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Shifting identities : the musician as theatrical performer

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CHAPTER TWO - BETWEEN MUSIC AND THEATRE

In this chapter I will provide a grasp on the field in which the research is situated, the multimedial field of music theatre. Departing from where the discussion about the musician's professional identity ended in Chapter One, the aim of this chapter is to give an outline and a conceptual framework of music theatre as a manifold field in which the musician finds herself as performer, and is doing (or asked to do) things that are possibly different from the things she tends to do in concerts or other "mono-disciplinary" professional situations. I do not intend to aim for an historical account of music theatre, as this has been done extraordinarily well recently by pianist and music theatre scholar Zachary Dunbar (2013). The few historical references that I give are only intended to place the present into context, but should by no means be understood as sufficient for gaining an overview. Although I refer to works that date back to the second half of the twentieth century, the reference and artistic context I am situating this project in is the present and recent past, from around the 1990s. I understand the field of music theatre as an "inter"-space, and area of in-betweens: the musician in between the concert space⁵⁷ and the theatre.⁵⁸ The same goes for the practice of the "creators" (composers, directors, visual artists): music theatre might serve as a meeting point for artists from different art forms. The case that a composer is exclusively writing music, understood as performance instructions for musicians, or that a director is only concerned with the *mise-en-scene* are fairly traditional cases and tend to be broken more often than followed in contemporary practice. Music theatre dramaturg Regine Elzenheimer suggests to understand this collaborative work as "productive disruptions" ("Produktive Störungen") across the different art forms and aesthetic methods, which irritate "the rules of the individual media [...] and pace this irritation out up to the boundaries, where it reverts into an unsettling effect." (Elzenheimer 2009: 22, my translation)⁵⁹

As a first move I will return to the difficult term of "music theatre". In the introduction I suggested to avoid a precise definition of the term, and roughly framed the art form's most important elements as both multimedial and inherently musical. On the basis of concrete practical approaches of music theatre makers, I will recapitulate what this "inherently musical" implies according to my understanding. The focus thereby lies on "creations" (Coussens 2009), collective working processes from the very first ideas until the final performance, rather than traditional forms such as opera. I will trace different possibilities of musical thinking and structuring, how these can take shape in different forms of music theatre, and how this is working out for the performing musician. In doing this, I do not necessarily focus myself in first instance on the actual products, such as performances, compositions, and installations, but rather investigate the processes and

⁵⁷ It does not have to be the concert *hall*, as contemporary music practice is not restricted to this space anymore. When I use the term "concert space", I refer to spaces and locations that are intended to listen and experience music.

⁵⁸ I do not limit the field of music theatre to the different media of music and theatre. Obviously contemporary music theatre takes its influences from many more art forms, and generates its various aesthetics in relation to participating art forms such as dance, the visual arts of media art.

⁵⁹ [...] welche "die Eigengesetzlichkeiten der einzelnen Medien [irritieren] und diese Irritation mitunter bis zu den Grenzen ausschreiten, wo sie in eine ver-störende Wirkung umschlägt."

the agents that create the products: composers, directors and, of course, performers.⁶⁰ The pieces, which are on the other hand impossible to "avoid", will serve as references and/or contexts in which the different agents and processes are observed and discussed. They are to be understood as situations in which the musicians find themselves performing.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. Next to the term "music theatre" and its connected concepts of musicality, musical structure and musical thinking I will discuss a few sub-genres of music theatre, giving space to both the diversity of the different approaches and the terminological problems within the field. I will close the chapter with an examination of how the work of the composer is situated within music theatre, and how the composer's profession can be extended towards being director as well.

Musicality, musical structure and musical thinking

In the Introduction I already mentioned the difficulty of "music theatre" as a genre and the apparent problem of defining the term, or to create a generally accepted conceptualisation of music theatre. As outlined, I use the following elements to frame the specificity of the genre: music theatre is a) multimedial by definition, always staging more than one medium, and b) primarily music driven, working with specifically musical structuring and musical thinking while creating a performance. However, some recapturing and further deepening of the aspect of musicality is necessary, in greater detail than the examples of the introduction in order to make this aspect more accessible for practice and for theoretical reflection, and to understand the possible impact and consequences for creating work.

Musicality in theatre and performance

Also in contemporary theatre in general several tendencies and traditions show specifically musical structures, and musical ways of organising a performance - without necessarily becoming music theatre. Musicality introduces various possibilities for performance, since it approaches theatre from a musical perspective. This provides alternative dramaturgies and structures, and makes it possible to shift "the attention from working on character, situation and narrative towards aspects of timing, sound and the polyphony of the theatrical media"; not necessarily merely to introduce a structural order, but as a means "against interpretation" (Roesner 2008a). Directors such as Heiner Goebbels and Christoph Marthaler use the concept of musical polyphony and apply that to all elements of theatre. Roesner sees Marthaler's performances as truly polyphonic in the sense of a polyphony in individual actor's performances: they "co-exist in a well-organized and yet independent and non-hierarchical simultaneity of events." (Roesner 2008: 8) This results in an audiovisual polyphony that allows (or forces) the audience's attention to change and to oscillate between very small details and an impression of the whole, so that an audience member has to choose between following the performers in their vocal and performative utterances, just listen to the music, concentrate on the light, or follow the full impression of everything going on at the same

⁶⁰ In practice these different roles are often combined, so that many composers are also performers and the other way round, and sometimes also directors.

