 23) Additionally, microphones and loudspeakers give access to the possibility of dislocating the amplified sound from its acoustic source (the live voice or instrument), as British composer Caroline Wilkins describes as a part of her concept of "gained bodies": The first body is the live body of the actor. Alongside this, there is the body of the voice, which is the loudspeaker that amplifies and dislocates the live voice of the actor. According to Wilkins, she "gained one body". The instrument, the performer, and the amplified sound of the instrument - all these occupy different places.[4]

As an important area in the vast field of multimedial performing arts, the diversified genre of music theatre with all its varied forms[5] has specifically developed a great variety of strategies for working with musicians in ways beyond their core activity of playing music. An apparent problem of music theatre is that the genre lacks a precise categorisation and definition, and the terminology is confusing: in Germany the term "Musiktheater" is often understood as opera. City theatres that run

---

[2] In his book *analysing musical multimedia,* Nicholas Cook (1998) mainly analyses examples of multimedia such as advertising spots or music videos. However, unlike Cook, I focus on musical multimedia occurring mainly in live performance, examining the various relationships and tensions between the different media and the live performer, the human being who is present on stage, standing in relationship, tension and possibly conflict with the disembodied, digital technology.

[3] For a more in-depth view into the background and history of the use of microphones in (music) theatre, as well as its applications, see:
Eck, Cathy van (2013). *Between air and electricity. Microphones and loudspeakers as musical instruments* (Doctoral dissertation). Leiden University;
Verstraete, Pieter (2006). "De microfoon als interface." In Henk Havens, Chiel Kattenbelt, Eric de Ruijter and Kees Vuyk (eds.) (2006), *Theater & Technologie* (pp. 214-227). Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland;
Salzman, Eric and Thomas Desi (2008). *The New Music Theater: Seeing the Voice, Hearing the Body*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 23-27.

[4] Taken from my notes of Caroline Wilkins' lecture "A Sound Theatre of Objects", at the *Music on Stage* conference at Rose Bruford College, Kent, UK, 24.10.2010.

[5] Despite the difficulty of the term *music theatre* as such, - potentially including all forms of performance that include music and theatrical elements - I will use it here, until later specification.

as a threefold stage[6] almost exclusively produce operas under the term music theatre. Many different art forms, works and practitioners can be included within the parameters of music theatre: conventional opera, Broadway musicals, twentieth-century European avant-garde experiments, contemporary performance practices from groups like Monster Truck[7] or Theater der Klänge[8], postdramatic theatre which theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann sees as specifically musical (Lehmann 2006: 91-93), and a great range of other types of music theatre. In short, what distinguishes music theatrical performances and works from theatre and other performing art forms in general, is music's essential role as well as the inherent musical structure and thinking. The specifically musical way of structuring is often a constituting element of music theatre creation, including not only the experimental creations of the recent decades, but also other forms such as opera or the popular musical. This gives many pieces an intrinsic consistency, different from theatre pieces in which the music is more an additional element than the essence of it. (Heilgendorff 2004b: 8) More than in most concert situations, musicians in (music) theatre need to be conscious of the stage space, stage design and lighting. Directors and/or composers create situations in which musicians become confronted with or set in relation to other means and media on stage. These phenomena, where musicians act as *theatrical performers* in different medial situations and contexts, form the core of this research project. In short, I regard a musician's actions and appearance as theatrical in those moments when her usually musical utterances are transformed in a way that they become open for additional meanings other than the musical. The study aims to explore the manifold (music) theatrical situations in which musicians are situated in the late twentieth and twenty-first century, and to develop a perspective, framework and understanding in which future music theatre creations with musicians as performers can be analysed. I understand this in the light of *live performances as events*, rather than in the sense of performing fixed and finished works.

Two perspectives

In most of the theatrical situations where musicians "perform", their profession is *extended*: in the first instance they make music; they sing or play their instruments. Besides this, they have to perform additional tasks such as walking on stage, reciting text, etc. On the one hand this introduces the fascination of watching highly trained people doing what they are best at - making music. On the other hand, other elements of performance are introduced, "settings and tasks in which performers [musicians] struggle and have to invest a new, intensified effort in order to achieve their performative assignments." (Roesner 2008: 12)[9] These diverse tasks, and the challenge and effort to perform them, result in the extension and transformation of the musician into a theatrical performer. I will refer to these strategies under the term *expansive approach*.

---

[6] The term "threefold stage" describes a type of theatre that produces operatic, drama and dance/ballet productions. Examples of large threefold stage houses are the theatres in Hamburg, Stuttgart and Cologne.

[7] http://monstertrucker.de.

[8] http://www.theater-der-klaenge.de.

[9] In my discussion I continue with describing this as an "other" or "different" effort rather than "new".

As an alternative strategy to the extension[10], to the use of additional elements, this research introduces and focuses on an opposite approach: the *abstracting away* of specific qualities or abilities of the musician's profession - subsumed by the term *reductive approach*. By *not* being able to use specific elements of their profession, musicians encounter problems that are very different from the ones in the expansive approach. The audience watches musicians *not* doing certain things that usually belong to their profession. Both the expansive and the reductive approaches are concepts of working theatrically with musicians, and are capable of transforming musicians into theatrical performers albeit with completely different working processes and artistic results. They are different, maybe contradictory strategies, but both bearing the potential to shift the musician's professional identity into a more theatrical one.

In performing arts other than music (theatre), both extension and reduction have been the subject of artistic practice throughout the twentieth century. One of the most common extensions of an actor's performance might be to let the actor sing. Kurt Weill's preference for singing actors is only one example among many; his choice also had an aesthetic reason, which is the preference of singing voices that sound different than the ones from trained (classical) singers. The ability of actors to sing has today become so commonplace that even the professional training programs for actors routinely include singing classes. Nowadays, also playing an instrument or dancing could hardly be considered extensions of the actor's profession any more. This is to be understood against the background of today's multidisciplinary theatre practice, but also because of the study programs at faculties of music, theatre and dance. A large variety of "music theatre" courses exists today, in which students are taught acting, dancing and singing, and in which they have the possibility to follow instrumental classes as well.

In dance, German choreographer Sasha Waltz frequently merges her dancers in the direction of other performing arts by means of extending their professions. In *insideout* (2003), two dancers perform both a choreography and a piece of sound/music with a singing saw in between them. In *Körper* (2000), they produce beautifully subtle sounds with dishes on the back of another dancer, and in one solo scene dancer Luc Dunberry performs a remarkable polyphony of spoken text and dance movements of the upper part of his body, closely interlinked in a very musical and rhythmical way. Here the profession of the dancer is extended with speaking text.

Reductive concepts have also been quite common and well-developed and reflected upon in theory and analysis in the performing arts since the early twentieth century: in Dada[11], Fluxus and performance art. In pieces by Steve Paxton[12] the dancers are walking, standing, sitting or smiling and seem to do nothing besides executing simple performative tasks such as everyday movements, but not *dancing* in the traditional sense. In 1965, Yvonne Rainer formulated her famous *No*-pamphlet, as a post-script to the description of her piece *Parts of Some Sextet*:

---

[10] Throughout the book I am using the terms "extension" and "expansive approach" synonymously.

[11] The absence of traditional ballet or dance in *Relâche* by choreographer Jean Börlin (chief choreographer of Ballets Suédois), painter and writer Francis Picabia and composer Erik Satie, premiered in Paris on December 4th, 1924. The title phrase means "spielfrei" or "vorstellungsfreier Tag" in German, "free from play" (= no performance) in English.

[12] *Satisfying Lover* (1967), *State* (1968), *Smiling* (1969). The score of *Satisfying Lover* is even created for non-trained dancers. See also Siegmund 2006: 364-365.

> NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti-heroic no to trash imagery no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer no to eccentricity no to moving or being moved. (Rainer in Reininghaus and Schneider 2004: 173)

What else could you take away after this impressive refusal of almost everything that might constitute a dance performance? In *While we were holding it together* (2006) by Croatian/Dutch choreographer Ivana Müller, the dancers stand still in various positions and postures for long intervals, speaking sentences such as "I imagine us still being here in 300 years, being discovered by an archaeologist." or "I imagine we are found in a third world country and then brought to the British museum for professional restoration", all carefully organised in time. The professional identity of the dancers is confusingly relocated somewhere between dancer and actor, but mainly they are transformed into mediators of text. However, precisely by standing still in various positions, the dancers also communicate their profession and masterful control of their bodies. The text functions more than anything else as an opening for the audience, as an invitation to create a theatre individually with one's own imagination and individual interpretation. This will not be the only case throughout this study where reduction results in an *increased* rather than a reduced presence of the performer.

Another work which explicitly takes the profession of classical dancers as a starting point - in particular the classically trained ballet dancer - is *I/II/III/IIII* (2007) by Belgian visual artist and director Kris Verdonck. Four dancers hang like marionettes in a huge machine, performing a choreography that is half produced and provoked by the machine and half "performed" by the dancers themselves. The dancers are denied the strongest, and most-developed habit of their profession: the creation and production of bodily movement. Instead they have to follow the machine and must accept what the machine "offers" them. Verdonck's aim in this performance is very much to create "cyborgs" - an identity falling between man and machine such that the movement is "[for] fifty percent provoked by the machine and for fifty percent their own movement."[13] However, as the movements still refer heavily on the repertoire of classical ballet movements, the piece can only be performed by classically trained dancers.

[13] Personal conversation with Kris Verdonck.

Image 0.1: Kris Verdonck, *I/II/III/IIII* (2007)

In music and music theatre the expansive approach is quite common, and appears regularly. Expansive techniques are highly developed, so that it is not uncommon for most musicians who work regularly in theatrical projects to speak, to sing, or to move on stage in choreographic structures. The reductive approach is much less common, and rarely found in music and music theatre. The reason for this might be a combination of different developments during the second half of the twentieth century, such as the extension of the musical vocabulary in both musical and performative sense, and the emergence of new media, electronic and interactive applications. All of these developments tend to support the extension of the musician's activities much more than to reduce them. Nevertheless the reductive approach offers fascinating and challenging new areas for both theory and the artistic practice of working with musicians in theatre. It opens up new possibilities for a music-driven theatre that does not have to include music, but breathes a musical energy originating from the movements and the profession of musicians on stage. The reductive approach gives access to another kind of *musical theatricality*, which is a major subject and an incentive of my own artistic work. However, because these concepts build very strongly on the

"remaining" professional qualities and skills of the musicians the specific theatricality is quite different from that which actors or dancers may offer, yet allows the musicians to become theatrical without the necessity of becoming an actor.

As yet there are only few examples where the performer is specifically involved in reduction. Here, I will restrict myself to two examples: Dieter Schnebel's *nostalgie* for solo conductor and the *Emergency Solos* by Christina Kubisch. In *nostalgie* (1962) the orchestra and its entire presence and sound are literally taken away from the conductor, so that he conducts an imaginary orchestra. In *Emergency Solos* (1974/75)[14], German composer, visual and sound artist Christina Kubisch uses a variety of objects (thimbles on her fingertips in *In Touch With*, a gas mask through which she plays the instrument without mouthpiece in *Week-End*, a condom stretched over the flute in *Erotika*) to make the playing of the instrument almost impossible. The objects lead to a self-reflective comment on the nature of musical performance and to a "re-evaluation of the visual dimension, which is equal to the musical [dimension] in these performances." (Sanio 2004: 9, my translation)[15] The musician is denied the possibility of a "proper" performance, and it is just that what transforms the flute player into a theatrical performer.

Image 0.2: Christina Kubisch, *Emergency Solos - In Touch With* (1974/75)

There is little research available on the musician as theatrical performer, or the musician in multimedial contexts other than the concert performance practice. Although musicians have obviously taken part in the ground-breaking processes of exceeding the boundaries between the different artistic disciplines in performance throughout the twentieth century (think of the

[14] There are different data available concerning the years in which the *Emergency Solos* were developed. In an email conversation Christina Kubisch wrote me that she developed most of the solos in 1974, and put them together as one performance series in 1975.

[15] "[…] einer Aufwertung der visuellen Dimension, die in diesen Performances des musikalischen gleichwertig ist."

collaboration of composer Nam Jun Paik with Joseph Beuys, Laurie Anderson, John Cage, and others), as performers they have been of little interest to theory and analysis. Musicians have certainly been *mentioned* in several publications about theatre and performance art, but what their actual tasks have been and what directors have asked them to do besides just making music, is barely discussed. There seems to be little academic interest in the musician in the context of other media, or the musician in the theatre. Theatre scholar and music theatre researcher David Roesner has analysed aspects of musicalisation in contemporary German theatre, especially with regard to the work of theatre makers Heiner Goebbels, Christoph Marthaler and Einar Schleef. However, Roesner is more concerned with strategies of musicality in theatre in general than with what musicians actually *do*. Roesner mentions performative assignments as a means to "theatricalise" musicians, but he does not condense this to a concept of extending the musician's profession; nor does he theorise possibilities or any kind of structuring or gradation of extensions. Apart from Roesner's work, there are several accounts to be found on the genre of *Instrumental Theatre* and the tasks that must be executed, especially in Mauricio Kagel's and Dieter Schnebel's work. However, most of these studies generally deal with the composer's intentions, a detailed analysis of the score, and about the nature of the piece-as-work. Typically these studies do not investigate the actual tasks of the musicians, and the potential struggles or extra-musical performative elements that these tasks provoke. The same goes for the way in which authors tend to deal with the creation process, which is often either ignored or neglected.[16]

It is exactly the interest in the musicians themselves, into the actual human being live present in theatrical and performative situations which lies at the heart of the research project at hand. Following Christopher Small in his basic approach that the "fundamental nature and meaning of music lie not in objects, not in musical works at all, but in action, in what people do" (Small 1998: 8), I will focus on the musician as theatrical performer. My dedicated interest is in what musicians actually do on stage; how they are put into a theatrical situation, what they are asked to do besides making music, what their efforts are in performing diverse kinds of extra-musical tasks or in situations in which they are denied specific elements of their core profession. From both an artistic and a theoretical side, I am fascinated by the playground between music and theatre, a situation or moment in which musicians become theatrical. This will test the limits of the musician's profession and define the core elements of this profession in a theatrical setting. Additionally, this study will investigate the relationships between the composer/director and the musician-as-performer, and the techniques and strategies that are used for the transformation of the musician into a theatrical performer. As suggested above, I have structured the various techniques into two main groups: the expansive and reductive approaches. As the reductive approach is less developed I am interested in finding out the limits and challenges of this approach. In my own artistic work I therefore isolate and radicalise reductive elements in close collaboration with the participating and performing musicians. It is especially the reductive approach, its area of artistic production and theoretical specificity, that is the focus of my research. I am interested in situations or moments where essential elements of musical performance are reduced, denied or absorbed, and in cases in which musicians are challenged to become

[16] See Roelcke 1988 on Kagel, Zeller 1980 on Schnebel. One possible counter-example is Matthias Rebstock's study of the compositional process of Mauricio Kagel and several works of Kagel's Instrumental Theatre. Here Rebstock gives detailed insight how works such as *Match* developed from the first draft of the score until the finished staged version, including a somewhat collective process and intensive exchange with the musicians. But also here Rebstock neglects the actual work of the musicians-as-performers, their difficulties or challenges, and what the concrete effect of the extra-musical and performative elements were on the musicians. See Rebstock 2004.

theatrical. Furthermore I want to direct my attention to the possible roles and functions of a musician in performative art forms other than music, and how she can merge with the performers of other art forms; how she might reach into other art forms like theatre or dance; and how she might become a theatrical performer. It will become clear that by recalling the specific qualities, abilities and habits of musicians, it is possible to get access to a specific musical theatricality, different from the kind of theatricality that actors or dancers offer even if there is no music to be played or sound to be heard.