time. Einar Schlee and Christoph Marthaler extensively organise their performances in numbers: solos, ensembles, choirs, choreographies. Derived from applications in music, both directors make use of repetition and variation as strategies to make theatre.⁶¹

The notion of "compositional strategies"

One way of understanding musical structuring and thinking which is frequently recalled in the discourse about the creation of (music) theatre is the notion of *compositional strategies*. Since around the 1960s composers have begun to extend their compositional material to include electronics, video, lighting, costumes, stage design, performative utterances and spatial arrangements. Mauricio Kagel laid a foundation with his often-quoted idea that it is possible to compose with "sounding and non-sounding materials, actors, cups, tables, omnibuses and oboes". (Kagel 1982 quoted in Roesner 2012: 10) Seen this way, applying compositional strategies in the theatre means to "compose" not only with musical material but with many different media, in a musical and compositional understanding,

[...] to approach the theatrical stage and its means of expression as *musical* material. [Various composers] treat voice, gesture, movement, light, sound, image, design and other features of theatrical production according to musical principles and compositional techniques and apply musical thinking to performance as a whole. (Roesner 2012: 9)

Cage's understanding of music as being theatrical, Kagel's Instrumental Theatre, the "optical music" (Meyer in Rebstock and Roesner 2012: 84) of Robert Wilson, the staged concerts by Heiner Goebbels or the intermedial "scores" by Paul Koek are all examples that reveal theatre as a framework for organising and staging musical processes. The observation of the usage of compositional strategies is also one of the central elements that lead David Roesner and theatre scholar and director Matthias Rebstock to their concept of *Composed Theatre*,⁶² describing an artistic practice which "is situated *between* the more classical conceptions - and institutions - of music, theatre and dance, and [...] is highly characterised and unified by making use of compositional strategies and techniques and, in a broader sense, by the application of compositional thinking." (Rebstock in Rebstock and Roesner 2012: 19) Rebstock and Roesner define several main characteristics as symptomatic for Composed Theatre, such as the independence of theatrical elements without a predefined hierarchy, and without, for example, music illustrating and reinforcing the psychology, or following the dramatic structure of a dialogue. However, not so much the outcomes (performances, compositions, works) are defining what Composed Theatre is, but rather the application of "compositional strategies" during the *process* of creation - not necessarily visible or audible in the products themselves:

⁶¹ Examples of artists who explicitly work with musical principles are composers like Heiner Goebbels, Georges Aperghis, Manos Tsangaris, Carola Bauckholt, Daniel Ott, Robert Ashley and Meredith Monk; directors like Robert Wilson, Christoph Marthaler, Paul Koek and Ruedi Häusermann; choreographers like William Forsythe, Sasha Waltz and Xavier le Roy; ensembles like Theater der Klänge Düsseldorf, Die Maulwerker and LOSE COMBO in Berlin, Cryptic in Glasgow and Post-Operativ Productions in Sussex, "most of them having some roots in the work of composers such as John Cage, Mauricio Kagel, Dieter Schnebel or in the Fluxus movement." (Rebstock in Rebstock and Roesner 2012: 19)

⁶² In 2009, Rebstock and Roesner conducted two symposia with invited artists and theorists to reflect about this notion of *Composed Theatre*, which lead to the publication *Composed Theatre. Aesthetics, Practices, Processes* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012).

A performance may not show any typical sign of compositional strategies; yet, without applying such strategies, the composer, the director or the ensemble would not have come to the same result. This means that dealing with the field of Composed Theatre requires a consideration, not only of the performances but also of the working processes if we are to determine in what sense compositional thinking drives these processes. (Rebstock in Rebstock and Roesner 2012: 21)

As such, Composed Theatre as a concept offers many useful aspects to the discussion at stake. It has several parallels as to how "music theatre" is understood here, such as the focus on "creations" and on musical strategies. However, in spite of these parallels I do not choose to adopt the term or the field assigned by Rebstock and Roesner as my area of study. The most important argument for not doing so is that I am focussing more on the musician in an intermedial field what I prefer to call music theatre.

"The score" as metaphor

Closely related to the notion of compositional strategies is the use of the "score" as a metaphor for compositional organisation and related to compositional strategies of different media. Traditionally a musical score is understood as result of a composer's work, as a kind of script that organises musical events in time. In music theatre, the "score" is occasionally used as a metaphor for how to understand a structure of a performance as a whole. Comparable to the musical score, a theatrical performance can be described in a kind of multimedial score that organises not only music, but also performative events, dialogues, pitches of spoken text, video, light design, all of them interrelated and yet independent of one another.

The individual [theatrical] elements should remain independent of one another and self-sufficient - meaning not in the service of illustrating another element - as well as related to one another. This approach has nothing to do with the unrelated juxtaposition of various events that we know from the works of Cage. The musical model here is polyphony. [...] the point at which the organisation of heterogeneity according to musical principles comes into play: tempo, rhythm, colour, density, direction, variation, morphogenesis of motifs, repetition, movement types, etc. (Rebstock 2012: 230-231)

Also composers such as Heiner Goebbels or Georges Aperghis emphasise the independency of elements: "The visual elements should not be allowed to reinforce or emphasise the music, and the music should not be allowed to underline the narrative. Things must complement themselves; they must have different natures. This is an important rule for me: never say the same thing twice." (Aperghis in Singer 2001, quoted in Rebstock 2012: 230) Not seldom this emphasis on independence and autonomy of media is mentioned with reference to Bertholt Brecht and his concept of epic theatre, in which he also frequently argues for the independency of the various theatrical elements, as well as the concept of distance on various levels - distance of the performers to their characters, of the audience to the plot, or of the various theatrical elements and media to each other. The application of musical principles has proven an effective way of realising this distance, as a result of understanding the various elements as intermedial voices of a polyphonic score, "as a rhythmical, gesticulatory, melodic, spatial and sounding phenomenon as well as a carrier of meaning." (Roesner 2008: 7) When an actor has to concentrate on the exact timing of his text and the pitch of his spoken voice, the attention shifts from character or psychology to performing musically.