Research area - Music Theatre and the musician as theatrical performer

Looking back - musicians on stage

In order to understand the novelties and developments of today's music theatre, it is useful and necessary to review the appearance of musicians on the theatre stage during the twentieth century. For audiences of contemporary theatre today, it is not unusual to see musicians appearing next to actors, dancers and other performers, and not only playing music, but also performing all kinds of extra-musical assignments. The opposite was true at the beginning of the twentieth century, when opera was the main genre of music theatre, and the musicians in the orchestra "gradually moved out of the main space, down into a pit, and increasingly under the stage." (Salzman and Desi 2008: 34) On the occasions where musicians were on stage in small "mixed ensembles" they merely "provide[d] stage music that is expected to evoke the sound of 'real' […] music that is part of the scenic action […]." (Salzman and Desi 2008: 36) Examples of such on-stage music include Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, and Bernd-Alois Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten*. This changed with Igor Stravinsky, who pioneered bringing the whole ensemble onto the stage as part of the dramatic action. The seven musicians in *L'histoire du soldat* (1918) were placed on stage together with the narrator and the other actors, so that their playing became a part of the scene. This was the first time that the playing of musicians was treated as a scenic element, which developed into one of the most basic premises of experimental music theatre in the second half of the twentieth century, and was taken up by John Cage, Dieter Schnebel, and especially Mauricio Kagel. (Reininghaus 2004: 20)

Before the experimental forms of the second half of the twentieth century, Berthold Brecht and Kurt Weill took on the presence of musicians on stage in their *Dreigroschenoper* (1928). In the Brechtian concept of epic theatre, the actors were no longer supposed to embody and become the characters they played. Instead, they presented themselves *as actors* to the audience, making it obvious that they were playing a role which was assigned to them. This theatrical concept and change of the actor's function also opened up possibilities to present the musicians *as* musicians, instead of *as if* they were musicians, playing music without having a psychological function in a play or narrative. This set a course for the generations to come. The self-reflexive presence of the musicians developed into a more theatrical use of musical playing.

Music as theatre

At the time when the orchestra "gradually sank into the opera house pit […] and then melted into the film or television soundtrack", on the other side of the music theatre spectrum "instrumentalists reappeared on stage and often came to play leading roles in new performance theater, roles quite equal in importance to those played by singers, actors, and dancers." (Salzman and Desi 2008: 69-70) Grounded by ideas from performance art and Fluxus, the work of composers like John Cage, George Crumb and others lead to the notion of Instrumental Theatre. When Mauricio Kagel entered the European experimental music theatre scene at the end of the 1950s, he essentially introduced the idea of *music as theatre*, or the theatricalisation of the music itself.[17] Influenced by the ideas of John Cage, he emphasised physical activity as intrinsic to the performance of the musicians. Kagel argued that movement on stage is the constitutive characteristic to differentiate between Instrumental Theatre and the classical concert performance. The playing of the instruments should become one with a theatrical performance. The theatrical movement is performed by musicians instead of actors, dancers or mimes. Depending on the nature of the specific piece, the musician is interpreter and/or co-creator of her part. (Kagel 1966: 252) In *Match*, one of Kagel's most well-known Instrumental Theatre pieces, two cellists are placed opposite to each other and alternately playing short pizzicato flageolets on their instruments. In doing so, the execution of the sounds, in combination with the positioning can be perceived as theatrical: two cellists personifying two tennis players hitting balls in a tennis match. This is reinforced by the third musician, a percussion player in the middle of the stage in between the two cellists, as in the role of the referee.

Instrumental Theatre started with subtle extensions of the traditional classical music concert, which was perceived as too static by avant-garde composers of the 1960s like Kagel or Schnebel. The musicians were placed in various positions on stage which differed from their usual ensemble setting, or they had to wear costumes different from their usual concert dress. In the early phases of Instrumental Theatre, various possibilities were developed, such as a wide range of approaches to the playing of instruments; going from the "turning around and exaggeration of everyday movements on the instruments up to 'converting the instruments'." (Heilgendorff 2004a: 8, my translation)[18] Composers and directors created staged structures for the musicians, such as moving from one position on stage to another, or looking at each other according to "composed choreographies". The instrumentalists were assigned to use spoken text, and subconscious and everyday movements of musicians became augmented into the main focus of performance.

[17] Theatricalisation of music is different from musicalisation of theatre. Whereas Kagel's approach in the early phase of Instrumental Theatre belongs to the former, the latter refers rather to a specifically musical approach to theatre and all of its media. This could be an understanding of the different theatrical means as (musical) "voices" of a "score", or working with spoken text in a more musical - e.g. as rhythm or pitches - rather than psychological way.

[18] "[…] das Verkehren und Überzeichnen alltäglicher Bewegungsabläufe an den Instrumenten bis hin zum 'Umfunktionieren der Instrumente'."

Image 0.3: Friedrich Schenker, *Missa Nigra* (1980)

As result of these aspects, something very theatrical but also absurd, comical and sarcastic is inherent to many Instrumental Theatre works. (Heilgendorff 2004a: 8) Besides the already mentioned Kagel and Schnebel, other representatives of the genre are Karlheinz Stockhausen (*Originale* 1961) and György Ligeti (*Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures* 1962-65).

In the later period of the genre[19] - since around the 1980s until the turn of the century - these ideas were further developed by a younger generation of composers. The palette of sound generating material was extended by non-musical objects that became substantial elements for sound. (Heilgendorff 2004b: 8) The stage space becomes much more consciously used as a theatrical space using lighting, stage design and visual media much more extensively. This gave the pieces a visual form closer to theatre and dance works, rather than being explicitly connected to the concert stage. Heiner Goebbels, Manos Tsangaris, Gerhard Stäbler and others developed forms that went far beyond the genre of Instrumental Theatre. These works bear obvious references to Instrumental Theatre, but are also influenced by other art forms (dance, visual arts and installation art, or the incorporation of digital media).

The acting of the musician has been affected enormously by these developments. In the few decades up to the present musicians have experienced a great extension of their profession while participating in music theatre projects. In the early stages of Instrumental Theatre, playing music was often the theatrical act itself, although certain aspects of music making were exaggerated, accentuated and staged as visual and physical elements of performance. In later works, this was extended greatly, such that musicians had to do much more than follow the score, play their instruments and perform the (musically or textually) notated actions. They were asked to perform together with actors in mixed musician-actor-dancer-ensembles. They have performed with objects of all kinds to make sound or gestures, quite close to the notion of "live musique

[19] In the division of Instrumental Theatre into two main periods - the first from 1964-1982 and the second one from 1982-2000 - I am essentially following music theatre scholar and viola player Simone Heilgendorff. I do not want to suggest too much of a clear cut distinction between these periods, but, as my description suggests, there are indeed differences to be found between two generations of composers working in the genre of Instrumental Theatre, and differences between the aesthetics of the first experimental period and the second period that moves much further from concert-like settings into clearer theatre spaces and productions, and into more collaborative creations.

concrète".[20] As the stage space, stage design and lighting have become increasingly important, musicians have been issued the challenge of being much more conscious of the physicality of the space and the visual structures on stage. In The Netherlands, composer, theatre maker and multimedia artist Dick Raaijmakers accentuated this awareness of the physical and visual surroundings. In his "instruction exercises" the performers, both musicians and actors, have to execute large varieties of tasks in - or with - stage designs, such as a setup of tables in *The Microman* (1982) or a variety of installations in *Der Fall/Dépons* (1993).

Another excellent example of such spatial and task-oriented work is *Schwarz auf Weiss* (1996) by German composer and director Heiner Goebbels, created in close collaboration with Ensemble Modern. Being a true milestone of experimental music theatre, *Schwarz auf Weiss* contains elements of installation art, concert music and performance art, and combines these into an impressive collage in 23 scenes. Still bearing references to Instrumental Theatre and chamber music, the piece crosses the boundaries. In the opening scene the musicians use their instruments in installation-like setups, combining them with objects and constructions of various kinds; one musician writes with a pen on paper, with the sound amplified and later electronically processed to build musical sounds and structures. Later, besides performing a fixed piece of music, the musicians throw tennis balls against drums and large metal sheets, resulting in a playful cross-over between concert and sports game. In the middle of the piece trumpeter William Forman recites Edgar Allan Poe over his wireless trumpet microphone. Similar elements can be found in his later pieces as well, such as his strategy of task-based performance. Instead of working with any kind of psychology (understood as acting emotional states or developments), Goebbels prefers to give assignments to his actors and musicians to achieve the effects and expressions he wants.[21] He applies essentially the same technique to actors and musicians, and by these performative task strategies he is able to create pseudo-psychological layers performed by musicians without the necessity for them to act. Structurally his works are foremost musically driven, as seen in *Eraritjaritjaka*: the actor André Wilms has to adjust his text to the music, as cameraman Bruno Deville has to synchronise the timing of his movements and camera shots to the musical score.

---

[20] The group *Sing Song*, part of the music theatre company VeenFabriek, based in Leiden, The Netherlands, plays "live musique concrète" on instruments made from everyday items and cheap things such as toys and electronic apparatuses. By using these objects as musical instruments, the ensemble seeks to make hidden possibilities audible and to communicate the joy of listening to beautiful sounds created form ordinary material. (www.veenfabriek.nl/De_Veenfabriek, last retrieved May 24, 2011)

[21] In order to underline this approach, Goebbels himself refers to a scene in *Eraritjaritjaka*, in which the actor André Wilms has to cut an onion, which causes him to cry instead of having to act an emotion such as being sad: "When I want an actor to cry, I give him an onion." (Heiner Goebbels in conversation with Marianne van Kerckhoven and Falk Hübner)

Image 0.4: Heiner Goebbels, *Schwarz auf Weiss* (1996)

Music Theatre - a genre?

In the following paragraphs I will narrow my understanding of how music theatre concretely works. First, composers, directors and writers Eric Salzman and Thomas Desi offer two useful theoretical stances towards the genre, referred to as the *inclusive* and *exclusive* meaning of the term "music theatre". The inclusive definition describes all forms of combinations of music and theatre encompassing "the entire universe of performance in which music and theater play complementary and potentially equal roles" (Salzman and Desi 2008: 5), and contains all kinds of music theatre, including opera, operetta and musical theatre. The exclusive definition mostly excludes these forms, and defines music theatre as a different genre than opera and musical, referring to smaller, more experimental forms.[22] A similar differentiation can be found in the writing of the Belgian theatre critic Evelyne Coussens, when she defines music theatre "in its 'narrow' meaning - distinct from operetta, opera, musical and cabaret." However, she problematises a strict classification, as "every effort for classification comes across as artificial, with the risk of harming the richness and diversity of the field." (Coussens, 2009: 23, my translation)[23] I agree with Coussens that, in the end, every precise definition of the term and the genre can only do injustice to the richness and diversity of its manifestations. But even though the lines between the various forms of music theatre are often blurred, "this does not mean that valid species do not exist (they clearly do) and should not lead us to deny that differences exist - differences of purpose, of category, of social setting, of casting, and of vocal type." (Salzman and Desi 2008: 6)

[22] Salzman and Desi (2008: 5) coined the term *New Music Theater* for this exclusive understanding.

[23] " […] elke poging tot classificatie gekunsteld over[komt], met het risico afbreuk te doen aan de rijkdom en diversiteit van de sector."

In my opinion two main aspects of music theatre are its multimedial[24] nature (with, of course, an emphasis on music or sound), and the specific musical way of structuring and organising its material. Situated on a continuum between (concert) music and theatre, music theatre always contains and stages more than one medium; in its most simple form music and mise-en-scène. No music theatre is possible without these two elements. The possibilities of integrating other media in the framework of music theatre are virtually endless: dance, video, interactive electronics, painting, architecture, photo art, etc. Music theatre is by definition an art form that stages different media in various relationships. As theatre in general, music theatre can be seen as a hypermedium, with respect to its ability to stage other media "without damaging the specificity of these other media and its own specificity." (Kattenbelt 2008: 22)

As already mentioned above, the crucial element of music theatre is that it is music-driven in its very essence. This goes for all kinds of music theatre with different implications: in the case of opera the musical score is usually composed and finished before any rehearsals have started, determining for a considerable degree the length of the piece, the timing, the dramaturgical structure, the characters, the voice types, the instrumentation. In the case of new opera works, the score often has to be finished long before the rehearsals begin, or sometimes even before the singers (the individual persons, not the voice types) are known.[25] There are counter-examples for this: Michel van der Aa collaborated with a dramaturge and a stage designer already during the composition process of *After Life* (2005-2006). Still, van der Aa is the one who makes the decisions and holds the musical composition, the direction of the film and the stage direction in hand, which enables him to make a considerable amount of choices, even for the staging, long before the rehearsals start, and fix them in the score.[26] Coussens draws a parallel between operatic music theatre and text theatre, as the musical score has the tendency to over-determine, comparable to the classical drama text. (Coussens 2009: 24) But also (and perhaps especially) in non-operatic music theatre, music is essential in being an element providing structure to a performance. This could be musical timing and organisation of material, but also the way in which music theatre makers think. An example of such a musical thinking is how Dutch director Paul Koek describes the creation process of the VeenFabriek production *Licht is de machine* (2008). In this performance-collage Koek made a "score of assumptions" for a "composed performance" (Koek in Vigier and Elstgeest 2008: 10) in order to structure the piece. Koek's terminology in describing this process of structuring is striking. The fact that he calls this a score, which is an essentially musical term, is insightful to his thinking in musical terms.

---

[24] I regard music theatre generally as multimedial in the sense that it presents "different art forms within the frame of one integral medium" (Spielmann 2001: 55). In this case, the integral medium is theatre. Related to this is Kattenbelt's notion of theatre as a hypermedium, which is able to stage different media that behold their own, distinct mediality. (Kattenbelt 2008: 22)

[25] My own practical experience of this working structure is similar to how I describe it here. For the chamber opera collage *Gestrandete Zukünftige* (2009), directed by Amelie Beer and produced at the city theatre of Krefeld/ Mönchengladbach, I had indeed the possibility to work with the four female singers before I started composing the music. However, after the score was finished (and had explicitly been composed for the voices of these four singers), the singers were changed again, as the organisation of the theatre had decided to put the singers in different projects than announced earlier. It was not possible to adjust the score to the new choice of singers, as the rehearsals had to start in time, which was something around three weeks after the decision of the singers' choice.

[26] However, it is remarkable that in the published scores of van der Aa's operas *One* and *After Life*, no staging directions can be found. Typically, van der Aa's scores are accompanied by a stage and film script, although these are not officially published but in possession of van der Aa himself.

The consequent musical structuring of theatre works also found its way to more traditional text-based theatre forms. Several directors use specifically musical structures and ways of working to organise their performances, to rehearse, or to give the music more autonomous space in their works. In director Ruedi Häusermann's *Gewähltes Profil: Lautlos* the "act of composing […] becomes the music-theatrical act itself" (Roesner 2008: 5): the musicians "test" sounds on their instruments as a kind of visible "act of composing", record sounds with small tape-recorders, and hang the recorders on an object, playing back all the different sounds and voices in a musical collage. Works such as *Gewähltes Profil: Lautlos* explore and challenge the boundaries between theatre and music theatre, by playing with the amount and function of music.