It is important to realise that what I present here is a kind of extrapolation of methods used in theatrical processes. In the actual practice, the circumstances are often much more blurred and not that clear at first sight. Musicians are by far not the only group of artists who use this kind of musical vocabulary to describe theatrical processes, ways of working and products. One finds dancers and choreographers using this vocabulary as well, though not necessarily with the same meaning. In music theatre, not every performance has to be organised by a "score" in the sense of a tight organisation. A whole continuum of diverse practices exist, from strictly determining almost every detail of a performance including direction and light assignments, through forms of scripts comparable to more traditional forms of theatre scenarios, to no score or script at all, purely based on oral agreements.

A word about terms and genres

Besides "music theatre", one can come across several other terms that attempt to describe specific sub-genres, such as "staged concerts" or the already mentioned Instrumental Theatre. Most of these terms have once been introduced by practitioners, and have then be taken up and used by theorists. However, as with all definitions of genres, these terms are often blurry and quite unspecified. As any precise and closed definition would be inappropriate to the diversity of the field, I will not try to fill this gap, but rather give an impression of what some of these terms assign and how the musician as performer is situated within them. What I aim to point out is that these different terms assign a variety of thinking on theatre and performance from the medium of music. Here I present an introduction to some of the terms that one comes across either in practice or in theoretical discourse.

I will restrict myself to three different terms or genres in order to show terminological difficulties as well as the plurality of the field in which musicians participate and act as performers. The reason why I include these different genres in my discussion is threefold: First, they all deal with specifically musical structures and musical thinking in one way or another. Second, these terms are relevant because they are either widely used, or play a role in recent theories. Third, they potentially transform the musician into a theatrical performer, that is, doing "more" than playing music.⁶³ However, every section on the different genres should be read with keeping a certain all-present blurriness of these genres in mind. The borders are never clear-cut, and often one and the same piece could be allocated to different genres.

From staged concerts to Instrumental and "Integrative" Theatre

A term that one frequently comes across is *staged concert*. In first instance this might seem odd, as every concert is "staged" obviously: when a pianist enters the stage before playing a solo concert, there is something theatrical, and a kind of staging involved. An average pop concert is carefully staged, considering the arrangement of the band members, the lighting, the entering of the musicians on stage, the order of the songs, up to pyro effects, video projections, and moving

⁶³ I will not deal with opera in my discussion of genres here, as most operas do not fall into the category of "creations", as they tend to be created in succession (libretto - score/music - staging), rather than with a collective, parallel and integrated approach.

parts of the stage. However, one hardly comes across the specific term "staged concert" in these kind of contexts, which hints at the self-explanatory nature of the understanding of every concert as staged in some sense.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, literature proves that the term "staged concert" seems to be reserved for more experimental and reflective practices.

Thinking of a field between music and theatre, a staged concert is probably the closest to music as a concert form. Staged concerts tend to rethink and to reflect on "traditional" concert modes - mostly understood as a classical music performance, and usually aimed to present ways of 'theatricalising the concert hall'. The term as such has been coined by Heiner Goebbels, who created a number of staged concerts, among them *Der Mann im Fahrstuhl* (1987), *Eislermaterial* (1998) and *I went to the house but I did not enter* (2008).⁶⁵ One way of thinking about staged concerts is to start with a composition or piece of music, and then arrange the musicians' positions on stage, such as an ensemble of musicians located in "unusual" spots on stage compared to concert spacing, in which a conductor stands in front, with his back to the audience, facing a half-circle arrangement of the musicians' ensemble. Another example could be the traditional arrangement of a classical string quartet, in a circle, being the four players close to each other. In a staged concert, a composer and/or director could choose four positions of the four string quartet players in the four corners of the stage, with their backs to each other.⁶⁶ The idea of a staged concert shows an obvious nearness to Instrumental Theatre, which had its origins in the extension of the traditional classical music concert, and aimed at a theatricalisation of music-making itself.⁶⁷

Salzman and Desi described Instrumental Theatre ("Instrumentales Theater", "azione teatrale") as a kind of music theatre "with only instrumentalists or [where] instrumentalists can be actors in their own musical dramas." (Salzman and Desi 2008: 94) As a sub-genre of music theatre, Instrumental Theatre is particularly important from an historical point of view. As an aesthetic form it is much more located in-between the concert format and the theatre; its basic idea is to turn concert music into dramatic action, and the musicians into theatrical performers. Instrumental Theatre can be with or without voice, with or without stage design, with or without detailed staging directions in the score or by a director. Mauricio Kagel emphasises particularly the importance of onstage movement as crucial characteristic of Instrumental Theatre compared to concert performance with a more static character. (Kagel 1966: 252)

⁶⁴ One also comes across terms such as "semi-staged" or "mise-en-espace". These refer to forms in which musicians, often singers, are performing almost as in a usual concert, staged to be sitting on stairs, or a balcony or just on specific spots on stage, quite often also involved in forms of "quasi"-acting.