In order to embrace a wider understanding of music theatre and an understanding of the form as multimedial and collaborative, I would like to avoid the distinction between a "narrow" and a "broad" definition of music theatre. I want to suggest a different kind of categorisation, which is less bound to specific forms, but pays tribute to the way pieces are created. In order to do this, I would like to have another look at the writing of Evelyne Coussens. As the title of her text "Tweestromenland tussen repertoire en creatie" ("Land between repertoire and creation") suggests she is mainly dealing with a continuum between repertoire and creation. Coussens suggests four categories: interpretation, sampling, radical edit and creation.

First, when a director decides to stage an existing score, or to stage a new score which is finished before the (stage) rehearsals begin, he *interprets* the music in his staging, or he presents a counterpoint in his staging - but he keeps a strong relation with the structure, timing and tempo of the pre-existing music.

The cases where directors go further than interpreting the score and play with elements from the repertoire are called "sampling" by Coussens (2009: 27), which is the second category in her continuum. ZT Hollandia's *Sentimenti* (2003) is a good example for this strategy. Directors Paul Koek and Johan Simons used a number of arias by Giuseppe Verdi that are combined, cut, orchestrated and rebuilt into a new score. Composer and saxophone player Fabrizio Cassol used a similar concept in *Pitié!* (2008), directed and choreographed by Alain Platel, where he re-structured and re-orchestrated Johann Sebastian Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*.

The third strategy are the "radical edits" ("radicale bewerkingen"), taking the second strategy further in the direction of an autonomous creation: "Continuously shifting towards the area of creation, a group of directors announces itself which radically edits the repertoire, in collaboration with a composer and/or dramaturge. This way of editing in fact requires the energy and production means of a totally new creation." (Coussens 2009: 28, my translation)[27] Any combination of repertoire and newly composed music is possible here, including arrangements and even a staged reading of a libretto.

The fourth strategy is where my research is primarily situated: "creation". "In the case of creation we see that the various makers - composer and director/dramaturge/librettist - work

[27] "Steeds verder opschuivend naar de creatiepool dient zich een groep regisseurs aan die het repertoire radicaal bewerkt, in samenwerking met een componist en/of dramaturg. Deze manier van bewerken vergt in feite de energie en de productiemiddelen van een totaal nieuwe creatie."
This note of Coussens is particularly interesting because in the case of *radical edits* and a totally new creation, the production time and process are indeed likely to be quite different from the making process of an opera with a pre-existing score.

together intensively from an embryonic idea. In the practice of contemporary music theatre it happens less and less that a score is written first and only after this a director is been looked for." (Coussens 2009: 28, my translation)[28] Coussens calls this the "parallel and integrated way of working" (Coussens 2009: 28) To put it shortly, the focus in this dissertation lies on *creations* of music theatre, of performance with a strong, if not determining emphasis on music, musical understanding and musical structure. As will become clear in the discussion on the reductive approach, this might also include border cases which are music-driven, even if there is no sound, yet still can be labelled as music theatre. Even if there is no music to be heard, it is interesting that these forms potentially offer new perspectives on what music might be, as music obviously can be about more than sound exclusively.

As Coussens suggests, the working process is an important aspect in all four categories. A central issue is the relationship between the musical and staging elements, and the different media of a creation from within the perspective of performance practice: "Obviously both components, music and mise-en-scène, cannot be separated from each other – it becomes a continuum in which music and theatrical staging merge more or less." (Coussens 2009: 23, my translation)[29] There are different kinds of approaches to this relationship between music(al score) and mise-en-scène, or between the composer and the director. The most traditional way of working in this continuum, as it is still common practice in opera, is that the composer works alone, outside the theatre, and the director works in the rehearsals. It is worth noting that operas in almost all literature are counted as "the composer's work", such as an opera by Mozart instead of Lorenzo da Ponte, no matter how important the libretto has been for the creation of the music. Only later during the twentieth century, collective models emerged. *Parade* from 1917 was a ballet created collaboratively by Erik Satie (music), Pablo Picasso (scenography and costumes), Sergei Diaghilev (choreography) and Jean Cocteau (stage direction). *Sieg über die Sonne* (1913), created by painter Kasimir Malewitsch, poet Alexej Krutschonych and painter-musician Michail Matjuschin, stands as another collective creation of music theatre. These pieces are *devised* - a term that points to a way of theatre making that is not necessarily based on a script, and which is less director-centric. The "traditional role of the text-based director has shifted from one of interpreter to one of conceptualist". (Bicât and Baldwin 2002: 9) The vast majority of music theatre "creations", in the sense as described above since the second half of the twentieth century, have been developed in collective working processes. In its most basic form, a composer and a director might collaborate, but this may also be broadened to include a choreographer, stage designer, and dramaturge. The working process on a devised music theatre piece is often quite different to the rehearsal structure of an opera production, orchestra or chamber music practice. Devised work embraces a process of creation and collective development of a piece, and a "rich dialectic, rather than monofocal, blinkered vision" (Bicât and Baldwin 2002: 6) In most cases the work as such has to be developed during the rehearsals, and it often relies on the ideas and chance discoveries that occur during that process. Concerning the music, many compositional procedures for devised productions are not yet finished, sometimes not even started when the rehearsals begin. In many contemporary music theatre projects musicians work together with the composer and/or director

[28] "In het geval van creatie zien we dat de verschillende makers - componist en regisseur/dramaturg/librettist - vanaf een embryonaal idee intens samenwerken. In de praktijk van het hedendaags muziektheater komt het steeds minder voor dat er eerst een partituur wordt geschreven en pas daarna een regisseur wordt gezocht."

[29] "Uiteraard zijn beide componenten, muziek en regie, niet strikt van elkaar te scheiden - er strekt zich een continuüm uit waarin de muziek en de theatrale enscenering in min of meerdere mate met elkaar versmelten."

during the entire process, similar to the working structures of contemporary theatre or dance productions. The musician becomes an important co-creator, and the creation is more adapted to specific performers. Unlike the relationship between composer and interpreter for whom the composer writes a dedicated composition, there

> has been a new emphasis on the performer/creator following the model of the artist-driven modern dance company or the jazz/pop groups whose repertoire is self-created. […] The movement away from strict adherence to a previously existing text or score and the return of improvisation are both a result and a cause of the changing relationship between creator and performer. (Salzman and Desi 2008: 70)

This specific relationship between creator and performer also results in pieces whose nature is more closely bound to the live performance as event than to the notated score as representation of a fixed work. Significant works of music theatre such as *Schwarz auf Weiss* are scarcely performed by ensembles or performers other than by those who premiered them, even though scores are available.[30] Since the pieces are so closely developed in collaboration with the composer-director and the performers, their performance seems to be bound to those with whom they have been developed.