⁶⁵ He still differentiates his performance works into these two genres, calling *Schwarz auf Weiss*, *Eraritjaritjaka* and *When the mountain changed its clothing* "music theatre", and *I went to the house but did not enter*, *Eislermaterial* and *Der Mann im Fahrstuhl* "staged concerts".

⁶⁶ From this point of view, Karlheinz Stockhausen's famous *Helicopter Quartet* (1993, premiered 1995) could be seen as a possible form of a staged concert as well: At the premiere 1995 in Amsterdam the audience could see the four musicians entering four helicopters, The helicopters left off and the audience was guided inside the Westergasfabriek where four monitors showed the inside of each helicopter, filming the members of the string quartet while playing the piece. Loudspeakers projected the sounds of both instruments and the helicopters' motors and rotor blades. The concert form is transformed to a mediation of a concert that actually happens in the air, staged in spacial relationship between the guided audience and the performers entering the helicopters, performing in them and leaving them again.

⁶⁷ See p. 14-16.

A way to differentiate between Instrumental Theatre and staged concerts is that whereas Instrumental Theatre aims to transform musical into performative utterances, staged concerts tend to keep a focus on playing music, but in a form that is visually more appealing, or aims to add a visual or scenic element to "just playing music". In Chapter Three I will assign this kind of approach to the first, "simple" category of "extensions". However, the border between Instrumental Theatre and staged concerts is often unclear. It is important to keep in mind that the differentiation that I make here can never be absolute, but merely has the status of an indication, in order to find one's way in the broad field of music theatre. Also the differentiation between either a staged concert or Instrumental Theatre on the one hand, and "music theatre" on the other, might prove equally difficult. When is a piece Instrumental Theatre, when a staged concert, and when is it music theatre? Composer, musicologist and music pedagogue Karl-Heinz Zarius makes the difference according to how the media are handled: while Instrumental Theatre deals with the scenic and theatrical aspects of music making, (new) music theatre is much more concerned with an integration of all elements in theatre, such as lighting and stage design. (Zarius in Klüppelholz 2008: 86) Kagel could have supported this argument, as he opted for merging the musician's instrumental and theatrical presentation, concentrated on the performing musician, without additional theatrical means. He stated that in Instrumental Theatre no stage design is necessary, no "special technical equipment, furniture or other accessories. The naked stage alone offers enough stimulation." (Kagel 1966: 252, my translation)⁶⁸

One last term which is interesting in the discourse at hand is coined by Jörg U. Lensing, artistic director of the German company *Theater der Klänge* (*Theatre of Sounds*). Lensing calls the group's form "Integrative Theatre": an environment "played" by performers. In short, the concept of these kinds of works could be described as having a stage that is fully equipped with all kinds of sensors such as cameras, microphones or other movement-sensitive devices, in order to track actions and sounds that happen on stage. The performers can "play" this environment by movement or sound, then being electronically processed to sound and images. This goes back to experiments such as *Variations V* (1965) by John Cage and Merce Cunningham, where "the entire floor was transformed into a musical instrument responsive to movement throughout the space [...]." (Winkler 1995: 1) According to Lensing, dancers are possibly the best performers to play these environments, and a considerable part of the rehearsals is devoted to finding compositional structures that are performed by dancers, as in their recent work *Suite Intermediale* (2010):

In the scenographic setup for [*Suite Intermediale*], the implementation of sensors and transformation of data generated by the sensors into control data for lighting and sound plays an important role. The space - and during the process of creation this means our rehearsal studio - functions as an electronic instrument, which only waits to be played and played on! (Lensing in Rebstock and Roesner 2012: 161)

The term "Integrative Theatre" as such is not generally used, in spite of a small discourse also in the discussion on Composed Theatre mentioned above, but it can be helpful to describe comparable surroundings, which are not too rare in today's theatre.

Staged concert, Instrumental Theatre, and Integrative Theatre are all terms with a quite specific understanding, which is often connected to one company, director or performance. What they have in common is that performers are challenged to execute assignments that do not

⁶⁸ "[...] benötigt man keine Bühnenbilder, besondere technische Einrichtungen, Möbelstücke oder sonstiges Zubehör. Die nackte Bühne bietet für sich genügend Anregung."

necessarily belong to their specific discipline. As the focus on the musician as performer is fairly independent from the specific sub-genres, I continue to use the generic term music theatre.

The composer in (music) theatre

As a last move in this chapter, I will discuss the role of composers working in theatre, and how the identity of some composers shifted towards being directors as well. Although the performing musician (who might also be a composer) is the subject of this research, the composer is one of the important agents who create music theatre. It is important to discuss the composer's work due to the relevance for the performer. Often the composer is a close collaborator for the performing musician, and this is why I want to give context to the work of the composer, and point out several potential differences from the "traditional" or "autonomous" work of composers. I am relying on my own experience as a composer collaborating with directors, actors, dancers, and choreographers, and the reports of colleagues or students who were trained 'mono-disciplinary' as musicians or composers, and then experienced different working methods (sometimes seemingly incompatible with how they were used to creating music) in theatre.