The musician as theatrical performer

A crucial point in this research is the understanding of *theatricality*, and what the difference is between a musician who is perceived as theatrical, and one who is not. I start developing my argument with the basic assumption that a performance implies an audience; a staged performer in front of an audience constitutes a performative situation or a theatrical performance. The actions of the performer consist of performative utterances, defined as events

> taking place in the here and now, in [their] need to be carried out and presented and, in consequence, in [their] need to be perceived in this very moment. A performative utterance is an intentional act […], which is not just performed in the (literal) sense of being executed, but something that is staged. (Kattenbelt in Bay-Cheng et. al 2010: 30)

These performative utterances as staged intentional acts are complementing theatre scholar Marvin Carlson's understanding of theatricality, which he defines as behavior that seems to be "not natural or spontaneous but composed according to this grammar of rhetorical and authenticating conventions in order to achieve some particular effect on its viewers" (Carlson 2002: 240). With the aspect of "composed behavior" Carlson essentially aims at what Kattenbelt calls "staged", but Carlson adds the relation between the performative utterance and the audience. His understanding of theatricality leads to briefly investigate certain possible conventions and expectations of an audience. For the perceiver, a probable point of reference will be a musician in her usual setting. Obviously this "usual setting" is different from case to case; there are a number of different types of musicians, in a number of different genres and styles of music, in different settings and contexts. A rock musician has a different context, working structure and appearance (on and off-stage) in

---

[30] As far as I know, the first new staging of *Schwarz auf Weiss* after the original production with Ensemble Modern in 1996 was done in 2009 by the Czech Berg Orchestra and the director's collective SKUTR (see also www.heinergoebbels.com), twelve years after its premiere and worldwide recognition.

comparison to a classical musician, a singer-songwriter, a computer musician or a DJ. This also applies for possible "theatrical" elements such as costumes: almost every musician on stage wears a costume, no matter if this is a black suit or a t-shirt from a death metal band. With a specific kind of musician come also specific kinds of professional activities and "musical persona" (Auslander 2006) According to performance theorist Philip Auslander, this term includes playing style, outer appearance such as clothing and habitus. This specific set of elements, different from musician to musician, constructs the reference point for an audience when seeing a musician on stage. The appearance of most musicians already has some inherent theatrical elements in the concert performance which goes beyond the purely musical expression in sound; as Auslander recalls the "guitar face" of rock guitarists as a possible example.

As soon as this reference or code is changed, disturbed or broken, the audience's perception of the musician is challenged. The question is what this person is actually doing on stage; the door towards a theatrical perception is opened. This perception can be extremely diverse, as it may be connected to meaning-making processes, but also simply refer to an understanding of what the nature of the profession of this person on stage is: musician, actor, dancer, mime, technician, dervish or biker.

Theatricality means space for imagination, for meaning-making processes, and for individuality of every single member of the audience. This should not suggest that theatrical effects are not influenced by the makers of a performance, concert or any other kind of event. They are *invitations* for the audience to imagine, to think, to experience. What is crucial to the theatricality of the musician is that her performance is *staged* in such a way as to transform her usually musical utterances into performative ones. Deriving from theatre scholar Chiel Kattenbelt's definition of performative utterances, I understand musical utterances as intentional acts taking place in the here and now of the performance with the aim of making music. As mentioned above, performative utterances make up a performance which might be perceived as theatrical. The boundaries are often blurred of course, so that there is seldom one moment or break in which a performance turns from a concert performance with theatrical elements (like the story telling character of most pop songs, including impersonation by the singer) into a theatrical performance. Transitions from music to theatre and vice versa should be understood as forming a continuum, among others depending on the context and stage space in which a performance takes place. To summarise, when I use the term "musician as theatrical performer", I am investigating the moments of performance where musicians are perceived as doing "more" (or less) than playing music[31], which might even lead to the point where musicians are perceived as theatrical characters.

[31] I consciously assign this "more" to the perception side of a performance, rather than the creation side. This is crucial for the further course of the argument, and the division into *expansive* and *reductive* approaches, which are in fact assigned to the creation side.

The reductive approach to musicians as theatrical performers - research question

As mentioned earlier, in most cases when musicians are perceived as theatrical, specific performative elements have been *added* on top of their profession. As a result of the friction between the way in which the musician plays an instrument or sings on the one hand, and the additional effort to perform any extra-musical performative assignments, the musician in perceived as theatrical. However, a transformation into a theatrical performer can be achieved through a variety of techniques. I divide the various approaches into two groups: the expansive and reductive approaches. Both are capable of transforming the musician into a theatrical performer, but the reductive approach is far less developed In music (theatre) than the expansive approach. This goes for both theory and artistic practice, and is the focus of this research. I shall investigate the musician as theatrical performer, through the use of reductive concepts, and with the aim of developing new ideas and possibilities for the musician in theatre. The following main research question lies at the foundation of this investigation:

> How can a musician be transformed into a theatrical performer by reducing, denying, absorbing and adapting, or taking away essential elements of music making?

The research takes its deepest motivation from within my own artistic practice, rather than from theoretical analysis, reflection and discussion. The scholarly problem of *Shifting Identities* was posed from within my practice as composer and theatre maker. In the research question I distil the central aspects of the research, both artistically and theoretically. Starting from the most important subject, the musician as theatrical performer, the research focuses on the reductive approach as a new and fascinating, yet not sufficiently researched area. Given the context of the often multimedial nature of many contemporary creations in our digital era, it must be noted that digital technology can play a significant role in the application of reduction as well. Some of the artistic works created in the context of this research use digital technology purposefully with the aim of taking over specific elements of the musician's profession. This will be elaborated more deeply in Chapter Four.

Research strategy

The research is conducted in and through artistic practice[32]: my artistic questions and struggles are the basis for the research, as well as the study of its context and the formulated research questions. Following guitarist and researcher Stefan Östersjö, the research might best be characterised as "*practitioner research*, in which the practitioner is also the researcher and in which there is no fundamental difference between researcher and other participants in the study […]." (Östersjö 2008: 12) For me the relation between theory and practice works very much like a feedback loop, which continuously influences, feeds and inspires itself. My artistic practice builds the foundation and motivation for the research questions and theoretical studies, which in turn feed back into the artistic work. Since the heart of the research lies in artistic practice - in the creation of experimental music theatrical performances -, some of my artistic works have given important impulses to sharpen the theoretical context and research questions, others are better understood as re-examining previously formulated questions. Artistic practice and reflective theory constantly influenced, fed and inspired each other, although not simultaneously but rather in turn. Theoretical and artistic-practical processes do not necessarily develop at the same time, but rather switch back and forth. Separate moments have to be created by the artist-researcher, where theory is merged with practice or the outcomes of practice.

Focussing on the relationships between theory and artistic practice in the context of theatre and performance, I am interested in "how it works", in how this - often manifold - relationship can be shaped; how the process of making a performance works when related to practice-based research. The theoretical side of the research is quite specific and made explicit by means of the research question, giving the research its direction and aim, and pre-mapping the field in which the research is situated. The practical, artistic side is much more difficult to examine, specifically in theatre. Several problems in this field are not shared by many practice-based research projects in the visual arts or music, because the relation between the artist researcher and her subject is slightly different: a composer relates the reflective theory to his own compositions and/or to compositions of other composers. A visual artist does so with her own art works and works of other (related) visual artists. A musician who performs and researches the performance practice of music from the sixteenth century, spends time with the works and documents from this specific period. In general the objects of these studies - compositions, sculptures, installations or paintings - are considered as finished. The visual artist reflects on her artistic decisions in her own work, as does the composer; works tend to be created individually.

In theatre and performance, things are more complex. Theatre is hardly ever created individually, but almost always the outcome of collective activity. No matter what a director decides, it always has a relationship with other decisions or proposals from the composer, the stage designer, the engineers or the performers. The decisions are, at least to some degree, bound to the performers of a piece, or even co-created. This is true to varying degrees for both traditional text-based theatre and experimental performances, which means that the artist-researcher also does not have complete control over how specific research questions are addressed in a work.