Of course the possible activities of composers today are by no means limited to sitting at a desk or piano, and putting notes on paper or into the computer. The profession of the composer is (and has been since the second half of the twentieth century), expanding: nowadays one finds a multitude of practices, from the organisation of pitched sounds played by traditional instruments organised on paper, up to the "design of interactive interfaces [as a] speculative composing in which not one concretisation is provided, but where a multitude of models for embodiment are taken into account [...]" (Craenen 2011: 228, my translation)⁶⁹ However, in most cases, creating music for theatre, dance or other multidisciplinary projects is different for a composer than creating an autonomous composition for the concert stage. This is not meant to be understood as an absolute statement, but more as an indication for a range of practices that happen much more in a collaborative, collective mode that is developed in the process, on the floor in rehearsals and workshop sessions. According to Dutch composer Thomas Myrmel, the work develops "from being an individual composer to a collaborating artist." (Myrmel in Versloot 2011: 117, my translation)⁷⁰ This collaborative nature also involves a specific "grey area" in which the work of writer and composer, or stage designer and musician, etc. overlap: "A grey area, where more people have an opinion and where nobody can justly claim the direct responsibility. In collaborative processes this is where conflicts occur constantly." (Myrmel in Versloot 2011: 117-118, my translation)⁷¹

Concerning the *process* of developing and devising music theatre pieces/performances, the various forms of practices can be located in-between and are often mergers of the traditions of music making and theatre making. In many contemporary music theatre productions musician-performers are working and creating together with the composer-director during the whole

⁶⁹ "Componeren als het ontwerpen van interactieve interfaces [...] kan beschouwd worden als een [...] speculatief componeren waarin niet één concretisatie wordt vooropgesteld, maar rekening wordt gehouden met de veelheid aan belichamingsmodellen [...]"

⁷⁰ "Die weg heb ik afgelegd van individuele componist naar een samenwerkend kunstenaar."

⁷¹ "Een grijs gebied, waarover meer mensen een mening hadden en waarvoor niemand met recht de directe verantwoordelijk [sic] kon opeisen. Bij samenwerkingsprocessen treden in dit gebied doorgans de conflicten op."

rehearsal period, in vital processes of collaborative exchange.⁷² Composers may start with musicians and actors improvising in order to generate musical material which then serves as basis for the final composition, an approach that aims to include the performer's input in the music. Another strategy is that a composer takes musical fragments to the rehearsals, tries out with the musicians, in combination with texts and/or other media on stage, and then further refines them on the basis of the rehearsal results. Simone Heilgendorff acknowledges these more process-oriented forms of creating in her reflection on Mauricio Kagel's work *Match*:

Match [1964] does not find its musical form via conventional methods of musical elaboration anymore, but through montage of dramatic and sounding material into a musico-scenic structure. (Heilgendorff 2004a: 12, my translation)⁷³

Also in the case of Heiner Goebbels, Heilgendorff argues that the development of his theatrical work is very much based on his experiences in theatre and the process-based strategies of working, additional to the intensive exchange with the musicians and everybody else participating in a production. In doing so, "improvisation is a means of finding material: material which is not made out of theoretical consideration, but which is bodily connected." (Heilgendorff 2004b: 17, my translation)⁷⁴ In these cases the composer is not exclusively responsible for the creative act anymore (in the sense of having composed a piece of music), and the musician is not merely the interpreter of the music anymore. Rather, the musicians become important co-creators during the creation process, not only of the music itself, but also as performers in a theatre piece. Kagel, though still quite closely connected to the concept of the authorial composer and the score as representative for the "work", argued in his "Thoughts on Instrumental Theatre" (Kagel 1966) that "[d]epending on the requirements of the piece to be performed, the musician is interpreter or co-author of his part." (Kagel 1966: 252, my translation)⁷⁵ At the point where the musician does not only have the function of playing music on stage, but also becomes a theatrical performer, the degree of her importance changes. As soon as the individual presence of a musician, her body language and other performative factors are becoming more important, the composer and/or director cannot avoid working with specific persons. By working closely together with the actual performing musicians, both the music and the performance as a whole become much more bound to the performers, far less exchangeable than in a classical orchestra, for example. It is very well possible that a composer does not compose all music for a theatre piece, and that a performing musician might be assigned (or chooses herself) to compose sections of music, next to the music

⁷² However, one should keep in mind that close collaboration with specific performers is not a phenomenon of contemporary music or theatre. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century (and before) it was very normal that composers wrote virtuoso etudes and caprices for instrumental virtuosos, or arias specifically for individual singers as a kind of "add-ons" to an opera. (Cloot 2008: 40)

⁷³ "Seine musikalische Form findet *Match* [1964] nicht mehr über konventionelle Methoden musikalischer Durcharbeitung, sondern durch die Montage dramatischen und klanglichen Materials zu einem musikalisch-szenischen Ablauf."

⁷⁴ "[Dabei ist] Improvisation ein Mittel der Materialfindung: Material, das nicht allein aus der theoretischen Überlegung erwächst, sondern das körperlich verbunden ist."