---

[32] In this terminology I am essentially following artist-researcher Stephen A.R. Scrivener (2009) in his understanding of research in and through artistic practice, as artistic practice being both the subject of inquiry (research *into* practice) and the research method (research *through* practice). Among others, Scrivener is building his argument on earlier research by Carol Gray (1998: 82), who defines 'practice-led' research as, "research initiated in practice and carried out through practice." (Scrivener 2009: 73)

Related to this is the nature of theatre as a process-based art form: it needs a collective *process* of creation. A piece might be based on a concept, a script or performative instructions, but has to be created in the rehearsal space, the studio, the stage on which it will be performed or in the public space *on location*. During the creation process, several things can change the course of a performance; the artistic team or the director decide on specific elements in the rehearsals which may be used or not. This processuality of theatre and performance makes it difficult for the artist-researcher, because she can never be completely sure about the outcomes of a piece at the outset of a new rehearsal or creation period.[33]

My own practice underlines these observations. All my artistic projects are collaborative and strongly dependent on the collaborators and the performers in particular. Most of the pieces are not only created together with the performers, but cannot easily be performed by anybody other than these specific performers. The collaboration is often so grounded on individuals that it would hardly make sense to let the pieces be performed by anybody else, or, I would have to make a completely new version of a piece, or even create the work anew. The problem with these very individualistic creations is a certain lack of objectivity or relevance for a larger context in (music) theatre and performance. I deal with these problems in two ways. Firstly by designing strong conceptual frameworks for a work, in which the concept already addresses the aspect of reduction, next to artistic interests. Secondly, I do not intend to present my own artistic work as the central element of the dissertation, but rather to a) contextualise it in the contemporary field of theatre and performance in digital culture, and b) present my own work as one example of this field which addresses the concept of reduction in particular. I refer to various artists and works in the current international field and situate my artistic work in this broader context. Additionally however, this practical outcome of artistic research also influences theory, and how the understanding of reduction might be rethought.

The source for this research project lies in collaborative projects which date back a few years. After having worked as a composer in diverse theatre productions across Europe for several years, I started to create my own performance works. Working from the main activity of creating music, I seek to push its boundaries into the media of theatre and performance, creating the mise-en-scène as well. What interests me as a theatre maker in general is the multifaceted way the audience may perceive a performance. In making artistic work, I like to open up possibilities for an active audience. I am interested in fragmentary structures that need to be negotiated by everyone who experiences them. Most interesting are the inter-spaces: between the art forms, between media, between pre-assigned meaning(s). In the following paragraphs I will briefly describe some of my older music-theatrical works in order to explain how I arrived at the ideas which became central for this research.

---

[33] It is not my intention to suggest that music and the visual arts never work in an either collective or processed-based fashion. There are cases in music where a performer researches performance practices of contemporary music which stand in close relationship to communication and collaboration with composers. In such cases, the working and creation process might also play an important role. An example of such research in and through musical practice is the doctoral dissertation of Stefan Östersjö (2008). For interesting paragraphs about the work-in-progress see the introduction (Östersjö 2008: 1-23), and his chapter about the collaboration with composer Richard Karpen: "Richard Karpen's *Strandlines*: a Joint Journey into an unknown praxis." (Östersjö 2008: 323-369). Also a visual artist might collaborate with a video artist or a composer to create an installation, which would present similar kinds of collectivity and processuality issues as in theatre and performance.

Musicians and their everyday life - *Alltag*

I developed my first music theatre performance *Alltag* in 2007.[34] The piece focussed on the everyday life and habits of musicians - as live and present performers, as social human beings, as passionate professionals. I was interested in the phenomena and specificities of this profession in a self-reflective view of the musician as a metaphor for specific groups in society and how they give shape to their identity. A large part of this work which lies between documentary, concert and performance dealt with aspects of musical practice that an audience does not usually see: preparing for a concert, setting up the grand piano, putting together saxophones and a trombone and checking the microphones. All these various activities, movements, or in-between moments fascinated me. These elements are things that are usually absent on a concert stage, which is already fully prepared for a concert when the audience appears.

Several elements were already present in this work which then continued to develop up to my recent projects: I worked with a group of musicians as theatrical performers, as opposed to a mixed actor-musician ensemble. This also contained elements of expansive approaches which I had assigned to the group earlier: besides playing their instruments the musicians had to speak text (with or without microphones)[35], and they had to perform a choreography of changing their places while playing various wind instruments. I also used specific elements of music making as theatrical elements, closely related to the concept of Instrumental Theatre. In one scene, three musicians play a saxophone trio. The trio starts with all three of them playing alto saxophone. During this small piece all of them change once or twice to saxophones with a lower range, so that the piece finishes with the instrumentation of baritone saxophone and two tenor saxophones. Besides the aural result, this choice of changing instruments resulted in a kind of choreography, and so heightened the attention to the everyday actions of a musician, such as moistening the reed. Again, this is an action which one does not usually witness or at least not consciously experience as an important element of saxophone playing, but which is accentuated in *Alltag*, simply by having it repeated several times in a short period of time.

An element which should develop into the focus of my recent work and of this research project is the use of absence: an abandoned piano (an instrument without a performer is also an aspect of one of my most recent works, *Living Room* (2011)), but also the accentuation of actions that do not specifically belong to the musical performance itself, such as setting up an instrument. By staging the setting up of two saxophones and one trombone as the central activity on stage (one of the first scenes of *Alltag*) and by deconstructing this setting up with stills, at the same time the absence of music making itself is made explicit: the absence of sound, the actual aim of music making, is made present.

---

[34] A trailer of the performance can be seen on http://www.falkhubner.com/Alltag.html.

[35] However, this speaking of text was not spectacularly successful, as I actually fell into the beginner's trap of how difficult it is to let musicians speak on stage, as they are obviously not actors, and can much less easily communicate a spoken text towards the audience, or even keep it audible and understandable the whole time. Of course there are lots of pieces in which musicians do speak successfully; see productions by e.g. Christoph Marthaler, Paul Koek and VeenFabriek, Jan Lauwers and NeedCompany.

Abstraction and absence as a source of imagination - *Malsturz*

The second project which initiated ideas for this research is the staged concert *Malsturz,* created in 2008.[36] Initiated by painter Karl Rusche and pianist Christoph Hengst, we created a concert for solo piano, electronics and live moving canvas. The music consists of compositions by Frederic Chopin, Dmitri Shostakovich, Olivier Messiaen, Maurice Ravel and myself. The canvas has two large areas of white, blue and white again. At the beginning of concert, only the white area is visible. After the first piano piece has been played the canvas starts to move slowly from right to left. Somewhere in the first half the blue area appears on the right-hand side of the canvas, emerging until it fills the whole visible area. In the last third of the concert the second white area appears.

In one section of the piece, the idea of absence, of an abandoned instrument, reappears. After having played Debussy's *Sérénade Interrompue*, pianist Christoph Hengst goes off-stage, accompanied by a loud and powerful soundtrack. He leaves the grand piano while the canvas continues moving. After the soundtrack finishes, Hengst begins playing Shostakovich's *Prelude and Fugue 24 in d minor* on a second grand piano behind the audience. Strangely, it seems as if the music he is playing accompanies the moving canvas: it gives the impression of film music. Although it is perfectly clear that the pianist is playing behind the audience (he is easily visible to anybody turning around), the on-stage piano as the "main instrument" of the concert is perceived as left, and the pianist "seems" to be absent.[37]

What fascinated me even more were the audience reactions afterwards. Despite the fairly abstract nature of the painting, and the absence of any continuous visual dramatic structures - the minimalistic development of the colours changing was much too slow to assign a dramatic development to it – various audience members reported their perceptions, experiences and associations. These were enormously diverse, prompted by the way in which different people perceived the painting, the music, and the relations between both. In fact, the concert was perceived as one large invitation to make one's own "story" - what the audience members did, each one in their own individual ways. Based on two abstract elements, the combination of perceptions allowed the audience to generate their own performances. This experience influenced my later work for a large part: most of my recent performances have been based on everyday experiences, or observations of everyday life, reflecting on these experiences by translating them into performance frameworks. These frameworks are mostly abstract, and seek to open up the individual imagination of each member of the audience.