⁷⁵ "[j]e nach den Voraussetzungen des aufgeführten Stückes ist der Musiker Interpret oder Miturheber seiner Partie."

of the "main composer".⁷⁶ Composer(s) and musicians alike might bring first rough ideas to the rehearsal, to be developed together in composition, arrangement and staging.⁷⁷ Thomas Myrmel reports similar experiences while working on a specific theatrical project: "[...] the tenor got the freedom to rework simple melodies that I brought to the rehearsals into full vocal phrases, which may be counted to his responsibility." (Myrmel in Versloot 2011: 120, my translation)⁷⁸ He argues that "[i]f the performers feel more responsibility for the piece, this leads to a stronger authenticity of the result." (ibid.: 123, my translation)⁷⁹ This implies that the composer occasionally has to give up on the sole authorship of the composition. Different from composing concert music, the composer in theatre is not necessarily the main author of what happens on stage, and often the concept of a performance is not the concept of the composer, but of the director, performer, dramaturg or playwright. Also the timeline of a production process is typically quite different from the "autonomous" composer's "usual" workflow. Other than in concert music, in theatre a composition is often not finished when rehearsals start, but is an outcome of rehearsal work.⁸⁰ Composers are often developing music during the rehearsals, not solely in their studio or at home.

The composer as director

In collaborative ways of working, notation is often much less important than in more traditionally oriented music theatre, opera and classical music. Opera nowadays is still largely based on the sequence libretto - composition/score - mise en scène, mostly executed by different persons, not necessarily closely connected to each other in a collaboration. Richard Wagner is the classical exception, but also Michel van der Aa, whose work will be discussed later. Perhaps because of the dominance of opera as most important form of music theatre for a long time, the

idea that new music and music theater could be created from something else than a base in strict notation was slow to take hold; even Cage's early work was still based on traditional notation. The creation of new work with strong performer input came about largely in three ways: (1) the development of alternate forms of notation (mostly the so-called graphic notations of the 1960s and 1970s), (2) the introduction of open form [...], and (3) the influence and methods of choreographers

⁷⁶ I observed such situations both in the practice of colleagues and myself: In a piece where I was participating as a composer, two actors proposed to give shape to a central poem of the piece in the form of a rap, and had already prepared this before showing the result to the director and myself. The director and I liked this proposal that much that I decided not to use my own music (which had been composed already as well) and to give the actors the freedom to develop this section further by themselves, only roughly guided by me.

⁷⁷ These techniques are not unusual in popular music, in which pieces of music are often created in co-creatorship in a 'trial-and-error' development directly in the rehearsal studio.

⁷⁸ "En de tenor kreeg de vrijheid om de simpele melodieën, die ik meebracht naar de repetitie, om te vormen tot volwaardige zangregels, die zo tot zijn verantwoordelijk [sic] mochten worden gerekend."

⁷⁹ "Als de uitvoerenden meer verantwoordelijkheid voelen voor het stuk, leidt dat tot een sterkere authenticiteit (eigenheid) van het eindresultaat."

⁸⁰ I am not suggesting that in the case of "traditional" compositions there are no changes made in a score during a rehearsal phase. Of course there are cases where composers make several changes in order to improve their composition. However, this builds on the already practically finished score, either in a draft of almost finished version, mostly not about developing a piece as a whole. Of course there are exceptions, such as composer Richard Karpen, who is used to develop his compositions in close collaboration with the performers, often on the basis of improvisations in the rehearsals. See footnote 32.

and creative stage directors, working with performers in extended rehearsal periods and without text (or with only text fragments) and without a controlling score. (Salzman and Desi 2008: 344-345)

However, in the course of the twentieth century, the role and function of the composers changed, due to the nature of most theatrical works with musicians as performers. From the early 1970s on many composers decided to direct their pieces, to do the *mise en scène* themselves. They developed a close relation to the actors and musicians performing their pieces, in the sense of regarding the individual *performers* as their "material" rather than agents to execute a score.⁸¹ Several performance artists also established themselves as composer, director and performer in one person, such as Laurie Anderson, Meredith Monk, and Pamela Z.

The reasons why composers start to direct their pieces may be very different. Some composers see their directing activities just as extension of their composing activities, more or less realising with other media what they could not achieve only with musical or sonic means. Others have been working as composers in theatre productions, leading to the development and realisation of their own ideas about theatre, staging and the relation between the different theatrical media.⁸² In either case, the decision of composers to take responsibility for staging and directing their pieces themselves results in considerable changes to the act of composing, causing "[the] composition process [to be] prolonged through the process of staging until the very moment of the performance" (Rebstock in Rebstock and Roesner 2012: 21).

I use the term *composer-director* to describe composers who personally direct their own pieces, among them Heiner Goebbels, Georges Aperghis, Paul Koek and Michel van der Aa. This "collection" of artists is not at all to be understood as a coherent group working in more or less the same way. Among the people mentioned Michel van der Aa might be the one who most closely works in the Wagnerian tradition of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, with a similar notion of a "full-blown *auteur* concept" (Salzman and Desi 2008: 106), meaning that he does not only compose the music, but also writes a stage directing script, directs the opera, edits and produces the film part, and often writes the libretto for his operas himself.⁸³ In the rehearsals and production of these pieces, he also directs both the video and the *mise-en-scène* on stage. Heiner Goebbels, on the other hand, mostly rejects the overall authorship for his pieces, and constantly points out how important his collaborators are in order to enable him to actually "do less" during the creation process. Paul Koek has shifted his profession through the years from being a percussion player and composer towards the domain of stage direction (though he continues to play percussion occasionally), he mostly collaborates with one or more composers in the music theatre pieces of his Leiden-based company VeenFabriek.