These two projects and their crucial elements - working with musicians as theatrical performers, working with phenomena of musical performance that are usually absent on stage, and the fascination for absence and abstraction as creating space for creativity and imagination for the perceiver - set the stage for the initiation of my PhD research. By connecting these elements with the idea of making a mime piece, I created *Thespian Play* in 2009, the first actual art work in the context of this research project, using the concept of reduction as a strategy to transform musicians into theatrical performers, and presenting the first thoughts about the focus of the

[36] A video trailer of the staged concert can be seen on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKHWN7NUaNU&feature=c4-overview&list=UU426oKSwIpk2bBj-Do9SgzQ.

[37] In the trailer this can be seen at 7:46 min.

research question. Below, I will briefly outline the artistic works which are relevant for this research project and give an introduction into each piece's concept and focus.

Reduction in particular - The artistic works of the research project

In *Thespian Play,* a saxophone player performs a musical choreography without his instrument, quasi-miming what happens on the soundtrack. He does not make one single sound during the whole piece; every sound is pre-recorded, partly processed by electronics, and coming out of two loudspeakers. A great deal of what the musician has been trained in for many years - playing his instrument and controlling both sound and timing - is taken away from him. By taking away the instrument, the body of the performer and the various kinds of movement he produces become the centre of the piece.

In the study for a performative installation, *still life 2.0* (2010) for viola player, dancer, live electronics and live video, the two performers execute short movements and sound fragments. For the largest part of the performance they "just stand", watching the other performer and watching the audience. The short fragments are recorded and processed by microphones and video cameras. The piece emerges and develops out of these short fragments on loudspeakers and a video screen. This electronic system works solely with the material of the performers: without them it remains silent. The performers give the input, provide the material, but cannot *control* the system. Nor do they have control over the overall structure of the performance; this is organised and controlled by the computer. The relationship between the live performers and the electronic system is not interactive; the piece is about difference and dependency. Performers and system have different functions that complement each other and need each other to survive.

Two aspects exemplify the concept of reduction in *still life 2.0*: First, the movements of the performers are cut or fragmented, with no instances of longer phrasing, be it movement or sound. Second, the control of the overall structure is transferred to the computer system. For the performers, the loss of control of the overall structure is more striking than it might seem at first: in most performing art works, the performers have a great deal of control over "macro" aspects of the performance: the structure, tempo, volume, length, or the coherence over time. Taking away the ability to control even the starting points of the various fragments and the overall structure means a significant cut in their autonomy and identity as performing artists.

almost equal / meistens gleich (2010) seeks to push the concept of *Thespian Play* further. Here, not only the instrument is missing, but also the reference to sound. The piece is a silent choreography for conductor and trombonist. There are no instruments on stage, the two players perform a choreography of musical movements. More so than in *Thespian Play*, perception is directed towards the bodies of the two performers. As *Thespian Play* lets the musician remain in her traditional playing position, *almost equal* uses musical movements (without its corresponding sounds) merely as point of departure and basis for a choreographic language.

In *Living Room* (2011) a harpist is set into both an oppositional and complementary relationship with her double on a video screen. The concept of reduction is exemplified in two ways: the harp player *plays* the harp occasionally, but in fact does not *do* that much on stage. The piece deals with the tension surrounding the question of who the main performer in the piece

actually is - the live performer or the performer in the video? The harp playing itself does not unfold until the last part of the piece, a composed duet between the video and the live player. Furthermore the idea of a musician without her instrument is reversed to "an instrument without its musician"; the performer enters the stage and leaves it several times, abandoning her instrument as a silent companion of her own video performance.

Wasteland (2011) for pianist, piano objects, soundtrack and video text adds yet another perspective to the idea of a *musical choreography*. As in *Thespian Play* and *almost equal / meistens gleich*, the pianist does not produce sounds during the performance, but performs a choreography based on musical movements, both traditional piano playing and a diverse repertoire of extended piano techniques. But in contrast to *Thespian Play*, the soundtrack is not a doubling of the movements of the performer, but works more like theatre music ("Schauspielmusik"), which is a medium of its own, a self-standing element of the performance.

The ways these artistic works are connected to the research questions and to the theoretical part of the research differ from one project to another. Whereas some of them might initiate theoretical ideas, serving also the process of focussing the research (*Thespian Play*), others might be directly developing the conceptual ideas and experimenting with them (*still life 2.0*, *almost equal / meistens gleich*). What binds them is first of all the explicit connection to reduction, the taking away of specific elements of music making in order to transform the musicians into theatrical performers. Additionally, in all of these works except *almost equal / meistens gleich*, the performers stand in a tensioned relationship with technology or digital media. In general, the use of digital media has the specific purpose of taking over several functions of the musician's profession: in *Thespian Play* the soundtrack takes over the function of sound production, usually the result of musical movement in musical practice. In *still life 2.0* the two performers are staged in conceptual opposition to the audiovisual electronics that take away a considerable amount of performers' control over time and structure. *Living Room* poses the question: which medium is more important as "performer": the live harp player or the harp player in the video? In *Wasteland*, the soundtrack in effect takes over the traditional function of the musician (in the theatre), the production of sound, whereas the musician only performs bodily movements, no longer connected to the sound or dependent on it.

Overview

The book is structured into four chapters. The first two chapters provide the context of the study, the latter two deal with the two approaches of working with musicians in theatre by either extension or reduction. In Chapter One, the discussion is started by framing and conceptualising the profession of the musician, in order to build an understanding of *what* is extended or reduced when the identity shifts from a musician to a theatrical (musician-)performer. Based on a diversity of practices of musicians, such as the actor-musicians in composer Stephen Sondheim's musical theatre and the experimental task-based performance approaches of artists such as Heiner Goebbels and Paul Koek, I develop a dynamic model that builds strongly on what musicians actually do, what their actual practice is. An important part of Chapter One deals with the categorisation of the musician's professional activities into internal, external and contextual elements, which forms the basis for my thoughts on extension and reduction. Based on the

profession of the musician, Chapter Two deals with the performative contexts of music and theatre, that form the field in which the theatrical musician acts. This chapter takes a closer look at the distinctive features of music theatre and related sub-genres, and elaborates on the composer as relevant actor in music theatre and an important collaborator to the musician-performer.

In Chapters Three and Four, I develop the two-fold distinction between extension and reduction, building on the concepts introduced in the first two chapters. I conceptualise the two approaches with a strong relation to artistic practice. Chapter Three elaborates extension as a strategy to transform the musician into a theatrical performer: I analyse works by Paul Koek, Michel van der Aa, Carola Bauckholt, Heiner Goebbels and John Doyle. The concept of extension is mapped to various stages, which have a varying impact on the performing musician. While the more simple kinds of extension are able to theatricalise the musician without having her actively contribute to this theatricalisation, the more complex kinds of extension leave the musician with a range of demanding performative assignments, and potentially force her to leave the initial profession temporarily. Chapter Four presents a closer examination of the reductive approach, designating the taking away of specific elements of music making from the musician, developed and conceptualised through a series of case studies. Being the central chapter of the book, it includes a close examination and discussion of artistic works connected to this research, and how these works transform the musician into a theatrical performer by making use of reductive approaches. The discussion emphasises on music theatre, but also pays attention to works that are situated between theatre and other art forms such as dance, visual arts, and installation art. Examples include my own artistic work, but also relevant works by John Cage, Heiner Goebbels, Xavier Le Roy, Sam-Taylor Wood, Dieter Schnebel and Kris Verdonck. The production processes of these works will receive specific attention, in order to give more insights into the creation strategies of the artists in relation to the final results, the performances.

I will conclude with a discussion of the interrelations of the expansive and reductive approaches, deconstructing and destabilising the dichotomy of those two. While extension and reduction are different strategies to work with musicians on a theatrical stage, I argue that they should be regarded as two sides of the same coin, rather than opposing and excluding each other. What is crucial for reductive approaches is which performative elements a director chooses to remain. However, even if the strategy for a creation might be reduction, the audience can experience the result as an extension of the musician's profession. I will elaborate on this paradox by relating it to the contexts, concepts and works discussed in this PhD dissertation.