⁸¹ That lets the composer-directors belong to a category of artists crossing and transcending the borders between different art forms: Originally based or trained in an art form being not theatre, composers, visual artists, architects and choreographers extended their own profession into the medium of theatre. The theatrical works of these artists often bear strong references to the art form in which they have been based in, but everyone of them offers other fascinating and unusual views on the theatre, both in ways of working processes and the aesthetic results: Among them Kris Verdonck, Jan Lauwers, Jan Fabre, William Forsythe, Sasha Waltz, Heiner Müller, Paul Koek, and Heiner Goebbels, just to name a few.

⁸² Richard Wagner might be the first composer who took this so literally that he also claimed the activity of playwright, librettist and stage director of his own operas.

⁸³ In three out of the four works for music theatre until now, Van der Aa has written the libretto himself (*One, After Life, Das Buch der Unruhe*). Writer David Mitchell wrote the libretto for Van der Aa's most recent opera *Sunken Garden*, premiered in April 2013.

The working processes of these and other composer-directors are all quite specific and can differ greatly from each other. In the following sections I will exemplify a few of these in slightly greater detail, referring to the working processes of Michel van der Aa, Mauricio Kagel, Georges Aperghis, Heiner Goebbels and Paul Koek, to provide a spectrum of examples that give an impression of how different the potential strategies can be. With Van der Aa I consciously chose an artist who explicitly relies on notation and the score as central element that constitutes a significant part of "the work", opposed to others who might not even write down one single note for a specific performance. As a substantial amount of literature is available about several of these composer-directors, I will not go into too much detail concerning the work of those individual artists, but rather give a brief overview in order to provide a glimpse of the different approaches and working methods.

Mauricio Kagel was a composer who preferred to stay close to the "traditional" western understanding of composition in terms of authority, and in the understanding of a musical score as a manifestation of "the work". In his theatrical works he often brought drafts of his scores to the rehearsals. Then he developed the existing ideas further in a collaborative fashion, testing different ideas both from himself and the performers, as he did for the scenic part of *Sur Scène*.⁸⁴ However, after such rehearsal processes and (semi-)collaborative creations Kagel chose to determine these creations in the form of scores and scripts, making them authoritative and binding for future performers. According to Mathias Rebstock, Kagel did this "also to secure the status of an artwork of this scenic compositions." (Rebstock 2012: 235)

Georges Aperghis opts for a slightly different approach. He does compose in the sense of putting notes on paper, but these are often only small fragments or motives; he chooses not to take already finished compositions to the rehearsals, the fragments have the purpose of pure material in order to be tried out and tested in the rehearsals. He not only combines fragments into scenes and/or larger structures; several fragments for solo instruments may also be combined into other ensemble sizes such as trios or quartets. During the rehearsals these musical fragments are then brought into contact with the text and other media, coming to a "shock", as Aperghis himself calls it:

The goal is that the music is independent. That it does not need to tell something of the piece. That it exists just for itself. And when later it comes to the shock with the text, then it becomes theatre. But if one changes the text it becomes a different theatre. The music is not made from the beginning to play such and such a role. It is just sound material. (Aperghis quoted in Rebstock 2012: 232)

He works closely with the performers during the initial creation of a work. Drawing largely of the inherent theatricality of the composed music itself, Aperghis realises most of the theatrical part without additional assignments or staging instructions, by often using repeating small musical fragments that require a substantial amount of physical engagement. This inherent theatricality of his scores might also be the reason why, in spite of the close collaboration with his performers, once a piece is finished (and fixed in notation as well), Aperghis does not bind a piece exclusively to its performers, having "confidence to other people that will follow." (Aperghis quoted in Rebstock 2012: 235)

⁸⁴ See Rebstock 2012: 235.

Heiner Goebbels acts as composer-director in most of his music theatre pieces, although he does not insist on composing the music for his pieces himself. He (re)uses music of Prince, The Beach Boys (*Hashirigaki*), string quartet compositions by Shostakovich, Mossolov, Lobanoc, Scelsi, Bryars, Ravel, Crumb, Bach (*Eraritjaritjaka*) and others. However, he seldomly collaborates with a composer; in other words, if there is new music to be composed for a piece, he will do that himself. Goebbels tends to see his activities as a composer and director of music theatre pieces in one and the same work as complementary, thinking of himself directing as a composer and composing as a director. This means that when he works as a director he aims to use compositional tools such as rhythm and polyphony, and applies these to the different media or theatrical elements. When he works as a composer Goebbels argues that he does not necessarily invent music, but rather works with the musical qualities and origins of the collaborators: "In the musicians with whom I work, or the musicians I invite to the process, or the machines with which I try to create the sound."⁸⁵ Significant for Goebbels' way of working is that he organises workshops with all collaborators, including performers, stage designers, video artists, lighting technicians and so on, about a year before the actual premiere, in order to ensure the active involvement of everyone participating in the creation.

The Dutch composer, director and percussion player Paul Koek gradually developed during his career from a composer and percussion player to a director of music theatre works. Although he still performs as a percussion player (mostly in concerts or staged concerts of his own ensemble VeenFabriek in Leiden, The Netherlands) and composes music from time to time (as for the theatre play *Hiob* (2008) at the Münchner Kammerspiele, directed by Koek's long time collaborator Johan Simons, or for the recent *Drie Monniken* ("Three Monks", 2012), he mostly works as a director for a large variety of music theatre performances. In many of the pieces directed by Koek, someone else composes the music, in the case of VeenFabriek productions he regularly collaborates with keyboard player and composer Ton van der Meer, but also with other composers such as Martijn Padding and Wim Henderickx. Paul Koek is an example of an artist who regularly works with assignments in an open form framework. Everybody of his ensemble might come up with an idea for a scene, a piece of music or just an experiment based on a set of rules. In doing this, Koek implicitly (and at times explicitly in talks that I had with him) rejects the authorship about scenes or whole pieces, although it was based on an assignment by him and although he is credited for the direction of the performance. Unlike Van der Aa or Aperghis, Koek hardly works in a true "auteur"-function, at least in his own understanding, but more as an initiator of a creative act in the sense of delivering the idea and framework for the scene on the one hand, and as the organiser of the material on the other. During the rehearsals he collects ideas, gives assignments, provides feedback and tries to bring everybody further in the process of creation, and in the end combines everything into a theatrical collage; with the result that the piece that is performed is inextricably bound to the performers of the premiere production. In most cases there is a script, accompanied by musical scores. But, and that is the most important difference to someone like Michel van der Aa, the score is hardly ever the basis, the point of departure, but rather the *result* of a working process.

This aspect of and approach to process, and how the process of creating a piece of music theatre is designed, is what actually marks the most important differences between the composer-

⁸⁵ Heiner Goebbels in interview with Marianne van Kerckhoven and Falk Hübner.

directors that are discussed here.⁸⁶ Kagel, Aperghis and Van der Aa all have a quite close, though different, relation to musical notation and the score as constitutive element of their work. While Kagel used first versions of his pieces in order to work out details together with the performers, Aperghis uses musical fragments in order to be most flexible in rehearsal while at the same time having enough musical material to work with. Van der Aa's scores are usually finished when the rehearsals start, as are most of the film parts; this goes even for the staging script, as the happenings on stage are so closely connected and woven together with the music and the film. Paul Koek operates almost at the other end of the spectrum, as a director of and guide through a collective process during a production. The way how the music is worked out, or how much music is already existent in the beginning of a VeenFabriek production may vary from piece to piece, also depending on the choice of music, as some productions involve existing music (possibly to be arranged or orchestrated), such as by Claudio Monteverdi or John Dowland. However, the music in its actual shape is developed throughout the rehearsals, and the final version is always a result of this process. This goes for Goebbels' work as well, who hardly ever starts with any notated music at all, in order to be able to be most open for the input of everybody participating in the process.

These different composer-directors and their specific ways of designing working processes have two important consequences for the musician-performer. First, they require quite different qualities from the musician in terms of following the rehearsal process, and second in terms of what the musicians are actually asked to do, and how their profession is shaped and transformed. Michel van der Aa's protagonists, besides having to perform the music, have to be perfectly aware of what is happening on the film screen and relate to that in different ways, which asks a constant amount of additional attention.⁸⁷ The musicians of Kagel's and Aperghis' pieces have to concentrate on performing both music as well as additional assignments with utmost seriousness and intensity. If not doing so, Kagel's often humorous and provocative absurdity runs the risk of drowning in clownish amateurism, and the physical-gestural impact of Aperghis' pieces threatens to be dramatically weakened and therefore become meaningless. Goebbels and Koek at last, both most devoted to the rehearsal process itself, ask enormous flexibility from their performers while developing the performances, as choices tend to be made quite late and things can change until a few days before the performances. Also do they extend the profession of the musicians regularly by a great diversity of assignments, from simple standing behind a window while singing (Goebbels' *I went to the house...*) up to telling the audience about an imaginative research on the composer John Dowland (Koek's *Flow my tears*) while being dressed as somebody in-between an American Indian and a doctor.

⁸⁶ Of course there are also other aspects, such as the reasons why they started to direct, all coming from a background of composition or playing an instrument. Michel van der Aa sees his directing activities as a logical extension of his being a composer, whereas Heiner Goebbels started to formulate his own concept of music theatre (which includes directing for a substantial part) mainly as reaction on what he considers fairly negative experiences as composer for theatre directors in the beginning of his career.

⁸⁷ From the instrumentalists in the orchestra Van der Aa asks fairly traditional qualities; they have to play the notes written in the score, not very different from other orchestral musicians performing contemporary music (to a click track). Only incidentally, such as in *Up-Close*, the orchestral musicians have to follow simple performative assignments such as standing up and play the music while standing.

Closing remarks

Chapter Two elaborated on the field of music theatre as context of the research, and as framework of the musician's activities within this context. Similar to the triangle of internal, external and contextual elements, developed in Chapter One, this context can have different shapes and contain various elements, depending on the performance space, the manifold forms of working processes, different natures of collaborations, and the actual products, the performances. Still, I argue that the panorama I have sketched is sufficiently stable for understanding how the musician's activities might change and transform in the multitude of performance situations, and to enable the reader to find one's way in the great variety of repertoire, between the various creators of music theatre, the variety of working situations and processes. Despite the impossibility of providing a panorama as being a "*completely coherent scenery*" (Latour 2005: 187), this chapter should provide the reader with the ability to follow the various examples I am going to elaborate on including my own artistic work, and to contextualise the divergent activities musicians execute in theatrical presentations.

The end of Chapter Two also marks the end of the first half of this dissertation, closing the discussion about the musician as the subject of research, and the different contexts in which she executes her profession, in which this profession is extended or reduced, and in which the musician is transformed into a theatrical performer. Part One has prepared the reader for the endeavor into the second half of this book, the discussion of the expansive approach in Chapter Three and the reductive approach in Chapter Four. The concepts discussed until here will be put into "practice", into concrete examples within the conceptual framework of extension and reduction.